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Consumer Experience Intensity: Towards A Conceptualization and Measurement

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CONSUMER EXPERIENCE INTENSITY: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALIZATION AND

MEASUREMENT

A Dissertation
by
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MEASUREMENT

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ABSTRACT

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Experience has been accepted as a separate market offering that is increasingly being utilized by various businesses. Consequently, there is a growing need to understand the phenomenon of commercial experiences, their role in various market contexts, and the reasons of consumers' interest in them. It is also crucial to understand the ways the consumers derive value from marketplace experiences. Yet, it would be misleading to assume that all experiences have the same significance for consumers, and consumers derive high level of value from every experience in the market. This dissertation aims to understand the experiences that consumers find to be meaningful and significant. It specifically aims to identify the characteristics of impactful experiential designs, and how these characteristics lead to certain consumer behavior, feelings, and senses in experiential market contexts.

Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were employed to accomplish the goals of this study. Qualitative research methodology was utilized to gain deep and culturally informed insights into the antecedents of experiences that contemporary consumers perceive to be superior. Qualitative data, which was collected through using different data collection techniques to assure triangulation, was analyzed in the light of the review of literature from the multidisciplinary fields, such as marketing, sociology, anthropology, museum studies, and

gameplay studies. As a result of this analysis, a theoretical framework, the hypotheses, and the scale items of each measure that were employed to test the hypotheses were developed. Quantitative research methodology was utilized to assess the reliabilities and validities of the scales developed, and to test the hypotheses about the relationships between the constructs.

The findings of this research reveal that consumer perceptions of the design of the experiential settings reflected by the stories and the sensory stimuli of the context are the drivers of consumer participation and immersion in the experiential setting. Presentationality, readability and appropriability are the primary dimensions of experiential setting narratives that are perceived to be meaningful and significant by consumers. Presentationality, multiple modalities, and spectacularity are the primary dimensions of sensory stimuli that are found to be significant and affective by consumers. Immersion has been found to be the key element in consumers' intensity perceptions of the experiences they drive from the context.

DEDICATION

To the sweetest grandmother Sabiha Mutlu; to my husband and the love of my life Özgür Uğraş Akgün who has been my biggest support in this process; to my loving, caring, and supporting parents Cumhur Ulusoy and Vahide Ulusoy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recently, experience as a market phenomenon has been commanding greater recognition among consumers, marketing academicians, and practitioners (Hopkinson and Pujari 1999; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007; Sundbo and Darmer 2008; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Grewal, Levy and Kumar 2009). The main reason for this greater interest in experience is the associations the concept has with some primary characteristics of the contemporary consumer culture, such as entertainment, fun, pleasure, leisure, fantasy, and discovery, which greatly attract people (e.g. Klinger 1971; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Mukherjee and Venkatesh 2008; Ritzer 1999; Wolf 1999; Kozinets et al.2002; Kozinetset al. 2004; Lonsway 2007; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008; Wikström 2008; Karababa and Ger 2011; Goulding, et al. 2009). Scholars and practitioners are increasingly realizing that contemporary consumers are less interested in material accumulation or in merely encountering finished products, and care more about what they experience (Rifkin 2000; van Boven and Gilovich 2003; Fırat and Dholakia 2006; Carù and Cova 2007a; Wikström 2008). As a result, they have started to consider experience to be a distinct offering in the market (e.g. Pine and Gilmore 1999, Schmitt 1999; Holbrook 2000; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Poulsson and Kale 2004; Darmer and Sundbo 2008; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008) rather than just the principal means of providing added value to consumption of products and services (Poulsson and Kale 2004). As Pine and

Gilmore (1999) suggest, at this time in history, we live in an "experience economy." In most market encounters, the focal offering in this economy is the *experience* Prahalad (2004).

According to the logic of the experience economy, experience plays the focal role in the marketplace due to the high level of positive managerial outcomes, such as economic value, that it provides to businesses (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Pine and Gilmore 2000; Voss, Roth, and Chase 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009). The value that consumers construct within and derive from the marketplace is also highly dependent on the experiences they find in market encounters (Abbott 1955; Peñaloza 1999; Kozinets et al. 2002; Schmitt 2003; Poulsson and Kale 2004; Prahalad 2004; Vargo and Lusch 2008). Indeed, today, not only for individual consumers and firms, but also for societies, value is largely created in commercial experiences as they catalyze various social and political changes (Kozinets 2002).

Given the recent shifts in contemporary marketing practice and theory, and in consumer orientations, the notion of experience has become the key element in understanding contemporary consumer behavior (Addis and Holbrook 2001), many characteristics of present-day marketing practices (Wikström 2008), as well as the social and architectural structures of many marketplaces ranging from retail stores to museums (Berger 1998; Sherry 1998; Peñaloza 1999; Kotler 1999; Kozinets et al.2002; Kozinetset al. 2004; Lonsway 2007; Klingmann 2007; Hollenbeck, Peters, and Zinkhan 2008). We observe that experience is increasingly utilized as an offering even in contexts such as hospitals and real estate developments (Lonsway 2007), which may seem surprising to some. Today, even information and education functions in many institutions involve a type of entertainment in which information and experience are intertwined (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008).

Many marketing academicians and practitioners agree that a significant portion of everyday and extraordinary experiences that contemporary human beings find meaningful are created in the market. Furthermore, people are willing to pay more and more for these experiences (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999; Diller, Shedroff, and Rhea 2005). However, it is important to recognize that experience has in fact always been a distinct economic offering, and people have always sought experiences (Holbrook 2000). Yet, what is different today is its changing role and the forms it takes in the contemporary culture and in the market economy (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmusses 2008; Christensen 2009). These changing roles and forms put the experience in focus for marketing scholars, practitioners, and consumer researchers recently. It has been observed that as the consumers have become increasingly concerned with experiences, marketers have also become more interested in the commercial potential of offering experiences, especially in industries that primarily involve entertainment, recreation, and tourism activities (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Benedict 2001; Lonsway 2007). Furthermore, today, a series of industries that primarily offer experiences are proposed to be "experience industries." (Christensen 2009)

Experience design and experience consumption are complex processes. Consequently, there is an urgent need in marketing and consumer research fields for a theoretically sophisticated and empirically grounded explanation of what experience is, how the experience phenomenon shapes market encounters and consumer perceptions; as well as how and why people consume and value certain experiences. This explanation should take into consideration certain cultural and social transformations under which these tendencies occur. It should also regard experiences as cultural artifacts, as complex social and cultural phenomena, meanings of which are negotiated by different market actors (Ahola 2005). In other words, experience should

not be regarded purely as what is subjectively perceived by individuals; but as what is socially and culturally created and negotiated in various market encounters.

Even though experience is a valuable offering in the market, it would be misleading to assume that all experiences have the same characteristics and meanings, and are equally important for market actors. Some experiences are more meaningful and influential for marketers and consumers than others. In other words, they are *richer* experiences (Pine and Gilmore 1999). For example, scholars from inside and outside of the marketing discipline have proposed that *liminal* experiences created in contexts such as festivals, carnivals, and extreme sports are highly meaningful for human beings (Bakhtin 1984; Featherstone 1990; Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Hopkinson and Pujari 1999) and for society as a whole (Kozinets 2002). More recently, it has been indicated that consumers have more powerful and significant experiences in themed settings than in other environments (Sherry, Kozinets, and Borghini 2007), and today they primarily seek to experience immersion into thematic settings (Carù and Cova 2007). This is one of the main reasons why many city developers and institutions that seem to have nothing to do with theming, such as churches, museums, and schools, and businesses other than theme parks increasingly use theming strategy (TEA 2008). It is critical to understand the characteristics and dimensions of powerful experiences that people draw from such contexts.

Literature, particularly in the consumer research field, provides discussion of contexts that provide consumers with meaningful experiences. Yet, the characteristics of experiences that consumers find more meaningful and substantial than others, the contextual and consumer input factors that lead to such experiences, and the way these factors relate to each other, are issues yet to be explored. There is a need for an integrated theoretical framework that could shed light on these issues. Especially in the time of hypercapitalism (Rifkin 2000), the question of "how can

we create relevant and meaningful experiences?" is gaining greater importance (Klingman 2007) for marketing and consumer culture researchers, both to reach commercial success and to create more meaningful and substantial market encounters.

One of the recently heeded characteristics of commercial experiences that influence consumers' assessment is *intensity* (Poulsson and Kale 2004). Intense experiences in the market can have positive or negative directions. Yet, as positive experiences are the type of experiences that marketers want to create and consumers value in market encounters, in this research experience intensity is examined with respect to positive experiences.

Scholars from various fields have tried to understand some processes of extraordinary experiences (Dewey 1983; Arnould and Price 1993; Jones, Hollenhorst, and Perna 2003; Jay 2004) that are perceived to be intense, such as flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), peak experiences (Laski 1962; Maslow 1970), and transcendent consumer experiences (Schouten et al. 2007). However, there are also some other valuable experiences in the market that are intense, yet are not necessarily spiritual in nature, and/or do not necessarily lead to self or identity transformation and actualization, or lasting shifts in the worldview of consumers. These experiences are significant in the marketplace today as contemporary consumers live for the thrill of the spectacle without feeling the necessity to relate such fragmented moments to a grand direction of progress (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Hannigan 1998).

What is meant by 'intense experience' as a common aspect of all kinds of experiences stated above, and how and why the intensity of an experience makes it more substantial and desirable for contemporary consumers are questions left largely unanswered in the literature. This study is an attempt to fill in some of the voids in our understanding of the dimensions and sub-dimensions of experiential market encounters from which consumers derive intense

experiences. The purpose of this research is first to explore and then to confirm how and on what dimensions intense experiences are constructed and assessed both by consumers and by marketers. Furthermore, in the light of recent transformations observed in culture and consumer orientations (Eco 1986; Featherstone 1991; Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Bauman 1996; Berger 1998; Jameson 1998; Gottdiener 2001; Fırat and Dholakia 2006), it tries to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the specific constructs that have come to constitute consumer experience intensity in contemporary culture and what are the characteristics of these constructs that are most influential in contemporary culture?

2. How do these constructs relate to each other in creating more intense experiences?

Even though experience has various definitions, the definition that is taken as the base for this research is the one by Fırat (2008). He defines experience as "the totality of thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise from an encounter." In this study, the focus is on commercial experiences. In this study, commercial experience is defined as *the totality of senses, feelings, thoughts, imaginations, and actions that arise from a market encounter*. Then, experience intensity is defined briefly as *the exceptional power of an experience that creates an overall high level of stimulation and meaning for one who experiences it*. This study proposes intensity as a characteristic of experiences that can help focus attention on a deeper understanding of the role and value of experience in contemporary consumer perceptions, as well as in current attractive marketing design and strategies (Healy et al. 2007) such as theming.

Focusing on dimensions of intense experiences may provide some insights as to why certain experiences have a greater impact not only on how contemporary consumers feel, but also on how people think and imagine, by taking into account the complex nature of experiences.

Overall, understanding the intensity characteristic of experiences and its dimensions by contextualizing them in contemporary cultural and social patterns will contribute significantly to the development of studies of experience consumption and marketing. Undertanding the antecendents of experience intensity would be useful for both consumers and marketers in creating more meaningful, significant, and desirable market encounters.

This study will have additional benefits concerning theories and conceptualizations of experience marketing and consumption. At the theoretical/conceptual level, understanding how and why consumers feel, think, imagine, and sense intensely has the potential to bring insights into some of the major discussions ongoing in the fields of consumer behavior and marketing. These involve utilization of some new perspectives and strategies in marketing endeavors that are challenging traditional ones, authenticity/inauthenticity and fantasy/reality perceptions of consumers, the process of co-creation of value in the market, and antecedents of consumer immersion in market encounters.

As has been addressed in multiple studies in the marketing and consumer research fields, experience marketing and consumption are highly dependent on textual and sensual dimensions of constructed marketplace spaces and interactions (Peñaloza 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Jensen 2006; Carù and Cova 2007a; Hardie 2007; Lukas 2007b; Santoro and Troilo 2007; Sally 2007; Darmer 2008; Hartl and Gram 2008; Laursen 2008). It is largely recent shifts in the cultural and social trends, supported by recent advances in technology, which shape these two dimensions. As a result, new experiential marketing strategies that are more a cultural urge rather than purely an economic one for both consumers and marketers have emerged and thrived.

For example, thematization, defined by Fırat and Ulusoy (2009) as "the patterning of space, activity or event to symbolize experiences and/or senses from a special or a specific past,

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present, or future place, activity or event as currently imagined" is one of these strategies that have emerged and flourished all around the world. Such a culture based strategy is so powerful in contemporary society that, according to some recent studies mentioned above, consumers have more powerful and significant experiences in "themed environments" than in other environments (Sherry et al. 2007). Consequently, conceptualizing and operationalizing experience intensity are important in order to better comprehend the new perspectives regarding marketing strategies; and their impact on consumer behavior and recent marketing practices.

This researcher's initial observations concerning intense experiences of consumers (context and consumer related factors and sub-factors that lead to them, and their impact on consumer perceptions) started with visiting a theme park called Epcot at Walt Disney World, Florida. Among themed environments, Walt Disney World is one of the most visited and pronounced, wherein consumers have intense experiences. It is so influential that, everyday life in contemporary culture takes on a Disneyesque nature (Meamber 2011 forthcoming) in the Disneyizied society (Bryman 2004). One important finding from interviews with the guests of the park and the researcher's observations was that consumers were highly focused on the intensity of their experiences. As a result, their reality perceptions were bent to the point that they accepted whatever they experienced in the park as real and the authentic. For example, when some of the visitors in the park's World Showcase section do not make a distinction between presentation of the countries in the theme park and countries in the world "outside" (Fırat and Ulusoy 2007), it seems evident that these consumers are concerned less with the "reality" or the "authenticity" of the experience and more with the "intensity" of their experiences. This phenomenon is not only the author's observation. Some other scholars who are doing research on experience marketing and consumption also talk about this pehomenon. For

example, Bærenholdt, Haldrup, and Larsen (2008) found in their research on the consumption of Viking Ship Museum that some visitors "indicate that they conceived of the re-enactment activities and replicas as even more real than the wrecks, displayed in the hall…" (p. 189). Therefore, experience intensity is proposed as a concept that matters in understanding consumers' perceptions of and the value they give to authentic and inauthentic, and real and fantasy in market contexts.

There are contexts that are specifically geared toward experiential moments, like Disneyworld, hotels in Las Vegas, or events like concerts. These are, like themed flagship brandstores that Kozinets et al. (2004) theorized about, entertainment-oriented marketing environments in which deep and playful consumer participation co-creates the vibe. Therefore, such contexts provide fertile ground for investigating the role of consumers as co-creators of value (Vargo and Lusch 2008). In these contexts, consumers participate in the experiential theater and become involved in the performance and meaning construction (Healy et al. 2007). Therefore, exploring the antecedents of experience intensity requires investigating the participatory roles of consumers. Consequently, this study has the potential to provide new insights into consumers' co-creator roles as well as how these roles shape market encounters and consumer experiences.

This study follows a method of both inductive concept and theory building and deductive testing. It contributes to the marketing literature also by developing and testing some new measures. Scales for two of the proposed antecedents of experience intensity, and experience intensity itself are developed and tested for the purposes of this research. Current outcome measures used in marketing do not adequately capture customers' perceptions of their experiences in certain market contexts that are geared toward offering experience as their

primary offer. The experience intensity scale is proposed as a valuable means for measuring such outcome. Also, marketing literature lacks the measures of effectiveness of stories and sensory stimuli that people find meaningful and value in the marketplace contexts. This study contributes to the literature to close this gap by developing and testing scales of textuality and texture.

Understanding and measuring experience intensity also has important practical implications for marketers. Managers whose aim is to create meaningful market encounters need to understand why consumers find specific market encounters with specific characteristics more meaningful and attractive, and search for them in the marketplace. This understanding is crucial in order to engage their consumers and create higher levels of value, both for their consumers and for their businesses. By understanding the logic of experiences consumers perceive as intense, marketers can develop strong tools for creating encounters more desirable by their consumers, and can differentiate their businesses in the intensifying competitive environment. This is increasingly significant today since an increasing number of marketers is in need of creating intense experiences to attract consumers in almost all industries. Realizing this need, as Lonsway (2007) argues, many commercial design practices, from urban planning to industrial design, have been borrowing the techniques and the logics of thematic experience design in the entertainment industry. Overall, in terms of practical implications, this study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the details of the more desirable techniques and the logics that businesses can use in order to achieve greater success in attracting contemporary consumers.

The conceptual model developed in this research is based on a combination of findings from qualitative research and a literature review. The theoretical framework of this research draws from different sources in order to conceptualize and operationalize experience intensity by contextualizing it in market encounters that reflect contemporary cultural and social patterns.

These sources include the literatures on experience economy, experience marketing, and experience consumption, as well as the studies that investigate consumer orientations and the meaning and role of marketing in contemporary culture from the perspective of contemporary cultural theory. Even though the literatures in these fields do not provide testable theories or models about the concept of interest, they contribute some analytical perspectives that are elaborated on in this study.

The following chapter (Chapter 2) presents a review of literature that establishes the theoretical background for the theoretical framework and the operationalizations that are developed in this work. In the literature review, meaning of the concept of experience, different forms of experiences, meaning of experience as a distinct offering in the market, and the socio-cultural reasons of growing attention to experience in the market are discussed.

In chapter 3, first, the qualitative data collection and analysis processes employed in this research are described. Later, the constructs that are identified as key to consumer experience intensity through an analysis of qualitative data and literature review are defined and discussed.

The conceptual model developed in this research is explained in Chapter 4. In this chapter, the relationships among key themes that emerged as a result of the qualitative research and literature review is explored. More specifically, the antecedents of consumer experience intensity, their dimensions, and the relationship among them are discussed.

Quantitative research design, the details of development and validation of measures, quantitative data collection and analysis methods are discussed in the methodology chapter, Chapter 5. The findings of the data analysis are discussed in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I provide a discussion of the theory and empirical data and propose some implications of this research and future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Experience

Experience is a frequently used word in various academic literatures, as well as in

everyday life (according to lists provided by Fry et al. (2000), it is among the 1000 most

frequently used words). It is used both as a verb and as a noun (Tynan and McKechnie 2009).

Furthermore, as Throop (2007) suggests borrowing from Jay Martin, it might refer to "sensory,

perceptual, lived and embodied processes or narratively configured, cognitive, evaluative,

mnemonic and expressive forms" (p. 109).

Yet, there is no consensus on what experience exactly means and how its meaning differs

across various different contexts. The word is generally used in a very broad sense and in so

many different contexts that make it difficult to present a clear definition of it (Jay 2004). Some

scholars have attempted to explore the etymology of the word experience in order to delve

deeper into its meanings and uses in various contexts. According to Turner (1986: 35):

> "…an etymology of the English word for "experience," deriving it from the Indo-
> European base "per-," "to attempt, venture, risk" you can see already how its
> double, "drama," from the Greek dran, "to do," mirrors culturally the "peril"
> etymologically implicated in "experience." The Germanic cognates of per relate
> experience to "fare," "fear," and "ferry,"…The Greek "perao" relates experience
> to "I pass through," with implications of rites of passage. In Greek and Latin,
> experience is linked with peril, pirate, and ex-periment."

According to Sherry et al. (2007), the etymology of the word experience is the Latin root

experiri, which means a test or trial. Schmitt thus proposes that "experiences occur as a result

of encountering, undergoing or living through things." (1999: 57). Similarly, Dilthey states that experience is what is "lived through" (Bruner 1986: 3). Consequently, the word experience emphasizes primarily active engagement (Kotler 1999; Sherry et al. 2007; Deighton 1992; Kozinets et al. 2004; Kozinets 2002, Hetzel 2007), knowing through sensory stimuli (Kotler 1999; Kozinets et al. 2004; Kozinets 2002; Fırat 2001; Arnould and Price 1993; Carbone and Haeckel 1994), and multidimensional stories (Sherry et al. 2007; Dalli and Romani 2007; Ladwein 2007). All these endeavors to explore the etymology of the word indicate that it is an encompassing term that can only be understood in relation to many other concepts, as well as contexts in which it is created and lived. However, even though all these various dimensions are discussed regarding experiences, there is still too much emphasis on emotions and creation of emotional intensity as a result of experiencing (Arnould and Price 1993; Pullman and Gross 2004). Yet, emotions are not the only dimension that constitutes an experience. Sensations, cognitive processes, such as in the form of knowledge acquisition, actions, and imaginations also play focal roles (Gupta and Vajic 1999; Sundbo and Hagendorn-Rasmussen 2008).

Although there is no consensus on what constitutes an experience, there is consensus that it cannot occur without the participation of one who 'experiences'. In other words, it can only be perceived subjectively as an internal response (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Laursen 2008; Verhoef et al. 2009). It primarily involves combinations of thoughts, senses, and feelings from all kinds of social encounters as a result of interaction between individual processes and the social situation (Abrahams 1986; Gupta and Vajic 2000). Therefore, experience is considered to be personal and the word experience is mostly used in order to highlight the internal and subjective reception and interpretation of current external social and cultural cues or events by individuals in the light of the language and the culture in which one lives (Turner 1986a).

Abrahams's proposition that experience is where individuals may find a "…validation in the world of the here and now…" (1986: 46) is an example of such conventional conceptualization and use of the word experience. Bruner broadens this perspective by addressing the active role of the individuals in shaping the experience (1986:5):

"An experience is more personal, as it refers to an active self, to a human being who not only engages in but shapes an action."

In a similar vein, Kotler (1999), while specifically discussing museum visitors' experiences in experience economy, expresses that "experiencing connotes active engagement (direct observation of participation in an event), immediacy (knowing something through sensory stimuli), individuality (something that is lived through).... " (p.1). Consequently, according to scholars who are interested in the concept, experience highlights the critical distinction between reality as "…what is really out there, whatever that may be…" and experience as "…how that reality presents itself to consciousness…" (Bruner 1986: 6). Yet, no matter how subjective they are, experiences are always embedded in the culture and their meanings are created and negotiated among various cultural actors (Turner 1986; Ahola 2007).

Contingency of experiences is another consensus in the literature. An experience can be evaluated as positive or pleasurable in certain contexts, neutral in some other contexts, and negative or unpleasant in some other contexts (Richins 1997; DeJean 2002; Blythe and Hassenzahl 2003). For example, many experiences people have during vacations would not be that attractive in the course of their everyday lives. Also, depending on the consumer's mood, an experience evaluated as pleasurable in a specific context at a certain time may be considered unpleasant in the same specific context at another time.

Traditionally, experience has been largely approached as the means to an end. According to this perspective, experience plays the role of an instrument in achieving an end, such as

satisfaction or happiness felt after the experience, when the subjective evaluation of the experience leads to more positive reinterpretation (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003), or higher status when visiting a popular and expensive place, due to the responses of others. On the other hand, there are experiences that are considered to be ends in themselves, that is, they are valued for their own sake (Holbrook 2004; Lanier and Hampton 2009). Meditation, for example, can be considered such an experience. Similarly, research results suggest that the activity of playing a video game, which is a very common activity among contemporary consumers, is a goal in itself (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005).

Different Forms of Experience

Scholars attempt to classify different forms of experience for a more in-depth exploration of the meaning and value of the concept of experience. As a part of this attempt, Turner (1986) distinguishes between *formative* and *transformative* experiences. He asserts that formative experiences are "…distinguishable, isolable sequences of external events…", and transformative experiences are "…internal responses to them…" (p.35).

The contexts in which experiences are created, staged, and lived provide another basis for classification. Some experiences are *market-based*, meaning that they are created in the encounters and exchanges that take place in the market, whereas some experiences are *non-market-based*, meaning that they are not a result of a market encounter or transaction and that they are staged and lived in contexts that are not dominated by the market (Carú and Cova 2007a; Cova and Rémy 2007; Gupta and Vajic 2000).

In contemporary consumer culture, the principles of the market domain apply to all aspects of life, from social relations, to self-concept, as the market is the dominant institution. The shift in focus in the market from a product-centered orientation to a co-creation (of

experience and value) orientation renders the role of the market domain even more significant in dominating experiences of human beings. In consumer culture, firms are the agents that create narrative (text) and sensory (texture) elements of the experiential contexts of almost all types of social encounters (Carú and Cova 2007b). As a result, even though experience can be defined as a rich phenomenon that takes place in various domains, the market domain has become increasingly dominant in constructing and shaping experiences of contemporary human beings. This dominance of the market results in a higher degree of commercialization of experiences as "the market makes having the experience contingent upon making (a) purchase(s)" (Fırat 2001: 113).

Experiences in the Market Domain

The notion of experience is not new in marketing, but greater interest in it among both marketing academicians and practitioners is. Today, "the main experience industries (where the experience is the core product) count for about 8-12 per cent of GNP and employment and are among the fastest growing industries." (Darmer and Sundbo 2008: 3).

As well, the forms experiential contexts and offerings are taking are also different. While marketplace experiences have always been related to social fantasies, recently they are more driven by a combination of technological developments and social fantasies, as in the case of recent video games in the market (Kristiansen 2008).

Definition of experience in consumer research and marketing fields is especially weak (Carù and Cova 2003b; Tynan and McKechnie 2009). Even though some marketing scholars from specific research streams, such as consumer behavior, have long discussed experiential aspects of marketing and consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) and how experiences add value to consumers when used in conjunction with products and services (Healy et al. 2007;

Voss et al. 2009), only recently has experience been recognized as a separate offering in the market; and its primary functions are proposed to be entertainment, aesthetics, escape from everyday routine, and learning-edutaintment (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Wikström 2008).

Moreover, only recently has it been recognized that it is not an offering that can be solely used by entertainment and leisure industries. Today businesses in various industries that sometimes may seem difficult to associate with the experience economy produce experience as their core offering (Poulsson and Kale 2004; Lonsway 2007; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008). This is due to the recent escalation of consumer interest in "experience consumption" due to two driving forces according to Wikström (2008: 33): "(i) increasing economic prosperity and associated dissatisfaction with mass consumption which is perceived to be less 'exciting'; and (ii) the tendency towards the individualisation (and 'liberalisation') of values, which results in a demand for more freedom of choice. This shift has been emphasized also by practitioners of experience design in their report on Architecture and Placemaking, where they mention that the biggest trend in the experience design industry is that "experience design opportunities have grown beyond the theme park industry":

> "While theme parks may have traditionally been the primary clients of TEA members, worldwide changes in demographics, competition for customers, and distribution of wealth are prompting clients in other businesses to capitalize on experience design opportunities." (TEA, July 2008 Report)

Pine and Gilmore (2000) define experience in the market domain as "memorable events that engage customers in inherently personal ways, like going to a theme park, visiting a museum, or engaging in sporting activities" (p.18). They differentiate experience from other market offerings (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 6) in terms of:

1. Economic function: For commodities it is 'extracting', for goods it is 'making', for services it is 'delivering', and for experiences it is 'staging',

2. Nature of offering: Commodities are fungible, goods are tangible, services are intangible, and experiences are memorable,

3. Key attribute: For commodities it is 'natural', for good it is 'standardized', for services it is 'customized', and for experiences it is 'revealed over a duration',

4. Method of supply: Commodities are stored in bulk, goods are inventoried after production, services are delivered on demand, and experiences are revealed over a duration,

5. Seller: Commodities are sold by trader, goods are sold by manufacturer, services are sold by provider, experiences are sold by stager,

6. Buyer: Market buys the commodities, user buys goods, client buys services, and guest buys experiences, and

7. Factors of demand: In commodities what is demanded is characteristics, in goods what is demanded is features, in services what is demanded is benefits, and in experiences what is demanded is sensations.

Yet, in the marketing literature experience is sometimes considered to be a specific type of service (Chase 1981; Heskett, Sasser, and Hart 1990, 1997; Roth and Menor 2003; Bitran, Ferrer, and Oliveira 2008) as its certain characteristics such as intangibility and perishability are the same with that of services. Therefore, Poulssan and Kale (2004), addressing this issue, make further distinctions among experiences, services, and goods. According to them,

> "A service is something that is done for you; whether that service involves work on your body (a haircut), or on your property (having your lawn cut) or a task carried out on your behalf (filing a tax return). An experience on the other hand is a product that does something to you (entertain, educate, or engage), and what you typically walk away with is memory of the encounter. Goods, services and experiences all have a consumption phase, what differentiates an experience from the other two offerings is that here the consumption phase itself is the main product. Purchase of a good leaves you with a physical object to keep, and a

service will leave you with something done for you or your possessions or on your behalf. With an experience, however, what is of essence is only what happens between the customer and the experience provider in that extended and intensified consumption phase, and the memory of the encounter " (p.271).

Moreover, Schmitt (1999) argues that, contrary to highlighted functional values of many goods and services, "…experiences provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational values that replace functional values." (p. 57). Experience, for the most part, is lived through in the present to create the meaning of the present (Grayson and Martinec 2004) based on these values that are beyond functional. It can be proposed that experience is the key market offering that provides consumers with the opportunity to enjoy the present moment, no matter if the content of the offering is the past (in the case of visiting a museum for example), or the future (in the case of a visit to Tomorrowland in Walt Disney World for example). That is, it does not only validate here and now, but shapes here and now as Kozinets (2003: 2) reflects in his analysis of the moments of the Burning Man Festival: "When we lose ourselves in the moment, change has a chance to manifest in the evanescent wake of our experience." As a result, to distinguish further between experiences and material products, scholars link experience offering to the *doing* aspect of life contrary to material products that they largely link to the *having* aspect (Weinberger 2008).

Yet, conceptualizing experience as a separate market offering does not mean that the concept of experience excludes goods and services. Experience is linked to the perspectives and meanings that different operand and operant resources represent (Lanier and Hampton 2009). As a result, creation, staging, and marketing of experiences usually require mixing and matching other offerings, such as services and products, as symbolic resources in order to create more exciting and engaging market encounters (Pine and Gilmore 2000; Kotler and Keller 2006; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008; Lanier and Hampton 2009).

Another important discussion topic concerning experience offering in the market is the reasons for its increasing utilization by firms from a wide range of industries. From a conventional viewpoint, Schmitt (1999) argues that the main reason for experience becoming the focus of marketing practices of firms is the economic benefit it provides. Experiences stress "…stimulations and memorable events and not just traditional consumption…" (Wikstrom 2005: 4), or, "…events that engage individuals in a personal way…" (Pine and Gilmore 1999:12). Therefore, it helps firms to differentiate themselves, attract more consumers (Tynan and McKechnie 2009), and hold consumers' attention for a longer time (Voss et al. 2009). Also, it helps firms to create loyal consumers and charge higher prices (Pine and Gilmore 2000; Voss et al. 2009). Businesses, in order to earn more, have moved away from traditional "features-and-benefits" marketing toward creating experiences for their customers (Schmitt 1999; Voss et al. 2008). Schmitt (1999) calls this movement "experiential marketing", and categorizes experiences that businesses need to focus on as sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles, and social-identity experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) further conceptualize experiences that businesses can create mainly within the framework of entertainment, education, aesthetic, and escape realms. As a summary, experiences in the market domain help 1) consumers to engage in the market encounter physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually, making the encounter more meaningful (Carù and Cova 2003), and 2) businesses to benefit from a positive image and from the willingness of consumers to pay for their offerings.

Different than experiences produced in other contexts, market experiences are products of acts by people who are market players labeled specifically as consumers and producers; not by people who are labeled citizens, family members, friends, or neighbors (Edgell, Hetherington,

and Warde 1997; Carù and Cova 2003). The type of market player that plays the dominant role in the creation of the experience provides another basis for classifying market-based experiences. From a conventional viewpoint, such as that of Schmitt's (1999), experience is an economic offering that is being offered by the marketer and consumed by the consumer. Prahalad (2004) also emphasizes a conventional approach when he discusses staging of an experience in the sense that "…the firm constructs the context and the customer is a part of it" (p. 23). This perspective attributes the central role to firms in experience creation and provision. The consumer is located at the end of the chain, reflecting the traditional marketing approach. According to this view, experiences are firm-driven offerings that have the potential and power to make consumers respectively sense, feel, think, act, and relate to the firm that creates and provides them (Schmitt 1999).

More recent approaches to experience marketing and consumption have attempted to go beyond this view which makes a clear distinction between production and consumption. They try to explore the dialectic negotiation and dialog between consumers and companies in the production and consumption of experiences (e.g. Kozinets et al. 2004; Wikström 2008). According to most of the scholars advocating this approach, there are modulations in the experience production and consumption process(es). That is, there are experiences that are consumer-driven, co-driven or company-driven. However, it is emphasized that even in experiences that are classified as company-driven, the production and consumption dichotomy is not as clear as has been stated in the more traditional perspective (Badot and Filser 2007). Furthermore, Carù and Cova (2007b: 38) propose that firms cannot offer experiences since experience "…is a subjective episode that customers live through when they interact with a firm's product or service offer." In a similar vein, Poulssan and Kale (2004) define experience as

"an engaging act of co-creation between a provider and a consumer wherein the consumer perceives value in the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter." (p. 270). Some scholars (e.g. Verhoef et al. 2009) also mention the interaction of consumers with other consumers in the encounter as an important component of the experience. According to this model, "the service designer can design *for* experience [rather than the experience] and operations manager can facilitate an environment *for* experience by manipulating key elements." (Pullman and Gross 2004: 552).

From the perspective that conceives the consumer as an active partner in experience creation, Arnould (2007) states that experience "…may be thought of as the outcome of the value extraction processes in which consumer engage" (p. 186). Experience, in other words, is the reaction of the consumer to his/her interactions with a product, firm, or part of a company's organization (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci 2007) and some other factors, such as other consumers, that influence these interactions. These consumer reactions are multidimensional and involve responses at cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical dimensions (Verhoef et al. 2009). Even the consumers who may seem passive in an encounter react at various levels, and necessarily bring many elements such as their desires, anticipations, and previous experiences with them, as is observed among gameplayers (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005).

Therefore, commercialized experience is recognized to be different from a commercialized good or service in terms of the degree of marketer's role in constructing and controlling it. More specifically, as Deighton (1992) argues in his study on performance, marketers can only provide the stage and raw material for the consumer to translate into a narrative which only then can become experience. Further, and as Kotler (1999) argues, the consumer is the ultimate judge of his or her experience.

These new approaches have become the focus of experience marketing and consumption discussions both by scholars and practitioners mainly due to the changing orientations of contemporary consumers, and transformations in the marketing conceptualizations and implications, as well as the nature of the offering. Experiences consumers draw from Issey Miyake's A-POC brand (Hetzel 2007), or festivals/concerts organized by organization firms, spectacular consumption environments like Nike Town (Peñaloza 1998), or ESPN Zone Chicago (Kozinets et al. 2004), demonstrate the impossibility of a production-consumption dichotomy in experience creation. Experiences are largely offerings of businesses that favor the strategy of becoming partners with consumers (Fırat and Dholakia 2006). They are results of complex negotiations among many market players; so they are offerings in which many cultural and social meanings are (re)constructed. Therefore, a shift to focus on experience as a focal offering signifies moving away from a structured and mechanical content of marketing and consumption.

Consequently, experience is a focal offering in *embedded marketing*, which is defined as "the process whereby human (post-consumer) communities imagine, construct, and experience meaningful and substantive modes of life." (Fırat and Dholakia 2006: 152). As Fırat and Dholakia (1998) propose, experience reveals the aspect of consumption that emphasizes the production of multiple experiences and selves or self-images in order to conceive a multidimensional life. Hence, it has become the key element for consumers in their relations with the market, and it emphasizes a union of production and consumption. Subsequently, it can be proposed that experience is a focal offering as a result of not only economic needs, but more of cultural needs of corporations and consumers.

One of the main aspects of experiences in the market domain is that people pay a price for them. Even though sometimes some experiences in market encounters may seem to be free,

they are usually related to some other experiences or products for which people pay a price. Or, they are related to positive image building endeavors of the firms or businesses, which in the long term have the potential to convince consumers to spend their money on the goods, services, or experiences that they provide. Poulssan and Kale (2002) call these latter types of experiences that are used as a marketing tool as *indirect commercial experiences*.

Paying for experiences, directly or indirectly, is primarily due to commercialization of culture in general where "it is clear that that which in the past was developed within a collective elaboration of social culture is increasingly delegated to firms" (Codeluppi 2007: 157). Similarly, Pine and Gilmore (1999: 161) state that "…much that was previously obtained through noneconomic activity will increasingly be found in the domain of commerce. That represents a significant change. It means that what we once sought for free, we now pay a fee." Such shifts in the culture bring more and more commercialization and commodification of experiences (Rifkin 2000). Even the experiences that were largely provided by public institutions such as museums for free are today for a fee, and in the experience economy these public institutions that offer experience increasingly "...operate under market conditions." (Darmer and Sundbo 2008: 3).

Fırat (2001) further proposes that, in this culture, experience seeking consumer, in many cases, finds himself/herself having to look for it in the market and usually in pre-packaged forms. River Rafting tours on the Colorado River (Arnould and Price 1993) provide a good example of such pre-packaged experience forms. Even though the commercial nature of such offerings are realized and accepted by consumers, overt commercialism and commercial elements that do not fit with other symbolic elements of the encounter have been found to interfere with and detract from consumers' positive perceptions of the encounter (Lanier and Hampton 2009).

Yet, contemporary experiential contexts, even the ones that are in the market domain, do not purely involve market features, but, as Peñaloza (1998) indicates, "…typically combine both market and nonmarket features" (p. 347). More cultural, social and humanistic nonmarket features largely mask the market features that consumers perceive to be negative. That way, offering experience helps marketers to convince consumers that their offerings are apart from a simple commoditization (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008), or the commodity trap (LaSalle and Britton 2003;) and the commercial realm (King 1981; Peñaloza 1998).

Another characteristic of market-based experience is that they are largely sanitized ones (Fırat 2001). Shopping malls and theme parks that are private but that serve as contemporary public spaces are examples for settings where sanitized experiences, which are free of negative elements such as physical danger, crime, and so forth, are constructed (Hannigan 1998). Main Street U.S.A. can be given as a specific example to sanitized experiential settings where people experience a pedestrian culture in a public space while at the same time they have the securities, such as physical safety and hygiene, that they look for (Beardsworth and Bryman 1999).

According to Ritzer (2005) these types of highly standardized experiences are in the forms of McDonaldization, where a process of principles of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control are being applied, whereas enchantment emerges from moments of unpredictability and spontaneity. Hence, the result of sanitization might sometimes be a disenchanted encounter. Still, such encounters are perceived to be more enchanted compared to an encounter that is mostly focusing on the mechanical and material aspects of exchange. Sanitization discussions bring into question whether experiential strategies provide companies

with benefits other than economic ones. Indeed, it can be suggested that companies' need for occupation with experience rather than products and services is cultural rather than economic.

Companies now have the need to create meaningful and substantive lives to reenchant the disenchanted world that they had a central role in creating (Fırat and Ulusoy 2009). Yet, at the same time, they have the need to link themselves to what is secure, safe and hygienic as it is what consumers look for. Therefore, cultural benefits of experiential strategies that provide the companies with possibilities that detach them from what is commercial and disenchanted and link them to what is visionary and enchanted can be proposed to be the main force behind companies' focus on experience as their main offerings.

Another point that has been largely emphasized and investigated in studies on marketplace experiences is "extraordinariness". In most of these studies, experience has been largely linked to what is liminal, or in other words, outside the everyday domain. This aspect has been put forth as the aspect of experience that makes it valuable to consumers. Consumer experiences in the Mountain Man Myth (see Belk and Costa 1993), Burning Man festival (see Kozinets 2002), River Magic rafting trip (see Arnould and Price 1993) and others are all experiences that are considered extraordinary in the sense that they are highly related to "fantasy." Even if they last only for a couple of days, they are very intense in terms of their high texture (meaningful sensory stimuli), textuality (meaningful stories and messages), such that consumers participate in their co-creation at a high level, and consequently can immerse highly into the moments of these events. Due to their perceived intensity, no matter how commercialized these experiences are, they are considered as *lived*, rather than *purchased*.

In contemporary culture there are two driving forces that can be identified as the reasons as to why experience is largely recognized as a focal offering, why it takes on specific

characteristics, and why consumers are increasingly interested in experiences and are content

with paying high prices for them: 1) the shifting orientations of contemporary human beings, and

2) transformations in conceptualization and implications of marketing.

Shifts in Consumer Orientations

There is a need to understand the transition in consumers' perspective to an emphasis on

experience in consumption by placing it in its historical context where in general there is a shift

in culture and, particularly, in consumer orientations. Contemporary culture is a culture that can

be understood in terms of five conditions: reversal of production and consumption,

fragmentation, hyperreality, juxtaposition of opposites, and a decentered subject (Fırat and

Venkatesh 1995). In this culture, the sign constitutes the basis for culture, the social, and the

economic (Baudrillard 1981).

Consequently, today experience has become a need for many consumers as emphasized

by Darmer and Sundbo (2008):

> "In the earlier stages of the economic development, the production of products
> was more or less related to needs. The consumers wanted commodities, goods,
> and services to satisfy their needs for survival, later for materialism, knowledge
> and solving problems (which the service sector provided). Now they want to have
> an interesting life, experience experience new aspects of life or new places, be
> entertained and learn in an enjoyable way. Customers are now looking for more
> than the mere product or service. Experiences fulfil this need." (p. 3)

It may be said that new, emerging human sensibilities that reflect and shape these

conditions of the contemporary culture in which they have been living, are the main reasons for

conceptualization of experience as a focal offering in the market. These sensibilities are stated as

(Fırat and Dholakia 2006: 125):

> "1. Non-commitment to any single project, order, or way of being; thus, openness
> to difference,
> 2. Dawning of a sensibility that certain conditions – which were already always
> present in the modern, and even the premodern (but were suppressed or denied)

are acceptable and that it is okay to playfully and critically engage with these conditions, and

3. Concentration of attention on the present; rather than the past or the future."

These growing sensibilities of consumers are at the root of major changes affecting consumption in contemporary culture. They have forced companies to revisit their marketing efforts (Carù and Cova 2007a) and forced academics to develop new perspectives, such as the service dominant logic of marketing (Vargo and Lusch 2004), which propose alternative visions for evaluation and conceptualization of concepts like production and resources.

Transformations in the Marketing Conceptualizations and Marketing Implications

The modern marketing practices emerged to create economic value for organizations that are involved mainly in the production and distribution processes of goods (Wilkie and Moore 2003). Marketing has been, therefore, regarded as a technical business activity (Bartels 1976) where "marketers take matter and change its form, place, time, and possession" (Vargo and Lusch 2004: 7). Clearly, with the emerging conditions of contemporary economic and social environments that reflect and are shaped by new emerging sensibilities of consumers, conceptualization of marketing and marketing activities utilized by businesses are transforming.

There is also a transformation in the economic system in general, in which marketing plays a key role. Venkatesh et al. (2006) propose this economy to be the sign economy. According to them, "…in this view, firms are no longer identified with the products and services they produce; rather, they operate within significatory systems as interorganizational alliances oriented around various symbolically oriented transactions." (p. 257).

In the light of these transformations, a movement from a managerial understanding to a macro understanding of marketing is recently being witnessed (Shawver and Nickels 1979; Arndt 1983). For example, as more and more the focus of creativity in the market "…is not

things, really, nor services as "parcels" of useful labor, but information fields, treated as private property, in which memorable and entertaining experiences can be had" (Benedikt 2001: 84), even retailers that mainly sell physical goods redefine themselves as memory sources rather than merchandise sources (Matchwich et. al. 2001). In the contemporary market, a mix of "…fantasy facades, huge hotels, gambling casinos, amusement rides, carnival midways, film studio shows, theme park adventures, shopping malls, and musical concert spectaculars…" in Las Vegas, for instance, exemplifies the successful offering that businesses can provide (Belk 1998a: 7). Consumption of experience offering is therefore distant from broader market rhetoric of functionality, efficiency and rationality (Kozinets 2002; Christensen 2009). This way, experience provides answers to the re-enchantment need of consumers who live in a disenchanted world that revolves around the rational market that emphasizes the commercial (Ritzer 1999).

In the contemporary marketing logic how consumers are perceived by businesses has also transformed, transforming their activities. In this relatively new perspective, consumers are recognized as active actors or co-builders of the events / offerings in market encounters rather than as buyers who exist at the end of the marketing chain (Fırat and Dholakia 2006; Mukherjee and Venkatesh 2006; Hetzel 2007). In sum, marketing in contemporary culture empowers consumers to construct alternative experiences by being partners with companies (Fırat and Dholakia 2006).

Based on these discussions on the concept of experience in the literature from various disciplines, in this research, I define experience in the market domain as *the totality of thoughts, feelings, sensations, imaginations, and actions that arise from a market encounter.*

CHAPTER III

KEY CONSTRUCTS IN THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"The value or utility in experience derives from the intensity of the experience…"
(Poulsson and Kale 2004: 270). Therefore, a concept that requires exploration in terms of
understanding consumer meaning construction in a market culture and an economy that focuses
on experience is *experience intensity*.

This chapter first describes the procedures of qualitative data collection and analysis
procedures employed for developing an understanding of consumer experience intensity
construct and of the constructs that are antecedent to intense experiences in experiential
marketing contexts. Later, the meaning and importance of the construct of experience intensity
and its key antecedent constructs are articulated.

Towards an Understanding of Consumer Experience Intensity

Given the lack of a solid theory-based model of characteristics and determinants of
marketplace experiences that are valued by consumers, it was deemed necessary to conduct
exploratory research initially to gain an understanding of certain elements in experiential
marketing contexts that lead to experience intensity. A grounded theory approach was followed
to accomplish this end. A qualitative data collection and its analysis in the light of a review of
literature from different fields mentioned earlier were accomplished in order to explore the
nature of the phenomenon of interest. Even though earlier studies using a grounded theory

approach preferred to use only the data to understand a phenomenon, and put aside prior literature, recently the more widely accepted practice is consulting the literature well before the data analysis is complete (Fischer and Otnes 2006). This study follows this more recent approach to utilizing grounded theory methodology, as the researcher believes that combining available perspectives and concepts in the literature with data enables the researcher to theorize more fully.

The context that is chosen for the exploratory research in this study was the Las Vegas Strip. Different qualitative data collection techniques were utilized for the purposes of triangulation to gain deeper insights into factors that lead to consumers' intense experiences. Four qualitative research methods that were utilized to collect data primarily: Participant observation, informal conversations with Las Vegas consumers, following consumer blog postings and comments on Las Vegas related travel blogs and Facebook pages, and in-depth interviews with Las Vegas consumers, and managers of Las Vegas businesses.

There are many reasons for particularly choosing the Las Vegas Strip as the planned field site for this study. First and foremost, it is an experiential market context that within itself involves many different experiential contexts which are complex artistic, sociological and psychological constructs (King 1981b). The travel blog posting by a consumer from Canada below reflects the power of Las Vegas as a result of such complexity:

> "Las Vegas is like no other town in the world - Mix in the vibe of Times Square (multiplied by 10), the magic of Disney Land (on acid), and your next door neighbour's [sic.] colourful [sic.] Christmas lights (taken from some futuristic vision of neon Japan). Throw in a million or so tourists from all over the world. Serve them up a load liquor and food (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Turn the heat up way over 40 degrees. Include the dazzling lights and the shrill bleating sounds of an army of over a million slot machines and the smiling precision of a few thousand table drones. Have a drive through wedding chapel, which includes a $100's worth of free chips and a free ticket to a one night only extravaganza, by some half forgotten performer, which happens to run every night of the year. Put this all together and you will only have captured a small iota of what Las Vegas is about." (Tumbleweeds, August 3, 2007, Travelpod.com)

Furthermore, Las Vegas is a worldwide known themed environment where people from

all around the world visit or have a desire to visit as can be observed in many consumer postings:

> "I wanna go to Vegas sometime! Never been there before but I bet its [sic.]GREAT!!"
> (Amber, The Las Vegas Strip Facebook page, January 7, 2011).

> "I love Vegas...is fascining [sic.] to me..well [sic.] I wasn´t there never and I´m from
> Czech Republic but see Strip or MGM is my dream" (MacS14, 3 years ago,
> Youtube.com, Comment on Las Vegas Montage 6:49, Added: 5 years ago, From: dpcure,
> Views: 313,470)

> "Well this stop is the one I have been looking forward to the most in the US its [sic.] LAS
> VEGAS BABY!!!! From all the people I have spoken to Vegas is the one place
> everybody agreed was great! With all the good feedback I was hoping it lived up the
> expectation! I'm glad to say it did!... All in all Las Vegas was without doubt my favourite
> [sic.] place so far!Cant [sic.] believe its [sic.] been a month already!." (Ellievilla, August
> 2,2008, Travelblog.org)

These quotes from a Las Vegas Facebook page, and travel blogs reflect the consumers'

desire to visit Las Vegas and their interest in it, sometimes even before experiencing it. Yet, the

power of Las Vegas comes not only from creating a desire to visit, but also from its ability to

exceed the high expectations of these consumers who have the desire to visit once they are there.

As can be observed in many consumer accounts, it also is powerful in terms of convincing

consumers who were skeptical about the place prior to their visits, at least to a certain level, that

it was a place worth visiting. Most of these skeptical consumers write in their blog entries that

they left the place with a positive experience, and they will want to return:

> "My views of Vegas are not as negative as i'd [sic.] expected… Buildings such as cesars
> [sic.] palace and the fountains at the Bellagio are genuinely impressive. I had a great
> time here. There is fun to be had whatever you're in to." (Podgyboy, June 8th 2009,
> Travelblog.org)
> "Several people had told me I'd either love or loathe Vegas and even before exiting the
> much larger than expected airport I was suspecting my feelings were going to veer
> towards the latter. So what is there to do in Las Vegas other than sit at a table and lose
> money ? Well. If you're into sitting for two hours watching a magician pull rabbits out of
> a hat or an array of long legged ladies doing the can can then there's the 'legendary'
> shows, of course there's the architectural magnificence of the different themed hotels to
> look and marvel at…..... erm !.... Like…. Thankfully my initial concerns had not
> materialized. For a weekend 'blow out' Vegas is the bee's knee's, perfect for letting
> one's hair down in a shower of glitz and glamour and certainly something to look
> forward to and get excited about." (Matt The Pig, November 12, 2008, Travelblog.org)

It has been argued that people have the most powerful and significant experiences in themed environments (Sherry et al. 2007). It can be proposed that multiplicity of the elements in texts and textures of themed environments allows a good understanding of the extreme levels of experience intensity of consumers. Las Vegas is the ideal field as it has the most diverse themes with successful narratives that are supported by displays of spectacular Hollywood-like simulations (Gottdiener 2001). Lukas (2007) counted more than 25 themes just on the Strip. In other words, it is a multidimensional system of signs.

According to Forbes, Las Vegas is the second most visited tourism destination in the world (www.forbstraveler.com/2008; http://all-most.com/misc/most-popular-tourist-destinations/). Indeed, according to the official Facebook page of Las Vegas Strip, it is "…the second most recognized brand in the U.S. behind Google" (LasVegas Strip Facebook Page, August 19, 2010).

In addition, Las Vegas is one of the largest tourist destinations in US. It is also proposed to be one of the most successful consumption phenomena of the late Twentieth Century (Belk 1998). It symbolizes something new and unique, "…a prototype for future tourism, shopping, and entertainment…" (Belk 2000: 106). Or in other words, it is considered to be prototype postmodern space of the contemporary consumer culture from which businesses and other institutions learn about attracting people (Fırat 1998, 2001). It is a place where all elements are playfully designed for fulfillment of senses at levels rarely experienced elsewehere (Fırat 2001).

Most consumer entries in Las Vegas on travel blogs and comments on various Las Vegas related Facebook pages reflect the power of the Las Vegas Strip, and the superior experiences consumers derive from there:

> "las vegas [sic.] is the greatest place on earth, i've[sic.] been 5 times, going again in sept [sic.] 07! wish i lived a little closer so i could go every other week! It's a long way from

the UK" (steveC101, 4 years ago, Youtube.com, Comment on Las Vegas Montage 6:49, Added: 5 years ago, From: dpcure, Views: 313,474)

"Nothing beats the strip, it's awesome. I want to live there! Forever! And then heaven be just like it!" (Travelpod.com)

"Ow. I have no idea how far we've walked in the last seven days - but it has to be more than 15 miles. My blisters have blisters. My ankles are so swollen and they refuse to go down. Bah. But Vegas is still fantastic." (californiadreaming, March 21, 2009, Travelblog.org)

"You cannot believe Las Vegas!! We walked around with our eyes like saucers and our mouths opening and shutting like goldfish!!!" (Travelpod.com)

"It was funny, when I told my dad that I wanted to go to Vegas with my friend, he had no idea why I would want to do something like that. "Why not London, Madrid, or even New York?" Because unlike those places I got to see the Eiffel Tower, Statue of Liberty, a Pyramid, and best of all, all the buffets and half naked men you could want all on one street! I love Vegas!" (Jenn0612, January 9, 2009, Travelblog,org)

"Again, I WISH YOU WERE HERE!!!! On the 10 things to do before you die, this would have to be in the top 3! I'll be back, I [sic.] have actually even considering moving here" (May 25th 2008 by KeegsB, Travelblog.org)

"Great video! Perfect tune for it! I LOVE Vegas to tears. I go every 2-3 yrs and stay on the strip, would never go less. Leaving tomorrow for the Mandalay. Stayed at the Bellagio in 05. Aiming for the Wynne next time. Vegas is incredible! "(ArizonaFay 3 years ago, Youtube.com, Comment on Las Vegas Montage 6:49, Added: 5 years ago, From: dpcure, Views: 313,470)

Even though people have superior experiences in various contexts, Las Vegas is still found to provide the extremes of such experiences on a different level compared to the other powerful contexts, as one of the Las Vegas consumers emphasize:

"This place rocks! It's right up there with Hawaii but on a totally different level." (June 9th 2008 by The Perth Girls; Travelblog.org)

Therefore, Las Vegas serves as a laboratory that represents one of the main achievements of contemporary experiential consumer environments.

Additionally, Las Vegas is a place that is full of paradoxes. Witnessing the interaction and juxtaposition of the opposites in Las Vegas is what some consumers find unique and

attractive, as such witnessing makes their experience more intense as they write in their blog entries:

> "Las Vegas is the city of hedonism, In my travels I have not encountered such a city. It reminds me of Costa del Sol, Falaraki and Blackpool.. full of complete tat and the worst possible excesses of humanity. But it is strangely compelling. Everything in Vegas is bigger better and completely over the top… People are standing on the street wearing billboards and handing out cards bearing the legend "Girls who want to meet you phone...." And then there are the fountains of the Bellagio choreographed to the music of Andrea Bocelli.. However none of it is classically classy.. but it is an amazing display of wealth and sheer opulence." (DebzandSam, March 27th 2009, Travelblog.org)

> "Vegas is like another world - there are strip clubs everywhere and peep shows, which are so seedy and tacky, but then you have some of the grandest and most beautiful hotels in the world. Quite a weird mix. We had a wonderful time… VIVA LAS VEGAS!!!" (Paulandamber, July 10, 2005, Travelpod.com)

Analyzing these paradoxes that involved in Las Vegas provides important insights into the structures of successful experiential contexts in contemporary culture.

Las Vegas is a powerful context that leads to superior consumer experiences not only for one, the first, visit. Many people go there, or at least have a desire to go there, again and again, and each time they are able to derive superior experiences from their visit. In the following comments people talk about where their desire to visit Las Vegas repeatedly comes from:

> "But it is this buzz and contrast that makes it so infectious and ensures that its visitors are always suitably wowed by its elaborate decadence each and every time." (Victoria and Mike, January 3rd 2009, Travelblog.org)

> "i [sic.] live in new york las vegas [sic.] is just the place where shows happen" (anger654, 2009, Youtube.com, Las Vegas Montage)

There are mainly two types of Las Vegas consumers: the ones whose main focus is gambling in order to pursue their dreams of a wealthy future, and the ones who seek to immerse in various themed contexts and events in order to find meaning in the present moment (Fırat 2001). Even though the dominant motivator of Las Vegas trips nowadays are shows, clubs, and other attractions on Strip, as can be observed in below consumer travel blog and Facebook entries, and interview notes with the managers of big hotels in Las Vegas, Las Vegas is still a

rich context to investigate these paradoxes, and different mindsets and orientations of consumers in terms of their experience intensity.

> "i [sic.] love vegas [sic.], its[sic.] not all about parting and casinos, there is soo [sic.] much to do there! Vegas [sic.] is a good town, i [sic.] would definetly [sic.] make that my future town for me and my family, i [sic.] think we would be pretty happy there! "(Joy Lujan, LasVegasStrip Facebook page, December 27, 2010 at 10:46pm)

> "Long gone are the days when Vegas appealed only to gamblers and all night 'revellers', it is now one of the most glamourous [sic.] places in the world." (Laurieandjilly, July 9, 2007, Travelpod.com)

> "Confirmed reservations for next month! Can't wait for the coaster, Nine fine Irishmen, and Zumanity!" (Ambrea Lenhardt, NewYork-NewYork Hotel&Casino Facebook Page, April 8, 2011 at 8:11 am)

Overall, investigating Vegas experiences is appropriate to shed light onto broad range experiences that consumers derive from various experiential contexts.

The investigation of consumer experiences on Las Vegas Strip employed ethnographic and netnographic techniques. Data are triangulated using complementary qualitative data collection methods. The use of multiple data collection methods and multiple data sources strengthens the validity of the findings.

The researcher visited the Las Vegas Strip two times just for the purposes of collecting data for this research. She spent seventeen days on the Las Vegas Strip on her first visit, and four days on her second visit. The previous three trips she had taken to Las Vegas prior to starting this study also provided insights to her as to what to focus on in this context. During her visits to Las Vegas Strip for this research, she observed, photographed, and videotaped the sites, events, attractions, activities; and peoples' behaviors and interactions in these sites, events, attractions, and activities. She was a participant in many of these sites, events, attractions, activities, and interacted with as many people as possible during her visit. She kept detailed notes of her observations, took more than 1000 pictures, and recorded more than 12 hours of video footage.

She also involved in informal conversations with people she interacted about their thoughts and feelings about the sites, events, activities, and attractions on the Las Vegas Strip, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in situ. In her first research trip, the researcher visited the Las Vegas strip with her husband who was a first-time Las Vegas consumer. Observing his reactions to the sites, events and attractions provided the researcher many insights.

In addition, in her first visit she shadowed two first-time Las Vegas visitors for three days. These visitors were a friend of the researcher and his mother. They knew that the researcher was doing a marketing-related study on Las Vegas, but they did not know the specifics of the research. The researcher was also able to observe the reactions of her husband throughout their stay. In her second visit, she shadowed six more Las Vegas visitors with whom she took the trip for four days. These visitors were from six different countries. Her observations of these visitors' reactions and her chats with them in situ provided the researcher rich insights.

The researcher has also become a member of the two largest travel blog communities: Travelpod.com and Travelblog.org, and read all of the blog entries - over 1000 entries- that are written by Las Vegas consumer within the last 5 years. In addition to travel blogs, she became a member of various Las Vegas groups on Facebook, and liked and started to follow many Facebook pages that were created by Las Vegas consumers and businesses. This data provided the researcher with a broad understanding of perceptions of consumers from many different parts of the world, as many people from different parts of the world are parts of these groups.

In addition to these, she collected various magazines about Las Vegas attractions, sites, events, and actions, and that were published within a year. She also followed online magazine articles in the internet environment. Review of photos and written materials in these magazines

provided her insights into the narrative and physical designs involved in many encounters in Las Vegas.

Finally, the researcher conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews that lasted around one-and-a- half hours on the average with ten Las Vegas consumers and four managers from Las Vegas hotels. Las Vegas consumers were chosen from the city in which the researcher lives, as well as from Las Vegas consumer blogs. Las Vegas consumers who were chosen from blogs were interviewed online through Skype or on the phone. Interviews were also conducted with the Marketing Manager, Brand Manager, Operations Manager, and Executive Director for Design and Architecture who were working at MGM Group hotels. Manager informants were reached with the help of a professor working at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. The interviews conducted with consumers were less structured and allowed consumers to lead the conversation for the most part. Interviews conducted with managers were relatively more structured than the ones conducted with consumers. Prior to these interviews, the researcher did research on each hotel's designs, events, attractions, and sites. Afterward, the researcher created questions focusing on specific aspects of each hotel. Yet, the interviews were in conversation format and they were not completely led by her.

An analysis of the textual and visual materials collected was undertaken to identify the key emergent themes. All the data she collected were analyzed using constant comparison method to interpret the common patterns and identify themes until point of saturation is reached in ability to 1) identify some new insights into the characteristics of the constructs (experience intensity, its antecedent constructs, and some outcome constructs that it may relate to) and their dimensions, and 2) develop some new items to use in the scales that can be employed for further quantitative research.

Three levels of coding utilized by the researcher in analyzing the data are open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Glaser and Strauss 1967). During open coding, the data was broken down, examined, compared within and among cases, and categorized. After making the categorization, in the axial coding process connections between these categories were made. In the final, selective coding stage, categories were systematically related, and relationships found were validated by analyzing the data further.

In the comparison making process, following Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher did not only compare incident to incident to come up with classifications, but also made use of theoretical comparisons. Therefore, the author compared the emergent themes with existing theory. The tools used when making the theoretical comparison is largely derived from the literature, and sometimes from experience. Theoretical propositions premised upon the previous literature were identified first. The properties and dimensions derived from previous literature were used to guide the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data in hand.

The findings of the qualitative data analysis were combined with a through literature review in marketing, consumer research, sociology, anthropology, travel studies, museum studies, gameplay studies fields on topics that are related to experience marketing and consumption, in creating the framework and building hypotheses discussed below. This provided an opportunity to thoroughly examine the phenomenon of interest at dimensional levels. Below, key constructs in this study will be articulated (see Table 1for definitions of the constructs).

Table 1

Identified Antecedents of Consumer Experince Intensity in Experiential Marketing Settings

Primary Dimensions	Subdimensions	Key Points Discussed regarding the Domain	Example Studies
Textuality		Consumer's perceptions of the narrative elements in a market setting	Carù and Cova (2007b), Deighton (1992), Derrida (1966), Dholakia and Fırat (1998), Ermi and Mäyrä (2005), Kotler (1999)
	Readability	*The sense making characteristic of the narratives *Perception of text by as many senses as possible *Elements of the text that are arranged in a grammatically correct way *Meaningfully coherent arrangement of the elements of the text *Harmonious relationship between the elements of the text and elements of other broader texts - intertextuality and transtextuality	Brumer (1986), Chandler (2002), Codeluppi (2007), Merriman (1991), O'Donohoe (1997), Ozanne (1988), Scott (1993)
	Narrative Presentationality	*Creation of narratives that offer visionary models of behaviors, lifestyles, aesthetics, moral and social values. *Response to consumers' quest of multiplicity, extraordinary, visionary and alternative styles	Gottdiener (2001), King (1987), Ritzer (1999), Sherry et.al. (2007), Sorkin (1992)
	Appropriability	*Textual elements provided by companies as raw materials to be playfully engaged with. *Ellipticality, inclusiveness and openendedness characteristics of a text *Consumers own interpretations of company texts by mixing and matching mass cultural material for appropriation. *Decontextualization and fragmentation in texts.	Carù and Cova (2007a), Davis (1999), Dholakia and Fırat (1998), Fjellman (1992), Goulding (2000), Hetzel (2007), Peñaloza (1998), Sherry et.al. (2007), Scott (1994a), Scott (1994b), Santora and Trolio (2007), Kozinets et al. (2002)
Texture		Consumer's perceived positive impact of the sensory stimuli in a market encounter	Carù and Cova (2007a), Carù and Cova (2007b), Dholakia and Fırat (1998), Kozinets (2003), Lanier and Hampton (2009), Santoro and Troilo (2007)
	Sensory Presentationality	*Sensory stimuli that provide alternative visions, novelty, fantasy, and presentation of the unrepresentable *Transformation of the mundane to attractive * More sensational stimuli compared to the structure of the routines of the everyday life *Safety, comfort and hygiene limits. *Response to consumers' growing urge to experience impacts on their senses and emotions at highest levels	Beardsworth and Bryman (1999), Belk and Costa (1993), Hannigan (1998), Kozinets et al. (2002), King (1981), Peñaloza (1998), Stapleton et al. (2002)

Table 1 (Continued)

	Multiple Modalities	* Polysensorial layering of sight, smell, touch, taste. *Response to multimodal human behavior and multisensory human experience. *Highest level of effectiveness and receptiveness of consumers.	Featherstone (1990), Kotler (1999), Lindstrom (2005), Molitor (2007), Santoro and Troilo (2007), Schmitt (1999)
	Spectacularity	*Impressive, sensational, large-scale display *Result of focus dominantly on entertainment in today's culture. *Theatrical presentations of the market. *Role of technology. *Extravaganzas and simulations	Badat and Filser (2007), Crawford (1992), Davis (1999), Firat and Venkatesh (1995), Holbrook (2000), Kozinets et al. (2004), Rizzer (1999), Sorkin (1992), Wolf (1999)
Consumer Participation		*Physical partaking / being interactive in the activities and events in a market setting * Social interaction with other people in the encounter *Consumers feeling of involvement in the context	Bærenholdt et al. (2008), Carù and Cova (2003), Carù and Cova (2007), Gentile et al. (2007), Kozinets et al. (2004), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Wikstöm (2008)
Immersion		*Essential for consumers to close the physical and mental gap between themselves and the context * Refers to a transition from being a detached subject to becoming one with the event/activity and the context within which the event/activity takes place * Places the experience as the valued market offering in opposition to the mere ready-made products in the market * Happens instantaneously or gradually *It bends 'reality' perceptions of human beings and makes the consumer suspend his/her knowledge of its laws *Takes place at mental and physical levels * Takes place when the interaction of textuality and texture is perceived at high levels by the consumer	Carù and Cova (2006), Carù and Cova (2007a), Carù and Cova (2007b), Featherstone (1991), Fırat and Venkatesh (1995), Murray (1997), Pine and Gilmore (1999)

Consumer Experience Intensity

For the purposes of this research, consumer experience intensity is defined as *the perceived degree of physical, emotional, and mental arousal as a result of a market encounter.* More specifically, it may be defined as *the perceived degree of strength, force, or energy of the*

totality of senses, emotions, imaginations, and thoughts arising as a result of an encounter in the market domain. It simply is consumer's outcome evaluation of the strength of total senses, emotions, imaginations, and thoughts that s/he lived through in an encounter.

Experiences that people find most meaningful and prefer to return to, such as the ones that arise from visits to themed environments, concerts, parties, or festivals such as Burning Man, enclaves like Mountain Man, and the like, are very powerful in terms of their strong effect on consumer meaning creation through the perceived superiority of the totality of his/her thoughts, feelings, and senses (Belk and Costa 1998; Fırat 2001; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets et al. 2004; Hardie 2007; Lukas 2007; Sally 2007). Such experiential spaces of consumption from where consumers derive their intense experiences are polysemic and heteroglat spaces that embrace a multiplicity of qualities (Styhre and Engberg 2003). Consequently, intense experiences that arise from there are the ones that provide education, entertainment, and engagement at a high level.

Experience intensity has always been an important means of meaning construction in people's lives since it is an important factor in making the experience *memorable* and *significant*. Carnivals and festivals, as cultural and social events that have been around for centuries in almost every culture, are examples of how experiences that are perceived to be intense have played important and transformative roles in people's lives (e.g. Bakhtin 1984). Hence, in this study experience intensity is proposed as a critical construct also in the market domain in order to develop a better understanding of how consumers value various marketplaces, and market events and offerings, and how they construct meanings through these elements.

Based on the literature review and preliminary exploratory study, this study, which is an investigation of consumers' emotional, sensational, imaginative, and behavioral journeys in

experiential marketing contexts, proposes that the common denominator in such perceived-to-be-intense experiences that attract contemporary consumers at the highest level is the highly textual and textured nature of the context that lead to high levels of consumer participation and/or immersion.

In this research, *immersion*, the construct which is proposed to lead directly to intense experiences is defined simply as the sense of losing one's self and becoming one with the experience context. *Consumer participation in a market encounter* is defined, in the context of this research, as the consumer's feeling of involvement, interaction with other people and active physical partaking in the encounter. In other words, it refers to the consumer's input at physical, social, and cognitive levels in the creation of the encounter. Consumers' perception of the context and its elements are fundamental to their participation and immersion levels. Even though in marketing literature the context is operationalized as an *exogenous* influence on how consumers behave, based on the suggestion of Sherry (1995), Peñaloza argues that "the environment *is endogenous* to spectacular consumption processes in a range of marketplaces including tourist destinations, theme parks and museums, as well as department stores, malls, and restaurants." (Peñaloza 1999: 349-350). This research supports this view and investigates the important ways in which the "context" operates. Two main significant facets of the contexts that are found to be influential in consumer immersion, participation, and the intensity of experiences they derive from these contexts are found to be the narrative structure and the physical aspects (or more specifically, sensory stimuli) of the context. The notion of *textuality* in a market encounter is used to describe consumer's perceived significance and meaningfulness of the narratives (stories and messages) in the context which bring about his/her thoughts, imaginations,

feelings, sensations, and actions. The concept of *texture* in a market context is used to describe consumer's perceived significance of impact of the sensory stimuli utilized in the encounter.

These factors that are proposed to be the antecedents of consumer's experience intensity will be investigated further below.

Textuality

"Context is the primary concern for experience design and management." (Pullman and Gross 2004: 553). Gupta and Vajic (1999) simply define context as "*the physical and relational setting where the customer consumes everything that s/he interacts with in that setting*" (Pullman and Gross 2004: 553). Context is becoming more central in today's marketing places as consumers who are presented with an overload of information and alternatives can be attracted primarily by a more attractive atmospherics (Kotler 1974). Designing an experiential market context is about endowing the context with qualities that can lead to positive consumer thoughts, feelings, senses, imaginations and acts. One of these qualities is the text, or in other words, narratives (e.g. stories, themes, messages and tales) utilized in these contexts (Darmer and Sundbo 2008).

A text, in simple terms, is a narrative that is culturally constructed and that is based on a sign, the relation between the signifier and signified (Barthes 1964). Every market offering involves and promotes a text, a specific sign system that produces meaning (Venkatesh, Peñaloza, and Fırat 2006). The *concept* of an encounter, which is also called *theme* by some scholars, is the overall sign system that is promoted in an encounter that defines and shapes other narratives used in the context. Simply, the text of the market encounter refers to the compilation of *narratives* of the offerings such as the events, activities, and performances in the encounter.

As can be observed in contemporary experiential consumer environments, narrative design of a context primarily involves informational and ludic creation and consumption of space.

Based on the above definition of text, textuality of a market context refers to *the perceived meaningfulness and significance of the stories and messages as a set of signs in a market encounter.* In other words, it is a consumer's positive perception of the narrative design (the use of a concept, theme and other narratives evolving around it) of the context. Consequently, it is proposed that higher level of textuality allows the creation of further and deeper meanings of the encounter.

Accordingly, stories and messages are the central elements of events and other offerings in market encounters from which consumers derive experiences (Darmer and Sundbo 2008). The narratives in a context are proposed to be the key in consumer's perception of the context (Jensen 2006). In many experiential settings, stories are what make the context sophisticated and interesting for consumers. Consequently, storytelling and stories are essential to the sustainable success of the businesses (Darmer 2008). Therefore, businesses pay much attention to their storytelling. The following description of the show Mystère in its official website is an example of how businesses emphasize storytelling as one of the focal dimensions of their offerings:

> "Mystere thrills generations of audiences with its exhilarating blend of whimsy, drama and the unimaginable brought to life on stage."
> (http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/mystere/show/about.aspx, January,24 2011, 11:00am)

Accordingly, content-rich environments and offerings, and the experiences people derive from them hinge on narratives. Text is a central element in all types of social encounters. People make sense of encounters primarily based on the stories provided in these encounters. Consequently, the more meaningful these stories are perceived by consumers, the richer the experiences they derive from the encounter. Certain cultural and social stories and messages that

consumers find highly relevant and positively meaningful are the primary drivers of the success

in many marketing contexts. In the crowded marketplace, it is the positively meaningful stories

that the contexts involve that primarily differentiate them in the eyes of the consumers in most

cases. In the following blog entry, Paulandamber reflects the role of unique stories in the

differentiation process of consumers:

> "We love how each one has it's own theme and individuality. They are all completely
> different." (Paulandamber, July 10, 2005, Travelpod.com)

The main reason for stories being fundamental to the context is that storytelling provides

consumers a framework to derive a meaning about the context from the marketer driven elements

of the context (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008). Additionally, stories are powerful due

to the fact that they primarily appeal to emotions (Jensen 2006). This is a very significant appeal

in a culture where emotions and dreams are gaining bigger significance, and the market for them

is expected to overshadow the market for realities and physical products soon (Jensen 2006).

This is why today brands are more important than products for example. Branding in a way

means endowing the product with narrative(s) that appeal to consumer's emotions and dreams.

For example, a Las Vegas consumer expresses in his/her travel blog entry that the

"beyond rational" concepts created in Las Vegas are one of the key elements, besides physical

forms, in his/her love of Las Vegas:

> "We love Vegas. Words can't describe what it's like here, unless you've visited
> yourself…We could honestly go on for hours about the amazing buildings and ideas that
> people have created here."(Loudan1979, May 20, 2006, Travelpod.com)

In a similar vein, below another Las Vegas consumer emphasizes the critical role of

meaningful narratives that appeal to their emotions in perceiving it as a richer, more significant

show. Narratives that are found to be meaningful for consumers complete the other aspects of

the show:

"We saw Zumanity, the sensual side of Cirque. It was an amazing show. The artists were fascinating and the sexual humour woven in was perfect for the experience. A great way to end a wonderful day." (Meganandkevin, January 28, 2009, Travelpod.com)

According to the findings of the qualitative data analysis in this research, four of the six explanations that Levy (2006) found to indicate the importance of storytelling in general are also the critical reasons of storytelling in experiential market contexts: 1.The need to communicate, 2. Stories transmit information, 3. Stories stimulate fantasy and 4. Stories stimulate emotions.

The concept and the other narratives are primarily created and transmitted by a provider who usually has a commercial interest; and provide symbolic value to consumers. Jensen (2006: 52) define story as the business's "value statement". As a result of recognized importance of stories in the market, today, many market architectures have plots (Klingmann 2007). TEA's report by practitioners emphasizes the importance of storytelling and the details in the narrative design to make an experiential architectural design project meaningful (TEA 2008). The reason for this is the realization that the story adds something to the architecture, as well as adding something to the performance in the context (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008).

Marketers decide the design specificity of the stories that will be told based on their business ideologies, current culture, expectations of the consumers and other competitive forces. These are emphasized by the marketing manager (MM) and the operations manager (OM) of the New York New York Hotel in Las Vegas in the interview about designing and managing the New York City story of their hotel:

"MM: Well, we have design team through our corporate office, that's a part of their job, it's how do we keep current and still maintain true to who we need to be. Ahh, we just went through a casino remodel. The previous casino was a Central Park theme. There were trees, there was water and little bridges, made you feel like you're in Central Park. When we decided that we were going to change the casino and move away from that theme in order to become more modern and current, we didn't want to offend anybody by getting too far away from a New York theme. So what we did was we tried to go with more of a modern Manhattan feel. And, we have designers that are skilled in doing transition in a way that will be acceptable to the consumer, and will be embraced in a way

that they'll accept, so, that's pretty much how we do it. We also do research, we spend time in the city, not as much as we'd like, but we do go and we'll do research, for instance, when we wanna bring a new restaurant concept here, it's typically that we want to know is it New York, has a New York presence?..mm and we'll go and see, you know, how is it implemented and executed within the city, and how is it going to be good fit here. So, it's mainly through research. We don't. we don't jump into anything without understanding how it fits in with our current culture

OM: We've even researched when we were replacing trees. You know, we looked online to see what are authentic New York trees, you know, then we had to replace them with that. So, we're constantly trying to stay true to New York.

MM: That's true. We have oak trees around the pool, which are really problematic for maintenance around the swimming pool, but that's what you find in the city. There's no place in town that puts oak trees around their pool. But we do, because it's genuine."

Texts, including the ones in the market contexts, are reflections of cultural and ideological norms (O'Donohoe 1997). Text has traditionally been perceived as the spoken word or written material that is in the realm of linguistics. Yet, the nature of text in contemporary culture has expanded. According to Derrida (1966), text is not purely linguistic and limited to written materials such as books; it even involves gestures and choreography. Similarly, Barthes (1977) regards visual images and music as text. Dholakia and Fırat (1998), specifically examining contemporary marketplace texts that consumers "read" and derive their experiences from, also emphasize that text has transcended being just the spoken and the written word.

Moreover, in contemporary life, the forms of texts, especially the ones that belong to the market domain, are highly shaped by the electronic and televisual media. A breakdown of the linear and logical modern character of text due to new information technologies is observed frequently both in multimedia texts such as music videos, which are pulsating and fragmented, as well as in conventional written texts. Dholakia and Fırat (1998) call this shift in contemporary texts "text becoming hypertext", which refers to the linked, networked, and webbed character of the text. These expanded views of text are largely observed in experiential marketing contexts.

With the increasing forms of texts and with the recognition of the focal role of narratives in experience creation, companies emphasize overstimulation of the imagination of consumers

through stories, intrigues, and images they constantly renew (Carù and Cova 2007b). Today,

even in contexts such as museums, where the central place is occupied by collections and

exhibitions of material objects, these objects are surrounded more and more by interpretive

materials and storytelling (Kotler 1999). These stories and messages are found to make the

encounter culturally richer and more effective. For example, Borghini et al. (2009), based on

their investigation of American Girl Place, state that the ideology of contexts that are created

around and expressed by certain cultural stories and messages lead to effective retailing. Such

stories and messages are marketplace myths that attract consumers to certain contexts and

activities (Arsel and Thompson 2011). As can be observed in the quote of a Las Vegas consumer

below, for some consumers, contexts that tell stories, or give messages that they find positively

meaningful are a key source of fascination:

> "Blimey Pimey, oh my, where am I . Viva las Vegas This has to be the most over the top
> , glitzy, brash, noisy and fascinating city I have ever visited and that is saying something.
> Al and I weren't fussed whether we came or not , well am I glad we did." (Caro 1,
> February 8th 2010, Travelblog.org)

From the same perspective, stories that consumers do not find positively meaningful lead

to a negative perception of the context, as is observed in the comment of a Las Vegas visitor:

> "I cannot like a place where they sell women on the street." (Pelin, 29, informal chat,
> May 2010).

Here in this quote, we observe that the negative story the consumer reads in Las Vegas

context, commoditization of the woman body, dominates her perceptions of Las Vegas overall,

and of various other contexts in Las Vegas, and detracts from the positive experiences she might

derive from the context.

Results of investigation of the texts in experiential consumption contexts in Las Vegas

Strip show that there are mainly two types of narratives in such settings: macronarratives and

micronarratives. Both types of narratives are interconnected, and reinforce the meaning of each other. A specific theme that encompasses all the stories and messages in an encounter might be considered as a macronarrative. This is similar to the *concept* of an encounter as mentioned by Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen. They define *concept* as "an idea which is the general framework…" (2008: 94). According to them, some experience firms emphasize the concept as the main phenomenon they develop and sell.

Macronarratives, in Las Vegas and in other experiential market settings, are largely based on concepts from nature, popular culture, science fiction, futuristic possibilities, the exotic, tropical, history, art, science, sports, nostalgia, music, and styles of different cultures (see Lukas 2007b for a whole discussion of these narratives). In the marketplace, these dimensions of life "..are being transformed from agents of change into mere sources for inspiration, for attractions" (MacCannell 1989; p. 86). In Las Vegas, the common macronarratives that are found in various contexts in this research are *connection with other cultures, nature, and art, sports, history, celebrity lifestyle, limits of human creativity, wealth, romance, luxury, the logic of complete freedom(specifically in sexuality),* and *anything goes mentality*. These ideologies of Las Vegas manifest powerfully through a variety of settings embedded in Las Vegas.

In addition, each context in Las Vegas has its own macronarrative. For example, many hotels, restaurants or clubs are based on a certain encompassing theme around which all the details are built. For some consumers, these encompassing themes that are obvious to consumers in the first place are what make a place meaningful and sophisticated, as can be observed in a consumer's comment on Las Vegas contexts:

> "We thought that the Encore and Wynn Casinos had less personality than the elborate ones, like the Venetian and TI..." (RaeDan, June 13th 2009, Travelblog.org)

Micronarratives are stories and messages in a consumption context that are more detailed and that is highlighted by and that reinforces the broad macronarratives. Details about romance presented in Paris Hotel or by Bellagio fountains, historical details and stories utilized in Ceasar's Palace, designs reflecting wealthy life in the Bellagio Hotel, various visions of sexuality at Zumanity show (by Cirque du Soleil) are examples of micronarratives encountered in Las Vegas. Each of these micronarratives is multilayered, in other words, endowed with multiple details. Pleasure that consumers find in many micronarratives in Las Vegas is gleaned partly from experiencing the narrative in Las Vegas, situated in its macronarratives. Micronarrative details that are utilized in positively meaningful ways are the ones that make a macronarrative more elaborate and meaningful. Below consumer comments reflect this process:

> "…the show started with few adult jokes and contents and as it proceeded we saw more and more adult content in it but even due to such adult content it looked more thematic and expressing than vulgar. It was the best show with lot of expressions and adult jokes put to gather in a thematic way. It was really entertaining and worth spending money on it. The show lasted for around one and half hour which ended at a very high, dramatic and funny note." (Audisahni, January 7, 2008, travelpod.com)

Texturizing the contemporary texts or in other words, endowing them with qualities that invoke senses, is a crucial strategy for communicating the ideas of these texts more effectively (Dholakia and Fırat 1998). As a result, most of the new marketplaces not only provide consumers with narratives that stimulate imagination, they also convey the appeal of the narratives by highlighting their physical and symbolic structures (Kozinets et al. 2002). Through increasing application of textured text strategy, even in contexts like museums, one observes increasing use and role of multisensory interactive and virtual reality supplements to exhibits in order to create different learning and perceptual modes (Kotler 1999). Indeed, these supplements have started to play the key role in exhibits, as well as other textual contexts.

Another observation that is related to the narrative structure of experiential marketing settings is that in some contexts, scripts are developed based on the narrations. For example, in the King's Tournament Dinner show, the dinner has to be eaten by hand due to the fact that the narrative reflects a mediaeval era, and there are also other rules in the show. Following a script makes the dinner context more entertaining and immersive for some consumers, as can be seen in one of the comments of a consumer from UK, where s/he emphasizes the script that was followed and how s/he got into the spirit of the night as a result:

> "That evening we went to the "Tournament of the Kings" at the "Excalibur", which is an excellent night out where you eat like a banquet with your fingers and each area supports their own Knight depending on which country they are sitting in. We had to cheer for France, which was a shame but I really got into the spirit of the evening and Sara commented that she had never seen me so animated. . We were both feeling quite lively" (Richsarasloper, May 6, 2006, Travelpod.com)

Texts of contemporary market encounters which are found to be positively meaningful for consumers, so that make them participate in the encounter at higher levels and, thus, into which they can immerse more easily, are proposed to be the ones that are readable, presentational, and appropriable.

Readability

It is important for marketers to develop a sign system that successfully reflects "…the general perspectives and meanings that they want to transmit through the offering" (Lanier and Hampton 2009). Yet, one crucial point they need to take into consideration is that the effectiveness of such reflection is largely dependent on the degree to which their consumers can make sense of the sign system they provide. The text(s) in a marketing encounter should be easily readable to the consumer, to grab his/her attention and consequently, to be effective. Thus, creating a text that is highly readable is crucial for marketers who want their consumers to find the stories that they incorporate into their context's design meaningful. This is primarily due

to the fact that only through making sense of these texts at a high level can consumers develop their own meanings easily and effectively in a way to have positive perceptions of the context and to derive intense experiences from it.

Readability of a text simply refers to its *sense making characteristic*. According to some scholars, readability is a necessary feature of a text, as reading of the text per se is what produces the text (Barthes 1977). If a text does not make sense for someone, then it cannot be considered a text by that person. Moreover, if the text makes little sense to someone, then it is not an effective text. Therefore, "it is crucial that the experience provider creates a story about the concept so that the audience will know it." (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008: 95). In other words, to make their contexts clearer, and thus more meaningful, for consumers, marketers need to endow it with narratives that are familiar to consumers. Even though another key dimension of positively meaningful perceptions of narratives in experiential contexts, narrative presentationality, largely implies the novel; it is usually the complex mixture of the familiar and the new elements brought together in surprising ways that create the significance of contexts (Laursen 2008).

Readability of narratives in experiential marketing encounters can be defined as *the extent to which these packaged stories and their details in a context make sense to the consumer through recognizing and associating them with similar signs that are available within the same context, and more generally, with signs from the popular culture*. Overall, textuality is partially based on the extent of the perceived easiness for consumers to make sense of the narratives in a context by connecting the signs they encounter in experiential contexts with signs that are familiar to them. This perceived easiness is facilitated largely by marketers; at least as much as it is an outcome of consumer's literacy level.

Readability, specifically in marketing contexts, directly impacts on the ways consumers apply various frameworks that provide for them an understanding and acting opportunity. Consumers' appreciation of the presentationality of the narratives and many details used in narratives of contexts, and their playfulness with the narratives in a context are highly dependent on the readability level. Consumers, who, in the marketing context, find narratives that they can easily read by relating them to broader texts that they find in their everyday lives, perceive such contexts to be more exciting:

> ";-) The place is just so impressive and awe-inspiring, it's difficult to put it into words. We checked out as many of the places as we could and loved recognising random CSI:Vegas scenes." (Greystling, Tuesday, March 30, 2010, Travelpod.com)

> "We went see[sic.] 'Peepshow' at Planet Hollywood. Basically its [sic.] a striptease spectacular, like being at the strippers but its [sic.] a big Las Vegas showpiece. It was awesome, it had Holly Madison in it who is Hugh Hefners [sic.] ex-girlfriend…it was great, loved it" (December 1st 2009 by DJBEECH, United States of Damo).

Marketers need to take into account the three criteria to create text that make sense for the consumer:

1) The text should be perceived by as many senses as possible. Therefore, texturizing the stories is critical for marketers.

2) The text as a specific sign system must have elements that are arranged in a grammatically correct way (syntactically correct), that are meaningfully coherent (semantically correct) and that have harmonious relationships with the elements of broader texts (pragmatics) so that the text communicates more effectively. Therefore, marketers need to link their stories to a context of which the consumer can make sense easily.

3) The reader's literacy level should be sufficient for him/her to be able to read the text. So, marketers need to provide support for consumers in order to increase their context related literacy.

People make sense of what they encounter through the five senses: vision, hearing, smell, touch/feel, and taste. A text, therefore, first should be perceived by at least one of these senses in order to be a text that the person is able to read. However, perception of stimuli by more senses increases the probability of higher level of sense making. Making sense is largely based on making distinctions, and humans make specific distinctions about specific things that allow them to have deeper insights into things through their senses. For example, it is through taste that one can distinguish between bitter and sweet. Consequently, sensing is necessary for one to be able to read a text, because it is necessary to make distinctions; and involvement of more senses help consumer make more and finer distinction. Therefore, for marketers endowing their stories with sensory stimuli that will allow consumers make finer distinctions about these stories is essential.

People derive a significant portion of textual meanings from the interactions of elements (signs and symbols) within a text. One characteristic that the elements and expressions in texts need to have is that the signs must be in the right order for the text to be readable; that is, syntax. According to this characteristic, the elements need to be arranged in a way that the text is grammatically correct. The other characteristic is semantics which refers to the harmonious relationships among signs and symbols of a text that make the text meaningful. A text can be grammatically correct (syntactically correct) but may still be meaningless or at least have an incoherent meaning, which would interrupt its readability.

All texts, including the ones in marketing contexts, are historically and culturally constructed. As a result, consumers mainly derive the meanings of a text from the interaction of the text with other texts, contexts, and their own social activities (O'Donohoe 1997; Fjellman 1992). Kozinets et al. (2002), for instance, found in their research on ESPN Zone that consumers make sense of the experiential contexts by comparing them to other established structures in their

lives. Therefore, "if the meaning of things is found in their relations to contexts, then one way to gain control over these meanings is to capture the context." (Fjellman 1992: 31). Since the texts we live in are produced, used and situated within other cultural practices (Graddol 1993), and consumers generate meanings of a text from its context-dependent features, readability requires "contextualization." Strauss and Corbin (1998: 106) define context as "…the conditional background or situation in which the event is embedded." As addressed by Hudson and Ozanne (1988: 510), "it is crucial…to know the context of a behavior or event because social beings construct reality and give it meaning based on context." To make the contextualization easier for consumers, marketers need to understand consumers' cultural background and rather than using an explicit language in their designs, they need to extract symbols from this background to place in the narratives of their contexts in order to generate interest and promote response from the consumers (Young 2002).

As also can be observed in consumers' statements about their experiences in experiential marketing environments, knowledge about the contextual elements one has is one of the most critical elements that influence one's experience that s/he derives from there (Christrup 2008). Having a deeper background in the narrative of the setting and its details make the context more readable for the consumer; therefore, make it more meaningful and exciting for him/her. Yet, each consumer has a different capacity to contextualize and make sense of the narratives provided. For example, a consumer who doesn't have any knowledge of the icons and celebrities mentioned by many consumers in their comments about the appeal of Las Vegas cannot read the narrative of the context in the same way, because his/her associative network will be very small, and therefore s/he will not be able to be as excited about his/her encounter as the consumers who

have a deeper knowledge. Comments of Las Vegas consumers below further emphasize the

impact of the level of knowledge in consumers' level of sense making of the context's narrative:

> "…it is so hard to explain the show, which was really incredible. Basically, Cirque du Soleil has interpreted and illustrated a number of Beatles songs, including some of my favorites like Blackbird, Sgt. Pepper, Hey Jude, Something in the Way She Moves, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds and so many more… LOVE had a few haunting scenes, as well as clips of the Beatles together - I always enjoy the little glimpses into how silly they were with some of their banter. I bet John Lennon would have gotten a real kick out of the show if he was still around. They definitely focused on the theme of "love" too, ending the show with the song "All you need is love," which always reminds me of Love Actually (my favorite movie)." (November 21st 2008 by LexTraveler, Travelblog.org)

> "We checked out a few of the casinos, then headed to the Belliago [sic.] to see the Chichuly [sic.] glass displays that I learned about in an art class a long time ago… The Chihuly glass was beautiful." (DeWalls, Travelblog.org, July 7th 2010)

> "Next up was the Venetian just across the street. Once again this hotel was truly breathtaking and the architecture and décor was beautiful. This hotel and casino definitely came a very close second to Caesar's, what with its accuracy and attention to detail." (ckbe, July 24th 2009, travelblog.org)

> "…we took a walk down Las Vegas Boulevard and into the Mirage hotel which was beautiful and based on a South Seas Pacific theme…" (StuandRach, June 24th 2010,Travelblog.org)

One is required to be literate to be able to read a text. Literacy has been simply defined as

the ability to read and write. Being literate is a necessary condition for one to be able read the

text in a way to make sense of it as a whole, as well as of each of the signs involved in it. For

example, a text written in a specific language cannot make any sense for a person who does not

know that language or the letters in it, and while the text is a text for the natives of the language,

it is not a text for someone who cannot read it. It is important for marketers to attract as many

consumers as possible to their contexts. Therefore, in the marketplace, it is observed that

marketers modify the narrations of the attractions according to the largest number of consumers'

literacy level. For example, Walt Disney reduces history to a simplified version of events so that

the consumers are able to read the stories and myths presented in specific sections of its theme

parks such as the American Adventure at EPCOT in Florida; and become more fascinated by the context.

 Deriving from Bengtsson and Fırat's (2006: 375) definition of brand literacy, it can be proposed that in contemporary culture being literate to read the texts provided by marketers "… means that the consumer's understanding … goes beyond the immediate surface meanings of the words and symbols associated with the…" provided narrative. Taking a similar approach, Ritson and Elliot (1995) emphasize, in their study on advertising literacy, "*co-creation of",* and "*act on"* meanings of advertisements as main characteristics of consumer's literacy. Being able to read the experiential setting as a context, and details in this context, and furthermore being able to act on these context-related meanings is an important part of consumer literacy.

Skills developed as a result of a higher level of literacy allow the literate person to have a bigger associative network of the details of the narrative(s) in the context, discriminate and interpret the signs more finely, and let him/her relate to and use the words and other symbols knowingly. The ability to make finer distinctions in their readings of the narrative signs of the context allows consumers to appreciate the details more and find the context more significant:

> "Next stop was Caesar's Palace, which was my most favourite [sic.] hotel and casino on the strip by far. It was just so beautiful and the architecture and décor inside was truly inexplicable. Everywhere was decked out like ancient Rome, with roman faux-marble statues, smaller versions of famous statues like Michelangelo's 'David', angels, beautiful centaurs and mysterious horses with wings." (July 24th 2009 by ckbe, travelblog.org)

Some other comments by other consumers reflect how consumers might appreciate the artwork presented in the Bellagio hotel more when they are well-versed and are able to read it deeper by knowing the artist of the artwork:

> "ceiling in bellagio lobby art done by Dale Chihuly. really cool." (July 23rd 2009 by Jackie D, Travelblog.org)

or, by knowing the details that are key for elegancy of a theater context by comparing it to other

elegant context:

> "…they also have a huge theatre showing "The Phantom of the Opera" with beautiful
> Red & Gold fixtures like those built in countries like Italy, France & UK." (July 16th
> 2009 by Bencat, Travelblog.org)

Some consumers even take their readings of the details of the context to a more "factual"

level. For these consumers, this reflects their higher level of reading of the context and thus,

higher meaning derivation. Following consumer expressions of Paris Hotel, Las Vegas reflects

consumer's positive perceptions of a context that results from his/her ability of reading factual

details:

> "Paris, Las Vegas as its name suggests, its theme is the city of Paris in France; it includes
> a 5/8ths scale, 540-foot-tall (164.6 m) replica of the Eiffel Tower, a neon sign in the
> shape of the Montgolfier balloon, a two-thirds size Arc de Triomphe and a replica of La
> Fontaine des Mers. The front facade of the building suggests the Paris Opera House and
> the Louvre. Before the night comes to an end we take a look in side and in the casino its
> like being under the structure of the Eiffel Tower... Inside Bellagio, Dale Chihuly's Fiori
> di Como, composed of over 2,000 hand-blown glass flowers, covers 2,000 sq ft (190 m2)
> of the lobby ceiling. Which are over the top..." (Bencat, July 16th 2009, Travelblog.org)

In these expressions above, it is observed that when consumers think that the design fits

into their knowledge framework, they make a higher level of sense of the narrative elements of

the context. Today, it is also crucial to regard literacy not as a concept limited to the reading and

writing of verbal language, but as a concept that is extended to new visual and participative

communication types (Debes1968; Scott 1993). Knowing how to read texts in the encounter

which involve interactions, design, and the like, means being able to make inferences as to what

the encounter is about and what is happening in the encounter, as well as using and playing with

the elements in the encounter for (co-)creation of further elements and symbols.

Consequently, a higher level of literacy is crucial for consumers to understand and play

with the themes and the elements narrations provided in the encounter. Hence, companies

employ tactics involving a support system, collective action, and self-determination to help

consumers with developing abilities to read the texts they provide (Caru and Cova 2007b), or in

other words to be more 'context literate.' For example, hotels in Las Vegas sometimes have the

exhibits of the shows that they host. In these exhibits, they inform consumers about the details of

the show. Today, social media, such as Facebook, is a significant support system that businesses

use to make their consumers more literate about the narratives they provide. Las Vegas hotels,

for instance, largely use Facebook for these purposes. Sometimes they give the information in

their status updates about the narratives of their attractions, sites, events, and activities; and

sometimes they want consumers to try to figure out certain narratives and meanings by asking a

question and starting a discussion on their Facebook page. Below are examples of this

phenomenon:

> "MGM Resorts is presenting the 29th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Parade in
> downtown Las Vegas on Monday, Jan. 17 at 10am! Thousands of people are expected to
> be there, along with about 100 MGM Resorts employees.
>
> MGM Resorts has an award-winning Diversity Initiative and is celebrating the
> accomplishments of Dr. King. Come down and see our Company's float! Floats will be
> judged in 18 categories including "Best Overall Entry."" (New York-New York Hotel &
> Casino Las Vegas Facebook Page, January 14 at 5:09 pm).

The importance of consumer's context literacy is that higher level of literacy brings

higher level of contextualization on the behalf of the consumer. For a consumer, placing the text

within a larger text (context) is a necessity in order to be able to make larger number of

associations about it. Intertextuality is a key concept for marketers to investigate to be able to

grasp how consumers create associative networks. According to Chandler (2002), intertextuality

refers to making sense of texts both on a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a

text, and a vertical axis connecting the text to other texts. Reading of every text depends on prior

encoding and decoding regarding these axes. Using intellectually accessible and culturally

relevant elements in texts is a significant approach to creating texts consumers can read easily and in which they can highly involve themselves (Merriman 1991; Codeluppi 2007).

For example, effectiveness of texts in the marketplace might be very much dependent on consumer's ability to read the previous texts provided by the same company in other encounters (for example, most consumers of Cirque de Soleil follow their different shows in different theaters in Las Vegas and compare and contrast their stories to evaluate the success of the narrative of each of their shows), his/her ability to relate texts of various offerings that take place in a specific time and a specific context (most consumers not only compare and contrast Cirque's shows, but also take into consideration other shows by other companies to evaluate the effectiveness of the story a show), and to read the same or similar stories in various different contexts, or in various forms. Readings of the same narrative by the consumer in different media is another example for the latest of these phenomena. A consumer who is able to appreciate the Lion King show in Las Vegas more as a result of his/her previous reading of the show's story in a film is a good example:

> "We went to see The Lion King and it was fantastic - very clever how they interpreted scenes from the film which would have seemed impossible to do on the stage." (Chocolateaddict, July 21st 2009, Travelblog.org)

Another consumer, in a similar manner, mentions how his/her previous readings of Lion King in some other contexts influence his/her perceptions of the show s/he watched in Las Vegas:

> "The show was excellent, Timon and Pumba always make me laugh. The scriptwriters also changed some of the dialogue to make it specific to Las Vegas and also mentioned the economic situation which was quite clever and funny." (Calmyourjets, August 25, 2009, Travelpod.com)

As mentioned earlier, marketers widely use simplification methods (e.g. using world-wide known icons as mentioned below) in order to achieve the creation of contexts that

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consumers perceive to be readable. Simplification methods allow a larger number of consumers to apply their own frameworks more easily to make higher levels of meaning of the narratives in a market context. For instance, in many experiential market contexts, marketers appropriate certain popular (culture) narratives that are socially ubiquitous ideas in order to make the stories they provide simpler, more understandable, and more desirable for a large number of consumers. The reason for this is that such popular culture narratives (e.g. stories of certain cities, stories of celebrities, stories of Hollywood movies and etc.) dominate most of the contemporary consumers' tastes and desires from all around the world, and their omnipresence in the context increases readability perceptions of most number of consumers, which in return lead to success (Kozinets et al. 2002). Thus, popular culture is a rich source for marketers. Laursen (2008), in his discussion of the aspects of complex experiences that makes Rome a significant tourist attraction for example, emphasizes the role of movies in making the Rome context more readable for the visitor:

> "If you have not been to Rome, but have seen some of the many successful films shot here, you may even get the feeling of being in the middle of one, especially of you just turn an corner and suddenly find yourself in front of a tourist attraction. Walking in Rome sometimes reminds me of cuts in films…" (p. 67).

In a similar fashion, in Las Vegas, many consumers mention the movie "Ocean's Eleven" when they are talking about their fascination with the Bellagio Water Fountain show. Most compare what they experience watching the show to the scenes they see in the movie:

> "So the other highlight in Vegas is the Belagio [sic.] and the water show that happens every fifteen minutes (think back to Oceans 11 i nthe [sic.] last scene where they all sit out the front of the Belagio [sic.] and watch the water display and lights)" (Wallace n Duckers, February 5th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Moreover, they take pictures in the same place where in the movie 'Ocean's Eleven' are watching the water show.

In addition to utilizing vivid imagery they borrow from what they have seen before, some consumers consult their imaginations that were triggered by some popular culture elements in reading the narrative elements of the context. When this imagination is confirmed in physical forms in the context, they find the narrative elements of the context even more exciting:

> "After lunch we crossed the street and went into Caesars [sic.] Palace, again it was just like how I imagine Rome to be." (March 3rd 2009 by Kate Fiko, Travelblog.org)

Consumers' immediate grasp of popular culture narratives makes the contexts that employ these narratives more exciting, worthy of participating in, and further exploring for them. For example, quotes from consumer blog entries below indicate the importance of being able to read celebrity related narratives of Las Vegas immediately. Consumers who read such narratives immediately, perceive Las Vegas more significant and moving:

> "The premiere for the movie The Goods was also on at Planet Hollywood so we ended up watching stars including Will Ferrell and Jeremy Piven walk down the red carpet. As a movie geek and celebrity stalker I was in heaven. It was all just so exciting." (Leanne and Simon, September 12, 2009, Travelblog.org)

> "…but we got to see some of the biggest names in the game. For all you poker fans, you may know Phil Hellmuth, Mike Matusow, Peter Eastgate, Doyle Brunson and Scotty Nguyen, - plus we got a picture with Mike 'the mouth' Mathesaw - very exciting!!" (Matt and Dianna Hoskins, July 13, 2009, Travelblog.org)

To provide the consumers a sense of familiarity, for the purposes of moving them, marketers in Las Vegas largely build the stories of the market contexts around an icon (generally of the popular culture), or at least incorporate some icons somewhere in their design. This is a significant strategy in contemporary marketing contexts that function in the economy of icons (Sternberg 1999). New York City story of the New York New York Hotel in Las Vegas, elaborated with various widely known New York icons used in the hotel, is a good example of this phenomenon. Most consumers emphasize the icons that they recognize when they talk about

their fascinations with certain Las Vegas contexts, as can be observed in the consumer comments

below:

> "You could admire the Manhattan skyline and the pyramids of Giza" (waterfia, August 8,2010, Travelblog.org)

> "…we journeyed up and down the strip, being transported into foreign and exotic locations with each hotel; from the ancient worlds of the Pharaohs of Luxor Hotel and Casino (appropriately shaped as a pyramid), to the medieval times of the knights of the round table at Excalibur, the castle shaped casino. Further down the strip was New York New York, with a front face of bustling New York Architecture, everything from the statue of liberty, empire state building and twin towers; the interior modeled as various streets, the floor cobble stones, the shop fronts as building fronts you would see on the street, the ceiling, blue skies with clouds. The Paris hotel and casino featured its own scale replica of the Eifel Tower and also had an interior modeled like the streets of Paris, and just for added authenticity, the reception staff all spoke fluent French." (saorrento, Long way to Russia,S eptember 21, 2009, Traveblog.org)

> "We decided to spend a bit of money and stopped at New York New York. The hotels in Vegas are crazy!!!! It was literally like stopping in a mini Manhatten!!! It has a scaled down statue of liberty, brooklyn bridge and Chrysler building on the outside and then on the inside it has replicas of soho and Grenwich village." (Rich and Karen; April 10th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Employment of popular culture icons, therefore, is a critical element in creating and

providing a story to consumers, as icons are signs that have the highest readability level for most

number of consumers in experiential marketing contexts:

> "From there we headed on down to the Paris hotel and casino was which beautiful both inside and out. After taking some shots on the outside, we headed inside and decided to queue up for the Eiffel tower. It's somewhere between one half and one third of the size of the real thing, and looked exactly like the real thing even down to the smallest details." (ckbe, July 24th 2009, travelblog.org)

> "The canals, Rialto Bridge, Doge's Palace and tower from St Mark's square all dominate the front of the complex and our awe of the place was only increased by us visiting the inside of the building. We entered through the hotel lobby and found the golden globe monument (that Dan remembers from the Vatican City) in the centre of the room with the ceilings covered in Rennaissance-style paintings. (RaeDan, June 13th 2009, Travelblog.org)

One other way of making the narratives of the context easier for the consumer to read is

utilizing an overall consistent theme (Pullman and Gross 2004). Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggest

that businesses involved in experience marketing develop a coherent theme around which they stage their various experiences if they want to build a positive and consistent image in consumer's mind. By providing a consistent theme in the encounter, marketers first and foremost allow consumers to construct a higher level of associative network among the signs of the theme. Consumers who are able to grasp some of the details, for example the icons used, are also able to grasp the overarching theme of the context, and therefore are able to apply this framework to other sign details that they have not encountered before. As a result, they are able to make sense of these details. Therefore, such a framework increases the readability level of the narrative signs that were not previously familiar to them. For example, a consumer visiting the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas may not know about the details of every practice, attraction, and offering in the context. But the encompassing narrative of "romance" of France and Paris that circulates throughout the context and surrounding pastiche of practices and experiences in the hotel increases the readability of the various narratives of the context for the consumer; even of the details that they did not know about Paris before. Or, the artistic environment in Italy as stated by one of the Venetian Hotel consumers in his/her the comment below also shows the importance of an encompassing theme in consumer readability. This consumer, even though s/he does not know the details of the painting, such as the name of the work, the artist of the work and so forth, still reads it as a part of the artistic atmosphere of the Italy. Just knowing the predominant "high-art" narrative of Italy is sufficient for consumer's sense making, at least to a certain level, of the hotel's narrative:

> "Walked through there and over to the Venetian casino…Inside the entrance, is this amazing painted ceiling like something you would see somewhere in Italy" (Sparks fly in the USA, October 18th 2009, Travelblog.org).

People apply interpretive frameworks that they learn from their social environments in order to understand and act on the texts, or narratives, or stories they encounter (Berger and Luckman 1967; Goffman 1974). If the framework, or various frameworks, one uses in order to make sense of a text is based on largely accepted and diffused social realities, consumer might create a bigger associative network regarding the narrative; and therefore build deeper relationships with it and its particular elements. In other words, the larger and more these frameworks, the higher the level of understanding people have, and the more opportunity they find and create to act.

Also, based on their knowledge level about the details of context's narrative, when consumers are able to read that the narrative characteristics of a context conveys a sense of naturalness and truth by using accurate depictions, called "verisimilitude" by Kozinets et al. (2002) borrowing from Olson (1999), they find it to be more authentic and have more positive perceptions about it. As a result of more readable narratives and deeper background knowledge about the narrative elements in the context, the experience is perceived as authentic as "its authenticity lies in its state of being immediately knowable to the patron." (Lukas 2007b: 82). The comments below are examples of how consumers perceive stories that they immediately know, and that find to be endowed with accurate details (based on their previous knowledge) "authentic":

> "Inside the venetian - it feels like you are in a palace in Europe, no joke." (April 6th 2010 by mpchegrl, Travelblog.org)

> "From the outside it looks very grand and straight from a Venice street scene, with canal included. Inside it is equally, if not more, impressive! Take the stairs up to the second level and walk through the doors and you will suddenly enter, what seems like, Venice at night time!...The pièce de résistance is a replica St Marc's Square complete with entertainers and atmosphere." (JoHall, June 20th 2008, Travelblog.org)

> "Most of the casinos have a theme like Rome for 'Cesar's Palace' or Venice for 'The Venetian'. So if you didn't get to visit the real Rome yet you have a chance to see the

Trevi Fountain or for Venice the Piazza St Marco!" (Ben and Robson, July 26th 2009, Travelblog.org)

Such perceptions that erode the opposition of authentic and inauthentic in an unexpected setting and situation make these contexts more attractive for consumers:

"The canal, the gondols,the bridges,St Marco Plaza,the security staff in carabinieri uniforms:it looks like the real place ! The facade of the hotel is also inspired from Venice: it's charming." (Nathalieetfrans, May 27, 2008, Travelpod.com)

"…the hotel is French themed everywhere, even down to cobbled streets, patisseries and boutiques, signage and even the staff greet you in French." (snookymumma, May 27, 2007, Travelpod.com)

Overall, degree to which a consumer finds a text redable is a significant dimension of his/her perceptions of a context.

Narrative Presentationality

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for the importance of storytelling is stimulating fantasy as "…stories help people to think about experiences that are novel and unlike their own. They foster imagination and creativity…" (Levy 2006: 454). Consumers want their imaginations to be stretched in experiential marketing contexts. Thus, telling stories that stimulate consumers' minds are crucial in such settings in order to grab consumers' fuller attention. Yet, in today's story-full marketplace fostering consumer's imagination is not a simple task. The primary reason for this is that people today have an increasing number of entertainment and education options and means. According to Bauman (1996), the modern marketplace is a place where value creation is pursued for "maximal impact." And, "for maximal impact, since in a world over-saturated with information attention turns into the scarcest of resources and only a shocking message, and one more shocking than the last, stands a chance of catching it (until the next shock)…" (p. 25). A fulfilling fantasy exaggeration through shocking messages is an important dimension of experiential market settings for consumers. Below consumer travel blog entries

reflect the importance of messages that they find to be shocking in explaining their admiration of

Las Vegas:

> "The sky is the limit, and if the other crowd are doing it big, then we have to do it enormous. Even without setting foot in a casino, there's plenty to look at outside. The Mirage has a volcano that erupts on the hour and The Bellagio has a water fountain show, where the jets of water actually dance to the music they pump out. Has to be seen to be belie. Besides this, an outdoor Pirates show happens a few times each night, complete with firing canons and mving boats. It's just madness, and easy to understand the 'America's Playground' tag, because every single thing is man-made. You're in the middle of the desert, don't forget." (Scobo2000 , June 28, 2007, Travelpod.com)

> "Once again we could just not have imagined what it really would be like…LAS VEGAS! It is like a fantasy land in the middle of nowhere. No saints here, sinners only!" (Greystling, March 30, 2010, Travelpod.com)

A presentational text or narration can be defined as *a set of signs that provide the reader*

with alternative visions, novelty, fantasy, and presentation of the unrepresentable (sublime).

Walt Disney's vision of EPCOT Center very well reflects the significance and meaningfulness of

the logic of presentational texts in experiential market contexts:

> "I don't believe there is a challenge anywhere in the world that's more important to people everywhere than finding solutions to the problems of our cities. But where do we begin? How do we start answering this great challenge? Well, we're convinced we must start with the public need. And the need is not just for curing the old ills of old cities. We think the need is for starting from scratch on virgin land and building a special kind of new community. So that's what EPCOT is: an Experimental Prototype Community that will always be in the state of becoming. It will never cease to be a living blueprint of the future where people actually live a life they can't find anyplace else in the world. Everything in EPCOT will be dedicated to the happiness of the people who live, work, and play here, and those who come here from around the world to visit our living showcase. We don't presume to know all the answers. In fact, we're counting on the cooperation of American industry to provide their very best thinking during the planning and the creation of our Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. And most important of all, when EPCOT has become a reality and we find the need for technologies that don't even exist today, it's our hope that EPCOT will stimulate American industry to develop new solutions that will meet the needs of people expressed right here in this experimental community." (Walt Disney, 1966)

Narrative presentationality is defined in this research as *the extent to which the consumer perceives that the stories and messages of an encounter provides visionary, novel, fantastic and sublime knowledge and perspectives that are difficult to experience elsewhere.* In other words, it is *the consumer's perceptions about the capacity of the stories and messages of an encounter to provoke new thoughts, imaginations and fantasies.*

As is obvious in most consumers' accounts of their contextual perceptions, newness and uniqueness are among key determinants of successful experiential context narratives (Pine and Gilmore 1998; 1999), because they are what lead to consumer's sense of "discovery," or a sense of excitement and magic in experiential settings. According to Weber (2001), the prominence of this discovery is related to its ability to make the world seem much wider for the one who senses it. Accordingly, marketers need to come up with unique and novel narratives to be able to inspire, enlighten, and entertain, and make their context an effective one. Successful experiential marketing contexts are the ones that provide idealized versions of how certain experiences might be like through uniqueness and novelty.

Accordingly, innovation in experiential marketing settings is vital even when marketers utilize familiar narrative materials in their contexts. Plain presentation of concepts, such as certain ideas, myths, places, cultures, history, art, sports and so forth that are borrowed from other contexts is not sufficient to attract and amaze consumers living in today's culture. To attract these consumers, context should provide new forms of reflection even for familiar narratives. Each of the narratives, even the most familiar ones, should be endowed with unique and novel aspects to be striking for consumers.

> "Like Disneyland on steroids, Las Vegas takes great pride in being unauthentically authentic. Every year millions of dollars is spent building a new casino that is even better than the real thing. There are lions that don't bite, canals that never get dirty and of course indoor skies that never rain." (Paulortw, June 26, 2003, travelpod.com)

Applying imagination to real to create presentationality is a significant practice of story designs in experiential environments (Adey 2006). Today, designers of successful experiential consumer environments are rather 'imagineers' in Disney Company's words. They base their designs on ideas that have not yet been realized in everyday life, or they at least incorporate such ideas to their more mundane designs. Simulations created in successful experiential contexts about which consumers have positive perceptions are not copies or referents. Most of the effective experiential contexts, as Johnson (1981) puts it, help making certain stories, such as the historical ones, come alive and provide a lens onto these commonly known stories:

> "For example, we cannot now experience the Wild West as it was, but we can visit and experience Disney's version of it, so that for visitors, and especially the younger visitors, Disney's version becomes the original version, which is actually more powerful than history since its form is concrete, containing "real" people and "lifelike" people with plenty of action and drama by both." (p. 164)

This increases the verisimilitude perceptions, in other words, the naturalness and truth perceptions of consumers (Kozinets et al. 2002):

The large number of Las Vegas consumers emphasizing their amazement with the narrative of a compact world that they encounter in Las Vegas (as they can find many cities that they love gathered on one street) is another indicator of the value of the presentationality phenomenon in consumers' perceptions of the context. According to Meamber (2011), contemporary consumers as post-tourists have a preference for playfully sampling the world as a staged spectacle. Even though many consumers today are able to do this through various media, and these consumers are familiar with the stories of these well-known cities, the idea of finding all their favorite cities in the same place physically adds a unique dimension to their perception of Las Vegas, which makes it more exciting for them, as can be observed in comments below:

"It looks like Disneyland for adults. Most of the hotels have a theme,like the New York-New York,Paris Las Vegas and the Venetian. You can travel the world in Vegas !" (Nathalieetfrans, May 26, 2008, Travelpod.com)

"…we did get to see the Manhatten skyline and Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower and Grand Canal of Vence in less than 24 hours - in a world without concord it's the only way you'll be able to do that!" (Alexndean, August 29, 2006, Travelpod.com)

"…going to Las Vegas and walking leisurely along the Strip would give him or her approximately the equivalent experience. You can visit "atmospheric re-creations" of Southeast Asia, Luxor and other sites in Egypt, the movie studios in Hollywood California, New York City, Paris, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Venice and other sites in Italy, etc… And you don't even need a passport!"(Omega, April 18th 2008, Travelblog.org)

"In one day, it was possible to experience that authentic Parisian passion of the Champs Elysees, the gladiatorial excitement of the Coliseum and the Venetian romance of the Grand Canal." (waterfia, August 8th 2010, Travelblog.org)

"So as Saturday drew to a close we had been to Venice, Rome, the Pacific Islands, Paris and back! In a day! Only in Vegas....." (June 24th 2010 by StuandRach, Travelblog.org) "Its hard to understand, but a lot of the hotels are based upon areas of the world and theyre basically cities withing themselves. So paris has its own eiffel tower and new york has a statue of liberty! and all of this is just along the strip...bizarre but awesome to oogle at at the same time." (Beef_jerkey, August 3, 2005, Travelpod.com)

"…staying there is waking up in a new town every day." (eblonk, 2008, Youtube.com)

Successful experiential consumption spaces allow people to explore different aspects of life that are outside what they live through in their everyday lives, such as other cultures, new technological advancements, new inventions, nature, art, science, history connections and the like through presenting vision in their texts. Narratives utilized in a concept of experiential market environments are expected to present a vision that stimulate consumer's minds in ways to make them think and fantasize about things that they have never encountered or imagined before, or rethink and fantasize about things that they have already known from a different perspective. Creativity presented in the story is what makes the context valuable for consumer:

"I've been last year and going again this year can't wait! I love the originality of it all...the creativity behind the stage n storyline…" (Dave Doyne, Ka fecabeook Page, 4.7.2011)

People have always been fascinated by social encounters that have visionary and novel narratives. The central roles certain social events and encounters have had in human beings' lives throughout history are fundamentally a result of the visionary texts and novel narratives they provide. Bakhtin (1984) suggests that events like carnivals and festivals, which are common to almost every culture, are very valuable since they provide such presentational texts by being special, creative life forms, with their own space and time, and by signifying the symbolic destruction of authority and official culture and the assertion of popular renewal. Similarly, Featherstone (1990) emphasizes the key role of presentational and visionary aspects of the texts that are provided in such events for people that take place in sites of cultural disorders by asserting them as "…the source of fascination, longing and nostalgia, especially for people from middle class" (p.15).

Contemporary people still seek alternative visions and styles regarding almost all aspects of life in social encounters. What is different today, however, is that alternative lifestyles and behaviors are largely observed and lived by people through consumption texts in the market, such as that of advertisements, or of events in social market environments like shopping malls, or retail stores. Consumers look for multiplicity in texts of not only extraordinary encounters, but also of everyday market encounters for enhanced visions. Contemporary consumers mainly seek "…those experiences that can make 'present' all or most of the exciting elements of space/time settings without the difficulties and hardship" (Fırat and Shultz 1997: 190). The earlier comments of consumers about their fascination of being able to find different cities from different parts of the world together on one street reflects this mindset of consumers well.

Success of a growing number of themed environments in places people live their everyday lives, as well as visit for holidays, can be provided as evidence of an evolution in the

notion of "representation". For example, parts of Walt Disney World such as Mission: Space, The Land, Imagination!, and Test Track Pavilions, or Rainforest Cafés that can be found in everyday places all over the world, provide consumers with presentational texts, and are attracting the attention of contemporary consumers from all over the world at the highest level due to their presentational elements. Also, we increasingly observe that even more mundane spaces, such as shopping malls (e.g., Mall of America), provide consumers ever more with alternative visions. The construction and use of public space and provision of human connection in a secure environment are among examples of such visions.

Consumer encounters in experiential contexts provide an opportunity for production of unique and novel meanings not only for various dimensions of life, but also for consumers' subjectivities (Peñaloza 1999). Some of these encounters challenge consumers as they stretchthe limits of one's perceptions of himself or herself, or at least provide him/her a certain level of flexibility in thinking about his/her subjectivity, as can be observed in the below consumer blog entry about the ways s/he felt as his/her identity was challenged in an experiential setting:

> "…and went to a place called Dicks The Shame Of The Strip, this place the staff are rude to you and are nasty to you so we went in to get insulted and eat lol now in here they make you a hat and right rude things on it , i wasnt impressed with mines as it said 'Im English so the only thing stiff on me is my upper lip ' i told the dude i was Scottish and not English ,his response was same fucking difference just wear it and shut up,i should have taken offence but i was rolling around laughing" (McNicol, December 19th 2008,Travelblog.org)

In sum, presentationality in narratives of experiential marketing contexts is largely about providing a unique and novel vision. This is what contemporary consumers want, seek, and get excited about, since it enriches their "regular" way of thinking. Such an excitement of consumers was suggested by Fırat and Ulusoy (2009) in their study in EPCOT Center. Below is an example consumer comment that they provide in their study to support this perspective:

"We went to Innovation [section of Disney World where potential new technologies and visions of how they would restructure life are showcased] this morning, before the World Showcase. We'll probably go and see the Living Seas and The Land also, because, we're not really ecologists, but we do appreciate the oceans and I think it's time for us to wake up and speak for taking better care of our planet. I think Disney does a good job of representing that too."

Another significant source of presentation in the contemporary culture is the cult of celebrity (Hannigan 1998; Young 2002). Hence, besides visions about cultures, history, sports, arts and so forth that are presented in various Las Vegas contexts, the celebrity lifestyle that consumer get to experience by being close to celebrities in Las Vegas is another important source of unique meaning for consumers visiting there. This supports the perspective in previous studies that "more and more, it seems, the success of our urban encounters and experiences are determined on the basis of collective associations with celebrities, particularly Hollywood ones." (Hannigan 1998: 68). Below, comment of a consumer is an example of the excitement of a consumer by his/her unique celebrity exploration in Las Vegas which results in his/her perception of the context to be more significant:

"…we spent the day by the pool in their luxury hotel (ours bordered on dive), so we lounged with the beautiful people at the Mirage Hotel, and managed to do some star spotting. Vicky who is a professional star spotter, spotted David Spade from a mile-away. It was very exciting!" (Pauloandab, June 1, 2006, Travelpod.com)

One critical point in creating presentationality in experiential marketing contexts that will lead to success of the settings is that stories of the contexts need to be designed in a way to inspire the imagination of not just the first time consumers who have a fresh perspective about the setting, but also of repeat consumers. Adding or incorporating novel elements continuously is crucial for marketers of many experiential market contexts as there are many regular visitors to those sites. "If an experience firm wants to survive and grow, it needs to innovate to get ahead of

the competitors." (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008: 102). The marketing manager of a

hotel emphasizes the importance of constant innovation in her comment below:

> "…but we have something new almost every year. You have to have something new in order to keep the experience fresh for the consumers, for your loyal customers. They don't want to see the same thing every time they come, you have to have some kind of new hook. So, we try to have it, no matter big or small…" (Marketing Manager of a hotel)

Consumers also mention how important it is to find something new, or something old but

renewed in order to want to make repeat visits. A comment by a Las Vegas consumer on the

questions: "What advice would you give to a Las Vegas first-timer?" reveals the excitement in

finding a place that constantly changes:

> "Every time I go seems like the first time! It is always changing! The need for good walking shoes is a constant!!" (Tracey Weber, April 20,2010, Visit Las Vegas Facebook Page)

Presentationality in experiential contexts is mainly achieved through playful combination

and distortion of cultural elements. Multidimensionality and multilayerdness of the narratives,

and combination of these various dimensions in unexpected ways make the perception of these

narrative elements and the whole context more unique and spectacular for consumers.

> "From animatronic fountains to lions in glass enclosed habitats, Vegas has everything from the weird to the wonderful. As we've said before Americans do everything BIG, and Vegas is the epitome of this." (Thebusmonkeys, June 26, 2008, Travelpod.com)

As another example, the following comment by a consumer reflects how a meaningful

but unexpected mix of sensual and funny narratives in a show adds to his/her perceptions of the

context:

> "…to watch one of the popular Cirque du Solei productions called Zumanity. This production is billed as the 'sensual side of Cirque du Solei' and was indeed very spectacular to watch. The sensual theme worked well and was wonderfully acrobatic and unexpectedly comic." (Victoria and Mike, January 3rd 2009, Travelblog.org)

A well-crafted distortion and combination of cultural elements lead to positive consumer perceptions of the setting as it is reflected by many Las Vegas consumers about Las Vegas, and about various specific encounters they have in Las Vegas. Moreover, in some consumers' comments it is observed that a well-done mix and match of cultural elements make consumers perceive Las Vegas and variety of contexts in Las Vegas "the most", "the best", "craziest", "the most amazing", "over the top", "first-class", "world-class". Another widely used expression "only in Vegas" is also a reflection of the unique, shocking characteristics of contextual elements that results from mix and match. As a result of this distortion, people live through what is unbelievable in Vegas:

> "I've walked past New York, Paris, Monte Carlo...and there's move to come!! All on one street...can you believe it?? And it's also the world of stars and ex-stars… It is a world unlike any other" (Natsully, January 29. 2009, Travelpod.org)

> "As we ate our noodles we looked out of the 2nd floor window to see a guy dressed up as Freddy Krueger chatting to another dressed as the Mad Hatter along with people having their photos taken with the blue people from Avatar - only in Vegas!" (Gemma_doogal, June 4, 2010, travelpod.com)

> "just got back from vegas, what a crazy place. its ten times more OTT then i imagined, like a massive theme park as only the US can do." (Ann_ho, July 17, 2006, Travelpod.com)

Contemporary consumers want to be exposed to things that are not only different from their everyday lives, but that they may have never encountered before in any other contexts. They want unexpected stimulations presented in unexpected ways. Novelty and surprise are among most valued key elements of experiential contexts from which consumers derive meaning (Poulssan and Kale 2004). For example, MacInnis and Price (1990) found about their research on Spring Break vacations that new experiences contribute to consumer's satisfaction. According to their research findings, adventure and novelty metrics are important when consumers are being stimulated, such as in a learning context. In other words, the contexts and offerings in the contexts should allow

consumers a sense of discovery to stimulate them (Lanier and Hampton 2009). When consumers

find incredibility and presentation of something that they have never encountered before in a

context, their thoughts, feelings, and senses are stimulated.

> "Went and saw Gregory Popovich Comedy Pet Theatre on Friday which was excellent.
> We all laughed so much our ribs were hurting when we left! The things that guy makes
> cats do is incredible." (sshelly, August 24th 2008 by, Travelblog.org)

However, consumer's search for presentations has its own limitations. For example, many

businesses become more successful when they sanitize the negative elements in their stories, and

reinforce humanistic visions. This is the reason why strategies like Disneyification, which refers

to simplifying and cleaning stories of their unpleasantness (Schickel 1986; Waltz 1998; Ritzer

1999; Wasko 2001; Bryman 2004), are being implemented by an increasing number of

businesses. Consumers prefer sanitization even in their readings of history today, as can be

observed in the American History section at Walt Disney World, which presents the American

history as "largely positive and free of conflict" (Meamber 2011). Hence, creation of

presentational texts by companies is largely due to the cultural needs of consumers as well as

corporations who want to distance themselves from the commercial realm and negative aspects

of life by creating an impression through such texts that their concern is humanistic rather than

commercial (King 1981). Therefore, in experiential contexts some meanings are precluded while

certain meanings are encouraged.

Consequently, to provide answers to the vision needs of contemporary consumers and to

link themselves to what is enchanted, companies are forced to create narratives that offer

visionary models of behaviors, lifestyles, esthetics, and moral and social values. Especially, as

reality is recognized less and less as a source of experience intensity (Fırat 2001), presentations

of alternative visions about "reality" have become more a source of experience intensity. Below

consumer comment depicts consumers' appreciation of the context as a result of higher level of unique and visionary entertainment and education related meanings they find in experiential contexts:

> "After that I went to The Mirage - wow! I was impressed with the outside which has huge waterfalls and lakes but the inside is amazing, there is a tropical garden area (I'm not 100% sure but I think the flowers were fake) and of course this is the hotel which is associated with Siegfried and Roy… I walked through to the Secret Garden bit and there were two white lions in an enclosure with the bluest eyes I have ever seen. I didn't know they actually existed so I kinda thought they were fake until one moved. They actually took my breath away they were so beautiful! two males and they were absolutely huge much bigger than any lions I have seen before… The idea of the whole place is to educate people about these endangered species." (Emzeeb3, September 5, 2007, travelpod.com)

As a consequence, texts of market encounters are increasingly evolving from representational (where offerings are based on imitations or replications of other places, events and the like, rather than creating unique alternative visions) to a presentational mode. One significant aspect of this presentational mode is that it has come to mean "…the construction of the real as played through the human imagination without reference to objective reality…" (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995: 251) for aesthetic and commercial purposes in the market culture. Today it is largely observed that, as discussed above, most presentational texts in the market, for example the texts of themed market spaces, rely on playful combination and distortion of cultural elements (Beardsworth and Bryman 1999). As a result, presentational market texts "often provide consumers with a different sense of time and space" (Lanier and Hampton 2009: 5). Below interview quote from the interview with Brand manager of the MGM Hotel group reflects the impact of alternative reality provision on consumers:

> "Vegas is such a unique destination. Regardless of all the casinos opening in all over the country, they will never be Vegas. Vegas has this anything goes mentality. In Vegas we don't have last calls. This is the destination, every moment your experience may be different, where you can try different things, you can go as far as you want putting conservative side aside. Consumers do things that they wouldn't do in their home town." (Brand Manager, MGM Group)

Scholars have traditionally proposed that texts of events which are outside everyday domain, that are "extraordinary," for example tourism activities (Oakes and Minca 2004), provide escape to people. However, focusing only on escape is not sufficient to understand what experiences present to consumers. It is important to realize that these texts are not valued by people only because they provide an "escape", but because such texts now create the everyday life of people as they provide "…a lens onto and an energy for relationships with everyday life" (Jack and Phipps 2005: 1). In a similar fashion, speaking of themed spaces, Hardie (2007) emphasizes that in such contexts, "the aim is not to stir memory, but to create memories from the fabricated authenticity of the space" (p.35)

For instance, "…at Dollywood, many rides and attractions reflect … tension with nature and the rustic. White water rapids rides, mimes rides and many other attractions point to the idea of a dangerous nature or frontier, but one that can be managed by human intervention" (Hardie 2007: 28). Such "extraordinary" events help to address social issues, and provide people with alternative perspectives for everyday life behaviors, lifestyles, esthetics, and moral and social values. Hardie (2007), therefore, talks about Dollywood as a space created to present rather than represent a narrative: "The space of Dollywood is a miniaturized landscape that does not reproduce, but rather invents a lived, authentic experience of the district by which it is surrounded" (p. 34).

According to Hannigan (1998), such encounters with their presentational logic are new sources of cultural capital. These types of events / offerings in the market offer models, or, in other words, alternative visions for living and organizing many aspects of life, including the ones considered outside the market sphere. For example, social experiential encounters such as Walt Disney World or Sea World are the ones that (re)construct many social aspects of life like

gender, race, and history (Davis 1999). Therefore, contemporary consumer environments do

"...more than simply recollect an existing myth, [they create] popular culture's new ones."

(Young 2002: 5).

For instance, the opportunity of exploring different aspects of life in Las Vegas provides

consumers with new knowledge about life, and a visionary lens, rather than only an escapist one;

and is a key source of enchantment with the whole context, as well as with various aspects of

life, as stated by some consumers in their travel blogs:

> "These lions are from a nearby ranch and spend several hours a day on rotation inside the
> sanctuary. They are fantastic to watch, we became mesmerised several times by them and
> spent a long time watching their antics. There are handlers inside with the full grown
> Lions who trust and accept them as a member of the pride. As such they play with them
> and even lay down and have a nap with the lions! Watching the huge powerful Lions play
> around like a small domestic cat was enthralling." (January 3rd 2009 by Victoria and
> Mike, Travelblog.org)

> "Tigers & Lions - at the MGM Grand there was an enclosure that housed three lionesses
> and three lion cubs - oh my, so cute! It was just wonderful watching them and the men
> who worked with them did things we could only dream of - like lying in their arms whilst
> they slept, putting their heads in their mouth and just playing with them. Lovely to see.
> Then at the Mirage Hotel there were white tigers in an exclosure and they are very rare,
> so it was good to see that they are being breed and well looked after." (Paulandamber,
> July 10, 2005, Travelpod.com)

> "…the highlight for me was going into the Secret Garden at The Mirage. They had
> dolphin and tiger habitats, and they had a 3 month old baby dolphin and some baby white
> tigers." (December 22nd 2008 by Flyaway, Travelblog.org)

Sorkin and colleagues call this presentational mode found in many market encounters the

"logic of high consumption spaces" (Sorkin 1992). Overall, contemporary consumption spaces

provide consumers with emotions, symbols and stimuli of public place, nature, democracy, and

other cultures (Gottdiener 2001) while at the same time fulfilling consumers' need for spaces

that are safe, fear-free and clean (Davis 1999). Presentational texts of these environments, which

are created based on humanistic values and an enchanted life, allow many companies to get away

from the 'world outside' that they and their consumer partners construct as real and disenchanting (Fırat and Ulusoy 2008).

Overall, presentational narrative structure is a significant part of the uniqueness, novelty, and magic that people find in experiential marketing settings and thus, is an important dimension of consumer's positive perceptions about the context.

Appropriability

Consumers are "…creative, expressive, and hybridized beings who go about producing and experiencing cultural attractions." (Bærenholdt et al. 2008: 181). They actively seek out ways to interpret and negotiate certain cultural meanings when producing and experiencing cultural attractions. Stories are important aspects of this production and experience.

Appropriability is the characteristic of the encounter that emphasizes the idea that a story created and transmitted by a provider with a commercial interest is not the sole and the end narrative of the encounter. Meaning creation in experiential marketing environments is reciprocal (Kozinets et al. 2002: 23). Consumers consider texts that are created and transmitted to them by companies as raw materials to be playfully engaged with, rather than as ends to be read passively and absorbed (Stern 1988; Scott 1994). The experience is elicited as a result of an interaction in the construction of the final text. Overall, it can be argued that creation of an experience requires narratives provided by the marketers and involves narratives translated, interpreted by the consumer. Deighton (1992), in a similar fashion, notes that experience creation in a market encounter requires the translation of the marketer's performance into a narrative by the audience. The comment below reveals how consumers playfully construct their meanings of places by borrowing from the storyline of the places. For example, in this example consumers borrow from the "romance" theme of France in creating their own romantic story of Paris Hotel, Las Vegas:

"Eiffel Tower Kiss-Our Vegas version of the Eiffel Tower Kiss, since we did a similar pic when we were in Paris!" (March 24th 2008 by Starla; Travelblog.org)

In this study, appropriability is defined as *the extent of the perceived room in the stories and messages of a context for the consumer to utilize his/her own imagination and interpretations to make his/her own meanings of the story of the context in a way to make the experience of encounter his/her own*. In short, it is the perceived extent of the room in the set of signs of the encounter for personal subjugation of meaning and interpretation. . Appropriability is a result of combination of ellipticality, inclusiveness and openendedness characteristics of successful marketplace structures that Kozinets et al. (2002) talk about, borrowing from the ideas of Olson (see Kozinets et al. 2002) about the narrative structure of successful mythotypes. Ellipticality refers to leaving out particular elements in a narrative, omitting details to provide consumers with the experience of "aporia" or gaps in meaning that call out to the reader or audience to fill them." (Kozinets et al. 2002: 23). Inclusiveness refers to the feeling that the narrative gives that the "the consumer is included in it and its values" (Kozinets et al. 2002: 20). And, openendedness refers to narrative "…structures that invite further consumer development and interpretation in order to make them complete." (Kozinets et al. 2002: 22).

The importance of appropriability for consumers in experiential marketing contexts lies in the fact that, as discussed above for market stories in general, people do not passively read stories in experiential settings. They take up, internalize and transform them (Levy 2006). In today's culture, as we have been observing in people's increasing interest in brand stories, primary stories that people take up, internalize, and transform are the ones that marketers create. In this creative process, consumers incorporate the narrative elements involved in marketer created stories into their own idiosyncratic stories. It is observed that an increasing number of

consumers are becoming interested in creating their own version of the stories and meanings of market offerings, as most of the play in life for consumers today take play in the market realm.

Moreover, appropriation and interpretation of the text are proposed as necessities for contemporary consumers (Lanier and Hampton 2009). Consequently, consumers need to perceive enough room for their own interpretations and furthermore, to perceive mystery in the encounter. In other words, they need to find the stories that are provided to them in a context to be mutable to find the narrative structure of the context affective. Due to the appropriation needs and practices of consumers, texts that are created and transmitted by a provider with a commercial interest need to leave enough room for consumers to be able to effective. Research suggests the importance of this phenomenon even in stories about history. Consumers in museums for example are found to perform cultural history by filling in the blanks with their fantasies (Bærenholdt, Haldrup and Larsen 2008). Appropriability speaks to the playfulness of consumers. By leaving the consumers some room to play with the meaning, marketers let the consumer to create their own meaning palette of the encounter in a way to derive more meaningful and colorful experiences.

As Abrahams (1986) argues, experiences do not happen to individuals; they are created by individuals. Therefore, providing a symbolically rich offering to consumers to encourage them to create their own meanings and perspectives is an important strategy for marketers who want their consumers' experience to be intense, and thus, memorable (Lanier and Hampton 2009). Rich narrative contents – with narrative depth and breadth- provide conceptual spaces for consumers to build their idealized experiences (Borghini et al. 2009). Andersson (2007) addresses such creation of positive experiences in tourism context, where people usually find rich narrative content:

"When a tourist creates a consumption set, nobody knows in advance how successful it will be in creating a good experience. However, it may be assumed that a tourist chooses items for the consumption set that, at least hypothetically, will combine to generate experiences that, at that moment, will address the needs of the tourist. A tourist, it is assumed, acquires necessary resources and combines them in space and time in order to yield positive experiences." (p.47)

Lash and Urry (1994) also emphasize that contemporary tourist regards the travel experience as "merely a series of games with multiple texts and no single authentic experience" (p. 275-276). Tourists create their own positive experience as a result of appropriating the texts of what they encounter. In a similar fashion, Las Vegas consumers also find the rich content with multiple texts in Las Vegas to be one of the attractive aspects of the place, as it offers them opportunities to create a story, or stories of their own. Navigating their way through various narratives in the context, mixing and matching the ones they prefer, help consumers perceive the context richer and positive, in a way to drive their idealized experiences:

> "In The Mirage aside from gambling you can see dolphins and big cats in the garden. In Caesar's Palace you can have your own private Romanesque tent at the side of the pool. In the Bellagio you would have your breath taken away by the Italian granduer, see fine art in the Guggenheim museum and of course Dad's favourite, eat Italian ice cream in an oppulent cafe! Finally in Mandalay Bay we toured a shark reef and aquarium." (JoHall, June 20th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Accordingly, scholars argue that performances by marketers "…are never completely choreographed." (Bærenholdt et al. 2008: 180). "The experience creator is said to be the creator of the positions and roles which the customer is supposed to fill in-and from where the customer will develop the memorable experience." (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008: 101). This idea is reflected in Lion King Show's director's design of the content of the show:

> "Director Julie Taymor was determined to emphasize the "theatrical" in the stage version of the Lion King, She chose to allow the ropes, pulleys and wires that create the effects in the show to seen by the audience. The human beings who portray the animal characters are clearly visible beneath their costumes and masks. Taylor believes that when special effects are hidden, the audience is passive. But by revealing the inner workings of its magic, the Lion King asks audience members to use their imaginations to fill in the blanks." (From the Lion King Exhibit at Mandalay Bay Hotel, January 2010).

Many experiential contexts today reflect this "partially choreographed stories" logic. For example, in their research on American Girl Place, Borghini et al. (2009) depicts some of the sections of the stores as "museal vitrines that depict rooms in the homes of the historical characters, but the characters themselves are not in evidence; participants often suggest that they feel a sense of projection, as if they could enter these worlds." (p.4). In a similar vein, a Las Vegas consumer reflects how consumers are able to play more with the meanings in the show when characters of the show are freed from stereotypes. Such a design of the show's narrative gives more room for consumers to appropriate the story as their own:

> "The Blue Man does not communicate through speech or broad body language or gestures; rather, he communicates through intense eye contact and simple gestures. He acts impulsively and primarily as a group of three, "checking in" with the other two when making decisions and before moving to their next action...These characteristics provide a character free of stereotypes or race and allow all members of the audience to identify with them equally. (Bencat, July 16th 2009, Travelblog.org)

As marketers playfully combine and distort cultural elements in many experiential market encounters, consumers also playfully combine and distort the cultural elements utilized by marketers to create meaning. As a result, both the provider of the context of the event, and the consumer constitute the textuality of an encounter. In short, "the experiential effect [of the text of the encounter] is the result not simply of some type of conditioning process but of consumers' interaction with and interpretation of the symbolic resources." (Lanier and Hampton 2009: 5). In this process, the company provides a narrative platform and raw materials to be "…used by the consumer to mold and obtain his/her own experience. (Gentile et al. 2007: 397).

Leaving some elements of the event and context unorganized is a proposed strategy to make the text appropriable and thus more attractive (Carù and Cova 2007a). Indeed, creating texts that consumers can appropriate is critical for the provider company whose interest is commercial. One of the main reasons for this is that the experiences that consumers co-produce

are usually in non-commercial forms (Peñaloza and Price 1993). Therefore, allowing consumers to appropriate the text helps the provider to distance itself from the commercial realm, since consumers usually leave the commercial aspects of the texts out in their appropriation, and are more interested in the visionary aspects. Consequently, consumers become partners in companies' endeavors to link themselves to what is visionary rather what is constructed as real, which is boring and full of failures and tensions, in the world "outside."

The second reason why creating appropriable texts is important for businesses is that consumer appropriation reduces the gap between the consumer and the context. Consumers more easily satisfy their need to feel included in the context through filling in the blanks in the narratives that the context conveys to them, and ultimately derive the most significant meaning out of the context. Consequently, appropriability facilitates consumer participation and consumer immersion (Carù and Cova 2006). Yet, consumers differ in terms of the combination of elements they desire (Pine and Gilmore 2000) in an encounter. Hence, consumers take the raw materials in the provided text of an encounter and appropriate them within their own frameworks and desires to create experiences from which they draw their own personal meanings, not only of specific consumption moments, but of life in general. In these processes, consumers bring a wide array of associations to any text as they do to any particular symbol (Peñaloza 1999). Their interpretations match their own ideals, expectations, dreams, and their positive mood. They use their profoundly personal values, desires, and so forth. In sum, they create their customized and more valuable understanding of the stories.

To provide more insights into the issue of appropriation by consumers, Carù and Cova (2006) address consumer operations of appropriation. According to them, the three major operations of appropriation are respectively *nesting*, *investigating*, and *stamping*. They propose

that appropriation is a progressive process, and it plays an important role in consumer immersion. The nesting operation is "…characterised by the consumer's perception of a whole array of physical and mental sensations and by the search for and identification of points of anchorage…" (p.8). Investigating operations range from "…a simple description of what was happening to the discovery of something new." (p.9). And, "a stamping operation is characterized by the relationship between the development of impressions relating to the situation a consumer is going through and the attribution of meaning to that situation. In other words, it is an imaginative activity" (p.9), "here individuals use creativity to play around with the experience's context subjectively…" (p.6).

For example, consumers can relate his/her story to the story in an exhibition in various ways. The below comment shows how a consumer appropriates the story about the incredible, hard to grasp nature of the human body, that was told in the "Bodies" exhibit in Las Vegas. In this exhibit the narrative on the "creation process of the human bodies" is untouched and left to the reading of the consumer. But the consumer fills in this blank and interprets the narrative of the exhibit as a reminder of a section from the Bible:

> "Later that afternoon we finished up our package of 3 with the "Bodies" display. I was reminded of the scripture in Psalms 139 that says "we are fearfully and wonderfully made". We have an awesome creator who put our incredible bodies together."
> (RobKeller, May8th 2010, travelblog.org)

If this exhibit was based on a certain creation theory that is based on a certain belief other than the specified by the consumer, then probably the exhibit was going to have a different meaning for this consumer. Maybe s/he was not going to be able to appropriate its meaning in such a positive way.

In previous literature, multiple experiential zones consumers find in experiential contexts are found to be crucial in appropriating the experiential stories provided to them to create their

own meaning (Kozinets 2002). "The complexity of the built environment invites this diversity of engagement and interpretation" (Kozinets 2002: 23).By finding a variety of stories in these various zones, they are able to pick the more personally relevant ones and create the most significant narrative for themselves as is observed in the statements of a consumer:

> "Vegas is home to many weird and wonderful things… would renew our wedding vows. But not just in any fashion, this would be done in style, real Vegas style......by the one and only......king of rock and roll........Elvis Presley ladies and gentlemen!" (Marshallmatters, June 7, 2008, Travelpod.com)

More specifically, the design elements in the Luxor hotel in Las Vegas can be provided as an example of a symbolically rich text that leads to high level of consumer appropriation. These design elements are able to create variety of different feelings and thoughts in consumers. Consumers derive their own Luxor narratives from these elements. In other words, consumers are able to find many blanks to fill in in that context. History, luxury, fame, peace, entertainment are some of the concepts on which consumers focus and with which they play in creating their own stories of the hotel. Every consumer creates a different meaning of Luxor Hotel borrowing from the details offered in this "Egypt" themed hotel. For some it means finding peace, and for others it might mean finding the fame:

> "I just love the pyramid shaped Luxor with the beams of lights that race up and down the side. It's so beautiful to watch late at night especially when the heat has cooled down. Luxor has huge statues of spinxes, gargoyles and Egyptian writings. I feel really at peace when I'm here" (October 1st 2008 by Liana; Travelblog.org)

> "We walked over to the Luxor, walked around and took some pictures. Then we walked outside to try and find a good angle to take our picture with the sphinx and the pyramid.Why? Because that's the hotel you see in all the movies." (Laorfamily, Friday, February 9, 2007, Travelpod.com)

And for some others it is just the coolness of being able to encounter something different, something that is almost a social fantasy: "pretty cool to stay in the pyramid" (February 10th 2008 by draak). And, for another consumers it is visiting an impressive historical site:

"…the Pyramid hotel called the Luxor. As we walked into the lobby, we were surrounded by Egyption Statues and Sphinxes. It looked quite impressive, considering we'd seen originals in the British Museum, and the Louvre." (Psycik, Friday, June 17, 2005; Travelpod.com)

The most important point in the example of Luxor and consumers' appropriation of its narrative(s) is that the hotel provides certain elements in such a mutable way that various consumers create their own stories that they find significant, and derive experiences that they find more meaningful from there.

Accordingly, designers need to provide the materials of stories of their encounters in a way that consumers would feel that they can make the experience their own experience through playing with them. In contemporary culture, texts are usually appropriated through mixing and matching mass cultural material (Davis 1999) which largely consists of free-floating signs, and it is always possible for consumers to playfully engage in different mix and match variations. What is encountered in the textuality of the events or other offerings in the market today are meanings pulled out of their contexts. Continual fragmentation and decontextualization in contemporary culture (Dholakia and Fırat 1998) are two influential forms of text creation and appropriation, and meaning seeking both by marketers and consumers. These forms result in conditions of contemporary culture such as juxtaposition of opposites, or more specifically "…the juxtaposition of contradictory emotions and cognitions regarding perspectives, commitments, ideas, and things in general…" (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995: 255).

Juxtaposition and decontextualization processes utilized by marketers in designing the encounters make it difficult for consumers to have a coherent understanding of what is going on in the text as it is transmitted to them, while at the same time make it easier for them to play with the meanings that all get jumbled together (Fjellman 1992). With the help of these processes, consumers more easily reconfigure the symbols, and create their own texts of the encounter in

which they can have higher immersion. In their example of rock concerts, Santoro and Troilo (2007) propose that the performance, or the event by the providers (here in this case the artist and concert organizers), can be considered as a system of signs to be deconstructed and reconstructed and there may be too many ways the signs can be assembled by the consumer. Consequently, marketer-created narratives are fragmented, fleeting, disjointed, and sometimes illusory in nature in contemporary culture (Dholakia and Fırat 1998). In another way of saying, they have a kaleidoscopic nature.

Overall, filling in the blanks or connecting the dots in the narratives of an encounter leads to a story of the encounter that might be perceived to be more organic to the consumer. Yet, the imagination, fantasies, and creativeness of consumers to do so are largely inscribed by the narrative performances of the marketers (Bærenholdt et al. 2008: 181). Marketers have the possibility to manage some of the elements that have an impact on consumers' operations of appropriation (Carù and Cova 2006). As mentioned previously, Carù and Cova (2007b) propose support system, collective action, and self-determination as tactics to assists consumers with developing ability to appropriate texts in addition to assist them with developing ability to read them. For example, in nesting operations, it is important for marketers to provide multiple readable referents that stem from well-known cultural fields so that each consumer would be able to recognize a few of them. In investigation operations, marketers need to take on the role of a guide to help consumers to discover and to acquire competencies for further understanding of the context, product, event, or activity. Further, in stamping operations, all the elements of the encounter need to be made inspirational in order to stimulate consumer imagination. By capturing the context with his/her imagination "…one can sever meanings from their previous environments and leave them hanging or separate, or one can reinsert them into new contexts."

(Fjellman 1992: 31). This in the end leads to a perception of a more positive meaning of the context by consumers.

As a result, presentational texts, rather than representational ones (in a modern sense, the ones that reflect an objective reality) and texts whose signs are easier to decontextualize and to mix and match are more appropriable as they stimulate the imaginations of consumers at high levels. Appropriable text creation strategy is critical for the success of companies and brands for the purposes of profit-making and for distancing themselves from the pure commercial. Even brands like Issey Miyake now use strategies that highly stimulate the imagination of consumers by involving them in customized creation which requires their appropriation of the brand's signs (Hetzel 2007). These strategies appeal to consumers to get involved in co-creation of brand events and other offerings, and thus, experience high immersion into the brand events.

Texture

Sensual delight is very important for consumer's positive perceptions of a context and his/her willingness to visit a certain context, as can be observed in consumer comments above. In previous research, "design elements such as color, layout, architectural style, or type of furnishings" that create a sensual delight are found to be important factors in creating a positive consumer response toward a context (Baker, Levy, and Grewal 1992: 457).

One's positive evaluations of the experience are largely based on the number of senses that are engaged in a meaningful way in a context (Hartl and Gram 2008). In this research, texture of marketing encounters is defined as *perceived meaningfulness of impact the sensory elements of the events or other offerings in a consumer environment make on consumers.* Consumer comments below show how sensory stimuli play a critical role in their perceptions about the context:

"Seeing the glamorous facades and taking in the Bellagios fountains along the way. It is incredible to see these dancing fountains set perfectly to various styles of music. The lighting is great and it is easy to see why large crowds gather for each show every fifteen minutes." (Mike and Sarah, June 18th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Consumer perceptions about the effectiveness of the context increases with the perceived meaningfulness of the impact of the sensory stimuli:

"The musical fountains are so wonderful that you dont feel like moving…" (Sachin Gavde, January 10th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Especially in experiential consumer environments, where consumers highly seek arousal, texture plays even a bigger role. Previous research proposes that consumers prefer the experiences "… that are embedded as they call upon all of our senses" (Carù and Cova 2007a: 5). Today, experiential market environment designers need to take into account the impact of the sensory stimuli they provide in their designs on their consumers' feelings if they want to create a successful environment. Consequently, increasing sensory quest of consumers leads experiential context providers to use sensory devices that serve to overstimulate consumers' senses ever more (Carù and Cova 2007b). As revealed in much research, texturizing the encounter is a crucial strategy in contemporary culture to enrich, and thus enchant experiences. Based on Pine and Gilmore's work (2008), Pullman and Gross (2004) suggest that "effective physical context is concise, compelling, and engages all senses reflected in interior design, employee dress and behavior, and all tangible props." (p. 557). Lukas (2007b), in a similar fashion, underlines the importance of providing a meaningful textural design for creating a context that is perceived to be opulent and that would differentiate it from the ones that are perceived to be cheap:

"In trips to Aladdin, I have heard some customers say that the scale of the interior architecture and décor, including inlaid gems on pillars, is "all wrong." Conversely, while at the Wynn and the Bellagio, I have witnessed customers react with awe at the levels of ornateness that are detected in features like floors, ceilings, and light fixture." (p. 76)

Organizing and presenting the sensory stimuli in their contexts in a way that consumers find moving and unforgettable is crucial for marketers. Bellagio Fountain show with its evocative and inspirational music is a good example of a context that is found powerful by consumers, as described by a consumer:

> "…its performing fountains. These run the full length of "Lake Bellagio" in front of the hotel and provide a stunning spectacle as they seemingly dance in perfect time to the accompanying classical music. Enhanced by spectacular lighting, they often reach the height of the hotel itself and large crowds gather to watch their show." (ACDC World Tour, March 23rd 2008, Travelblog.org)

The variety consumers find in sensory stimuli and the exceptional design characteristics of these sensory stimuli are highly appreciated by consumers in experiential market contexts. Such a variety is perceived to serve their senses fully, as they would expect in an experiential setting:

> "We took a walk down to the main strip (our hotel was just off of it) and had a look at all the fantastic hotels. They are MASSIVE…There are replicas of the Eiffel tower, Arc de Triumph and Statue of Liberty. Add to this the gondola boats that go around the Venetian, the fun Circus Circus, the incredible malls, outdoor escalators and tons of bars, restaurants and shops and it makes for a feast for the senses." (Davidetthomas, June 27, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Accordingly, even the focus of architecture in the marketplace, specifically in experiential consumer environments, "…has evolved from an emphasis of "what is has" and "what it does" to "what you feel"…" (Klingmann 2007: 1). The reason for this is that sensory stimuli are an important part of consumers' expectations and perceptions in experiential settings as consumers emphasize in their comments:

> "A weekend in Las Vegas is not a vacation destination for relaxing and catching up on sleep. It is a place to get stimulated, really stimulated. Your body will be pumping at warp speed during your stay…" (Jay Rankin, February 9th 2010, Travelblog.org)

Sensory stimuli have a big impact on how consumers live through the context fully. And, they are among important elements that make the context unique and memorable:

"I'm typing this entry from a poolside sun bed at the famous Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas and we're just beginning to get our breath back. We've had a quite sensational five days here and there hasn't been anything even close to a dull moment - if New York is the city that never sleeps, this place doesn't even stop to blink. If you've been to Vegas, you'll know exactly what I mean; if you haven't, it's everything you see on the TV, in films and a lot, lot more. We pictured it as a slightly sleazy, run down place with not a lot else to do other than gamble. Whilst this may have been the case a while back but it certainly isn't now and Las Vegas is fully justified in its claim to be "The Entertainment Capital of the World" (ACDC World Tour, March 23rd 2008, Travelblog.org)

Similar to the creation of textual elements, textural elements in contemporary market encounters are primarily created and provided by marketers. The trend of the pronounced use of variety of sensory stimuli in consumer spaces by marketers as a means of creating an environment that stands out among the clutter is found to result in establishing a closer, more intimate connection with the consumer (Lukas 2007b). According to Lukas (2007b), higher level of use of sensory elements by marketers in a consumer environment leads to a higher level of communication with consumers and a better demarcation of the setting from that of competitors' contexts. In case of Las Vegas, sensory stimuli utilized are an important aspect of Las Vegas that make the place unique for many consumers compared to any other places they visit as is evident in the consumer's comment below:

"Las Vegas....The Sin City...The most amazing city man made city in the world... Its been a dream to visit this place ever since I watched a programme on Discovery channel on Las Vegas some time back!!I love city life...the gliteretti...the buzz...& there is nothing more glittreing than Las Vegas!!" (Sachin Gavde, January 10th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Marketers usually design the texture related elements of the encounter with a consideration of what consumers will use the designed setting for (Sherry et. al. 2007), and they usually provide these elements in combination and in accordance with the texts of the encounter. The uniqueness of specific market encounters largely depends on the appropriate connection of the narrative theme of the context and the sensory stimulation in the context. Thus, texture contributes highly to the impact that texts make on consumers' actions, feelings, thoughts,

senses, and imaginations about the events and other offerings in a market encounter. Based on

their readings of the works of Alben (1996), Carbone and Haeckel (1994), and Pine and Gilmore

(1998); Pullman and Gross (2004) propose that "good experience design uses all physical

context elements to support an underlying vision, metaphor, or theme." (p:557). Consumers

value such interwoven designs as can be seen in the consumers' blog entry parts below in their

accounts of the attraction to Las Vegas:

> "Now the focus was on the "sights," running from casino to casino to determine which
> had the glitziest, most over the top attractions. The self-proclaimed "seductive" Treasure
> Island pirate battle, complete with sinking ship, was a bust because the crowds to see it
> were already piling out into the street, earning hard looks and heavy honks from the taxis.
> We rushed to the Mirage to see their exploding volcano instead. Flames! Red-coloured
> water! The sounds of tropical birds amongst palm trees!" (Wanderlustcat, August 3,
> 2005, Travelpod.com)

In the literature, texture of market encounters is largely linked to creation of a theater

effect. For instance, technical features of the stage (size, shape, materials use and their visual and

tactile impact, colors and the theme of the stage); specific distance created between the audience

and the performer; concert location and lighting are all texture related elements of a rock concert

that are used in creation of a theater effect (Santoro and Troilo 2007). The theater effect makes

the perception of the sensory stimuli even more vivid. As a consumer expresses about one of a

show s/he watched in Las Vegas, this leads to more affective consumer perceptions:

> "…I was in love with the show. I loved it how it seemed 3d but real. The music was
> amazing. Everything was.... I remember being speechless after the show. Next time we
> get out to Vegas I def want to see the show again :)" (Martha Theriault, Ká FAcebook
> Page, 4.7.2011)

Advanced technology is the most important factor in the creation of high level of texture

in contemporary market culture. Today, sensory devices that utilize advanced technology make

the most impact on consumers, as they add dimensions and layers to the sensory stimuli utilized

in the encounter. The Spider Man simulator (Amazing Adventures of Spiderman thrill ride) in

Universal Studios Island of Adventure, which provides the consumers with a four dimensional adventure, is a good example of how elements of an experiential setting can be interwoven in an effective way to overstimulate the senses with the help of advanced technology. Consumers experience three dimensional visual images with the help of special glasses, there are amazing sound effects, visitors can smell when there is a fire, and they feel the cold water when they encounter the Ice Man character. It is an encounter where consumers can perceive the context totally with their senses, emotions, and cognition.

Consequently, today, increasing number of encounters utilize special effects to make their sensory stimuli more vivid and affective. The most important aspect of these special effects is the "realistic" feeling they give to consumers as can be observed in the below consumer comment. Such realistic feelings make consumers perceive the context to be more powerful:

> "The next day we went to the Star Trek Experience… the special effects were quite good, like being in a real shuttle being chased by the Klingons over 1980's Las Vegas." (draak, February 10th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Moreover, contemporary consumers derive meanings increasingly and primarily from the texture related elements of encounters (Dholakia and Fırat 1998). Therefore, companies or retailers pay ever more attention to the design processes that create textured encounters (Kozinets et. al. 2002). Today, even in historical sites it is a common practice to use films as the visual means of framing the message (Meamber 2010), for example. Orientation of consumers towards sensory and emotional properties of market encounters, and attentions of companies to create such encounters lead to "proliferating texture only strategies" as suggested by Dholakia and Fırat (1998). As a consequence, in some contemporary encounters text is lost or perceived as irrelevant, and texture of the event is the only element that leads to participation and immersion of consumers. According to Dholakia and Fırat (1998), in contexts such as the Royal Caribbean

cruise or the Club Med vacation, "…the texture of relaxed abandonment, hedonic enjoyment, and exciting fantasy that fills the space-time" (p.9), is what is central to the encounter, and the text "in the sense of ports, destinations, locations, and itinerary" (p.10) is irrelevant to what people perceive and evaluate about the encounter.

However, Dholakia and Fırat (1998) also emphasize that a recent counter-trend to this phenomenon is also observed in some encounters. Stapleton et al. (2002) similarly emphasize the need for a central story that should underpin virtual and physical sensory stimuli for a successful mixed fantasy (mix of fantasy and reality in entertainment applications). Furthermore, Lanier and Hampton (2009) propose regarding the thrill that a roller coaster ride gives that it "…is not simply the physical sensations associated with the ride but also the combination of perspectives and meanings…surrounding the ride" (p. 5). In other words, as Lanier and Hampton (2009) summarize, "because all aspects of an experiential offering are important, it is their combined effect that influence consumers" (p. 7). Sensory stimuli utilized in the physical structure of a context convey the narrative of a setting (Kozinets et al. 2002, Peñaloza 1999), and might highly influence, and sometimes even create, consumer's reading of the message(s) a context involves. The consumer comment below exemplifies how certain details in sensory stimuli that consumers encounter in a setting impact their perceptions of the message of that specific context:

> "The Wynn is very luxurious,with thick carpets and fresh flowers." (Nathalieetfrans, May 27, 2008, travelpod.com)

It can therefore be proposed that even though textuality or texture by itself may be sufficient for consumer's involvement and immersion in some contexts, highest level of consumer immersion in contemporary culture is the one that results from a combination of highest level of texture and textuality. Consumer blog entries below reflect how consumers

describe the ways their thoughts, and feelings were shaped by the combination of the two in

evaluating a context:

> "KA is not an acting show. It is primarily an acrobatics show but it does have a story line that it follows. The best way I can describe it is like a Jackie Chan/Jet Li film but in real time, on a stage, that pivots, moves and is never fixed in the standard 'stage position'. I must have sat there with my mouth open at least 6 times as the storyline pounded it's way through acrobatic acts and sequences of choreography that were unbelievably well timed. I cannot rate the show highly enough. If you're going to Vegas you MUST go and see it."(Goughy, April 15th 2008, Travelblog.org)]

> "Bellagio: the dancing water is awesome as always, but it was here that I saw my first Cirque du Soleil show, 'O'. There are really no words to describe what it was like. There was so much happening on the stage, but it all fit together. There was an underlying story but the acrobatics were really impressive. Every detail had been taken care of, every person in every corner of the stage had a stage presence, they couldn't be faulted anywhere...AND they successfully added an elemnt of humour! I absolutely adored it, and would definitely go see another Cirque show again!" (Cybelle (Norwegian), January 1, 2010, travelpod.com)

> "It was getting dark at this point and so it seemed like a good time to watch the fountain show at the Belagio as the display is all lit up. We had heard it was a good fountain display but what we saw totally exceeded our expectations. The fountains shot up in time to a song which was very patriotic. We now know it is called 'God Bless the USA' and included lines such as 'the flag still stands for freedom and they can't take that away' and 'I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free'. When it got to the chorus the fountains went berserk…it was brilliant!" (Gemma_doogal (UK), June 4, 2010, travelpod.com)

Another consumer comment on his/ her experience of Ká show further summarizes how

consumers are influenced more by the combination of the two. Consumers who find both aspects

deeply meaningful emphasize a desire to experience the context and its elements over and over:

> "In my case, the story and the special efects made the difference as well as the moving scenario... I've seen it just once, but if I could I'd see it over and over." (David Zepeda, April 7, 2011, Ká Las Vegas Facebook Page)

Marketers, therefore, employ both, substantial texts and textures, to attract consumers to

their contexts. The description of the show "Phantom- The Las Vegas Spectacular" in one of the

Las Vegas magazines depicts an experiential offering that uses both appeals:

"…you're promised extraordinary music, extravagant costumes, breathtaling special effects, remarkable choreography and one of the most romantic stories of all time." (24/7 Magazine, January '10, p.32)

Proposed dimensions of texture are sensory presentationality, having multiple modalities, and spectacularity.

Sensory Presentationality

In addition to their quest for presentational texts, contemporary consumers look for presentational sensory stimuli in market encounters. Sensory presentationality can be defined as the extent to which sensory stimuli in a market context are perceived to provide the consumer with alternative visions, novelty, fantasy, and presentation of the unrepresentable-sublime.

In contemporary consumer culture, utilization of senses in new ways to create new, unique, visionary opportunities for learning and entertainment are highly emphasized (Lukas 2007b). People seek visionary enchantment primarily in experiential market contexts; and presentational, rather than representational, sensory stimuli they encounter in these contexts are an important dimension of their enchantment in these environments and in the market overall. Presentational sensory stimuli that simply refer to the unique, novel, fantastic sensory stimuli in these experiential consumer environments present a new vision to the ones who experience them.

In successful experiential market contexts, sensory stimuli are interwoven in unique and novel ways that tend to be more sensational compared to the structure of the routines of the everyday life. That is, encounters that are found to be powerful by consumers present sensory stimuli that are perceived as fantastic, and thus, the possibility of transforming the mundane to what is more attractive. Such encounters provide consumers with thoughts of possibilities on how life could be if sensory elements in everyday routine life are this vivid or sharp. People experience sensations in these environments that they cannot experience in their everyday lives.

The consumer comment below depicts the excitement of a consumer when s/he encountered unusual stimuli in an unexpected setting in Las Vegas:

> "We went to the MGM Grand and saw some lions up close. Real close!" (Jacobsims, July 30, 2009, Travelpod.com)

Overall, sensory presentationality is one of the key dimensions of consumers' perceptions of significance of a context. This is primarily due to consumers' perception of the context in which they encounter presentational stimuli to be *dream-like,* a highly valued quality of stimuli in today's society. This is evident in the travel blog entries of consumers below where they describe their positive reactions to the show Mystere by Cirque de Soleil or to Las Vegas as a result of an unusual, dream-like presentation of sensory stimuli in these contexts:

> "That night we had got tickets to go and see Cirque Du Solie which is a world famous circus act. Karen had wanted to see this for years and it was well worth the money. We saw Mystere which is one of the longer running shows. Some of the things they did was completely unbeliveable. There were acrobats flying around the stage, strong men lifting each other in ways your eyes would not believe and a clown playing tricks on the audience. It is quite hard to explain how good it is…" (Rich and Karen, April 10th 2008, Travelblog.org)

> "As we flew in to Vegas it was like nothing I could have imagined, it looks like a movie set…" (MegAndHam, August 12th 2010, travelblog.org)

> "We are lead into the theatre, it is a full house and soon the show begins. It is all I have dreamt of and we both thoroughly enjoy the show. It is amazing how the pool appears and the floor comes up over it throughout the show. The use of water is amazing and the skills of the artists and always top notch." (Czardas, March 3, 2008, travelpod.com)

Besides providing fantasy perspectives to create a dream-like feeling, sensory presentationality is an effective dimension of experiential marketing environments also in providing consumers connections with various aspects of life. For instance, today in contemporary world, people, especially the ones living in urban areas, lost their touch with nature. Therefore, like the consumers below did in their travel blog entries, many Las Vegas

consumers reflect their excitement about getting in touch with nature in Las Vegas contexts by encountering sensory stimuli that they could only encounter in a natural setting:

> "I virtually touched paws with a monstrous lion when walking through the glass walkway passing directly through the MGM Grand's $9million lion enclosure" (monkey_boy, October 10th 2009, Travelblog.org)

> "MGM has a live lion exhibit in the middle of the casino Mandalay Bay has a shark reef! The hotels impress inside and out." (Stephen.j.booth (UK), June 7, 2008, Travelblog.org)

Experiential market contexts that utilize novel, unusual, or unique sensory stimuli are found to be powerful as they lead to a sense of discovery for consumers and attract their fuller attention. Contexts involving such stimuli are perceived to be special by consumers because such settings are "like nothing they could have imagined" and they "have never seen anything like that!" Consumers find these contexts creative and awe-inspiring and thus, become more attracted to them. Consequently, such remarkable sensory stimuli, rather than the availability of just products or entertainment, are the focus of any retail or entertainment space today (Urry 1999; Underhill 1999; Lukas 2007b). Comments below reflect how lured consumers can be to the place as a result of presentational stimuli they encounter:

> "- Checked out all of the truly amazing hotels. These behemoth structures are…immensely creative." (Goldieworldtour, April 5, 2010, Travelpod.com)

> "The inside of the hotels are unlike anything we have seen before! Shops, casinos, more restaurants inside one hotel than all of Stoke, spas, gyms, pools, cafes, bars, theatres, shark reef aquariums, lion enclosures, St Peters Square, waterways and gondolas! And that is just the inside of them!" (StuandRach, June 24, 2010, Travelblog.org)

> "…we loved it. How can you dislike a place where you can have your picture taken with Elvis, outside a cafe where a giant Harley Davidson motorbike is coming out of the wall, next door to the statue of liberty and the Eiffel tower? We walked down the strip for hours and still only got about half way; like the Grand Canyon, we need to return to see the rest it has to offer." (Rconkling, March 25, 2007, Travelpod.com)

Even the story of an encounter is already familiar to the consumer, presentational sensory stimuli have the power to create consumer's perception of the context and the encounter as novel and unique. Therefore, presentational sensory stimuli add a certain power also to consumers' perceptions of the text of the encounter. Consumers' depictions of Las Vegas overall, a lounge, and an exhibit they visited, below indicate the power of presentational sensory stimuli in creating uniqueness perceptions even when the text is immediately knowable by the consumer:

> "…the hotal called the Venetian and it was exactly as you would imagine a hotel in Vegas to be and NOTHING like anything i have experienced before." (Wallace n Duckers, February 5th 2008, Travelblor.org)

> "There was on place in particular that sounds really really cool. It is in the Mirage and is called the Revolution Lounge. As in, The Beatles revolution. It was created by Cirque du Soleil and is described as blending "cutting-edge interactive design, art and sound in a contemporary interpretation of The Beatles era". Sounds cool right? I think so. hehe." (Jackie D, July 23,2009 by Travelblog.org)

> "There was also a whimsical giant bug's life (not affiliated with the movie) display thing that turned out to be my favorite part of Vegas. It made you feel miniature as you walked through the garden" (DeWalls, July 7th 2010, travelblog.org)

> "The first casino we walked into was New York-New York. Being from the area, we found some of the smaller details fascinating, like steam coming out of the manholes, and statue of liberty torches as door handles." (Laorfamily, February 9, 2007, travelpod.com)

Overall, consumers are impressed by and appreciate the context even more when they encounters sensory stimuli that are unexpected or unrepresentable. This is usually a result of a sensory shock for Las Vegas consumers, for example:

> "Upon walking into the complex further, we discovered a remake of St Mark's Square with a beautiful blue sky and clouds painted on the ceiling giving the illusion of being outdoors. It was all so tastefully recreated with Italian Restaurants and coffee shops surrounding the square" (RaeDan, June 13th 2009, Travelblog.org)

> "We stopped at the Bellagio, and found out it had a beautiful display for the Chinese new year, even the Chinese tourists were impressed by it." (Laorfamily, February 10, 2007, Travelpod.com)

"The most jaw dropping show was Cirque de Soleil "O"! How do they change the stage from a pool to a dry stage within seconds, is beyond me! " (Worldtraveler 2, October 22, 2009, Travelpod.com)

"Had an incredible steak at one of the Planet Hollywood restaurants for dinner, even better than in Argentina and I never thought I would say that." (Garyjampot, April 2, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Furthermore, high level of sensory presentationality creates a "wow" effect on consumers and helps them differentiate the context from other similar contexts. Below comment, where a consumer describes his/her experience of the unimaginable in Las Vegas and the wow effect Las Vegas environments created on him/her, provides a good insight into the relationship between the remarkable impact the sensory stimuli creates and consumer perceptions of the power of a context:

"Then we walk past a wishing well type large pond and I am told a strom [sic.] happens here every 30 mins...ok?? What in the shops?? Indoors?? So sure enough 20 mins later rain starts falling from the cloud painted roof, lightening flashing and thunder cracking...indoors, seriously. It really was awesome!!...We went to the Rainforest Cafe in MGM Grand. WOW it's like Diego land LOL Parrots and fish, a giant mechanical anaconda, giant Mushroom, treehouse and heaps of jungle animals in and on the walls. Roof is covered with lights. Every 15 minutes there is a storm!! In the restaurant!! What are the bloody chances of it raining and thundering INDOORS twice in one day?? Only in Vegas apparently!!" (Misstrace, May 23,2010, Travelpod.com)

The key element in creating a textural structure in a presentational rather than representational mode in contemporary experiential contexts is advanced technology. Through new technologies, it is possible to create "…more impressive simulations than a simple reproduction of what is copied or imagined." (Fırat 2001: 109). Today, it is possible to create landscapes in ways that make a positive impact upon all senses. With the help of technological sophistication of most experiential contexts, (re)presentations of everyday places in themed environments, for example, have become the visions of how everyday places can have a texture in ways that make the highest level of delighting impact on people's senses.

"The Venetian: great imitation of Venice, although the water in the canals is way to clean and the boatmen sing way to well (they dont really sing in Venice do they???). Great inside with streets of Venice and the San Marco square." (Veromarcos, October 16, 2008, travelpod.com)

"One of the first sights we encountered was a condensed New York City (check buildings in it) with one key improvement over the original: a candy red roller coaster twisting its way through the city skyline." (Jennydavey, May 15, 2010, travelpod.com)

Simulations used in many market contexts are good examples of how sensory presentationality works in effective ways. Hannigan (1998) calls simulations used in experiential market setting "technological wizardry" (p. 69). These simulations are very powerful tools as they are not simple copies or referents, but they further apply imagination to real (Adey 2007), and provide consumers vision and novelty (Kozinets et al. 2002).

The mixing of reality and fantasy effectively in creating sensory presentationality is one of the most significant consequences of new technology (Stapleton et al. 2002). Advanced technologies used, for example in the theme park design industry, have the power to bend the audience's reality perceptions (Stapleton et al. 2002). Stapleton et al. (2002) explain this phenomenon emphasizing that "when all our senses validate a virtual event, the experience moves us across a credibility threshold." (p. 124). Technologies such as macrostimulator technology let "players cause changes to physical objects, thus diminishing the conceptual distance between the real and the virtual." (Stapleton et al. 2002: 124).

A presentational, yet safe, comfortable, and hygienic textural structure (Beardsworth and Bryman 1999) that provides the consumer with the events and contexts that are away from the unwanted physical elements, such as physical harm and pollution (King 1981) is what consumers seek. They look for a safe thrill in experiential settings. People still hesitate to try and experience presentational sensory stimuli, especially when the presentational belongs to the domain of the "other" (Bauman 1991). Perception of the presentational in the sphere of "culturally different

other" may negatively influence consumer's willingness to experience as is the case in American tourists' approach to Chinese food when they visit China (Bardhi, Bengtsson, and Ostberg 2009). Even presentational sensory stimuli that are not perceived to be in the domain of the other may be a source of hesitation if has not been tried before. The intense perception of reality as a result of realistic designs is an important source of such feelings. For example, Peñaloza (1999) mentions two junior high school age boys' hesitation to step on the video screen set into the floor of Nike Town in Chicago that displayed underwater images giving the impression of being under the water. In a similar fashion, researcher's observations at the Crystals Exhibitions at the City Center in Las Vegas also emphasizes the noteworthy impact of a context that result from a successful mix of the realistic and surprising elements on consumers' perceptions of the encounter and the way they act in the environment:

> "Two guys at their early 20s touch and play with the ice cubes. A man at his 60s, who has been watching quite for some time the ice cubes with changing shapes and colors approach them and asks "is the ice cold?" (fieldnotes, Las Vegas City Center Crystals Exhibition, January 2010)

Such reactions of consumers also show how people expect the unexpected in contexts that are full of novel and unique sensory elements. Such elements create a shock value for consumers. In contexts that present unique stimuli in realistic ways, consumers expect to be surprised all the time.

As Hannigan (1998) also argues, the desire for experience and reluctance to take risks is a very significant contradiction in today's culture. That is, what consumers seek in modernity, such as hygiene, comfort and physical safety (Beardsworth and Bryman 1999), and what they have the urge to be away from, such as danger, noise, unwanted crowds, and polluted spaces (King 1981), determine the limits of acceptance of presentational modes in textural elements. Therefore, the textural elements in market encounters are sought to be presentational but risk-free at the same

time. According to King (1981), for such reasons many themed encounters have the power of being the prototype and thus they also have a mythical importance. In such spaces, the senses are used in numerous ways to recreate the "holistic tableaus of senses that are present in real [spaces]." Moreover, the various senses that make up the theme experience are interpreted by the consumers as "distinct, seamless and meaningful" (Lukas 2007b) as they are presentational rather than representational.

As can be observed in many Las Vegas consumers' comments in their blogs and during the interviews, a sanitized Egypt at the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, a Paris that smells clean at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas, a vision of Venetian with clean smelling and looking canals at Venetian Hotel, Las Vegas are some examples of the presentational modes of sensory stimuli that might lead to higher consumer participation and immersion in these contexts, and ultimately to higher level of experience intensity.

Berlyne (1970), based on two experiments, concluded that pleasingness and interestingness increase with novelty of the stimuli. Similarly, in this study, sensory stimuli that are found to be inspiring by consumers, as can be observed in most of the consumer comments above, and in their blogs and interview accounts, are the presentational ones. The more consumers are inspired by the sensory stimuli, and the more they find them pleasing and interesting, the more they feel like exploring the context further. For example, the marketing manager and the operations manager of New York New York hotel in Las Vegas emphasize how the uniqueness perceptions of consumers make them more interested in further exploring their context:

> "MM: What we have found is our exterior is what really attracts people in. People will drive down and say wow that is really cool. I wanna know what's up going in there. Because our building is the most unique from the outside of any of the Strip buildings.

OM: Yeah, I would say probably the most photographed. If you go, when you're walking over from Excalibur, watch when you over that bridge, how many people stop on that bridge to take pictures, from both sides…"

Multiple Modalities

As addressed by Belk (1998), human behavior is multimodal and human experience is multisensory. As humans are "equipped with sophisticated multisensory capacities" (Laursen 2008), stimulation of as many senses as possible at one and the same time, and the interaction of various modes of different senses play a very key role in people's perceptions of places from which they derive meaningful experiences (Peñaloza 1999; Hartl and Gram 2008; Laursen 2008). Therefore, multisensory marketing is a predominant part of the contemporary consumer culture (Howes 2005). Microtheming, which "...refers to specific and nuanced ways in which theming is developed on a minute level" (Lukas 2007b: 76), for example is a commonly used form of multisensory marketing in experiential market settings. A bombardment of the five senses, ideally occurring in imperceptible levels to the consumer, is one of the most effective tools in eliciting certain sensations in consumers in experiential settings (Lukas 2007b).

"Multiple modalities" in the texture of market encounters is defined, as *the extent of perceived richness and multi-layeredness of each sensory stimulus, and of combination of sensory stimuli utilized in the encounter.* In other words, it is the perceived appeal of each sensory stimulus and of the synergy as a result of the combination of the sensory stimuli in the encounter to each of the senses at multiple levels.

Intensity of the sensory stimuli utilized in an environment is found to directly affect consumers' moods (Joy et al. 2003). As a result, one of the key principles to make consumers sense is proposed to be "sensory variety", or in other words, multiple modalities in sight, sound, touch/feel, taste and smell (Schmitt 1999). For example, Hoolenbeck et al. (2008) found in their

ethnographic research on Coca-Cola brand museum that in such contexts, consumers are impressed by "the various colors, lights, and sounds that accompany each exhibit." (p.347). Accordingly, complexity and multidimensionality have developed to be the key aspects of market offerings and encounters today, and experiential retail theaters are becoming more complex, differentiated, and are in constant flux in terms of their sensory designs (Kozinets et al. 2002).

Design of various rooms in a consumer environment depicting different cultures and historical periods, such as Japanese teahouse, an Indian temple, a Buddhist temple, an eighteenth century grand salon in a Parisian hotel, is an example for complexity that consumers seek in the textural elements of an encounter (Kotler 1999). The increasing need for and increasing utilization of sensory complexity is largely a result of characteristics and the structure of contemporary culture. In today's multimedia world, consumers are experiencing a sensory overload, and they get bored easily with unidimensionality (zapping can be given as an example to how consumers react to stimuli in a way to engage themselves through multiple sights and sounds at the highest level). Sensory stimuli with multiple modalities rather than a unidimensional mode are more interesting and attractive to a consumer since they engage the consumer at higher levels by arousing more of his/her senses and emotions. The importance of achieving a significant stimulation of senses by polysensory layering of sensory stimuli are found to hold true even for the experiences people derive from contexts where sensuality is not thought to play a primary role, such as churches (Christrup 2008).

Consumers have multisensory interaction with experiential contexts, and develop multimodal ways of communication in these contexts (Laursen 2008). Variety and layers in sensory stimuli consumers find in experiential market contexts are a significant source of

consumer fascination with these settings, as is evident in consumers' depictions of some

encounters in Las Vegas:

> "The show is very sexy and funny, sort of a cabaret which combines music, dancing, acrobatics and very colorful. Unlike the rest of Las Vegas' cabarets, Zumanity brings on stage people of all shapes, colors and sizes, including a few audience members.We enjoyed the show very much." (Laorfamily, February 9, 2007, Travelpod.com)

> "We went to the Bellagio (which is INSANE) and wondered around inside and then watched the fountains outside (really neat. they time the fountains with different songs... very pretty). We then walked to the Mirage and wondered inside before realizing that what we were after, the so-called Volcano, was outside the Mirage. So then we went out and were able to catch the volcano in action.. it was very cool. Involved water and lights but then also actual fire! All timed to music, as with the fountains. It was fun." (Jackie D., July23rd, Travelblog.org)

> "Every hour on the hour, all the lights from the casinos would switch off and the screen would come on showing amazing lights and graphics themed to the music that played - something like Queen or Kiss. It was pretty cool!" (Corinneandluke, May 15, 2009, Travelpod.com)

> "They have an Eifel Tower which provides some fantastic views. Luckily we were at the top when the Bellagio had it's last water show of the night. The sounds, lights, water make u speechless. Something you have to see if you ever go to Vegas." (Teasertool, April 26, 2009, Travelpod.com)

> "…today Las Vegas has a profusion of different people, cultures, languages, foods, music, arts, and attitudes, which collectively have produced a tremendous diversity which has added new depth and richness to this remarkable city." (Kcossin, October 9, 2005, Travelpod.com)

In a similar fashion, the statement by an interviewee about his awe with Las Vegas as a

result of variety of stimuli he finds there is also a good example of the importance of perceptions

of multilayers in the sensory stimuli to perceive an experiential context more significant:

> "Coming from a small place, it was amazing. Everything was brighter…just more attractive…Variety of colors, variety of sounds, variety of people, variety of everything…it's just awesome." (Interviewee, 24, Male)

Therefore, increasing number of experiential market encounters provide consumers with

multidimensional physical and virtual texture elements. For example, according to Nilesen's

2009 Industry outlook, "…gross sales increased over 60% for films exhibited in 3D as compared

to traditional film, and this increase is due to higher prices and higher attendance. With over a 1,000 3D theaters already in the U.S. and with studios helping to fund the transition from 35MM to 3D…" (http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/2009-industry-outlook-the-rise-of-3d-movies/ Feb. 26, 2010). Furthermore, four dimensional theaters, that make impact upon all senses except taste, are pervading all around the world and provide a vision of theater into which consumers can deeply immerse.

As Tuan (1990) emphasizes, each sense stimulated in experiential settings reinforces other senses with its multiple modes and in the end, they clarify the structure and substance of the context together. Supporting this view, Lindstrom (2005) notes that operating on all five senses leads to the highest levels of effectiveness and receptiveness of human beings. Consequently, some scholars argue that human emotions could be produced through sensory architecture, and an effective design should fabricate the spectator's experience on every level via scenery, lights, shows, and buildings (Sally 2007). Consumers value the context more when they were stimulated at a higher level through multimodal sensory stimuli:

> "From the sublime to the ridiculous…Las Vegas - what a shock to the senses after the serenity of the National Parks we have been visiting. The sounds, the sights, the scale, the smells... The Strip does truly have to be seen to be believed, especially at night. Crazy town, crazy people… We're glad we came…" (Carolandowen, June 26, 2009, Travelpod.com)

> "Vegas is an awesome place!!! U will never get board in vegas. Soooo many lights and massive hotels." (Beef_jerkey, August 3, 2005, Travelpod.com)

> "Later, we went back to TI to watch the Sirens of TI show outside with the Pirates. I think Sirens is quite good…There are some spectacular explosions and you really feel the heat from the flames that shoot out when the Sirens ship is supposedly hit." (Aerialhighlander, May 17, 2009, Travelpod.com)

Variety and multiple layers found in sensory details that speak to senses affectively make people perceive the context richer and more sophisticated overall, as can be derived from below consumer comment:

> "The Bellagio, Caesar's Palace, Ballys, The Wynne and several others are the height of luxury with beautiful statues, amazing fountains outside that dance to music, sculptured gardens..." (Laurieandjilly, July 9, 2007, Travelpod.com)

Overall, in contemporary culture, the richer, the more dimensional the offering is perceived in terms of its sensory impact, the more the consumers prefer it. Schmitt (1999) argues that a polysensory layering of senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch is the key to achieving overstimulation of consumers' senses in a meaningful way. For example, as the Rainforest Café at MGM Grand Hotel, a setting by which a large number Las Vegas consumers are impressed, does not only involve the sound of rain, and a dull, picture like forest imagery, but various sounds such as screams of various animals and environment events like thunder, and images like lightning, and the moving images of many animals at the same time.

Santoro and Troilo (2007), in their analysis of a rock concert, discuss the critical impact of multiple modalities of texture related elements on consumers' senses and emotions, and thus, perceptions and behaviors in a concert atmosphere. According to their study, wood, velvet, and fabric altogether tend to create a feeling of warmth, whereas metal and glass together have the opposite effects. Various modes of factors of lighting, which are mainly the focus, number of lights, dynamics, direction, colors, and rhythm, are also examples of the use of multiple modalities in creation of experiential context. A specific mix of those characteristics is provided to affect the concert-goers so that they can immerse themselves into the context (Santoro and Troilo 2007). Thus, consumers seek and appreciate multimodal sensory stimuli in contexts as

they provide an immersion. They appreciate constantly changing multimodal layering in the stimuli even more:

> "To set the scene, the stage was what looked like a huge swimming pool which actually had numerous mechanical platforms in it which sunk and raised throughout the show. So one second someone would walk across what looked like a puddle on the stage and the next someone would high dive into it after the platforms had been lowered. It was fantastic!" (StuandRach, June 24th 2010, travelblog.org)

A physical design that constantly changing colours, patterns, sounds, and consumers' reactions of amazement to these stimuli are observed in most contexts in Las Vegas. Consumers emphasize these constantly changing sensory stimuli often in describing many of the contexts they find to be attractive in Las Vegas, as in the example of a consumer comment below:

> "The first stop was the Fantasy pool at the Wynn, a huge waterfall and pool that changes colours and patterns once an hour." (Richandleight, February 11, 2009, Travelpod.com)

To satisfy the sensory needs of consumers, sensual stimuli provided in the market encounters are rapidly changing and evolving. Privileges given to specific stimuli and senses in the culture shape this change and evolvement. For example, Lindstrom (2005) argues that in modern culture visual designs of the consumer environments are privileged in the commercial realm. This is due to the fact that modern culture generally privileges sight over other senses (Jonas 1954; Arendt 1978: Mirzoeff 1999) as Schroeder (1999) emphasizes: "visual images play a powerful role in shaping how we view the world" (p. 641). Yet, today a movement away from this fact is being observed. Scott (1993) argues that expressions of today's culture, specifically the ones in the commercial realm, integrate many sensory stimuli in a multidimensional manner. However, still, a powerful visual sense of contexts supplements other senses (Lukas 2007b). People are found to relate bright and colorful environment with pleasure and arousal (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Therefore, contexts that provide layers of lights and colors are found to attract consumer patronage (Summers and Hebert, 2001). Some consumers emphasize the

importance of color variety describing their perceptions of attractiveness of contexts in Las Vegas. The comment below is about of the Spring Conservatory ate the Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas:

> "wonderful .....colorful.....♥♥" (Stephanie Elizabeth Larsen; Bellagio Las Vegas Facebook page)

Another consumer comment also reflects dominance of consumers' visual variety perceptions in their evaluations of the contexts:

> "…we decided to walk the strip and take in the free delights that Vegas has to offer. This is best done at night as it is cooler and the ambiance created by thousands of bright lights and fireworks is much more appealing." (Marshallmatters, June 7, 2008, Travelpod.com)

Hence, ingredients of each sensory stimulator, not just the sight, are expected to be multidimensional by today's consumers. Therefore, 'complification' is a significant strategy used by marketers in creating sensory stimuli in market contexts. Today, with the influence of advanced technologies, multiple layers of virtual sensory stimuli as well as physical sensory stimuli have started to play a key role as addressed by Stapleton et al (2002: 122): "A successful mixed fantasy should thus incorporate strong doses of physical reality with virtual elements that lead the imagination..."

Consumers largely emphasize the multisensory bombardment as a result of physical reality and virtual elements when they describe many contexts in Las Vegas. Yet, most of them perceive this a sensory motivation to be attracted more to the context, rather than something to overwhelm the senses. So, impressive multisensory bombardment is about being able to create in a way to motivate as many senses as possible without overwhelming.

Today, advanced technology is a key component of well-crafted multilayered textural design. With the help of technology, layers in various stimuli can be created and communicated more easily to make consumers immersed in the context at higher levels.

"We stopped to watch an indoor storm outside one of restaurants, where the 'sky' darkened, you could hear thunder and lights flashed as rain came down - it was actually very effective!" (Gemma_doogal, June 4, 2010, travelpod.com)

The below consumer comment also depicts the role of technology in creating a higher impact of the multilayered sensory stimuli utilized in a setting:

"…headed out to the show. LOVE. The Cirque du Soleil show with specially arranged Beatles soundtrack - wow the colours man! The show was absolutely excellent! Would go again in a minute… The seats have speakers build into them so you can here all the nuances of the soundtrack too. There were outtakes from studio time and snippets of other conversations too - can't recommend it highly enough." (Freeandeasy, August 8,2007, travelpod.com)

When consumers, who desire multidimensionality in spaces and experiences (Featherstone 1990), perceive that the textural elements of a market encounter are rich in the sense of pleasant complexity of the ingredients, they are willing to participate in and immerse into the context at higher level. Making impact on senses through multiple modalities is the key for immersion of consumers since "marketing through the senses triggers human emotion without going through the consumer's self-protecting "spam filters" (Molitor 2007). One of the primary reasons for this is that multidimensionality and complexity in sensory stimuli also enable richer text in addition to richer texture (Fırat 2001: 117). That, higher levels of impact on consumer cognitions, in addition to senses, emotions, and actions in experiential contexts requires complexity, and cannot be created through a unidimensional modality. Features of a consumer environment by that consumers are cognitively awed are the ones that simultaneously impact an all five senses at multiple levels (Lukas 2007b).

"As with all Cirque du Soleil performances, the play of colours and lighting makes it feel just like a dream!" (Zwergliazrael, September 23, 2009, Travelpod.com)

Thus, contexts where increasing number of layers are being added to sensory stimuli are imaginative in that consumers can have their senses highly stimulated in ways that they cannot

experience in everyday life. In consequence, they help consumers immerse deeper into the experience. The below comment is a reflection of how consumer describes his/her engrossment in a show that involves multimodal sensory stimuli in a way to impact highly upon their cognition, senses, emotions, and imagination at a high level:

> "Spectacular costumes. Beautiful ballet dancing, awesome tap dancing, incredible mind-blowing break dancing. Crazy insane acrobatics (much trapeze stuff that didn't stop amazing me)…Amazing use of lights and props. R-diculous choreography, there is no other way to describe it. The choreographers are geniuses. Excellent incorporation of videos. So gorgeous and breath-taking that at times (especially the very end), I was nearly brought to tears." (Jackie D; August 23rd 2009,Travelblog.org)

Overall, one of the most critical aspects in experiential marketing contexts is arranging the ingredients of the sensory stimuli in a way to lift the senses and emotions of consumers at an optimum level to help them participate at a high level and deeply immerse themselves in the experiential context. Utilizing and integrating multiple modal sensory stimuli with different ingredients, or, sensory variety that lead to textures that are richer, denser and more complicated is proposed to be the key to creating an ambience and engaging consumers at the highest level (Lukas 2007b). Encounters with multiple modalities in terms of various stimuli allow consumers' higher level of participation by leaving them more space to mix and match that also leads to higher level of immersion.

Spectacularity

> "…the world famous Strip is the height of luxury. With 16 of the worlds 20 biggest hotels, innovative architecture, top class shows and some amazing restaurants the Strip is a sight to behold" (Laurieandjilly, July 9, 2007, Travelpod.com)

Utilization of sensory stimuli in 'awe inspiring' and 'wow effect' creating ways, as is observed in Las Vegas, is one of the most important keys to success in attracting consumers' full attention for experience marketers. As can be witnessed especially in the new means of consumption (Sorkin 1992; Ritzer 1999), in today's image-saturated society, the mundane must

be transformed to be attractive to grab consumers' attention. Wolf (1999) asserts that this is increasingly observed in all aspects of life in contemporary culture where entertainment is the focus.

Consequently, in today's spectacular culture, where even the most serious information need to be transformed to spectacular -with a shocking dramatization- to be successful, experiential contexts that primarily focus on entertainment have to be flashy and striking to be able to break out of the clutter and attract consumers (Gottdiener 1997; Schmitt 1999; Wolf 1999). For example, Hollenbrock, Peters, and Zinkhan (2008) mention how spectacularity perceived in the exterior of the Coca-Cola museum captures peoples' attention and serves as a means to draw them into the museum. Similarly, Peñaloza proposes Nike Town as a successful example of a striking market setting. She emphasizes the design and displays and how "architecturally, the high ceilings and larger-than-life celebrity displays diminished consumers, creating feelings of awe potentially associated with the company" (Peñaloza 1999: 341).

Spectacularity may simply be defined *as the extent to which sensory stimuli utilized in the encounter is perceived to be remarkable, sensational, and awe-inspiring at the highest level.* Even though stories of the encounters may also be perceived spectacular, the impacts of these stories on consumers' senses, and their perception of being dramatically daring or thrilling, largely come from the sensory stimuli used in the encounters (Peñaloza 1999). This is the reason why spectacularity is considered as a dimension of texture in this research as well as in the literature and for the purposes of this research. Yet, as Fırat (2001) suggests based on his observations of consumer experiences in Las Vegas, experience intensity consumers derive from Las Vegas is a function of spectacularity in combination with textuality. Below consumer blog entry reflects the significant effect of this combination:

"our fascination at the boticelli inspired painted ceilings, 100ft high golden lions, 20 storey doric column clad grecian hotels with marble statues surroundig huge swimming pools, full size gondolas with their passengers paying $50 to ride around the canal with it's cobbled streets being serenaded, or seeing a full size version of the Sphinx, Cleopatras needle, parts of the Karnak Temple, Nephertiti and Oris as you walked up to a huge 50 storey concrete pyramid rising up across the road from a gold windowed 50 storey hotel next to it. We saw synchornised fountain shows rising 150ft in the air to opera music, fake erupting volcanoes and fires, full size pirate ship battles and watched fireworks compete in the night sky for attention with more laser and neon lights along the 5 mile strip than I am sure has more lights in them than the whole of London" (otley-groom, May 19, 2009, travelpod.com)

Specifically with the help of advanced technology, it is observed that in experiential settings mundane sounds, images, taste, smells are ever more transformed to more vivid, sharper ones; and, they are also interwoven in a way that makes them multidimensional, thus, more and more attractive. This transformation is increasingly approximating the mundane to what is perceived as fantastic (Crawford 1992). Consumers largely emphasize this transformation and their perception of a fantastic encounter in their evaluations of the context:

"Well after waddling out of the restaurant, we checked out the Fountains at the Bellagio, which is in a massive lake at the front of the hotel, with hundreds of fountains that move and sway with music for 5 minutes or so. I can't really describe it very well,… . I will say it was pretty ridiculous! The fountains shot SO high into the air, and they moved with the music too, so it looked like they were dancing! Gotta see it really." (Simonandflo (UK), October 27, 2009, Travelpod.com)

In extant literature, spectacles of consumptionscapes are conceptualized as theatrical presentations of the market primarily as a result of the transformations in the stimuli with the help of advanced technology. For instance, Davis (1999) in her book "Spectacular nature, corporate culture, and the Sea World experience," proposes that using audio-animatronics robot animals or fuzzy-costume versions of animated creatures, which are difficult to distinguish from the real ones, in the Sea World is an example of spectacular "nature" creation in a market setting. This example stresses how mundane nature is transformed to spectacular in the market through extravaganzas and simulations. Such striking displays attract attention or are noticed through

their unusual or conspicuous characteristics. Yet, as Debord (1983) asserts, spectacle is no longer a supplement to the real world; "…the spectacle is the main production of present-day society" (p. 4), it is the heart of the highly appealing unrealism of the real society. Hence, today, re-enchantment of life revolves around the spectacular (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Badot and Filser 2007).

Holbrook (2000), basing his ideas on today's spectacular consumption and marketing logic where "there's no business without show business" (p.184), emphasizes the role of the spectacular even in fields that have traditionally been perceived to be distant from entertainment, such as academia. He argues that recently the value decisions even about professors are increasingly based on the entertainment and spectacularity they can provide to their student "consumers." As can be observed in Holbrook's example, in today's culture, entertainment that is spectacular has become the essence of most social encounters as well as business practices.

The power of spectacular encounters rely on the fact that spectacular market settings are rich and complex environments (Fırat and Venkatesh 1996), which involve elements that are largely opposite of ordinary design and display (Kozinets et al. 2002). In experiential market settings, such as themed brand stores, spectacular design that transforms the mundane offerings to what is fantastic through providing shocking elements is the dominant characteristic (Kozinets et al. 2002). Settings that are found to be successfully spectacular involve exaggerated use of sensory stimuli in a way to make the highest level of sense. Furthermore, Ritzer (1999) proposes that in contemporary culture, spectacular offerings such as displays, events, and so forth in market encounters are created essentially through extravaganzas and simulations. Experiential consumer environments are expected to be extravagant on every aspect of their sensory designs.

The blog entry below emphasizes consumer perceptions about the spectacular designs in Las Vegas and overall perception of the context:

> "Vegas is an awesome place…everything has to be a spectacle or it wont fit in."
> (Beef_jerkey, August 3, 2005, Travelpod.com)

For consumers who value and expect spectacularity in experiential settings, that which is not ostentatious is perceived as out of place, and does not have a chance to succeed in creating stimuli that are found highly meaningful. Sorkin (1992) further argue that providing spectacular stimuli is one of the main techniques of high consumption spaces. In these spaces, elements of the events or other offerings impact upon as many senses and emotions of consumers as possible to be able to attract consumers who pay greater attention to what is larger and what is more noticeable. For example, the movie-set Alamo in Texas, San Antonio, attracts consumers' interest more than the original Alamo as it is the one that provides a spectacle (Hannigan 1998).

Consumers' spectacularity perceptions are mostly a result of the impressive, sensational, large-scale displays consumers encounter in many experiential market settings by which they are surrounded today. As a result, unexpected, unimaginable, excess, grand size, over the top scale buildings and displays are of main drivers of spectacularity perceptions of Las Vegas consumers:

> "…the Luxor, a hotel and casino inside a pyramid, guarded by a huge sphynx and which emits the worlds only laser powerful enough to be seen from space!" (Laurieandjilly, July 9, 2007, Travelpod.com)

A feeling or perception of affective spectacularity largely results from the enormous scale of almost everything, not just certain aspects in a certain context, as stated by one of the commentators on Ká show:

> " Being in total awe of the enormous scale of everything involved in the show!" (Trevor Kafka, Ka Facebook page, April 7, 2011)

People largely express their feelings of complete 'awe' as a result of encountering outstanding designs in Las Vegas:

> "We stayed in the Excalibur hotel/casino. Wow, its designed in the theme of a castle, and is bigger than the Tower of London." (Travel4, July 21, 2005, Travelpod.com)

> "Wednesday night Pearl and I went to see "Cirquel de Sol - Ka" this one was recommended to me and it was spectacular, just walking into the theater took my breath, just for the shear [sic.] size." (Santandrea, June 13th 2008, Travelblog.org)

As can also be derived from consumer comments above, in today's culture, achieving a high level of impact on consumers' thoughts, feelings, sensations, imaginations, and acts largely requires multiplicity, or multiple dimensions in simulations or extravaganzas utilized in the setting. Hence, it can be observed that encounters with simulations or extravaganzas that have multiple modalities are perceived to be more spectacular compared to other encounters. As a result, ostentatiousness and extravaganzas found in many of the experiential market contexts are the sources of consumer's perceptions of a powerful context. They also make the narrative structure of the contexts more affective, because spectacularity is the dimension that creates the highest level of unbelievability perceptions by encountering exceptional displays, styles, designs:

> "city Las vegas - the city that never sleeps. What a wonderful surreal crazy place -we couldn't quite believe our eyes as we strolled around Las Vegas Boulevard known as the 'strip' . We spent most of time visitng and admiring/ gawping at the many and incredible megacasinos (in their heavenly air con as it was in the 100s) and 'visiting' the different countires and cultures form all over the globe depending on which one we happened to be in." (Otley-groom, May 19, 2009, Travelpod.com)

> "The hotels and casinos are an experience alone. They are spectacular inside and out, not to mention the size of the buildings and number of rooms they boast! There's Circus Circus, which has a theme park…" (Loudan1979, May 20, 2006, Travelpod.com)

Encounters that consumers find to be well-crafted spectacular are affective since they provide highly sensual and emotional stimuli to consumers. As a result, spectacular marketing environments are associated with "higher quality, more experiential, more technological, more

emotionally engaging, more multifaceted presentations" (Kozinets et al. 2002: 24). Hetzel (2007) thus argues that the presence of something spectacular is one of the key themes pertaining to the level of relational intensity between the consumer and the company.

Yet, consumers' desire for spectacularity is not free of paradoxes. Peñaloza (1999) reflects on the paradox that consumers experience in settings with spectacular elements that make these settings even more meaningful and valuable for consumers: "Paradoxically, consumers were diminished by the larger than life displays even as they were empowered by the meanings and at seeing the artifacts displayed for them." (p. 391). This paradox is also observed in Las Vegas consumers' spectacularity perceptions of the contexts in Las Vegas:

> "Right near the lobby was the Botanical Gardens which reminded me of Willy Wonka's "lolly-land" except that it was full of colourful flowers rather than sweets. At the same time I felt like I was in the movie Honey I Shrunk the Kids because I was surrounded by giant ants, butterflies, bees and snails in a garden." (Emmafox –Netherlands, August 24, 2010, Travelpod.org)

In addition to focusing on the grand size, today spectacle is created in many of the contemporary consumer environments by providing a rich synthesis of artifice and nature, the quest for novelty and the myth, and systematic use of technology and unsystematic carnivalesque style (Register 2001). The syntheses consumers find in spectacular experiential contexts make the contexts more reliable, thus more poweful, for consumers. According to Ritzer (2005), experiential market contexts that are "new means of consumption" serve as cathedrals for contemporary consumers with their enchanted and sacred characteristics as a result of this power. It can be proposed that these characteristics are largely a result of the unbelievability in the 'reality' of the designs which brings about a sacred dimension to them. Below consumer blog entry reflects consumer perceptions of such characteristics of spectacular settings:

> "So, after seeing the best Mother Nature could do at the Grand Canyon, it was mankind's turn to impress us. And strange as it may seem he didn't disappoint. Vegas is like a neon version of the Grand Canyon in that you know what it looks like and you know what to

expect but when you're there it's even bigger, brighter and more spectacular than you expected it to be." (Rconkling –UK, March25, 2007, Travelpod.com)

As is witnessed in the consumer comment above and in other consumers' comments, people compare Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon, which is a structure that they find to have 'natural' sacred characteristics. Consumer fascination with Las Vegas as a result of such a challenging comparison is largely an outcome of its very well executed spectacular design:

"I think it is rather ironic that you can have the experience of being amazed by the man made scale of Las Vegas and the natural immensity of The Grand Canyon" (JoHall, June 20th 2008, Travelblog.org)

One key characteristic of spectacularity is that what is perceived to be spectacular is rapidly and drastically changing with the advances in technology, as they allow creation of more vivid elements of extravaganzas and simulations. For example, while silent and black and white movies were the spectacles of the 1920s and 1930s, three or four dimensional movies, full of visual, sound, and now even smell and touch effects are what are perceived to be the spectacles of today. Therefore, creation and perception of spectacularity, in addition to many other textuality and texture dimensions, are also closely related to advancing technologies. For example, according to MacCAnnell in 21st century, the prominent aspects of spectacular entertainment are films, special effects, and the interactive maps. These aspects are largely witnessed in every sensory detail, in every context in Las Vegas.

The most significant danger with a spectacular design might be its negative perception as cheap. In experiential contexts, marketers need to provide something that would break out of the prejudices of artificiality when they are creating spectacular designs in order to create intense experiences (Belk and Bettany 2011). Creating and executing a meaningful spectacularity in every detail is a very important aspect of the effective consumer environments that break out of artificiality prejudices. A fastidious design by paying attention on every detail, whether noticed

or not, is the dimension based on which consumers "distinguish between what is the opulent and grand and what is cheap and unrefined." (Lukas 2007b: 76). A well-designed spectacularity is one of most influential of these tools that make consumers perceive the context grand and powerful. Spectacular elements in a context should be endowed with elaborate displays and novelty to be fully impactful. Consumer comment below reflects the impact of an elaborate spectacular design:

> "I started off by visiting the Venitian. It was amazing!! The architecture and just general grandeur of it was inspiring. One thing I noticed about Vegas was that it is unashamadly fake. I loved it! There were gondoliers punting down this river that ran through the hotel, moving sidewalks to get you through to the shops as quick as possible and even a fake sky (which looked very realistic) over the streets of shops they have. Caesars palace was much the same, with colleseum style buildings. Enormous buildings-everything is so much bigger and brighter than anywhere else!" (Sarahx, November 5, 2005, Travelpod.org)

When contexts succeed in creating sharper effects while impressing consumers with the meaningfulness of every detail, they are cherished at a higher level by consumer:

> "…the extravagance and glitz has to be respected!" (Ann_ho, July 17, 2006, Travelpod.com)

> "From a picture you can not grasp the extravagance of this place. You really need to see for yourself. The likes of the titanic exhibit in the Luxor. They have made life size walk ways and rooms of all the classes and even of the grand staircase. They have the biggest part of this ship recovered which is a 3m x 5m piece of steel from the side of the ship." (Cody-max, May 6, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Consequently, when all details in the contexts are exaggerated in an elegant and consistent way, people perceive the context to be more effective, more dazzling. In Las Vegas, spectacularity of each context has an impact on spectacularity of other contexts; as well as the spectacularity of the overall context has an impact on each of the contexts. Moreover, spectacularity of many contexts in Las Vegas together makes the even more spectacular overall. This reciprocal impact results in higher spectacularity perceptions and longer lasting impressions of consumers:

"The size of these casinos is mind blowing they just keep going on and taking up a whole blocks. Each one bringing something different than the last, with the skyline on New York, New York complete with skyscrapers and the Brooklyn bridge. The Eiffel tower in Paris, The Disney Style Castle of Knights, and right at the end of the strip towering over everything was the Stratosphere where we would be staying. The bright lights of Vegas are infectious" (Elrigster, April 15, 2009, travelpod.org)

"The hotel-casinos on the strip are world attractions themselves. The Wynn, Luxor, Circus-Circus, New York-New York are all among the most thrilling eye events in the world." (nomad1979, August 17, 2008, Travelblog.org)

An elaborate spectacularity culminates in "transcending one's immediate physical circumstances and interjecting oneself into the story via imagination and fantasy" (Peñaloza 1999: 349). Therefore, it is closely related to presentationality. Well-designed spectacular contexts and elements are found to be inspirational by consumers as they alter their reference points. Consumers' strong feelings about Las Vegas, for example, base largely on their altered reference points resulting from an affective spectacularity.

"The next day the, little bus dropped me off outside Caesar's Palace which is flanked by two equally famous hotel/casinos -The Bellagio and The Flamingo.They're towards the top of the strip and herald the beginning of what must surely be one of the biggest spectacles on earth. The hotels tower abouve you and are a riot of colour, light and shimmer - I felt like Alice in an over-sized, glittering Wonderland. The closest I can liken in to is the memory I have of being in Disneyworld when I was little - which is rather apt really because that's exactly what this place is like, a Disneyworld for adults…" (Soprhiecorless, March 21, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Altered reference points that result from spectacular elements in a context make the context to be perceived more unique and significant:

"The sizes of these casinos are unreal, with the most extravagant decors around. After spending much of the day just gawking at all the sights" (Cmedancing, May 29, 2009, Travelpod.com)

Overall, spectacularity brings about perceptions of significance and a more appealing "reality." Thus, it draws consumers to the context, envelops them in the context and creates long lasting impressions in consumers' minds, feelings and senses.

Consumer Participation

As mentioned earlier, businesses cannot sell experiences, since experiences are subjective creations of consumers (e.g. Wikstöm 2008). Accordingly, Prahalad (2004) proposes that value can be created only through active participation. Therefore, the value of experiences is driven from active partaking in the experiential contexts. Consumer participation for the purposes of this research is defined as *the extent of consumer's mental, physical, and social inputs to the creation of an encounter*. In other words, it is conceptualized as interactive partaking in the context, or interactive performing of the encounter.

Bærenholdt et al. (2008) argue that in the experience economy consumers' actions, performances, and practices in these places are what constitute meanings of places and their various elements. They emphasize, based on their qualitative research on Viking Ship Museum visitors, that even in dominantly informative contexts such as museums, consumers actively perform cultural history by performing in these encounters. Moreover, Kozinets et al. (2004) propose, based on their research on a powerful experiential market context, ESPN Zone, that creation of a meaningful experiential market encounter that focuses on entertainment often depends upon deep and playful consumer environment and playful consumers. Accordingly, Peñaloza found in her research on Nike Town that "fundamental to spectacular consumption were consumers' bodily and visual activities." (Peñaloza 1999: 342). These findings support Wikström's (2008) findings that many consumers in passive entertainment contexts perceived these events not stimulating or memorable, due to the fact that they had a passive role in these events.

In experiential contexts, sometimes it is details of consumer's active participation in the context that make him/her immerse into the context from which s/he can derive powerful

experiences. The below quote is a part of a consumer's travel blog entry where s/he talks about a pleasant experience that s/he had in Las Vegas as a result of participation in the context:

> "We stood for the next 15Min's staring up at the movie playing on the ceiling to the soundtrack of Don McLean's American Pie.We danced and sung along, videoed and took photo's." (Ameski18, January 11, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Gentile et al. (2007) further argue that what contributes to the creation of value in a market encounter at the highest level is to enable consumer to co-create their own unique experience with the company. Yet, companies provide the stimulating stage and the materials for consumers that consumers can employ when they co-create their own experiences (Carù and Cova, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Carù and Cova, 2007; Gentile et al. 2007; Wikstöm 2008). In this co-creation process, consumers project their emotions onto both the narrative and the sensory elements of the context, and provide various inputs in addition to the stage and materials provided by businesses in creating their idiosyncratic experiences.

Participation construct emphasizes that the consumer is an active co-creator of the context. Consunmers draw their own experiences by reframing and manipulating whatever has been provided to them as raw materials in the encounter. Yet, different consumers might participate in the process of co-creating these contexts at different levels and on different dimensions. Some consumers might participate cognitively at a higher level; whereas others may participate more physically, or socially. Participation at a cognitive level refers to thinking about and focusing on the encounter and its dimensions and the level the consumer utilizes his/her intellectual capacity. This is similar to consumer's engagement with a product on the functional level as discussed by Mukherjee and Venkatesh (2006). Physical participation simply refers to active physical participation of the consumer in the activities and events in the encounter. Moreover, experiential market encounters are largely social contexts. Experiences in

these contexts are created as a result of social interactions. Accordingly, social participation refers to the extent of the consumer's relationship building with others in the encounter in a way to create the events, activities, and meanings in the encounter. However, no matter the level the consumer participates in the encounter, elements of participation are crucial for the richness of experiences for the consumer (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Wikström 2008).

The phenomenon of consumer participation in the creation of the offerings and value takes place in experiential consumer environments even at a higher degree compared to some other marketing contexts. Scholars emphasize an unusually high level of involvement by consumers in the experiential marketing literature (e.g. Peñaloza 1999; Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004; Bærenholdt et al. 2008; Wikstrom 2008). The reason for this is that in experiential market encounters, consumers are found to co-create the experience enthusiastically, as these are the types of encounters that they find playful and meaningful.

Experiential market encounters such as themed flagship stores are found to encourage a diverse range of consumer participative acts through their narrative and physical design in a way to allow consumers sense deeper immersion and a superior experience extraction (Peñaloza 1999; Kozinets et al. 2002; Kozinets et al. 2004). This is a significant act on businesses' side as a memorable context is found to allow for different levels of customer participation and connection with the event or performance both through relational and physical elements (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). As a result, businesses provide consumers with variety of stages on which they can perform. Also they provide them narrative and sensory signs, as sign is the necessity for one to provide inputs (Baudrillard 1968; 1970). Consequently, consumer's level and type of participation are largely contingent on the level of texture and textuality of the encounter for the consumer, that will be discussed further below. For example, interactive displays that are

commonly employed in contemporary experiential settings are important drivers of consumer participation. If consumers find these drivers more meaningful, they are found to participate more in the elements of the market contexts. This is the reason why places like Nike Town are using celebrity displays as contemporary consumers find celebrity related narratives highly meaningful and desirable for consumers (Peñaloza 1999). In these contexts, especially in the ones that are perceived to have meaningful stories and impactful sensory stimuli, consumers get into a playful mood as can be witnessed in the below consumer blog entries:

> "Me on the red carpet at The Goods premiere. Obviously before the stars arrived..."
> (September 12th 2009 by Leanne and Simon; Travelblog.org)

> "…so off we went to the venetian to do madam tussards wax museum… This is such a fun place and its all because you can actually touch the wax figures and interact with them as our photos (above) show,and this is also the closest i got to meeting anyone famous." (Cleo00, October 30, 2008, Travelpod.com)

In another blog entry, where the consumer talks about his/ her participation in the context by singing along the songs and even dancing, s/he emphasizes the contextual elements that allured him/her:

> "Absolutely gorgeous visual depiction of Beatles music. Amazing remixing and combining of Beatles songs…" (Jackie D; August 23rd 2009,Travelblog.org)

Consumers' playful mood in experiential encounters is what is observed also by managers: "Consumers do things that they wouldn't do in their home town." (Brand Manager of MGM hotel group in Las Vegas). They emphasize that this indeed is what they desire for their consumers do. They want their consumer actively partake in the encounter to create an energetic context which will be more inclusive and thus, immersive. Therefore, they provide them a social setting and materials in which they would be willing to involve at the highest level:

In a similar fashion, Pullman and Gross (2004) assert that, through creating certain designs, such as Finkelstein's (1989) "parodic" restaurant design, firms create VIP venues so that

the guest is "lifted out of the ordinary and deposited in a stylized atmosphere and theatrical setting designed in such a way that it requires the patron to enact a theatrical role." (p. 557). Consequently, consumer's perceptions of the impactfulness of the contextual elements that are designed and provided by businesses are proposed to be the keys to consumers' participation level.

In their study of customers' participation, Kellogg, Youngdahl, and Bowen (1997) found that customers experience higher frequency of satisfactory service outcomes when allowed to engage in relationship building behaviors. The social environment is an important dimension of the servicescape because people within a physically built environment can shape and influence the physical space and its impact (see Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994; Baker, et al.1992). Thus, relational context has positively influenced sales and ratings of satisfaction. Experiential contexts serve the leisure function of seeing and being seen in public and being entertained by others. The interaction among the various actors of the contexts such as the performers and other consumers is important for one's higher level of connection to the encounter (Arnould and Price 1993; Wakefield and Blodget 1996; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008). Accordingly, the social environment created, and the opportunities provided for customer interaction with other people are found to be the key context design elements in experiential settings (Pullman and Gross 2004). These elements help consumers actively partake in the contexts (Wikström 2008). The brand manager of a hotel group in Las Vegas emphasizes the importance of social dimensions of an encounter as a driver of connecting to the context:

> "To me it looks like the social activities are what drive people. It brings people together…" (Brand Manager of a hotel group in Las Vegas, January 2011).

Consequently, it is observed in many experiential settings that social dynamics and the rituals in a context lead to consumer participation and higher level of consumer connection to the

context (Lanier and Hampton 2009). Festivals for example are a good example of a powerful context where what the consumer lives through is as much a matter of social get-together as of the performance of interest (Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008). The dynamics and rituals that lead to consumer partaking in the context are largely founded in the narrative elements and sensory stimuli in an encounter. Also in Las Vegas context, consumers were commonly observed talking to each other (most of the times giving advices about where to go and what to do), laughing, holding hands, pointing out things to others, taking pictures of others, based on the narratives and sensory stimuli of the sites, attractions, activities, and events they observe and involve in. A sense of openness and social connection perceived in the experiential contexts like Las Vegas are proposed to lead to a higher level of social participation and connection to the context:

> "Dance Heads!! Funny, funny, funny. Las Vegas. We had such a great time making these videos. We had alot of people stop and check us out while we were filming."
> (Suzukimookie, November 08, 2010. youtube)

As can be derived from the consumer expression above, for most experiential contexts, the multifaceted interactions between performers and consumers, and among consumers are what makes the context unique (Christrup 2008).

Overall, active participation in the context enables consumers derive higher level of meaning from the context. Therefore, participation is a key concept that has the potential to enable the consumer to connect to the context at a higher level, and create feelings of immersion in a consumer.

> "Awesome! We had a great time and Adrian got brought on stage for the final act! It was a great show" (usa2009aswm (UK), September 14, 2009, travelpod.com)

Immersion

The level consumers connect to the context is critical in the strength of the experience they derive from the context. Therefore, to be able to understand the strength of the experience one derives from a setting, there is a need to understand the concept of immersion. Reflecting on previous studies, immersion can be defined in the marketing context as *the state of being completely integrated in the reality of a marketing context, and the events and activities it involves through compilation of available senses, emotions, cognitions, and actions.*

In the literature, immersion is largely conceptualized as perception of oneness with the elements of the context. It refers to one's sense of leaving the "actuality" and being present only in the present in the current environment, enveloped by its elements. For example, consumers' expressions about their captivation of different elements in Las Vegas, as a result of living fully in the present moment in their encounter with various setting of Las Vegas, are examples of consumer immersion in experiential marketing contexts:

> "Went and saw Cirque de Soleil KA last night and it was incredible.. never seen anything
> like it and would recommend everyone to go! we were all mesmerised the whole time."
> (sshelly, August 24th 2008, Travelblog.org)

The notion of immersion and consumers' immersion processes have been investigated largely in studies on virtual environments. Yet, immersion is instrumental to our understanding of the feelings of consumers also in physical experiential environments, where one encounters many elements that do not exist in his/her everyday life or that exist in different forms compared to what s/he encounters in everyday life. For example, Las Vegas consumers often emphasize sensations such as soaking in the elements in the context, being soaked in, losing track of a sense of time and place, and so forth as a result of many contextual elements, as well as their active

roles in the encounters in Las Vegas. Below are examples of how consumers feel enveloped by

the physical context in Las Vegas, and how they value this feeling:

> "My quickie is about a fast but fabulous trip to our nation's playground -- Las
> Vegas…There are tons of exciting activities to enjoy in around the area. Las Vegas is
> famous for it's many headliners and entertainment variety. Get out at night and soak in
> some of the glitz and excitement." (Armando Travels on Land and Paper, June 8th 2008,
> Travelblog.org)

> "The original plan was to spend a night in Las Vegas but once we got there we initially
> kind a got carried away with the atmosphere! We stayed for 3 nights…" (Alexndean,
> August 29, 2006, Travelpod.com)

> "Romantic fountains danced and exploded to classical music like nothing else, rendering
> onlookers breathless…" (Marshallmatters, June 7,2008, Travelpod.com)

In the literature from various fields, scholars have tried to explore different levels and

dimensions at which immersion can take place. For instance, Pine and Gilmore (1999) observed

that consumer immersion takes place at mental and physical levels. Furthermore, game studies

scholars argue that concerning video game playing immersion takes place at three levels: sensory

immersion, imaginative immersion, and challenge-based immersion. These dimensions can be

useful in understanding immersion of consumers in various different contexts. Sensory

immersion refers to the strong sensory stimuli of the context that overpower other sensory

stimuli from other contexts so that "…the player becomes entirely focused on the game world

and its stimuli" (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 21). Imaginative immersion is the dimension of

experience that occurs when one "…begins to feel for or identify with a game character" (Ermi

and Mäyrä 2005: 22). Challenge-based immersion is about one trying to "…achieve a satisfying

balance of challenges and abilities" (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 22).

In previous studies, immersion has been investigated primarily as an influence of sensory

elements on consumer's feelings. However, results from more recent research show that

regardless of the context of the encounter, immersion takes place when the interaction of

textuality and texture is perceived at high levels by the consumer (Fırat 2001). This is one of the main reasons why consumers are proposed to have powerful and personally significant experiences in themed settings compared to some other encounters (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Fırat and Dholakia 1998; Fırat 2001; Sherry et. al. 2007). High texture and textuality interaction at such experiential settings helps consumers to let themselves go more easily, or in other words, to lose themselves in events, activities, and the overall environment (Carù and Cova 2006).

In many experiential contexts, consumers feel included in the specific reality created in that specific context based on powerful narrative and sensory stimuli, and active partaking. Immersion is a sense of complete engrossment in the context, which marketers create and for the most part consumers interactively partake. When consumers find higher levels of meaning in the narratives and sensory stimuli of a context, the "actual" and the "produced" fuse together seamlessly and make the elements of the context the sole reality for them in the lived moment. When one immerses into the context, the context becomes the only reality for the him/her during the encounter. The 'reality' that consumers perceive in these experiential settings make consumers fully connect to the context, and make experiences they derive from there even stronger. This is why experience marketing practitioners label experiential strategies, such as thematization, as "immersive experiences" (e.g. Theme Entertainment Association Website, www.teaconnet.org). The altered "reality" perception that results from immersion is among the most valued aspects of the encounter for some consumers:

> "But best of all, was the dose of reality born out of delusion." (Kellyjohn; Wednesday, May 27, 2009; Travelpod.com)

Being enveloped by the context alters perceptions of consumers about the setting, as the consumer above mentions as "reality born out of delusion". Altered consumer perception of sense of place and time are observed largely among consumer perceptions in Las Vegas.

"Good afternoon groovers... or wait is it morning? I have lost all sense of time over in Vegas…" (The Perth Girls, June 9th 2008, Travelblog.org)

In other words, it can be inferred from consumers' accounts that being immersed in an experiential context refers to one's state of losing oneself in the moment of the experience which is created in the market encounter. Full immersion means full sensory, cognitive and emotional connection of the consumer to the context. Put otherwise, it is a sense of being completely captured by the situation. Hence, it refers to the enraptured mood of the consumer, rather than a detached and reasoned position s/he takes about the encounter. As a result of such a mood, the outside reality is shut down and the moment becomes the reality for the consumer, so that the distance between the consumer and the situation is eliminated (Carù and Cova 2003; 2007a). Therefore, contemporary consumers value and seek immersion in experiences (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Carù and Cova 2007a) both for escape and vision. The below Las Vegas travel blog entry of a consumer on which s/he names "Dream" depicts many consumers' reactions to highly immersive encounters:

"ok what can i say about this cirque du soleil show,lets see i cryed i laughed i was amazed i was out of words......BEST THING I HAVE EVER SEEN " (Cleo00, October 30, 2008, Travelpod.com)

Higher levels of immersion sensed in experiential settings creates long lasting effects on consumers:

"The second day, after I'd lost my hard-on over the show, I continued to meander…" (April 15th 2008 by Goughy: Travelblog.org)

One central factor playing an increasing role in creating high level of mix of textual and textural stimulations that allow consumers immerse in experiential contexts is again advanced technology. Today, we observe that fast advancing technologies, which Hannigan (1998) calls "seductive technology", which allows human beings "…build [and moreover share] fantasies

that go beyond simple overlay of texts and graphics in space" (Stapleton et al. 2002), and make human creativity happen in ways that provide high level of stimulation, have been shaping many experiential market encounters. Utilization of such technologies, such as interactive technologies, makes consumer immersion much easier and longer lasting in experiential marketing contexts.

An important discussion on immersion in the literature revolves around whether immersion happens instantaneously or gradually. Carù and Cova (2006) suggest that in the marketing literature, consumer immersion is proposed to happen rather instantaneously as it "…involves an implicit sense of immediacy that is conveyed by the often-associated idea of plunging deeply into something." (p. 5). This is observed specifically in encounters where advanced technology is so impactful on consumers' perceptions of the text and texture spontaneously without them being an interactive participant. Yet, according to a different perspective, experience is "…nothing like a single, instantaneous and fullscale dive by the consumer into the deep end of the pool" (Carù and Cova 2006: 10-11), rather a succession of intense moments of immersion lead to a total consumption experience (Carù and Cova 2006). Borrowing from Sherry (1998), Carù and Cova (2006) further argue that in marketing there is a perception that 'being-in-the-place' suffices to produce immersion. Yet, consumers who are available physically may still fail to access the experience, thus cannot immerse themselves into the context (Carù and Cova 2006). Most recent research on this topic proposes that immersion cannot only be envisioned as an instantaneous emotional or sensory induction of consumers who are physically available at a market encounter, but should also be investigated as a progressive and partial appropriation of the context by the consumer (Carù and Cova 2006; 2007b). Therefore, consumers' interactive partaking in the experiential context should also be

investigated as a possible antecedent of immersion in addition to their textuality and texture

perceptions of the setting.

CHAPTER IV

FRAMEWORK OF KEY RELATIONSHIPS AND HYPOTHESES

Based on the findings of the qualitative study and the literature review discussed in previous chapters, it is proposed that exploring the construct of consumer experience intensity requires investigating textuality and texture (as consumer perceptions about design elements of the context), consumer participation, and immersion as its antecedent constructs (see Table 1 for a summary of discussions on these constructs in the literature). This study, theoretically, suggests a hierarchical model. According to the proposed model, it is suggested that immersion in the context and the activites therein experience is a key antecedent to intense experiences, which itself is influenced by perceptions of certain context design elements (texture and textuality); and consumer participation in the experiential context (Figure 1).

Relationship between Textuality and Consumer Participation

Meaningful narrative creation is essential to create encounters in which consumers can highly participate (Kotler 1999). For example, in research on online gameplaying, it is found that the level of gameplayer input is largely a result of the story of the game (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005). These findings indicate that the more the story can engage consumer attention, the more the gameplayer participates in the game. An important aspect of participation in such games, imagination, is largely based on the narrative elements of the game for example. Physical experiential market contexts involve the same logic: The more meaningful stories they involve,
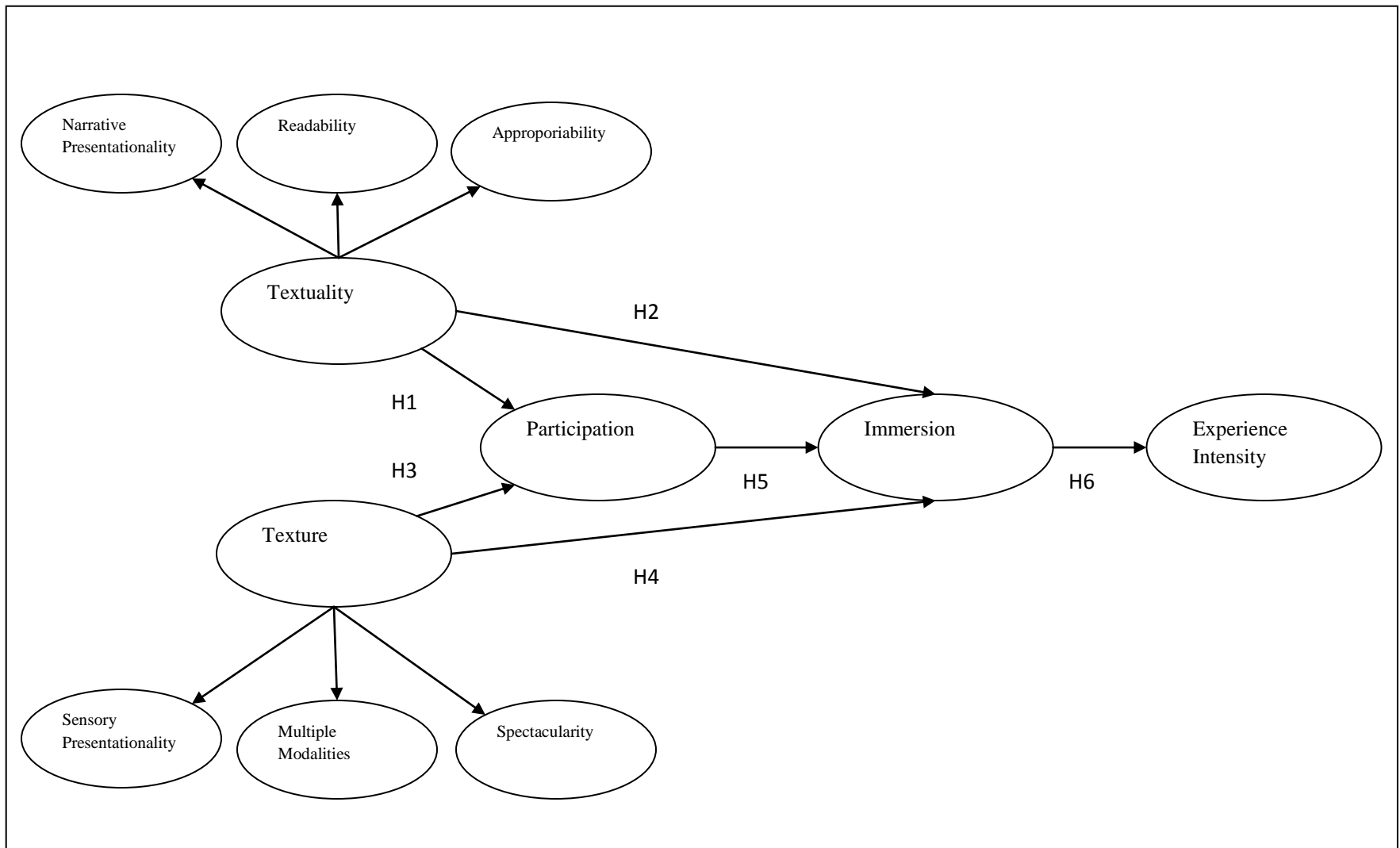
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Consumer Experience Intensity in Experiential Marketing Settings

the more consumers partake in them. A consumer's comments about his/ her excitement about

his/her participation in an exhibit of his/her favorite television show in Las Vegas reflects how

participation is influenced by textuality. For him/her, interactive participation was one of the

highlights of his/her trip to "incredible" Las Vegas:

> "…then took part in a CSI exhibit whereby we had to solve a crime as they would do on
> telly…,and we got a CSI Diploma" (Garyjampot – UK, March 26, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Some consumers for example, interact with the cast members of a show, and take

pictures with them when they find the show significant, as can be observed in the below

comment. The comment depicts the significance consumers find in the celebrity-related

narratives in Las Vegas and how they would be willing to interact in these contexts:

> "For the evening Rachel had kindly purchased us tickets to see Legend's at Harrah's
> casino…The show itself was fantastic... For the next hour or so we boogied along to
> some fantastic tribute acts which included Elton John, Donna Summer, Christina
> Aguilera, Michael Jackson and Elvis. After the show we then made our way out where
> we got to meet the stars of the show and have our pictures taken with the stars
> themselves…" (Tangerine9, July 22, 2010, Travelpod.com)

As can be observed in consumer accounts like the one above, a higher level of readability of a

text of the encounter is essential for a consumer to be able to relate more to the context, and be

more willing to participate in it. Participation in the context such as meeting the cast members

after the shows that they liked and taking pictures with them are frequently mentioned by Las

Vegas consumers. The primary reason for consumers' increased participation in contexts that

involve meaningful stories is that the narrative context of the encounter enriches consumer's

"inherent personal interest and involvement" (Wikström 2008: 37). Kotler (1999), from the same

point of view, talks about the importance of narrative elements in consumer participation in the

museum context. According to him, in contemporary culture as collections and exhibitions in

museums are "surrounded more and more by contextual and interpretive materials,

storytelling…visitors feel better informed about, more connected to, better able to participate in

museums." Las Vegas, Walt Disney World, festivals like Burning Man, Universal Studio, many brand flagship stores, and many popular modern museums are among contexts in which consumers actively interact as a result of various high levels of meanings they find in their narrative structures. It is proposed that a wide range of myths, narratives, and stories used in these powerful consumer environments lead to a higher level of consumer participation (Borghini et al. 2009; Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Kozinets 2001). The main reason for this is that it is easier for consumers to suspend their disbelief and participate in the context fully consequently when they find the narratives of these contexts meaningful.

A meaningful text encourages consumers to imagine, providing opportunities for the consumer to fantasize. As Goffman (1959: 252).argues, "a correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character." Overall, people are found to be more playful in contexts that provide significant stories, and as a result interact with their elements. Yet, the level of narrative meaning they find based on the readability, narrative presentationality, and appropriability perceptions influence their level of participation, since higher levels of these perceptions make them more willing to participate and make the imputation easier for them.

Many consumer performances in experiential contexts are "…embodied performances and embedded in cultural scripts and conventions…" (Bærenholdt et al. 2008: 283). Consumers are found to participate in marketing contexts at higher levels when the texts available are already familiar to them through utilization of commonly accepted cultural scripts and conventions by the designers. Codeluppi (2007) suggests that the great emphasis in themed settings by companies, and high level of involvement of consumers in these settings, are due to the highlighted particular conceptual categories in the texts of these encounters that are generally

already known by the consumer. For example, simulating countries that are most attractive for tourists all over the world such as France or Italy are very common in theme settings such as Walt Disney World, and Las Vegas. The meaningfulness consumers find in these contexts that enables them to partake more easily is due to the fact that texts of these countries are very familiar to most people (that is, they can identify and recognize the signs in the texts, they know what each of them means, and they can place the signs in a broader context), whether they have traveled to those countries corporeally or not. They may read these texts in books, or watch them on television since they are widely used materials of popular culture. This phenomenon also supports the view that "…experience comes to us not just verbally, but also in images and expressions" (Bruner 1986: 5). For example, in below entry, consumers mention their interactive experience at the Venetian hotel. Narratives carried throughout such theme spaces instill a sense of connection between the consumer and the environment due to their easily read cultural scripts (Lukas 2007b). As is observed in their statements, they are able to participate at the context and enjoy it at a higher level due to their high level of reading of the setting and its elements:

> "This [Venetian] hotel, by the way, is quite a work of Italian renaissance art. We sang "O Sole Mio" along with the gondoliers in the Grand Canal, and enjoyed a musical performance under a simulated blue sky in the Great Hall." (Armando Travels on Land and Paper, June 8th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Widely known, effective cultural narratives are therefore largely the focus of experiential contexts as they attract consumers to interact with the context that involves them. A consumer blog entry on the consumer's Titanic exhibition visit is another example that illustrates how a culturally significant, well-known story influences consumers' participation in the exhibit. Participation that involves sensations, such as touching, leads to even more intense thoughts and feelings in the end, as a result of emphasizing the meaning of the story even further:

> "Titanic Exhibition - our hotel housed an exhibition of over 300 Titanic artifacts and had displayed them in model rooms of how the interior Titanic would have looked. It was

amazing to see all the of the items that had been preserved after 80 years under the sea…They had on display a large piece of ice, which you could touch and they explained that the water that night was actually colder than that ice - it was absolutely FREEZING, it actually hurt to touch it; this explained why so many people died, it wasn't because of the actual sinking, it was because they froze to death in the water! Sad, but good, mixed feelings." (Paulandamber, July 10, 2005, Travelpod.com)

However, some consumers actively partake in certain activities in experiential contexts primarily because they find novelty in their meanings. The below consumer blog entry shows that even though consumers do not find a certain narrative meaningful and attractive in their daily lives, encountering it in a certain context might make it more significant for them due to its momentous link to the specific context. As a result consumers would be willing to partake in the activities evolving around that narrative just for the sake of trying something that they consider to be "extraordinary":

"WE [sic.] also went to gun range to shoot guns...hhhmmmm...now I'm not much of a gun person but the Americans love their guns so we thought we'd try it." (February 5th 2008 by Wallace n Duckers; Travelblog.org)

"Magicality" that results from vision and multidimensionality in the narratives highlights the high level of involvement and commitment of the individual (Hopkinson and Pujari 1999). As discussed earlier, presentational narratives attract contemporary consumers who look to increase the vision and multidimensionality in their lives. Consumers are more willing to actively participate in events that provide such extraordinary and visionary texts that they highly value. Such interactive participation in "magical" contexts refers to transformative play (Belk and Costa 1998). Sally (2007) gives the story of 'Fire spectacles' at Coney Island as an example of a presentational narrative in which consumers are willing to participate. She argues that the story that "provides insights into urbanities' growing anxieties surrounding the influx of immigrants, the growth of metropolis, and the advent of modernity allows visitors to celebrate the growth of the metropolis, the heroism of fire fighters, and the advent of modernity at the very same

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moment in which they were invited to succumb to their anxieties surrounding these same phenomena." (p. 40). According to her, the success of the narrative structure of the show in making consumers interact with the setting is founded in the fact that even though the story line is simple, the narrative put forth is not simplistic for consumers. They find it multidimensional, visionary, and engaging; thus, interact with the context involving it at a higher level. Furthermore, alternative visions and possibilities that are already familiar, or made familiar on some textual dimensions are also expected to make consumers participate more easily.

Appropriability is also a key to consumer participation. Pullman and Gross (2004) emphasize the importance of mutability of narrative structure of the context on customers' choice of the extent of participation and connection with people, physical objects, or technology. Mostly, stories and narrative performances in consumer environments are only partly choreographed but not objectified nor produced for visitors. They are rather open-ended structures, allowing for spontaneous, dynamic interactions between performers and audience (Kozinets et al. 2002; Young 2002). Appropriability that results from encountering texts that are elliptical, openended, and inclusive makes them more attractive for consumers to provide higher levels of inputs to make them more meaningful and enjoyable for themselves.

Narrative of "anything goes" in Las Vegas is a successful example of a mutable one that encourages consumers to playfully participate in the environment. The freedom narrative the consumers find in the context make them act, or at least think that they can act, in the context freely. The context is perceived as a limitless stage:

> "Vegas is certainly Fabulous. Inhibitions are left at the city limits. You can see and do just about anything as long as you have the confidence." (Meganandkevin, January 28, 2009, Travelpod.com)

Based on the discussion above,

H1: Textuality is positively related to consumer participation in a market context.

Relationship between Textuality and Immersion

'"Time To Say Goodbye" brought a tear to my eye" (August 5th 2009 by Globo, Travelblog.org)

Consumer's captivation by the experiential context is largely based on his/her perceptions of captivating stories in the context from which s/he derives the experience (Jensen 2006; Darmer 2008). The consumer's mind is engaged at higher levels if s/he finds the stories in the context meaningful and significant. Moreover, consumers will be mentally intertwined with the elements of the story in a context if s/he finds the highest level of significance in it. As a result of this, the distance between the consumer and the context shortens, if not disappears.

In gameplay studies, for example, it is found that a stronger story in a game helps the players to sense a higher level of immersion as a result of a higher level of consumer's mental input (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005). "The opportunity to make decisions, take actions, and have an effect on the gameplay…" are considered to be the most immersive aspects of games for the players (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 19). Therefore, when the design of the narrative elements of a setting of an encounter accentuate consumer's ability to focus on the context and be involved in the context by highly stimulating his/her thoughts and imagination, immersion of the consumer also accelerates (Fırat 2001; Ermi and Mäyrä 2005; Carù and Cova 2007b).

As is also evident in the above consumer blog entries, the narratives consumers find deeply meaningful and significant help with their immersion in physical experiential market contexts too. Some of the best examples of contexts in which consumers go into a state of immersion would be the Burning Man Festival, and modern Mountain Man enclaves where people find high levels of meaning in their texts and lose sense of time, and create a completely different, and for the most part controversial, reality temporarily. Such contexts are embodied fantasies of contemporary people (Belk and Costa 1998).

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As another example, consumers who love Beatles and their songs, who know more about the band and band member's lives, who know more about the stories of their songs have a higher chance to immerse into the show. Below consumer blog entry about his/her experience in the Las Vegas show "Love" also depicts how high level of the meaning a consumer finds in a show's content lead to his/her higher level of connection with the encounter:

> "I came here desperate to see The Beatles' Love, by Cirque du Soleil at The Mirage. I already had the album, so I knew that the music was going to be top-notch, I was just hoping the rest of the show would live up to my (high) expectations. What else can I say other than it was truly amazing. I left there feeling on top of the world." (Michut, Saturday, May 24, 2008, Travelpod.com)

Even though the influence of sensorial factors has been suggested as the main influence on consumer's senses of immersion in the literature (e.g. Addis and Holbrook 2001), stories in the market contexts are very influential in one's sense of losing oneself in the moment of the experiential context. Below consumer blog entry further illustrates how consumers think about losing themselves in Las Vegas context through the metanarrative of freedom they find there:

> "But like we see on tee-shirts they sell here "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas".It's the place where people let themselves go,and do things they wouldn't do at home." (Nathalieetfrans, May 26, 2008, Travelpod.com)

Another blog entry by another consumer shows how his/her reading of the same "freedom" narrative content of Las Vegas makes him/her live in a different reality s/he is enveloped by in Las Vegas:

> "Nobody tell Walt Disney, but there's a bigger, flashier amusement park in America than Disneyland. I don't know what roots it grew up from, but somewhere along the way, Las Vegas forgot it was supposed to be a city and instead became a spectacle. From a pinch of neon and dash of poker chips with a dollop of glitz, glamour, pizzazz and sheer tackiness, (toss in a few topless dancers for good measure), it's become the modern day dream of a place where you can forget that you ever grew up. That you ever had to behave, think responsibly and speak thoughtfully, chew with your mouth closed or be respectful to your elders." (Wanderlustcat, August 3, 2005, Travelpod.com)

As another example, below consumer blog entry depicts how the details consumers find in terms of the content of a theme in a marketing context make them have altered perceptions in the context which signifies immersion:

> "Caesar's Palace: Was I back in Rome again? Surrounded by the Colosseum, Roman Forum, Trevi Fountain, Julius Caesar, chariots, and marble statues it felt like it."
> (Emmafox, August 24, 2010, Travelpod.org)

Even though the consumer seems to be talking about visual forms in this posting, a deeper reading shows that it is indeed meaning of the context and its elements, or in other ways, the patterns in information that they reflect, that immerses the consumer in the context. A consumer who cannot read the meanings of these structures cannot be immersed in a "Rome" experience, but only encounter some artistic architectural structures.

Specifically mental immersion (Pine and Gilmore 1999) is largely derived from the narrative content of the encounter. This is why theming, a process of inscribing a text to a space to make the space more meaningful for consumers, is suggested as an important strategy in creating contexts into which consumers can easily immerse (Fırat 2001; Carù and Cova 2003; Carù and Cova 2007). Therefore, in many experiential encounters, the theme of the context that every other dimension of the setting revolves around is what leads to the feeling of being caught up in the context:

> "Here we are Excalibur –I almost feel like timetravelling to the 5th century and when entering the hotel via an archway I half expect to meet King Arthur or one of his Knights. Are you familiar with the tale of King Arthur? I got inspired by a beautiful movie once seen in television...." (Bindannmalweg; Monday, September 28, 2009, Travelpod.com)

As we can observe in Bindannmalweg's comment, getting into the spirit of the context and perceiving the reality s/he lives through in the encounter as the reality of the moment is triggered by the attractive, inspirational narrative of the context for the consumer.

Celebrity-related narratives are also among most significant ones for contemporary consumers that put them in an enraptured mood. By encountering celebrities in Las Vegas consumers go into another reality of living in a celebrity world as the below consumer blog entry reflects:

> "…but he [sic.] biggest surprise appeared when t Hilton sisters entered the bar. The club name TAO new life as soon as the Hilton sisters entered the club. We got more excited and felt like the dream come true, party like a rock star baby wohoo… Larry Johnson KC running back, west side boys and T-Pain also joined the party after a while. We were still unable to believe what we were experiencing" (Audisahni, Monday, January 7, 2008, travelpod.com)

Overall, businesses try to provide significance in their contexts through endowing them with texts that their consumers find meaningful, as is witnessed in themed market spaces.

Thus,

H2: Textuality is positively related to consumer immersion into the market encounter.

Relationship between Texture and Consumer Participation

As mentioned previously, contemporary consumers derive meanings increasingly from the texture related elements of encounters (Dholakia and Fırat 1998). As discussed before, texture reflects the qualities of a context that can create an intense sensory encounter (Dholakia and Fırat 1998) and plays a significant role in consumers' creation and assessment of experiences derived from the encounter. It can be observed in many experiential settings that encountering the possibilities of transformation of the mundane to what is more attractive and more dimensional, as well as, being able to live these modes in a safer and more hygienic manner (Beardworth and Bryman 1999; King 1981), as discussed earlier, grab consumer's interest at a higher level and motivate him/her to engage more, and actively partake in the encounter. Brand museums that theatriticize "the brand by staging the retail spectacle to be an engaging, interactive, and participatory experience." (Hollenbeck et al. 2008: 347), can be provided as an

example of experiential settings that consumers are enthusiastic about, and are willing to participate in.

Sensations that are produced as the outcome of texture have powerful symbolic effects on consumers (Lanier and Hampton 2009). According to Wasserman et al. (2000), different layouts and interior design of a market encounter influence consumers' behaviors and emotions in different ways. There is interplay between the physical infrastructure of a context and the social processes that take place in the context in previous literature (e.g. Svabo 2008). Texture related dimensions highly stimulate consumer's senses, emotions, actions and thoughts that s/he concentrates, involves, and actively partakes in the context at a higher level (Beardworth and Bryman 1999; Fırat 2001; Ermi and Mäyrä 2005; Carù and Cova 2007b; Lanier and Hampton 2009).

Accordingly, sensory excitement or thrill is an important driver of consumer behavior in experiential marketing settings (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Wikström 2008). Some experiential contexts attract people to engage in them, to make them a part of the setting.

> "A stage, that was set up in the centre of the floor level, had a man performing on stilts juggling and a balancing a ball onto the end of a stick that he had resting on his chin. We applauded his skill before finding our way to the circus dome." (RaeDan,J une 13th 2009, Travelblog.org)

For example, spectacular settings are found to be participative (Peñaloza 1999). Peñaloza (1999) found in her research at Nike Town that "consumers' spectacular consumption processes inherently involved exploration, discovery, suspended disbelief, and pleasure, each of which actively involved consumers" (p. 342) as a result of the layout and sensory design of the context. There, consumers enthusiastically move through the interspatial architectural design and interact with the displays (Peñaloza 1999), as well as other people in the setting.

Primarily, the "unbelievability" characteristic of many sensory stimuli that consumers encounter in experiential settings elicits the behaviors that would let consumers explore and discover. This "unbelievability" that many consumers find to be magical highlights the intense involvement and commitment of the individual (Hopkinson and Pujari 1999). Therefore, providing consumers with multiple sensory stimuli helps businesses with making them part of the context and experience the context in a more intimate sense (Lukas 2007b). Lukas further suggests that for example touching in addition to watching creates more room for making the consumer a part of events and activities. For instance, consumer touching of designs is frequently observed in Las Vegas as a result of the invitation of the textural design of the setting for consumers to do so. Consumers are observed to touch sculptures, art works, statues, and other architectural details which are primarily designed to be touched by consumers to provide a higher level of connection between the consumer and the context in many Las Vegas settings. Researcher's below observation at the Crystals Exhibitions at the City Center in Las Vegas depicts this phenomenon:

> "There are sculptured and colored ice cubes that are also colored at the entrance in front of Lois Vuitton at the Crystals Exhibitions at the City Center. People seem to be highly interested in these ice cubes. They watch but also touch. This is an interactive art work not just to gaze at but to touch. People excitedly try to feel the texture. Sometimes people wait in line to touch them." (January 2010)

Consumer engagement with the elements of the context is what managers look for. They utilize various sensory stimuli to achieve this goal. Brand manager of a hotel group in Las Vegas talks about olfactory stimuli in one of the hotels as a motivator for consumers to actively interact with the context:

> "Mirage has a beautiful smell, I think for Mirage, it's calming, you go in and you wanna get more. People want to explore." (Brand manager, MGM Groups, January 2010)

Today, an important part of an interactive texture is spectacular Hollywood-like simulations (Gottdiener 2001) that are created in marketing settings. Things that people find spectacular and interactive attract them to explore and enjoy the uniqueness of the stimuli in the setting. In the following consumer entry, the consumer mentions his/her participation in a context as a result of the attractiveness of the interactive design that it involves:

> "Upstairs, there was a large piano that walk on, so Things I&II attempted to play it like Tom Hanks in the movie "Big"." (August 6th 2008 by DarkStar, Travelblog.org)

Overall,

> H3: Texture is positively related to consumer participation with the elements in a marketing encounter.

Relationship between Texture and Immersion

> "Some of the hotels are unbelievably beautiful and I was actually moved to tears by one display in The Bellagio where a huge atrium had been constructed and filled with a field-size display of fresh flowers in every colour, ancient, towering olive trees and water features that defied gravity and logic. It was the most magical feast for the senses and I can honestly say I have never seen anything like it before." (Sophiecorless, March 21, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Researchers have found that ambiance factors such as music, lighting, and color affect customers' pleasure and arousal emotions in these settings (e.g., Pullman and Gross 1994; Dube, Chebat, and Morin, 1995; Baker and Cameron, 1996). Consequently, presentation of affective sensory stimuli is found to play a key role in evoking positive emotional responses (Finkelstein, 1989; Scapp and Seitz, 1998; Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003). As also below consumer blog post indicates, consumers find contexts that are endowed with such sensory stimuli design more moving:

> "Our sightseeing continued up to the Strip to the front of the Bellagio, just in time to see the fountain water show accompanied by ol' Blue Eyes singing Luck Be A Lady Tonight - really the combination of the music and animated fountains was actually quite moving." (shadowgoth, July 14, 2008,Travelblog.org)

Specific sensory designs, for example special effects, that consumer environments play out in consumers' minds and bodies are proposed to be among the most memorable aspects of these contexts (Lukas 2007b), as they are about "…enhancement and exaggeration of sensation" (Torque 2007: 35) and thus allow consumers have full sensory connection with the context. Below consumer posting on a travel blog shows how enhancement and exaggeration of sensation leads to a perception of being enveloped by a different reality:

> "I LOVE VEGAS! I wish i could take it home with me…I had a bit of a wander around last night and have taken a few photos of the place, it's like i'm in the middle of a movie and i have to keep pinching myself every now and then to remind myself that this is actually real!" (KeegsB, May 25,2008, Travelblog.org)

Consumers' senses are enhanced and exaggerated delightedly in a way to make them feel enveloped by another reality when they find the sensory stimuli of a context impactful.

> "The place is buzzing with atmosphere and it's hard not to get caught up with it as you enter Las Vegas Boulevard. The whole place is such an assault on the senses, particularly visual, that it's hard to know where to look." (Goughy, April 15,2008, Travelblog.org)

Below consumer postings on Facebook about Ká show (Cirque de Solieil), Bellagio Conservatory, and Bellagio Fountains also reflect a sense of being caught up in the moment that results from encountering an extreme level of enchanting sensory stimuli:

> "Either the Flight over the audience or the Love Dance...I cry every time! I've seen the show 4...yes 4 times!" (Adam Hawkins Ká Facebook page, 4.7.2011)

> "This is my favorite place.. ALWAYS and I hope to be here for my birthday... You always.. "knock it out of the ballpark" and bring tears of joy." (Linda Jenks, March 11 at 7:47pm, Bellagio Las Vegas Facebook Page "Spring is Arriving" Entry)

> "Never thought I could get quite so excited about water being blasted out of cannons into the sky but I must have got a little caught up in the moment." (josephbenson78; November 25,2008, Travelblog.org)

As addressed earlier, immersion is largely a result of contemporary consumer environments' sensory landscapes that coordinate and situate the ideal and the real. Experiential

consumer environments provide a physical context to mythical narrations that enhance their sensual impacts (Young 2002). Consumer posts above and below depict how powerful consumer's sensory fulfillment and his/her enraptured mood is in the context where the sensory stimuli are perceived to be magical or dream- like. In other words, the physical context that supports the mythical narrations through various sensory stimuli makes consumers immerse even deeper into the context. The consumer comment below on a show in Las Vegas is a good depiction of such deeper immersion:

> "Mystere is a nearly perfect performance. They fill your visual senses with men gracefully flying through the air, or gymnasts performing daring feats, or clowns making you laugh and they fill your auditory senses with mystical music accompanying it all. The perfection is that they never overwhelm you. As you watch and listen to performances you feel thy must have been in your dreams as a child an [sic.] we all felt this is one of the most magical things we had ever experienced." (Nextcapter…, September 23, 2007, Travelpod.com)

Indeed, use of sensory stimuli to arouse as many senses and emotions has been the key in creating effective social encounters since the ancient times where rites incorporated elements of texture such as loud music and fires so that participants could sense immersion (Kozinets 2003). What is different in today's experiential settings is the increasing use of advanced technology. As mentioned previously, texture in the contemporary culture is highly related to technological production techniques that produce illusion and spectacles (Featherstone 1995), rather than to employment of "authentic" sensory stimuli. Consumer comment below shows how a consumer compares the presentation of the same show in two different settings, and prefer the one with more affective sensory stimuli that stem from utilization of advanced technology as it allows him/her be caught up in the context more easily. This indeed reflects the technology oriented perspective of most consumers in contemporary culture:

> "The Venetian also contains two theatres (each with a capacity of almost 2,000) and it was there we saw a fabulous, pyrotechnic filled production of The Phantom of the Opera. We'd both seen a Saturday afternoon matinee version of this at the Opera House in

Manchester years ago; I didn't really enjoy it… This, though, was a different kettle of fish and the performances very moving. Angela got a bit too caught up in it though and I had to keep putting my hand across her mouth to stop her singing loudly" (March 23rd 2008 by ACDC World Tour; Travelblog.org)

In a discussion on creation of theater effect online through technology, Laurel (1993) argues that "tight linkage between visual, kinesthetic, and auditory modalities is the key to the sense of immersion that is created by many computer games, simulations, and virtual-reality systems" (p.161). Special effects that are created with the same logic (tight linkage among modalities mentioned above) in physical marketing environments allow consumers' full sensory contact with the context. These types of effects are an important aspect of "quality production values of a well-crafted spectacle", which "is also essential to arousing the emotions of experiential customers." (Kozinets et al. 2002: 24).

Furthermore, Lukas (2007b) argues that themed spaces as key contemporary consumer environments that utilize advanced technologies are effectively designed to engage consumer's senses, and therefore they are immersive geographies. He further asserts that the range of senses deployed in such settings indeed guarantees an immersive experience (Lukas 2007b). These characteristics that are emphasized by scholars allow consumers to suspend their disbelief. As a result, the meaning and value of "real" erodes and the reality becomes what is sensed, thought, and felt at the present moment as is observed in consumer posts:

> "Seeing the San Marco square, the Rialto bridge and the gondolas in the canals you could easily believe you are really in venice itself…" (Franseninge, July 11, 2008, Travelpod.com)

> "Next we went to "The Venetian", which we agreed had to be one of the most spectacular hotels on the strip. The architecture and design were amazing and it was easy to believe that you had stepped back in time to Italy, with the singing gondoliers and operatic plays." (Richsarasloper, May 6, 2006, Travelpod.com)

"…the ceiling was painted to be a sky with clouds etc and looked very real, so u ended up ignoring it and felt like u were outside in paris somewhere! really weird." (Beef_jerkey, August 3, 2005, Travelpod.com)

Such dissolution consumers experience is not just about sense of place, but also about sense of time:

"the Venetian… Basically, the hotel had created a mini Venice al fresco style inside - complete with painted-on sky on the ceiling and lighting which continuously gives the feel of late afternoon/early evening (ie happy hour). It is so real that after a while, even when we walked in at around 1am we instantly felt like it was only 5pm…" (Wallace n Duckers, February 5th 2008, Travelblog.org)

Pullman and Gross (2004) in their research on VIP hospitality tent for an internationally renowned touring circus also found that the physical context that is designed in terms of its moving sensory elements with the help of special effects make a guest feel as if s/he is not just a part of attractions but as a part of circus life (Pullman and Gross 2004) by bending their reality perceptions.

Overall, productions that employ advanced simulation technologies are proposed to be more immersive, as Featherstone (1995) emphasizes as an example "...the latest Disney World simulator "rides" in the sophistication of the detail achieved (through animatronics, sound, film, holograms, smell etc.) and the capacity to achieve a complete senses of immersion in the experience." (p. 77). Consequently, as can be observed in the consumer blog entries below, technology allows making each little detail more sophisticated and affective, which result in even higher level of immersion:

"I would say how the sights and sounds envelop & surround you and draw a person in by the grand scale of everything but yet still have such small intricate details & work." (Amanda Hugankiss, Ká facebook page, 4.7.2011)

"Jenn is a big Star Trek fan and a trip to Vegas would not be complete without a Star Trek Experience at the Vegas Hilton… The Star Trek Experience was one of the best simulator rides I have ever been on We were debriefed by starship officers and then we were beamed up to the ship. It really felt like we were there as we walked down the ship's

corridor to the bridge. We walked out onto the bridge where uniformed people were busily running around because the ship was about to be attacked. I began touching some of the control buttons behind me when our guide walked up to me to inform me that my DNA was not programmed into the computer and that I should stop. Then she thanked me sarcastically for trying to help. When we tried to get away from the Klingons in our escape pod, Jenn was busy arming our photon torpedoes by entering in the necessary codes into the computer beside her chair. I guess her DNA was accepted by the computer and she helped us escape. She deserved a medal for bravery." (Jenn_and_dave, December 20, 2002, travelpod.com)

Consumers immerse into contexts at higher levels when the safety and security they seek are also provided, because the level of involvement increases when they feel safe and secure. Based on contemporary consumer orientations, Carù and Cova (2007b) further suggest that highly textured contexts are enclavized, secure, and thematized for consumers to be fully immersed into them. In encounters with these characteristics, it is easier to let themselves go and become one with what they experience without considering some negative consequences.

Overall, consumers sense a higher level of immersion as a result of their higher level of participation due to the higher level of attractiveness and multidimensionality that stem from these affective sensory stimuli, and higher level of "safe" physical risk in textured marketing encounters (Sorkin 1992; Beardsworth and Bryman 1999;).

While the effectiveness of sensory designs may be dependent on inclusion of certain stimuli, exclusion of certain stimuli in the encounter also plays a significant role in the creation of affective consumer environments. For example, in the modern Mountain Man enclave, or in Burning man festival certain devices and materials are prohibited to ensure consumer's full sensory connection with the context through his/her disconnection with other contexts. Another example would be the Harry Potter themed environment at Universal Studios, Orlando, Florida where drinks except for the ones that are present in the movie are prohibited in the food sections of the park. Consequently, consumers have a higher level of immersion into the context by being enveloped by the stimuli that are "realistic" based on the narrative.

In formal terms,

H4: Texture is positively related to consumer immersion into a marketing encounter.

Relationship between Consumer Participation and Immersion

What people live through in an experiential context is always "…mediated through the body and its active engagement with and sensing of a material environment through the auditory, visual, olfactory and tactile perception systems…"(Bærenholdt et al. 2008: 180). In many marketing encounters, immersion, as are some other reactions to the experiential context such as higher level of satisfaction (Kellogg et al. 1997), is proposed to be largely a result of a consumer's level of participation in the encounter. Participation significantly influences consumer's cognitive and behavioral responses (Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003). Accordingly, the study by Pullman and Gross (2004) suggests that consumers perceive what they live through in an experiential context to be incomplete without participation. Below consumer comment reflects the immersive reactions of consumers to a setting as a result of interactive partaking in the setting:

> "We also attended Tony 'n Tina's Wedding at Planet Hollywood. This is a show in which the audience (us) are guests at the Italian-American wedding. This was the most unusual and funniest show I have ever been to. The room was set up just as a wedding reception would be and the actors interact with the guests as the evening unfolds. It was hilarious. Simon and dad ended up dancing with the bridesmaids while I was roped into doing the leg-kicking New York, New York last song of the night. There was a buffet, band, fights, throwing of the bouquet. It was brilliant." (September 12th 2009 by Leanne and Simon)

In a study on online environments, Ryan (1994) argues that "in order to feel immersed, the user must be able to move around the virtual space and to apprehend it under various points of view." Similarly, in other gameplay studies, it is found that different types of immersions are defined based on the involvement of gameplayers on different emotional, physical, cognitive, and sensory dimensions (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005). For instance, imaginative immersion, which is defined above as the dimension of experience that occurs when one "…begins to feel for or

identify with a game character" (Ermi and Mäyrä 2005: 22), is directly related to one's utilization level of his/her imagination through high level of cognitive participation (Arsenault 2005). As a result, the more consumers are involved in an encounter – whether emotionally, physically, cognitively, or, socially- the closer they are to a sensation of total immersion (Brown and Cairns 2004).

That is, in many marketing encounters, the degree of immersion of a consumer may be related to his/her level of engagement in various elements of the encounter. However, the ways and the level of each consumer's engagement in negotiating and articulating the meanings through reframing and manipulation may differ due to the structure of the context and consumer's perceptions of the elements of the encounter, as well as his/her imagination (Sherry et al. 2007).

Most of the experiential contexts speak to the imaginations of consumers at a high level. As a result, they provide the materials for consumers to connect with the context at emotional, cognitive and sensory levels, which in return make them feel engrossed. When consumers engage highly in the context, their senses and mind are challenged (Darmer and Sundbo 2008). The more a consumer engages actively with his/her senses, feelings, imaginations, or thoughts, the higher level s/he is expected to internalize and connect to the context at a level to perceive it as the reality. In other words, as immersion indicates the internalization of the elements of a context; active participation of consumers is expected to increase immersion since it is the key determinant of a successful internalization process.

Immersion refers to a transition from being a detached subject to becoming one with the event/activity and the context within which the event/activity takes place (Featherstone 1991). Similar to the approach taken by Featherstone, Pine and Gilmore (1999) consider immersion as

the opposite of absorption, and define it as an outcome of becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself. According to them, consumers go into the experience actively through active partaking, rather than being passively absorbed in an event to have the connection at the fullest. Immersion, thus, is the central element that places the experience as the valued market offering that engages consumers in the creation process in opposition to the mere ready-made products in the market (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Cova 2005; Carù and Cova 2007a).

Klingmann (2007) emphasizes the significant part the architecture can play in determining the ways and the level of consumers' participation, and in return their immersion. According to her, architectural design elements work as catalysts for new experiences and participation by creating sensation, which results in an enraptured mood of the consumer. Experiential contexts largely utilize "interactive displays and other engaging edifices [that] evoke emotions and other sensations that make an experience unique and individual." (Kozinets et al. 2002: 20). This uniqueness and individuality perceptions of the experience that results from high level of evoked emotions and sensations created through participation in return creates a feeling of engrossment.

In a similar fashion, research by Hollenbeck et al. (2008) shows that "when brand museum visitors participate in multisensory, interactive experiences, they are drawn to the brand." (p.347). Borghini et al. 2009 suggest that girls being turned into American Girl models for photo purposes in the photo studio that takes place in the store, "interjects the girl[s] into the reality of the American Girl brand experience…" (p.7). In other words, when consumers participate in an encounter, it is easier for them to be enveloped by the unique reality created in that context. The vividness of a context for a consumer thus stems largely from participation. The higher the consumers participates the higher level of contextual reality they perceive. And

consequently, they become one with the contextual elements as these elements become their realities. In their study of the Mountain Man myth, Belk and Costa (1998) talk about how participants' partaking in the context through use of certain objects and actions play a key role in the creation a different reality. Their findings indicate that when consumers fully participate in the context, time and place dissolves for them in the present moment and place.

Consumer's specific abilities and knowledge to manipulate the contextual elements of the encounter plays a key role in the participation process, and the feeling of immersion they sense as a result. For example, it is easier for a consumer to immerse immediately into an event if s/he is familiar with its text, and its sensory and emotional elements, and maybe has already appropriated these elements. That is, a literate consumer can be proposed to have a higher probability of experiencing a higher level of immersion in a shorter time. For consumers who are unable to reframe and manipulate the elements of the setting because of their unfamiliarity with referents, the means provided by marketers, such as a support system, collective action, and self-determination (Carù and Cova 2007b), may be essential to experience immersion. Sensations or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider (Gupta and Vajic 1999) is an example for such a support system.

As an important dimension of interactive participation, social partaking of consumers in the encounter can be an important aspect of an experiential marketing environment as stated by Baker et al. (1992). According to Baker et al. (1992), an environment that offers a high level of atmospheric characteristics which provides a pleasurable experience for consumers can be created by utilizing social factors.

This is the primary reason for marketers designing encounters in which consumers can socially participate. This participation largely determines the immersive dimensions of the context and consumers' immersion levels into the environment:

> "Other consumers have an impact on consumer's senses. Keep' em active because it keeps up the overall vibe. Vibe and energy creation is critical for Vegas. Creating a social atmosphere. People want interaction." (Brand Manager)

Specifically when socialization and social participation interact with thrill of discovery as a result of advanced technology, consumers feel deep immersion:

> "We joined 6 other people for our mystery tour and we all had a wonderful time finding clues and hidden mystery rocks. We were all assigned as amateur detectives with a case to find a woman's heart locket necklace, but before we left on our journey to the video store owned by the lady and her husband, we hear of a shooting that has occurred at the video store. We discover that it is the husband who has been killed and we enter the video store after the body has been taken away to start our investigation for the locket.
>
> I worked out the password for the computer and Dan quickly found relevant documents and CC TV footage that could be relevant to our case. The footage shows someone carrying what appears to be a body or body parts down the stairs outside of the video store. We find mystery rocks around the office and video store after finding clues hidden in the worker's lockers, which we opened after discovering keys and codes for the padlocks. We found an address and key for a place that we decided will be our next destination in Las Vegas to continue our detective work. Once we have exhausted the clues at the shop, we move onto the office of a newspaper reporter who works closely with an employee of the video store.
>
> In the reporter's office we find all sorts of information on UFOs etc that he has been investigating. We found a safe that we cracked the code for and uncovered more details relevant to the case. We gained access to the reporter's computer and read his notes and emails and Dan wrote down information gathered, adding to the info we accumulated from the last location. Next we moved onto a doctor's office who was actng as the employee's psychiatrist. There we discovered a secret room leading to a surgery where we found body parts and I also found a safe hidden in a cupboard. Dan worked on the doctor's computer and Dan and I worked out the code for the safe to find the heart locket inside. Other information found on the computer helped us understand that the employee had been killed to supply a heart to a local politician, who recovered suddenly from heart problems. We worked out that the doctor was illegally harvesting organs, obviously killing people in the process. Our group had solved the mystery and proved the doctor guilty of murder for him to be charged. We found all 18 mystery rocks (which were just an extra part to the fun), and we were told that not all groups were able to achieve finding all the rocks and working out the truth. We got a prize for finding all the rocks."
> (RaeDan, June 13, 2009, Travelblog.org)

Consequently,

H5: Consumer participation in a marketing encounter is positively related to consumer immersion.

Immersion and Experience Intensity

Borghini et al. (2009) emphasize "the powerful immediacy of well-designed physical experience, the orchestration of human behavior, and the availability of consumer immersion." as the determinants of a powerful experience that consumers derive from a marketing context (p. 9). The major reason for immersion to be a key determinant of intense experiences is the long lasting effect that it creates.

> "Last 4 days have been nothing short of a dream.Entire visit to & from Vegas was so meticulously planned that we hardly missed anytthing on each of our itineraries.MGM,New York New York Ride,Gondola rides at the ventian, the Blue Man show,Top of Eifel Tower at Paris,Bellagio Fountains,the scary Stretosphere ride,sneak peek at all the major casinos on the strip..we covered it all...& that too in style!They say, what comes stays in Vegas...But I have got something very valubale back with me...some unforgettable moments & memories of my first visit to The Sin city...Las Vegas!" (Sachin Gavde, January 10, 2008, travelblog.org)

The long lasting effects that stem from deep immersion make the experiential context and the meanings they drew from it more noteworthy for consumers after they leave it to return to their everyday lives. Consequently, the experiences consumers draw from contexts where they felt enveloped are found to be more intense. Below consumer blog entry about Las Vegas experiences that s/he wrote when s/he returned from Las Vegas is a good example of the intensity of the experience consumers derive as result of deep immersion:

> "…felt myself being pulled through the earth, literally and pychologically, I felt it all... I felt the earth spinning and the people breathing, I felt the pulse of the world and I became one with it, at least for one night..." (Irishrover7, February 14, 2004, Travelpod.com)

> "Vegas slapped us on the head! Wow!" (Greystling, March 30, 2010, Travelpod.com)

Consequently, immersive connection with the context is one of the crucial derivers of the experiences that people find rich (Pine and Gilmore 1998). This is the reason why businesses try

to immerse their consumers into the contexts that they design. As can be derived from the discussions above, a high level of immersion is essential for consumers to close the physical and mental gap between themselves and the context, and therefore plays a key role in making the experience intense and memorable (Pine and Gilmore 1999). These are the types of experiences to which people want to return. Therefore, businesses that want their consumers to evaluate the experiences they derive from them to be intense develop immersive strategues. Hollenbeck et al. (2008), for instance, suggest that when consumers are able to participate in different elements in the brand museum, they feel immersion, and have more significant memories of the context as a result of their immersion. And since there is a higher chance for consumers to immerse into the brand in such museum type contexts, brands have started to build museums. The main purpose is to create long lasting impact on consumers, such as the one expressed by a consumer in his/her travel blog entry:

> "…we go back to our hotel, stunned by all the impressions and the lights."
> (Nathalieetfrans, May 26, 2008, Travelpod.com)

A powerful characteristic of the concept of immersion that contributes to the intensity of experience is that it bends 'reality' perceptions of human beings. In game studies, for example, immersion is defined as "…the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality… that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus" (Murray 1997: 98). That is, immersion is a construct that is proposed to make people cease to perceive the textual and sensory stimuli of this "other reality" and forget the events happening in the real world, and thus makes him/her suspend his/her knowledge of its laws (Arsenault 2005).

> "I had such a Great week there, it's hard getting back into rountine!! Hope to visit again
> one day :)" (Lisa Malone, March 14 at 4:21pm, Bellagio Las Vegas Fecabook Page)

Obviously, if one feels enveloped by the context and feel that this is the reality at the time of living through it, that context and its elements seem more vivid for that person. This is the reason for example that companies in the themed entertainment business call what they do as "immersive experience provision". Immersion in a market encounter, therefore, makes the consumer become one with the reality of the market encounter which is often more playful and richer in terms of emotional, cognitive and sensory stimuli compared to everyday life reality, and thus leads to a more intense experience. As one of the bloggers emphasize, immersive environments are powerful in terms of creating superior feelings, thoughts, senses, and actions:

> "…the strip itself didn't impress me at first glance either with its tackiness and fakeness. It just seemed extremely odd to me that there were these huge, grand, opulent casinos and hotels but I could wander around any of them in my shorts and hoody and they were generally filled with slot machines and members of gamblers anonymous. However I spent quite a bit of time exploring the place and you can't help but get caught up in it all and eventually marvel at the sheer size, wealth and in some cases even beauty on display… I ended up actually quite liking the place and wanting to go back someday." (May 13th 2009 by Timgroves, Travelblog.org)

Below consumer blog entry section form a consumer's travel blog entry is a good example for intense experiences consumer derive from a context as a result of their immersion in the context based on its textual and textured dimensions and their participation in various activities:

> "Vegas is a difficult place to be on a budget, but it has definitely ensured that we want to return to this adult playground as soon as possible. It really is a wonderfully unique place that absolutely has to be experienced." (January 3rd 2009 by Victoria and Mike; Travelblog.org)

In sum, moment(s) of immersion at sensory, imaginative, mental, emotional, and physical levels is a necessary state for consumers to perceive the experience that arises from an encounter as intense. This discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

> H6: Consumer immersion in a market encounter is positively related to the perceived intensity of consumer experience.

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the procedures and methodology employed for developing the measures of the constructs, establishing reliability and validity of these measures, and testing the hypothesized structural model are described. Specifically (1) the research approach, (2) operational definitions and measurements of the constructs, (3) data collection and analysis procedures employed for the pilot study, (5) results of the pilot study, (6) process of refinement of the measures, and (7) data collection and analysis procedures employed in the main study are addressed in this chapter.

Research Approach

As stated earlier, this study utilizes mixed research methods. Qualitative research methods, which are described in chapter three, were employed for the purposes of theory generation, and development of scale items for constructs for which previously developed scales are not available or are not suitable for measuring the constructs offered in this research. Quantitative research methods were employed to assess the appropriateness of the scales, as well as to test the overall measurement and structural models and the hypotheses. Below, this process is explained.

Self-administered online survey methodology is used in this study. Because the research questions in this study lend themselves to Structural Equation Modeling method, a large sample size was required. Self-administered online survey methodology enabled the researcher to obtainsuch a large sample with greater efficacy and within the available budget. In addition, online data collection provided the possibility to reach geographically widely dispersed respondents, increasing the representativeness of the sample. People who visit the contexts that are chosen for this study - Las Vegas, Walt Disney World- Florida, and Disneyland-California - are widely dispersed throughout the United States and the world. Hence, targeting respondents in a specific geographical area would limit the generalizability of this study's results. Accordingly, collecting data online by means of an online survey was more appropriate for this research.

In previous research it was found that online questionnaires are returned faster and contain fewer missing responses (Londsdale, Hodge, and Rose 2006). In addition, in a previous study no difference was found between the psychometrical qualities of the Internet samples and samples of previously published research (Meyerson and Tryon 2003). In their research on comparison of postal and online surveys, Callas et al. (2010) found that online responses were at least as good as postal responses in terms of return rates, missing data, reliability, and follow-up rates, and data collected using both methods produced similar results. Yet, more recently, Barrios et al. (2011) compared the response characteristics to mail and web surveys among Ph.D. degree holders, and concluded that data quality is higher in web surveys than in mail surveys, with fewer overall errors, fewer missing items, and longer responses in open-ended questions. As a result of their empirical investigation and an examination of the results of previous research that compare mail and web surveys, Meyerson and Tryon (2003) concluded that online data collection is reliable, valid, representative, cost effective, and efficient.

This researcher created a questionnaire in one of the most widely used and known survey sites, Survey Monkey. She delivered this questionnaire to the target sample by sending the link of the survey accompanied by a cover message (see Appendix A for the cover letter and Appendix B for the survey).

Scale Development and Measures

As mentioned earlier, no comprehensive quantitative measures were found for any of the constructs investigated in this study with the exception of consumer participation and immersion. New scales were developed for constructs that have not been measured previously. The previously developed quantitative instruments for consumer participation and immersion constructs were not effective measures of these constructs concerning the physical experiential market settings. Consumer participation has been largely investigated in services marketing contexts as a key to co-production (e.g. Bendapudi and Leone 2003; Dong, Evans, and Zou 2008), and immersion has been investigated as a key construct in virtual reality and gameplay studies (e.g. McMahan 2003; Ermi and Mäyrä 2005; Örtqvist and Liljedahl 2010). Therefore, these instruments were not completely suitable to test the hypotheses of this research, and required new scales to be developed also for these constructs, specifically considering the experiential marketing settings. This process was informed by the qualitative data supplemented by the review of literature presented in previous chapters.

In developing scales for the constructs, primarily Hinkin's (1998) and Churchill's (1979) works were followed. The stages followed in this research, similar to those suggested by Churchill (1979) are: (1) identifying the domain of constructs, (2) developing items for constructs, (3) pilot testing the instruments, (4) refining the instruments, (5) collecting full data, and (6) assessing reliability and validity of the instruments.

As the first stage, the process of identifying the domains of the constructs was informed primarily by the qualitative data and the review of literature as discussed in the previous chapters. Below, the operational definitions, and identified domains of constructs are articulated.

Texture

Texture is one of the two key constructs in consumers' perceptions of the context. Texture is a second order independent latent variable in this study. The operational definition of texture in this research is *the consumer's perceived level of positive impact of the sensory elements, primarily created and provided by marketers in a marketing context, on his/her senses and emotions*. In this research, texture is measured through its dimensions of presentationality, multiple modalities, and spectacularity (see Table 2 for their operational definitions and items in the scales to measure them).

Textuality

Textuality, the other key construct in consumers' perceptions of the context, is also a second order independent latent variable in this study. The operational definition of textuality for in this study is *the consumer's perceived level of significance and meaningfulness of the messages in the stories that are primarily created and provided by marketers in a marketing context*. Textuality is measured through its dimensions of readability, narrative presentationality, and appropriability (see Table 2 for their operational definitions and items in the scales to measure them).

Table 2
Items in the Scales, Operational Definitions, and Cronbach's Alpha values of scales in the pilot test

Scale	Items	Operational Definition	Literature review	Cronbach's Alpha Value (Pilot Test)
Sensory Presentationality	1. They were unique 2. My senses were aroused in ways I cannot remember experiencing in other places 3. My senses were pleasantly surprised 4. I would not have believed many of them if I hadn't encountered them	The extent to which a consumer finds vision, novelty, sublime, and fantasy elements in the sensory stimuli	King (1981), Fırat (2001), Kozinets et al. (2002), Stapleton et al. (2002), Lukas (2007b)	0.93[3]; 0.70[4]
Multiple Modalities	1. Each of them used many detailed elements 2. Each of them was rich in its features 3. I found great variety in each of them 4. Each engaged my senses in multiple ways	The extent of the consumer' perception of multi-layerdness and richness in every sensory stimuli utilized in the context.	Schmitt (1999), Lindstrom (2005), Molitor (2007), Santoro and Troilo (2007),	0.93; 0.82
Spectacularity	1. They were exciting beyond words 2. X was like a dream world of sensory wonders[1] 3. They were out of this world 4. They were very sensational 5. They had a 'wow' effect on me	The extent of the consumer's perception of remarkable, sensational, and awe-inspiring characteristics of sensory stimuli in the setting	Sorkin (1992), Fırat and Venkatesh (1995), Ritzer (1999), Kozinets et al. (2004)	0.96; 0.94
Narrative Presentationality	1. They provoked new thoughts about things I already knew 2. They informed me about things I didn't know before[2] 3. They made me have thoughts I never had before 4. They made me imagine things I never imagined before 5. They inspired thoughts impossible to express	The extent to which a consumer finds vision, novelty, sublime, and fantasy elements in the marratives of a marketing context	King (1987), Ritzer (1999), Gottdiener (2001), Sherry et.al. (2007),	0.89; 0.88
Readability	1. I clearly understood the messages they convey 2. It was easy to associate them with what I already knew of similar activities, events, attractions, and sites 3. The messages communicated in them were easily recognizable 4. The messages they had made a lot of sense to me 5. It was easy for me to grasp the elements in their messages 6. They had many features which I learned about in movies, TV shows, books, magazines, and other media[2]	The extent to which the consumer perceives the narratives and their details in a marketing context easy to comprehend	Kozinets et al., (2002), Codeluppi (2007), Caru and Cova (2007b), Christrup (2008) Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen (2008, Lanier and Hampton (2009),	0.76; 0.93
Appropriability	1. They allowed me to have my own interpretations 2. I found that I could play with their meanings to create my own meaning 3. They made it easy for me to make X experience my own 4. I was able to create my own meanings for each of them	The extent of the room the consumer finds in the narrative elements of a context to create his/her own meaning of the context.	Kozinets et al. (2002), Andersson (2007), Borghini et al. (2009)	0.85; 0.88

Table 2 Continued

Participation	1. I felt like I was a performer in the activities, events, attractions,and sites in X 2. I was highly involved in the activities, events, attractions,and sites in X 3. I was physically engaged in many of the activities, events, attractions,and sites in X 4. I interacted with people in the activities, events, attractions,and sites in X 5. I was active in many activities, events, attractions,and sites in X	The extent of the consumer's active partaking in the context	Peñaloza (1999), Carù and Cova, (2007), Bærenholdt et al. (2008), Wikstöm (2008)	0.83; 0.83
Immersion	1. When I was in X, the activities, events, attractions, and sites there became my only reality 2. I lost track of time when I was experiencing the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X 3. I lost sense of the rest of the world when I was experiencing the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X 4. I found myself completely caught up in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X 5. I felt as if I was in another world when I was in X	The extent of the consumer's feeling of becoming one with the reality of a context	Pine and Gilmore (1999), Ermi and Mäyrä (2005), Carù and Cova 2006	0.95; 0.91
Experience Intensity	1. My experience of X was extremely powerful 2. I felt like I had experienced the unimaginable in X after my visit[2] 3. I felt disoriented when I got back to my everyday life after my visit to X[2] 4. After my visit, I felt extremely delighted for having been at X 5. My excitement after my visit to X was extremely powerful 6. After my visit, I was left feeling that I thoroughly enjoyed the activities, events, attractions, and sites at X	The consumer's perceived superiority of his/her senses, feelings, thoughts, and imaginations aroused in the context after s/he returns from the context	Belk and Costa (1998); Fırat (2001); Kozinets (2002); Kozinets et al. (2004); Hardie (2007); Lukas (2007); Sally (2007)	0.92; 0.83

[1] X refers to the context (Las Vegas / Walt Disney World / Disneyland) for which the consumer fills the survey out
[2] removed from final scale
[3] Cronbach's alpha value s in the pilot study that employed the seven point Likert scale
[4] Cronbach's alpha value s in the pilot study that employed the nine point Likert scale

Consumer Participation

Consumer participation is conceptualized in the context of this research as a first order latent construct. It is operationally defined in this study as *the extent of the consumer's active partaking in the events and activities in the context, and his/her social interaction with other people in the context* (see Table 2 for the definition of the constructs and items used in their measurement).

Immersion

Immersion is also conceptualized in the context of this research as a first order latent construct. It is operationally defined in this research as *the extent of the consumer's feeling of becoming one with the reality of a context* (see Table 2 for the definition of the constructs and items used in their measurement).

Consumer Experience Intensity

Consumer experience intensity is the outcome latent variable in this study. It is operationally defined in this study as *the consumer's perceived superiority of his/her senses, feelings, thoughts, and imaginations aroused in the context after s/he returns from the context*. All the items utilized to measure consumer experience intensity are related to the feelings, thoughts, senses, and imaginations of the consumer after returning from the trip (see Table 2 for the definition of the constructs and items used in their measurement).

Afterward, items for each scale were generated. An inductive approach was followed in this process. The items were developed based on qualitative data, considering the identified domain of each of the constructs. In all scale items, the researcher attempted to capture, as much as possible, the language informants used in describing their perceptions of the contextual elements, their participation stories, their sense of immersion, and the experience they took with

themselves after they returned to their everyday lives. An initial pool of seventy six items was generated as a result of the exploratory study.

Assuring content validity is a crucial aspect in establishing construct validity. It refers to the extent to which the content of the identified domain is reflected by the individual items utilized to measure the construct. Evaluations of content validity are largely based on logic and theory (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). To assure content validity of measures, evaluation of the items used in each measure by other experts is needed because almost all the items were newly created (Kaynak and Hartley 2006). Hence, seven academicians who are well informed in experience marketing and consumption fields as well as scale development fields were asked to evaluate the items in the scales. Clarity, simplicity, length, directionality, lack of ambiguity, consistency of items in terms of perspective, and avoidance of jargon are critical issues in writing up the items (DeVellis 1991; Spector 1992; Hinkin 1998). Therefore, experts were asked to evaluate the items' clarity and conciseness, and whether there were any phenomena that they think were not included (DeVillis 1991). The eventual goal was to retain four to six items for each construct (Hinkin 1998).

As a result of the item screening by the researcher and other scholars, redundant, double-barreled, ambiguous and leading statements were eliminated, and a total of forty items were retained for the pilot test (presented in Table 2).

All items were measured with a seven point Likert scale labeled: 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neither agree, nor disagree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree.

Pilot Test

When developing measures, the step after identifying construct domains and developing

scale items is conducting a pilot study (Churchill 1979; DeVellis 1991, Hinkin 1998). For the

purposes of refining the originated and developed instruments utilized in this research, a pilot

test was conducted prior to full data collection.

Two questionnaires, one using a seven point Likert scale and the other using a nine point

Likert scale, were created for the pilot test. When consumer research related journal articles

using survey methodology is examined (e.g. Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz 1996; Bearden,

Hardesty, and Rose 2001; Schouten et al. 2007), it is observed that there is a favor for using

Likert scales with seven or fewer points in consumer research for practical purposes. Yet, a nine

point Likert scale was also created to be tested for the purposes of preventing the amount of

information loss due to low number of scaling points (McClelland and Judd 1993; Russell and

Bobko 1992; Kaynak and Hartley 2008). The purpose of pilot testing two different

questionnaires employing Likert scale with two different points was to see respondents' reactions

to both types of Likert scales, and to check the reliability coefficients and return rate for both

types of scales. The target population for the pilot study was Las Vegas consumers, as the

exploratory study conducted for developing the scales for this research also focused on Las

Vegas consumers. The sample for the pilot test consisted of respondents similar to those of the

main study that are described in detail later in the chapter: people from the researcher's

immediate social network (people whom the researcher knows in person), and from the online

groups to which she belonged. The links to surveys with the seven-point and the nine-point

Likert scales were sent to 172 and 176 people, respectively. The message included the survey

link accompanied by the cover message (for the survey and the cover message see Appendix A

and B). People who were sent messages were the ones who were identified to have been to Las Vegas within the last two years. Among them, 5 were from the researcher's immediate social network. Overall, 68 people took the survey within a three week period. Thirty-two people took the survey using nine point Likert scale, and 36 people took the survey using seven point Likert scale. Out of all the respondents who took the survey using seven point Likert scale, 6 people did not fully complete the survey. Therefore, only 30 of the responses were analyzed in the first pilot test. Overall, in this pilot study, 20.4 percent response rate was obtained. Of the respondents who took the survey using nine point Likert scale, 11 people did not fully complete the survey, and 21 of the responses were included in the analyses in this pilot study. Consequently, 12 percent response rate was obtained in this pilot study.

Since these sample sizes are too small to run any type of complex statistical analyses, only Cronbach's alpha test and exploratory factor analysis for each scale were performed. SPSS Statistics 17.0 program was used to run these analyses.

Cronbach's alpha value was calculated for each of the scales (see Table 2 for the results). The results of the pilot test that utilized the nine-point likert scale showed higher Cronbach's alpha values only for readability and appropriability scales. Results of both pilot tests showed the same Cronbach's alpha value for the participation scale. Cronbach's alpha level was higher for all other scales in the pilot test that employed seven-point Likert scale.

According to the results of both pilot tests, even the lowest Cronbach's alpha value exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 recommended for exploratory studies (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). Even though the sample is small to draw a robust conclusion, the results of the Cronbach's alpha estimates in the pilot test data demonstrated that the scales developed are reliable.

Consequently, the researcher decided to use the seven point Likert scale when collecting data for the main study as a result of: (1) higher response and lower drop-out rates by respondents in the pilot study that utilizes the seven-point Likert scale, and (2) higher Cronbach's alpha coefficients that resulted from utilizing the seven-point Likert scale for six of the nine scales developed. Researcher also performed exploratory factor analysis for each of the scale to see whether they are unidimensional. Only one factor was obtained for each of the scales, demonstrating their unidimensionality.

Based on the feedback by some respondents, a few minor changes were made in three of the scales to increase the clarity of their meanings. One new item "They were unique" was added to the sensory presentationality scale. Furthermore, the item "Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland was like a dream world of sensory wonders" was moved from the sensory presentationality scale to spectacularity scale based on some respondents' comments. Some respondents thought that it was semantically more appropriate for the spectacularity scale. A result of the scrutiny of this item by the researcher and some other scholars also resulted in supporting respondents' suggestion of moving this item to the spectacularity scale. Moreover, another new item "I was highly involved in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland" was added to the participation scale.

Target Population and Survey Procedure

The target population for this study is people who have visited Las Vegas, Walt Disney World, or Disneyland within the last two years. The subjects who were sent the online survey link were identified through three different sources: (1) researcher's *immediate social network*, (2) researcher's *social network in social media sites*, and (3) a *market research company*.

First source was the researcher's immediate social network. The researcher asked people who she knows in person, but who did not know her research subject, whether they had been to any of these three contexts within the last two years, or whether they knew anyone who had been to any of these places within the last two years. Yet, since the contexts chosen for this study are very specific, this method was not efficient for reaching the target number of respondents. This group accounts for less than ten percent of the respondents.

The second source used was social media, or more specifically, researcher's social network in social media sites. As the study targets consumers of such specific contexts, a convenience sampling method was employed in selecting the groups from which respondents were selected. As mentioned earlier in Chapter three where the qualitative research process is described, the researcher became a member of multiple Las Vegas related Facebook groups that had more than fifty members and started following many Facebook pages that are managed by Las Vegas businesses such as hotels, or by Las Vegas consumers. In addition, she became a part of the Walt Disney World and Disneyland related Facebook groups which, to her knowledge, have more than fifty members, and started following Disneyland and Walt Disney World Facebook pages. Even though convenience sampling method was employed in selecting the groups mentioned above, random sampling method was employed in sending messages to people in these groups. The researcher randomly sent messages that included the survey link to people in these groups who talked about their recent trips to one of these contexts, or who are fans of these sites on Facebook. Randomization was assured by sending the message to every fourth person identified to have been to one of the mentioned contexts recently. Primary reasons for preferring collecting data from these groups and pages were that (1) it is easy to identify people who had a recent trip to one of these contexts, and (2) most of these members are enthusiastic

about sharing their experiences about these places as the qualitative data showed, therefore, the return rate was expected to be relatively high. Beyond these advantages the researcher observed, unexpectedly, many people to whom the researcher sent the message replied to the message expressing the details of their experiences in these contexts, in addition to taking the survey. These messages provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Moreover, some respondents thanked the researcher for including them in the study, which showed their enthusiasm about sharing their experiences.

The major problem that the researcher encountered during her data collection through this method was that social media sites, such as Facebook, automatically recognize messages that include a survey link as spam and, do not allow one to send such messages to their members frequently. In addition, some people hesitate to click on the survey link to go to survey's website because they think that it is spam. Furthermore, some people do not even open a message they receive from someone they do not know. Another significant problem the researcher encountered when conducting this research was that some people reported the message sent as abusive as a result of perceiving it as spam, therefore, Facebook limited these messages, and eventually temporarily blocked the researcher's messaging option. As well, some people do not allow people who are not their friends to send them messages on these sites, so they were not available for the researcher to contact.

In this study, besides people in these online groups who chose not to participate in the survey and who could not be accessed, there might be some other groups of non-respondents. One group might consist of people who had been to one of these contexts many years ago, so that they may not feel confident taking a survey about their experiences of these trips. Another group of non-respondents might consist of consumers who had been to one of these contexts, but

feel neutral about their experiences there, so that they are not enthusiastic enough to share their experiences. Even though people who are members of such social media groups are expected to be enthusiastic about the focus of the group, based on people's high level of interest observed during the qualitative data collection process, some people join such groups primarily to get information prior to their visits, but not to become community members. Some of these people might feel neutral about these contexts after their visits, and do not actively participate in these groups. Another group of non-respondents consists of people who have been to one of these contexts within the last two years, but are not members of any of these online groups, so they cannot be accessed using online data collection methodology. Lastly, some people are not willing to participate in survey studies unless they are offered an incentive. Since the researcher did not offer any incentives to survey participants, some people might have ignored the survey. Some of these non-response situations might have led to non-reponse bias.

The researcher prepared a cover message, to accompany the survey link, where she addressed her research goal, her status as a doctoral student, and her affiliation with a university (see Appendix A). This message and the survey were approved by IRB (Institutional Review Board) before the researcher started to send them out. The researcher for the most part tailored this message to individuals to whom she was sending the message, based on their written or visual entries and comments in the social media sites about their trips. The purpose in doing this was to emphasize that she was really involved in the community and was sincerely following group members' status posts and comments, and the message she was sending was not spam. At the beginning, the researcher used her Facebook account that she has been using actively for the last three years. The purpose of using this account was to emphasize that the message was sent from a 'real person's' account, and that it was not spam, as people were able to see some

information about the researcher's identity, such as the network she belongs to, if they check the account. Yet, after using this account for three months to send messages, Facebook blocked her messaging option for the reasons discussed above. Later, she created another account on Facebook with one of her other email addresses. She added her friends at her university network to her new account to show people she contacted that she really belonged to a university's network to be able to convince them that she was not a spammer but a 'real' Ph.D. student. Yet, Facebook blocked her messaging option also on this account after three weeks. Even though the messaging option in both of her accounts was unblocked after a few days, she was not allowed to send the message with the survey link anymore through her Facebook accounts. Therefore, she could not use this medium further for collecting data for this research.

Therefore, next, she tried to send messages to people on travel blog sites of which she is a member. However, none of her messages were approved by moderators to be sent to other members while they were recognized as spam since they involved a link to another website. In addition, she tried to reach people on yahoo groups. She sent a message to each group explaining her project, her student status and her affiliation with the university. However, even though her message was approved by the moderators of some of the groups, and was posted in the groups' emails, many people, in their replies to the group message, emphasized their concern about being spammed, and their preference of not clicking on the link. The researcher collected data from these two social network sources (immediate and social media), for a four month period of time, from January to April 2011.

Eventually, due to the restrictions she encountered in social media sites and the limited number of people she could reach through her immediate social network, the researcher decided to buy a sample from a professional research company to increase her sample size. The research

company, from which the researcher decided to buy the sample, USamp, is one of the most reliable online market research firms, which has online panel members, in other words pool of respondents from all around the world. Three reasons for her choosing this specific company over others were: (1) this company has the highest number of panel members compared to other market research companies. They have "5.7 million actively engaged panelists in six continents" (Usamp.com, 5.11.2011); (2) the places their panel members have traveled is one of the automatic filters this company uses (market research companies use various filters to classify their panel members so that they could send the surveys to appropriate members. One of the classification criteria this specific company uses in the application form of their members is the places they have visited, and the year of their visit(s). Sometimes, depending on the researcher request, the company may need to create a new filter specific to the research, which adds an additional cost to the collection of the data), and (3) the price they charge per completed survey is less expensive compared to other market research firms as they have more panelists, and they do not need to use extra filters specific to this study to identify specific panelists who have been to either of the contexts of interest in this study.

Since different sources were planned to be used in the data collection process, the researcher added a question at the beginning of the survey asking whether the respondent has taken this survey before. This allowed the researcher to exclude duplicate survey responses from the same respondent.

The theoretical reasons for choosing Las Vegas, Walt Disney World-Florida, and Disneyland-California as the contexts for the second stage of this research were the same as the reasons explained in detail in the third chapter for choosing Las Vegas as the context for the

exploratory stage of this study. The empirical reason for adding Walt Disney World and Disneyland contexts is increasing the generalizability of the findings of this study.

Because this study utilizes Structural Equation Modeling, the suggested minimum sample size for a model with this complexity (models with more than seven latent constructs) is 500 (Hair et al. 2006). The researcher and the people in her immediate social network sent the survey to an average of 120 people whom they thought to have been to one of these contexts within the last two years. Additionally, 461 people who were identified as Las Vegas consumers, 364 people who were identified as Walt Disney World consumers and 293 people who were identified as Disneyland consumers on Facebook pages were delivered the survey by the researcher before her messaging option in her accounts was blocked by Facebook. As mentioned above, the researcher also sent messages on relevant Yahoo groups about her survey. Even though the numbers of members of these groups are known, it is not possible to know how many people received the email in their inbox and opened it, since it is widely filtered as spam email due to the link it involves. Furthermore, most members receive so many emails from these groups in a day that some do not even open some of these emails. Consequently, it is not possible to know the number of people to whom the survey was delivered through these groups. In addition, 208 people were delivered the survey by the research company mentioned above.

Overall, a total of 645 people took the survey. Because it was not possible to know the response rate of people who received the researcher's message on Yahoo groups, the survey response rate was 30%-35% tentatively, excluding the responses from the panel members of the research company. When the responses from the panel members were included, the survey response rate was 40%-44.6% tentatively. These percentages are much higher than the previously reported %15 return rate for internet surveys (e.g. Comley 2000; Schaefer and Dilman

1998; Schuldt and Totten 1994). Thirty-one of the returned surveys were not usable because they were incomplete. In addition, 52 surveys were unusable due to the fact that people who filled out these surveys visited these sites more than two years ago, and 6 surveys were also dropped because people did not report the last time they visited these contexts. These surveys were eliminated. Also, it was identified that 12 people filled out the same survey more than one time. The surveys they took for a second time were also eliminated. Consequently, 544 responses, 44 more than the minimum suggested, were included in the analyses. Among respondents of all usable surveys, 39 percent are Las Vegas consumers, 31 percent are Walt Disney World consumers, and 30 percent are Disneyland consumers.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collection procedure for the main study was explained above. Subsequent to collecting data, first, the sample demographics were examined using SPSS Statistics 17.0 software program. The results of these examinations, as well as the results of the analyses that are addressed below, are presented in detail in the next chapter. Below, the data analysis procedure for the main study is described.

Following the examination of the sample demographics, missing data were examined closely using NCSS (Number Cruncher Statistical System) software program. The percentage of missing value for independent variables ranged between 0.2 and 0.7 percent. The percentage of missing value for dependent variable ranged between 0.1 and 0.3 percent. For the final dependent variable, experience intensity, the percentage of missing value was 0.1. Missing values were calculated using the same program. The method employed in this computation was multivariate-normal method.

Afterward, tests for reliability and unidimensionality were conducted. Cronbach's alpha estimate for each scale was calculated using SPSS Statistics 17.0 software program prior to and after establishing unidimensionality of the scales. In addition, composite reliability values were calculated for each scale. Unidimensionality of scales were assessed by Exploratory Factor Analysis, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

SPSS Statistics 17.0 software program was used in performing Exploratory Factor analysis. Prior to this analysis, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin tests of sampling adequacy and Bartlett tests of sphericity were performed and their results showed that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. Principal Component method was used in conducting the exploratory factor analysis. Two separate analyses were performed. In the first analysis, the items of the components of texture and textuality were analyzed together because these were constructs that pertain to context design dimensions. In the second analysis the items for participation, immersion, and experience intensity were analyzed together because these were constructs that are consumer-related. This method was similar to the procedure followed by Kaynak (2003) in her article on Total Quality Management and perceived performance, where she performed exploratory factor analysis separately for total quality management and perceived performance constructs. Because the constructs are proposed to be correlated in the theory (as discussed in-depth in the previous chapter), an oblique rotation method, namely Promax, was employed in the analyses to reflect the inherent correlations between the components (Fabrigar et al. 1999).

After exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was performed to evaluate and refine the scales further. One of the assumptions of Structural Equation Modeling is normal distribution. For that reason, the data was examined for multivariate normality by examining the skewness and kurtosis of the scales by using the NCSS software program before performing the

confirmatory factor analysis. As the data was skewed to the right, it was normalized using LISREL software program, and the later analyses were conducted using the normalized data. Multivariate outliers were also detected using the NCSS software program prior to confirmatory factor analysis. After a close examination of detected multivariate outliers, the researcher concluded that these outliers provide useful information, and contribute to the findings of the research because they are valid observations, and decided to retain these outliers as recommended by researchers (Clark 1989; Hair et al. 2006).

Confirmatory factor analysis was employed using LISREL 8.5 software program. Standard errors, *t*-values, and multiple and various fit indices (see Table 8 for their acceptable values) were taken into consideration in evaluating the measurement models tested. As a result of measurement model assessments, some redundant items were eliminated (see Table 2 for a full list of items that were included in the final analysis and the ones that were eliminated). This elimination resulted in an overall measurement model that fits the data satisfactorily. After refining the scales further based on the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, reliability is reassessed for each refined scale to check whether each scale exceeded the threshold value of 0.70. Later, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the measures of each factor were assessed using multiple methods.

In the final stage, the proposed structural model is tested. LISREL 8.5 software program was used in this stage. The goodness-of-fit statistics that were taken into consideration in assessing the model's fit to data were the same as the ones used in testing the measurement model. The structural model results are examined to test the hypotheses in this study.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, analysis of the data and the findings of the hypotheses testing are presented. The findings that are presented and discussed are: (1) sample demographics, (2) results of reliability and validity tests, and (3) results of the structural model test.

Sample Demographics

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there were 544 usable survey responses. About an equal number of respondents from each of the contexts of focus of this study responded to the survey (see Table 3 for the frequencies and percentages). The groups of consumers who have been to one of these contexts 1-3 times, and who have been to one of these contexts more than ten times have an almost equal number of respondents; and these groups are the largest respondent groups. More than half of the respondents had been to one of these contexts 1 year ago.

An almost equal number of female and male responded to the survey. The median age of the survey participants was 46.5 years. The mean age of survey participants was 40.7 years. More than half of the respondents reported the place where they are living right now as *suburban*. People who reported the place they live right now as rural constituted the smallest group. More than two-third of the respondents were from North America. More than two-thirds

Table 3: Sample Demographics

	Frequency	Percent
Visitors		
Las Vegas	212	39
Walt Disney World	170	31.3
Disneyland	162	29.8
Times Visited		
1-3 times	173	31.8
3-5 times	67	12.3
5-7 times	75	13.8
7-10 times	35	6.4
more than 10 times	194	35.7
Last Visit		
2 years ago	78	14.3
1 year ago	306	56.3
Within the last year	160	29.4
Sex		
Female	287	52.8
Male	257	47.2
Place lived		
Urban	166	30.5
Suburban	310	57
Rural	61	11.2
Country		
North America	392	73.3
European Countries	71	13.2
Latin America and Asia	55	10.2
Other	18	3.3
Education		
High School or less	69	12.7
Attended some college	211	38.8
Undergraduate college degree	175	32.2
Graduate degree	74	13.6
Professional degree	13	2.4
Marital Status		
Single	165	30.3
Married	281	51.7
Divorced/Separated	51	9.4
Widowed	12	2.2
Living with a partner	31	5.7

Ethnicity		
American Indian/Native American	6	1.1
Asian	33	6.1
Black/African American	29	5.3
Hispanic/Latino	73	13.4
White/Caucasian	378	69.5
Pacific Islander	2	0.4
Other	22	4

of the respondents were *White/Caucasian.* The ethnic group that was second most represented was *Hispanic/Latino.* The ethnic groups that was least represented was *American Indian/Native Americans*. Married consumers constituted the largest group followed by single consumers.

More than 60 percent of the respondents attended some college or had an undergraduate degree. The numbers of respondents who had a *graduate degree* and *a high school degree or less* were almost equal. The median income group of respondents was $60.000-69.000.

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Reliability and Validity Tests

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Below first reliability test procedures and results for the scales developed in this research are addressed. Later, test procedures for assessing validity are described.

Reliability of Scales

Reliability of each scale with all the items included in the survey was estimated by calculating Cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability value. The Cronbachs' alpha values for all scales ranged from 0.88 to 0.94 (see Table 4 for the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha value for each scale). All scales had Cronbach's alpha values higher than 0.70, the acceptable value for newly developed scales (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). Composite reliabilities for each of these scales ranged from 0.76 and 0.87. These values also indicated the reliability of the scales (see table 7 for the composite realibility values of the scales).

Table 4 Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's α, and bivariate correlations for the variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean	S.D.	Cronbach's α
1. Sensory Presentationality	1									5.50	1.26	0.88
2. Multiple Modalities	0.895 (0.000)	1								5.69	1.24	0.94
3. Spectacularity	0.927 (0.000)	0.876 (0.000)	1							5.64	1.34	0.94
4. Narrative Presentationality	0.775 (0.000)	0.708 (0.000)	0.760 (0.000)	1						5.09	1.42	0.93
5. Readability	0.702 (0.000)	0.703 (0.000)	0.710 (0.000)	0.649 (0.000)	1					5.62	1.21	0.94
6. Appropriability	0.769 (0.000)	0.733 (0.000)	0.752 (0.000)	0.826 (0.000)	0.769 (0.000)	1				5.55	1.27	0.93
7. Participation	0.639 (0.000)	0.627 (0.000)	0.653 (0.000)	0.662 (0.000	0.660 (0.000)	0.701 (0.000)	1			5.09	1.44	0.92
8. Immersion	0.719 (0.000)	0.694 (0.000)	0.774 (0.000)	0.685 (0.000)	0.636 (0.000)	0.711 (0.000)	0.716 (0.000)	1		5.59	1.48	0.94
9. Experience Intensity	0.780 (0.000)	0.729 (0.000)	0.819 (0.000)	0.698 (0.000)	0.686 (0.000)	0.751 (0.000)	0.681 (0.000)	0.836 (0.000)	1	5.86	1.3	0.89

Unidimensionality

Unidimensionality of factors proposed in this research was assessed first by using exploratory factor analysis, and later by using confirmatory factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity were performed prior to these analyses. For the factor analysis of texture and textuality related items, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure value fell in the acceptable range (above .50) with a value of 0.962. The observed significance level of Bartlett's test result was 0.000. For the factor analysis of participation, immersion and intensity items, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure value fell in the acceptable range (above .50) with a value of 0.948 and the observed significance level of Bartlett's test result was 0.000. Both test results for both analyses indicated that the data were appropriate for conducting factor analysis.

Following Bearden et al.'s (2001) suggestion, the statistical criteria that were taken into consideration for item retention in this stage were (a) corrected item-to-total correlations above 0.35, (b) interitem correlations above 0.20, and (c) factor loadings above 0.40. Even though Bearden et al. (2001) recommend 0.50 for the last criterion, a loading above 0.40 was considered acceptable in this research considering the sample size of above 500 (Hair et al. 2006).

All the texture and textuality related items in the questionnaire were factor analyzed using the principles components analysis followed by an oblique rotation method, namely Promax rotation. Oblique rotation method was preferred in factor analyzing these items as they are theoretically proposed to be correlated (Fabrigar et al. 1999; Hair et al. 2006). Even though primarily the pattern matrix is reported in many studies due to the fact that it demonstrates a simpler structure compared to the structure matrix (Ford et al. 1986; Hatcher 1994), it is suggested that the pattern matrix and structure matrix be examined together in interpreting the

factor solutions that result from using the oblique rotation method (Hatcher 1994; Hair et al. 2006). Pattern matrix involves results that are equivalent to the standardized regression coefficients that show the importance of the specific item for the factor when the impact of other items are partialled out. Therefore, the values in the pattern matrix convey the unique relationship between an item and the factor. On the other hand, the structure matrix provides correlation coefficients of each item and the factors that have been rotated. All paths from a factor to all items are reflected in this matrix. The reason why the results in structure matrix are higher compared to the pattern matrix is that the factors are correlated with one another, so that there may be overlap in the loadings (Russell 2002). Table 5A and Table 5B exhibit the values in both matrices for all factors in this research.

Concerning the exploratory factor analysis results of the items related to texture and textuality constructs, all items loaded highest on the factors on which they were theorized to load. The six-factor solution accounted for 69 percent of the variance. In combination with a sufficient degree of coefficients of reliability that were reported above, it was concluded that each texture and textuality construct had three underlying dimensions. Considering that all the factor loadings were higher than .40, all corrected item-to-total correlations were above 0.35, and interitem correlations were above 0.20, the items employed to measure texture and textuality related measures were retained for further analysis.

All of the items that were used to measure participation, immersion, and experience intensity were factor analyzed together using the principle component analysis also followed by Promax rotation method. The three-factor solution accounted for 76.9 percent of the variance. All items, with the exception of one, loaded on the factors on which they were theorized to load (Table 5B). The item "I felt disoriented when I got back to my everyday life after my visit to X"

Table 5A Exploratory Factor Analysis – Texture and Textuality Factors

	Principle Components											
	Pattern Matrix						Structure Matrix					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sensory Presentationality												
They were unique						.55						.80
My senses were aroused in ways I cannot remember experiencing in other places						.62						.82
My senses were pleasantly surprised						.41						.78
I would not have believed many of them if I hadn't encountered them						.79						.88
2. Multiple Modalities												
Each of them used many detailed elements				.77						.90		
Each of them was rich in its features				.94						.94		
I found great variety in each of them				.85						.91		
Each engaged my senses in multiple ways				.80						.90		
3. Spectacularity												
They were exciting beyond words		.72						.87				
X was like a dream world of sensory wonders		.86						.91				
They were very sensational		.77						.92				
They were out of this world		.83						.89				
They had a 'wow' effect on me		.91						.91				
4. Narrative Presentationality												
They provoked new thoughts about things I already knew			.48						.77			
They informed me about things I didn't know before			.78						.88			
They made me have thoughts I never had before			.91						.93			
They made me imagine things I never imagined before			.81						.90			
They inspired thoughts impossible to express			.83						.89			
5. Readability												
They inspired thoughts impossible to express	.87						.88					
It was easy to associate them with that I I already knew of similar events, activities and sites	.97						.82					
The messages communicated in them were easily recognizable	.93						.93					
The messages they had made a lot of sense to me	.84						.92					
It was easy for me to grasp the details in their messages	.86						.92					
They had many features which I had learned about in movies, TV shows, books, magazines, and other media	.46						.75					
6. Appropriability												
They allowed me to have my own interpretations					.85						.90	
I found that I could play with their meanings to create my own meaning					.83						.90	
They made it easy for me to make Xª experience my own					.82						.91	
I was able to create my own meanings for each of them					.89						.91	

Table 5B Exploratory Factor Analysis – Participation, Immersion and Experience Intensity Factors

	Pattern Matrix			Structure Matrix		
Principle Components	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Participation						
I felt like I was a performer in the events, activities and sites in X [a]		.69			.78	
I was highly involved in activities, events, and sites in X		.85			.88	
I was physically engaged in many of the activities, events and sites in X		.93			.91	
I interacted with people in the activities, events, and sites in X		.95			.89	
I was active in many activities, events, and sites in X		.92			.91	
2. Immersion						
When I was in X, the activities, events and sites there became my only reality			.68			.82
I lost track of time when I was experiencing the activities, events and sites in X			.68			.83
I lost sense of the rest of the world when I was experiencing the activities, events and sites in X			.75			.88
I found myself completely caught up in the activities, events and sites in X			.55			.85
I felt as if I was in another world when I was in X	.44		.51			.82
3. Experience Intensity						
My experience in X was extremely powerful	.81			.91		
I felt like I had experienced the unimaginable at X after my visit	.55			.83		
I felt disoriented when I got back to my everyday life after my visit to X			.98			.7
After my visit, I felt extremely delighted to have been in X	1.09[b]			.89		
My excitement after my visit to X was extremely powerful	.83			.89		
After my visit, I was left feeling that I thoroughly enjoyed the activities, events, and sites in X	.96			.9		

[a] X refers to the context (Las Vegas / Walt Disney World / Disneyland) the consumer who filled out the survey visited.

[b] Values that are above 1.00 are common in pattern matrix, as "…loadings are not correlations and are therefore not limited to values of one or less. If they are greater than one, it is only marginal and should be interpreted along with other values in terms of size." (Child 2006: 90)

in the experience intensity scale loaded on another factor. Even though deleting this item was

considered, it was decided to leave it for confirmatory factor analysis to validate the elimination

decision. Another item "I felt as if I was in another world when I was in X" loaded on two

factors above .40. Yet, as its loading to the factor it was expected to load on was higher (.51)

than the second factor on which it loaded (.44), it was also retained for confirmatory factor

analysis. In combination with sufficient degree of coefficients of reliability that were reported

above, it was concluded that each construct is a separate factor. For all three constructs, the items

employed to measure them were retained for further analysis considering that all the items,

except for the one item in the intensity scale, loaded on the factors they were expected to load on

and their loadings were above .40, all corrected item-to-total correlations were above 0.35, and

interitem correlations were above 0.20.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted in order to further evaluate the items and

their structure. First, the measurement model for each scale that is related to texture was

examined. Using multiple and different fit indices is important and makes higher level of sense

in coming up with a conclusion about the fit of the model to the data since many criteria, mainly

including sample size, variable number, and model specification would have an influence on

goodness-of-fit assessments (LaDu and Tanaka 1989). Jaccard and Wan (1996) suggest using at

least three indexes, while Kline (1998) suggests at least four indexes, each reflecting diverse

criteria. Furthermore, it is suggested to involve at least one absolute fit index, one incremental fit

index, in addition to ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (normed chi-square) to define the

fit of the model. In this research, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error Approximation) was used as

the absolute fit index as it is one of the most informative criteria as to an absolute fit (Byrne

1998), and CFI (Comparative Fit Index) was used as the incremental fit index as it has the ability

to adjust for model complexity (Bentler 1990). Additionally, PGFI, PNFI, and NNFI fit indices were employed in this study. The acceptable levels for these goodness-of-fit indices are addressed in Table 8. Some of the items in the scales needed to be reconsidered based on the results of the confirmatory factor analyses. These are explained below.

1. The measurement model for *sensory presentationality* scale demonstrated asatisfactory fit.

2. The initial measurement model for *multiple modalities* construct was not acceptable. Therefore, the modification indices were examined to improve the fit. Taking theoretical considerations into account, the errors between two items in the scale "Each of them used many detailed elements" and "Each of them was rich in its features" were correlated. Theory, as discussed in the third chapter, suggests that the detail in each sensory stimulus lead to perceptions of richness of the stimulus. Therefore, this correlation is theoretically meaningful. An improved fit was achieved after this process.

3. The initial measurement model for s*pectacularity* scale demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the data. Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis, all the items used to measure sensory presentationality, multiple modalities and spectacularity were retained for further tests.

4. The initial confirmatory factor analysis model for *narrative presentationality* scale was not acceptable. According to Gerbing and Anderson (1998), removal of some items and running the CFA analysis is a good approach to achieve an acceptable fit when the item elimination can be theoretically supported. Accordingly, one item "They informed me about things I didn't know before" was eliminated from the scale

based on theoretical and semantic considerations. Even though people may be informed in experiential contexts, being informed about things they did not know before is not the primary concern in their evaluation of these contexts which focus on entertainment. Also, 'being informed' emphasizes solely the cognitive aspect of consumer perceptions and leaves out affective aspects, thus, was found to be different than the other phenomena covered in this scale. After dropping this item, an acceptable fit was achieved.

5. The initial confirmatory factor analysis model of the *readability* scale was not acceptable. After examining the modification indices and the correlations among the six items used in the scale, it was decided to correlate the errors between two items "It was easy to associate them with what I already knew of similar events, activities and sites" and "It was easy for me to grasp the elements in their messages." As discussed in the third chapter, if one has a larger associative network, that person can make higher level of sense about the details in the messages. Thus, this correlation is theoretically meaningful. In addition, the item "They had many features which I learned about in movies, TV shows, books, magazines, and other media" was eliminated from this scale. The focus of this scale is whether people are able to make sense of the stories they encounter in experiential settings easily rather than the sources of their sense making. Hence, elimination of this item was theoretically meaningful.

6. The initial measurement model for *appropriability* scale was not acceptable. After examining the modification indices and the correlation coefficients among the items, the item "They made it easy for me to make Las Vegas/Walt Disney

World/Disneyland experience my own" was eliminated to achieve an improvement in the model fit. Since it was not easy to support the elimination the item theoretically, it was decided to run the whole measurement model also with this item retained in the scale. Because the model with the item retained in the scale demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the data, and retaining the item is theoretically more meaningful, ultimately the item was retained in the scale.

7. The initial fit of the *participation* scale was not acceptable. Modification indices were examined to improve the fit of the model to the data. Consequently, the errors between "I felt like I was a performer in the events, activities and sites in Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland" item and "I was physically engaged in many of the activities, events, and the sites in Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland" item were correlated. This correlation is theoretically meaningful, as engagement in specifically experiential contexts is what leads to perceptions of performance in such contexts. In addition, the error terms between "I was physically engaged in many of the activities, events, and sites on the Strip" item and "I interacted with people in the activities, events, and sites" item were also correlated. As the experiential contexts that were chosen for this study are largely social contexts in which human interaction is a key element, most physical engagement in these contexts involve interaction with people. Therefore, for such contexts this correlation is meaningful.

8. The measurement model for *immersion* scale initially had a satisfactory fit.

9. Lastly, the initial scale for *experience intensity* scale did not demonstrate an adequate fit to the data. Therefore, after a close examination of modification indices and the semantic meanings of the items included in the scale, items "I felt like I had

experienced the unimaginable in Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland after my visit" and "I felt disoriented when I got back to my everyday life after my visit to Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland" were eliminated. Concerning the first item, feeling of experiencing the unimaginable might lead to experience intensity for some people, but it is not an item that can be a direct measure the intensity of the experience, as the focus of this scale is experiences that people think that are powerful, not necessarily dream-like. Regarding the second item, even though a feeling of disorientation might be a sign of experience intensity, this is an extreme feeling. Even though one might feel that s/he had an intense experience (positive and powerful senses, feelings, thoughts, and imagination) in one context, s/he might not feel disoriented when s/he returns back to the everyday life. In addition, feeling of disorientation might mean different things (possibly something negative) to different people. Therefore, scrutiny of these items suggested that these phrases might be vague and confusing to respondents and it was decided that they are not ideal measures of experience intensity. Moreover, the latter item did not load on the appropriate factor in the exploratory factor analysis. As a result, both items were dropped.

Later, as addressed in the previous chapter, the factors were combined into pairs, and the measurement model for each pair was estimated. Then, the complete measurement model, a nine-factor first order correlated model, was estimated. In every stage, standard errors, t-values, and multiple and different fit indices were taken into consideration in examining the results. The overall measurement model had a satisfactory fit to the data (see Table 8).

After elimination of the items based on the confirmatory factor analysis results, reliability of each scale was estimated one more time by calculating Cronbach's alpha value. The Cronbachs' alpha value for each scale ranged from 0.88 to 0.94. The Cronbach's alpha values of all scales were higher than 0.70, the sufficient reliability level for newly developed scales (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to the extent to which indicators of the same construct are related (Bagozzi 1991; Hair et al. 2006; Kaynak and Hartley 2006). Anderson and Gerbings (1988) suggest that if the coefficient of each item in a scale is greater than twice its standard error, items demonstrate convergent validity. According to the results of this study, the coefficient of each item in a scale was greater than twice its standard error. All *t*-values were significant and all items loaded highly on the factors on which they were theorized to load (see Table 6 for *t*-values and confirmatory factor analysis loadings). These results are indicative of convergent validity of the scales offered in this research.

According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), if the latent construct explains more than fifty percent of the variation in an item, this suggests that the indicators are good measures of the latent construct and they have convergent validity. In other words, standardized factor loadings of items above 0.70 indicate high convergent validity. All standardized factor loadings of the items in all of the scales in this research ranged between 0.71 and 0.93 (Table 6), demonstrating convergent validity.

Table 6. Standardized factor Loadings and *t*-values

Sensory Presentationality Scale Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	*t*-values
1. They were unique	.79	*
2. My senses were aroused in ways I cannot remember experiencing in other places	.80	20.813
3. My senses were pleasantly surprised	.84	22.111
4. I would not have believed many of them if I hadn't encountered them	.76	19.397
Multiple Modalities Scale Items		
1. Each of them used many detailed elements	.85	
2. Each of them was rich in its features	.87	32.721
3. I found great variety in each of them	.88	27.115
4. Each engaged my senses in multiple ways	.87	26.432
Spectacularity Scale Items		
1. They were exciting beyond words	.85	
2. X was like a dream world of sensory wonders	.87	27.202
3. They were very sensational	.90	29.126
4. They were out of this world	.86	26.555
5. They had a 'wow' effect on me	.86	26.298
Narrative Presentationality Scale Items		
1. They provoked new thoughts about things I already knew	.77	
2. They made me have thoughts I never had before	.89	22.780
3. They made me imagine things I never imagined before	.90	23.203
4. They inspired thoughts impossible to express	.86	21.852
Readability Scale Items		
1. I clearly understood the messages they convey	.84	
2. It was easy to associate them with what I already knew of similar events, activities and sites	.74	20.426
3. The messages communicated in them were easily recognizable	.93	29.347
4. The messages they had made a lot of sense to me	.93	29.679
5. It was easy for me to grasp the elements in their messages	.91	28.529
Appropriability Scale Items		
1.They allowed me to have my own interpretations	.87	
2. I found that I could play with their meanings to create my own meaning	.89	29.132
3. They made it easy for me to make X[a] experience my own	.86	26.999
4. I was able to create my own meanings for each of them	.88	28.496
Participation Scale Items		
1. I felt like I was a performer in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X	.71	
2. I was highly involved in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X	.81	21.297
3. I was physically engaged in many of the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X	.86	19.583
4. I interacted with people in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X	.88	19.935
5. I was active in many activities, events, attractions, and sites in X	.92	20.808

Table 6. Continued

Immersion Scale Items		
1. When I was in X, the events, activities, attractions, and sites there became my only reality	.79	
2. I lost track of time when I was experiencing the events, activities, attractions, and sites in X	.83	21.876
3. I lost sense of the rest of the world when I was experiencing the events, activities, attractions, and sites in X	.90	24.406
4. I found myself completely caught up in the events, activities, and sites in X	.92	25.203
5. I felt as if I was in another world when I was in X	.87	23.369
Experience Intensity Scale Items		
1. My experience of X was extremely powerful	.90	
2. After my visit, I felt extremely delighted for having been in X	.82	26.052
3. My excitement after my visit to X was extremely powerful	.88	29.793
4. After my visit, I was left feeling that I thoroughly enjoyed the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X.	.84	27.356

[a] X refers to the context (Las Vegas / Walt Disney World / Disneyland) the consumer who filled out the survey visited.

* The first item in each scale does not have an associated *t*-value since it has a fixed parameter.

Discriminant Validity

The extent to which a concept differs from other concepts is a discriminant validity issue (Kaynak and Hartley 2008; Venkatraman and Grant 1986). In other words, discriminant validity refers to the extent to which the measures of different contructs are discrete. In order to measure how the measures of each of the first-order constructs proposed in this research differ from each other, three methods were used. In the first method, chi-square difference tests between the unconstrained model and constrained models were performed (see Table 7). In this test, the chi-square value for each two-factor model where the correlation between both factors was constrained to 1.0 was tested against the chi-square value for the unconstrained model. The

Table 7. Discriminant Validity Test Results for First-order Factors

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sensory Presentationality	0.87; 0.76 [a] 0.64 [b]								
2. Multiple Modalities	0.867-0.923 [c] 105.507 [d]	0.89; 0.87 0.75							
3. Spectacularity	0.905-0.949 75.557	0.848-0.904 232.156	0.94; 0.87 0.75						
4. Narrative Presentationality	0.731-0.819 331.475	0.658-0.758 560.146	0.718-0.802 595.151	0.93; 0.81 0.87					
5. Readability	0.65-0.754 527.727	0.687-0.779 575.599	0.662-0.758 1172.094	0.593-0.705 863.12	0.91; 0.89 0.76				
6. Appropriability	0.725-0.813 362.684	0.672-0.768 563.167	0.708-0.796 708.798	0.792-0.86 360.923	0.729-0.809 696.325	0.93; 0.86 0.76			
7. Participation	0.576-0.696 602.129	0.567-0.687 724.27	0.597-0.709 887.692	0.606-0.718 760.684	0.606-0.714 928.658	0.651-0.751 730.811	0.92; 0.80 0.70		
8. Immersion	0.669-0.769 480.96	0.642-0.746 634.245	0.734-0.814 776.907	0.633-0.737 771.972	0.58-0.692 1414.383	0.663-0.759 829.983	0.668-0.764 746.502	0.93; 0.83 0.74	
9. Experience Intensity	0.736-0.824 337.958	0.681-0.777 724.27	0.783-0.855 461.546	0.646-0.75 686.328	0.634-0.738 878.53	0.707-0.795 589.598	0.627-0.735 777.037	0.804-0.868 401.874	0.92; 0.85 0.74

[a] Values on the diagonal are the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliabilities for each factor, respectively

[b] Values represent the Average Variance Extracted values

[c] Values represent the confidence interval values

[d] Values are the differences in chi-square values between the constrained and unconstrained models

statistical significance for each chi-square difference was calculated. The significance level was adjusted by dividing the alpha level by the number of tests performed (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) and was 0.0015 (0.05/33). For each constrained model, the chi-square value for the unconstrained model was significantly lower than the chi-square value for the constrained model (see Table 7 for chi-square differences). In the second method, confidence interval (± 2 standard errors) around the correlation estimate between each pair of constructs was constructed (see Table 7 for the confidence interval values). None of the confidence intervals included 1.0 value. This demonstrated discriminant validity of the measures (Anderson and Gerbing 1988).

Lastly, Average Variance Extracted was calculated for each latent construct to establish discriminant validity. Average Variance Extracted refers to the the amount of variance that is captured by the latent variable in relation to the amount of variance due to the measurement error in the latent variable (Dillon and Goldstein 1984). The threshold value for AVE for each construct is 0.50. In this study, the lowest AVE value was 0.64 (Table 7). All the values for AVE were greater than the square of the construct's correlations with the other factors. This indicated that the constructs offered in this research have discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

In addition, discriminant validity between textuality and texture as second order factors was assessed to see whether the measures of these two factors are discrete. To assess discriminant validity between these two constructs, two measurement models, one in which all six of the first order factors that are proposed to indicate texture and textuality were modeled as the indicators of only one factor, and one in which three factors that were initially proposed to indicate texture were theorized to indicate texture, and three factors that were initially proposed to indicate textuality were theorized to indicate textuality, were tested. Values of the Goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the model where the measures of texture and textuality factors were

conceptualized as discrete fit the data better (Normed chi-square=3.09, RMSEA=0.065, PGFI=0.73, PNFI=0.88, NNFI=0.99, CFI=0.99) compared to the model where these measures were theorized to load on only one higher-order factor rather than to distinct higher-order factors (Normed chi-square=3.50; .RMSEA=0.069, PGFI=0.72, PNFI=0.88, NNFI=,0.98, CFI=0.98). In addition, Average Variance Extracted was calculated for these constructs. The AVE value for texture was 0.89, and the AVE value for textuality was 0.75, further indicating the discriminant validity between the two second-order constructs.

Criterion-related Validity

Criterion-related validity refers to the extent to which predictions made based on the theoretical framework are supported (Venkatraman nd Grant 1986; Kaynak and Hartley 2008). The size of the correlation between the predictor test scores and scores on the criterion variable indicates the level of validity. This study investigates the relationships between texture and textuality, participation, immersion, and experience intensity. The relationship between each construct is proposed in the fourth chapter. All bivariate correlations pertaining to the proposed relationships, with the exception of one, are significant at p-value <0.0000 and in the anticipated direction. The correlation pertaining to the proposed relationship between the texture and participation was insignificant and was not in the anticipated direction due to the suppression effect. This issue is discussed further later in the chapter. Yet, the significant correlations are evidence that criterion-related validity is adequate (Kaynak and Hartley 2008). Furthermore, all bivariate correlations pertaining to the relationships that are proposed in the other two models that are described below are significant at p-value <0.0000 and in the anticipated direction. These significant correlations also indicate the adequate criterion-related validity.

In addition, the structural equation modeling test results, which are discussed later in the chapter, also establish criterion-related validity (Kaynak and Hartley 2008).

Common Method Variance

Common method variance, defined as "variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent" (Podsakoff et al. 2003: 879) might occur when the data for both independent and dependent variables are acquired from the same respondent. Common method variance is considered as a bias in behavioral research as it was found to be one of the reasons for measurement error which threatens the power of conclusions about the relationships between measures (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Method variance might either inflate or deflate observed relationships between constructs, thus leading to both Type I and Type II errors (Bagozzi and Yi 1990; Podsakoff et al. 2003). Because the data for both independent and dependent variables were acquired from the same respondent in this study, common method variance should be addressed.

Prior to conducting the study the researcher tried to mitigate the common method variance threats by selecting informants that are enthusiastic about the contexts of the study, and encouraging their sincere cooperation by explaining the purpose. After collecting the data Harman's single-factor test was utilized to check whether common method variance was present. In Harman's single-factor test, all of the variables of the study are factor analyzed using unrotated factor analysis. Emergence of a single factor indicates the presence of a significant common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Due to the large number of items in this study, the items in each scale of texture and textuality were factor analyzed with items in scales of participation, immersion, and intensity. For instance, first, items in the sensory presentationality scale were factor analyzed with items in the participation scale. Later, the items in the sensory

presentationality scale were factor analyzed with items in the immersion scale, and later with the items in the intensity scale. This process was followed until all the items in each of the texture and textuality related scales were factor analyzed with the items in participation, immersion, and intensity scales. In each analysis, two factors were obtained. The result of this test indicated that there is no significant common method variance.

Test of the Overall Measurement Model, the Structural Model and the Hypotheses

In analyzing the results of the hypothesized structural equation model, first, goodness-of-fit indices were examined. The value for each of the goodness-of-fit index indicated a satisfactory fit of the model to the data (see Table 8 for the values of the goodness-of-fit indices).

Afterward, the structural equation model results of each hypothesized relationship between constructs were examined. Figure 2 depicts the estimated path coefficients and associated *t*-values. All of the paths in the model, except for the path from texture to participation, were supported (Figure 2). Unexpectedly, the path between texture and participation had an inverse sign. Even though this path was not statistically significant, the negative path coefficient contradicts the theory. Thus, the correlation coefficient between the two constructs was examined. The correlation coefficient was positive and significant. In addition, the correlations between each independent variable and participation variable were checked against the correlation between two independent variables. The correlation coefficient between the texture and textuality was 0.88, and the correlation coefficient between textuality and participation was 0.77 and the correlation coefficient between texture and participation was 0.67. According to Kaynak (1997: 186), "suppression indicates that the relationship between the independent variable set is pushing down (suppressing) the relationship with the dependent

Table 8. Test Results of the Overall Measurement Model, Hypothesized Structural Model and Competing Structural Models

Goodness-of-fit statistics	Measurement Model	Structural Model 1: Two second-order latent constructs	Structural Model 2: One third-order latent construct	Structural Model 3: One second-order latent construct
Chi-square/df[a]	1727.195/701=2.46	1920.162/724=2.65	1939.377/725=2.67	2089.257/727=2.87
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)[b]	0.054	0.058	0.058	0.061
Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)[c]	0.73	0.74	0.74	0.73
Parsimony Normed Fit Index (PNFI)[d]	0.88	0.91	0.91	0.91
Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)[e]	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.98
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)[f]	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99

[a] Recommended value for normed chi-square (Chi-square/df) is <3 (Bollen 1989). Yet, some scholars accept values <5 as adequate (Wheaton et al. 1977; Arbuckle 1997).

[b] Recommended value for RMSEA is <0.08 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993; Byrne 1998, Hair et al. 2006). Yet, some researchers suggest a cutoff value close to 0.06 for RMSEA (Hu and Bentler 1999)

[c] Recommended value for PGFI is >0.50 (Byrne 1998)

[d] Recommended value for PNFI is >0.50 (Byrne 1998)

[e] Acceptable value for NNFI is >0.95 (Hu and Bentler 1999)

[f] Acceptable value for CFI is >0.90 (Byrne 1998; Hu and Bentler 1999; Hair et al. 2006)
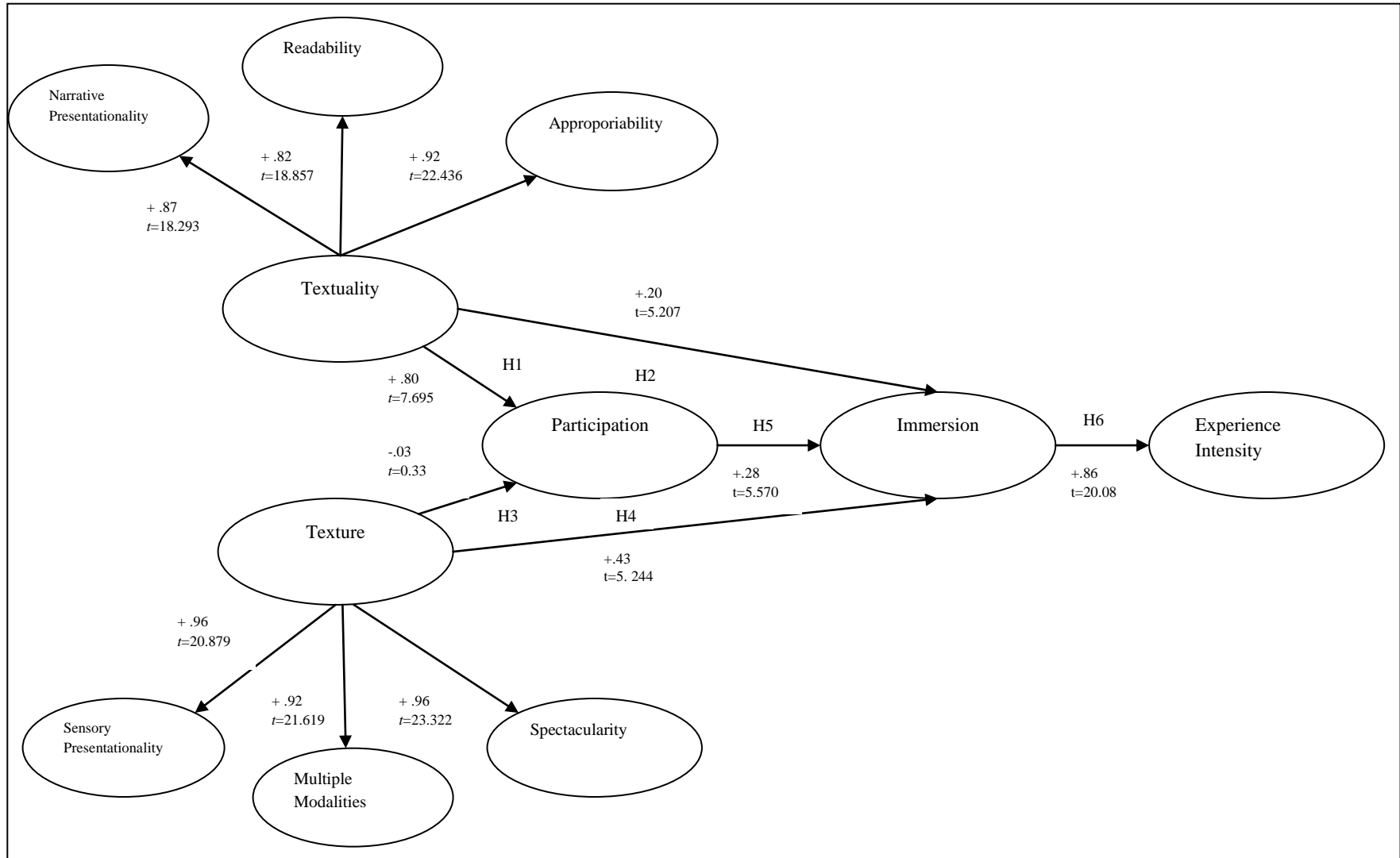
Figure 2 Structural Modeling of the Relationships between Textuality, Texture and Consumer Participation, Immersion, and Immersion and Experience Intensity

Note: t-values for path coefficients greater than 1.96 are significant at p<0.05, and t-values greater than 2.58 are significant at p<0.01.

variable." Consequently, it was concluded that the inverse sign of the path from texture to participation indicated the presence of suppression. As a result, the hypothesized model was reexamined and two additional theoretically meaningful structural models were developed and tested.

In the first alternative structural model, a third-order factor which is reflected by the second-order texture and textuality constructs was added. The theoretical reason behind proposing texture and textuality as constructs that reflect a higher order construct is that even though texture and textuality are separate constructs (as previously discussed in the third chapter where these constructs are defined and explained in detail), they both reflect consumers' overall perceptions of an experiential context's design elements. Indeed, as was discussed earlier in the third chapter when analyzing consumers' accounts of their experiences, most of the time consumers do not intentionally distinguish the impact of one from that of the other when evaluating the design elements of a context. They rather address both the meanings they find in the stories and the meaning they find in the sensory stimuli presented in the context when they talk about their experiences of the context. Moreover, the meanings consumers find in the stories reinforce the meaning they find in the sensory stimuli, and vice versa. Consequently, a third-order factor for which texture and textuality were second-order factor indicators was added to the model as the only exogenous variable. This variable is named as *context design perceptions*. Context design perception is defined in this study as *consumer's perceptions of the design elements of a context that are primarily created by the marketers of the context.*

As this model proposes adding a new construct, context design perception, to the model, first composite reliability and average variance extracted values for this construct were
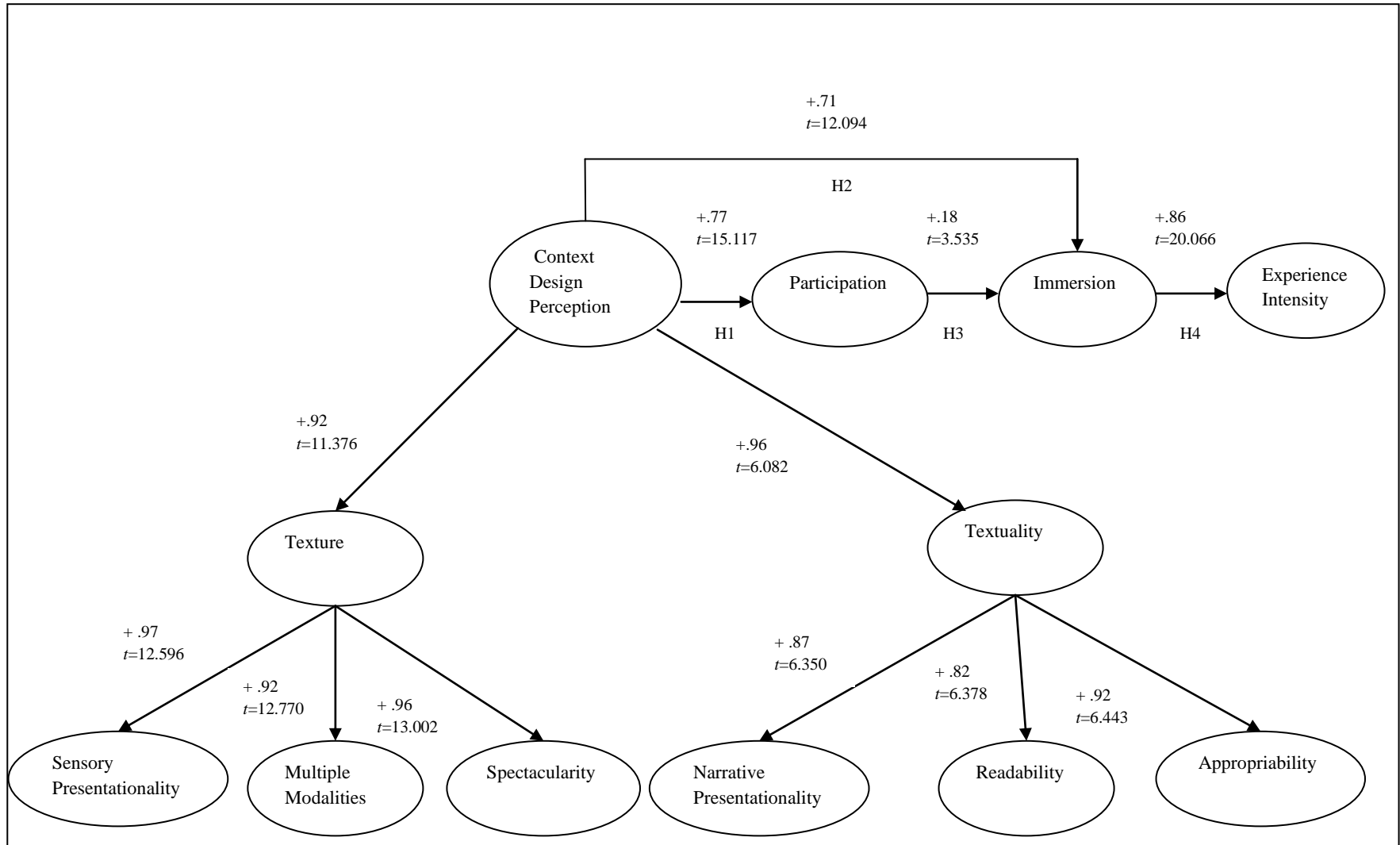
Figure 3 Relationships Between Perceptions of Context Design Elements, Consumer Participation, Immersion and Experience Intensity (Third-order factor)

calculated. The Composite reliability coefficient was 0.94, indicating the high reliability of the

construct. AVE value of 0.88 for the construct indicated the distinctiveness of the concept.

As a result of such a respecification of the model, hypotheses about the relationship between

textuality and consumer participation, textuality and immersion, texture and consumer

participation and texture and immersion needed to be restated. Below are all the hypotheses

tested in this model.

H1: Context design perception is positively related to consumer participation in a market context.

H2: Context design perception is positively related to consumer immersion into the market encounter.

H3: Consumer participation in a marketing encounter is positively related to consumer immersion.

H4: Consumer immersion into the market encounter is positively related to experience intensity derived from the encounter.

In analyzing the results of this third-order structural equation model, first goodness-of-fit

indices were examined. The normed chi-square value was 2.67, the RMSEA value was 0.058,

the PGFI value was 0.74, the PNFI value was 0.091, and both the NNFI and CFI values were

0.99. The value for each of the goodness-of-fit index indicated that the model fit to the data was

satisfactory (Table 8). Figure 3 depicts the estimated path coefficients and t-values for these path

coefficients that were taken into consideration in testing the hypotheses in this model. All of the

paths in the model were supported. They were all statistically significant at p<0.01. In addition,

the suppression effect was not an issue anymore.

To check the validity of the findings of the previous third-order model, another structural

model was developed and tested. In this model context design perception was not theorized as a

third- order factor that is reflected by two second-order factors (texture and textuality), but as a

second- order factor that is reflected by six first-order factors (in the previous two models, three

of them were hypothesized to reflect texture, and three of them were hypothesized to reflect textuality).

The theoretical reason behind this was that even though texture and textuality are theoretically distinct constructs, as was observed in many of the consumer accounts of their experiences in experiential settings, as discussed in the third chapter, consumers find the meanings of the stories and sensory stimuli reinforce each other. In other words, they may not evaluate them in isolation, but in combination. Thus, it might be expected that consumers' evaluation of each of the proposed factor of texture and textuality might reflect consumers' overall context design perceptions rather than their perceptions of the stories and the sensory stimuli they find in the context separately. The hypotheses tested in this model were the same as the restated hypotheses in the previous model. Even though the theory and the discriminant validity analysis between textuality and texture constructs strongly suggest that the measures of texture and textuality constructs are discrete, and therefore, these measures should not be theorized to indicate the same construct, this model was still tested to see the differences in the fit of the different models to the data.

Values of normed chi-square, RMSEA, PGFI, PNFI, NNFI and CFI were 2.87, 0.061, 0.73, 0.91, 0.98, and 0.98 respectively. According to these values, it was concluded that the model fits to the data satisfactorily. According to the estimated path coefficients and t-values for the path coefficients (Figure 4), all the paths in the model were supported and were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.
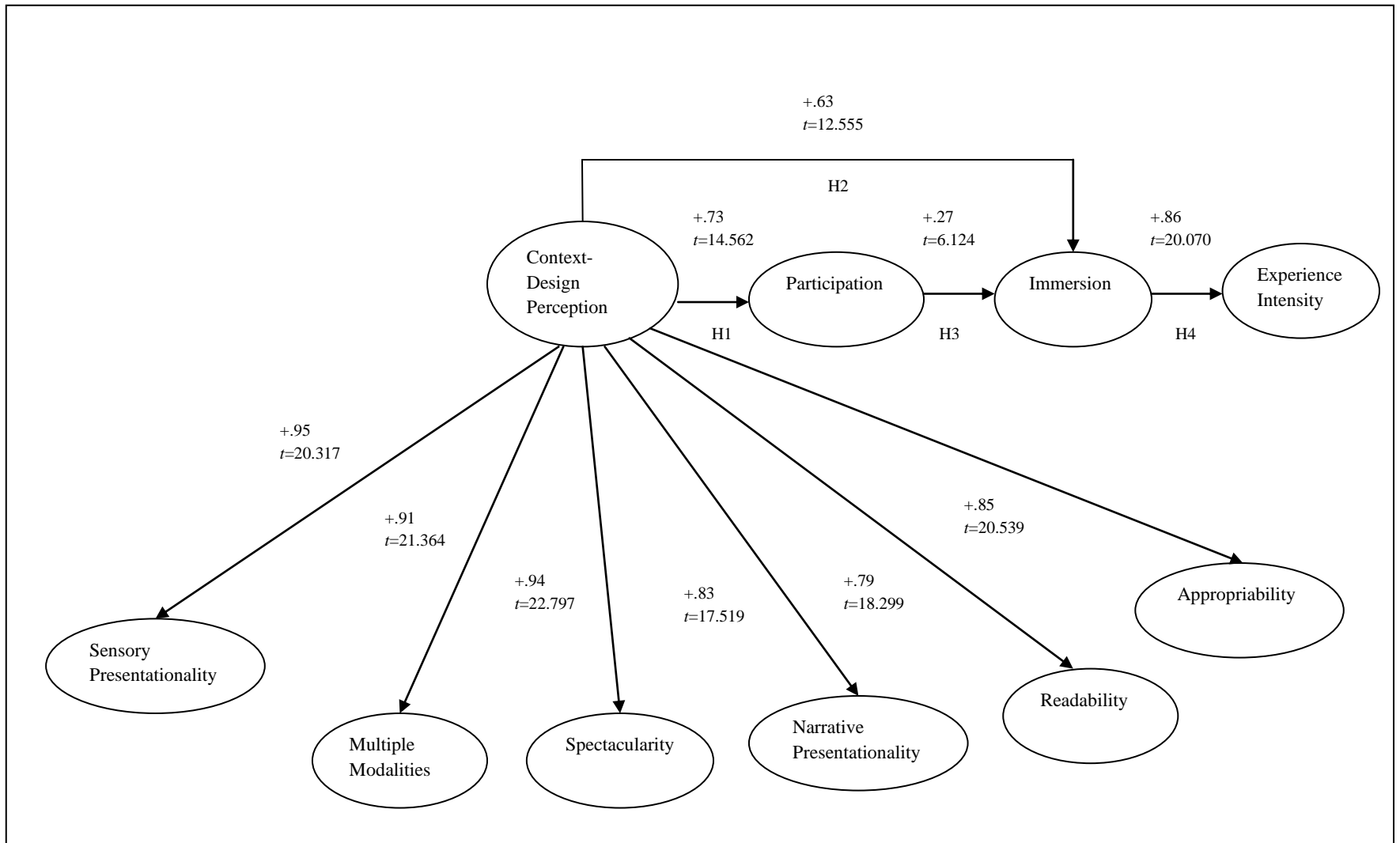
Figure 4 Relationships Between Perceptions of Context Design Elements, Consumer Participation, Immersion and Experience Intensity (One second-order factor)

The test results of analyses of the three structural models suggest that the model in which texture and textuality were theorized as constructs that reflect a higher-order construct (context design perception), and that this third-order construct acts as the independent variable demonstrates the best representation of the data. These findings suggests that even though texture and textuality are distinct constructs reflecting consumers' perceptions of two different (story-related and sensory stimuli-related) aspects of the context design; they go hand in hand in consumers' overall evaluation of the context. In the next chapter, a summary and conclusion of the study, implications for researchers and practitioners, and the limitations of the study are presented.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, first, a summary and conclusion of this research is presented. Later, implications of this study for future research and practitioners are addressed. Finally, limitations that are associated with the design and the conduct of the research are described.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature and observations in the contemporary culture suggest that experience has become a focal offering in the market (e.g. Pine and Gilmore 1999, Schmitt 1999; Holbrook 2000; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Poulsson and Kale 2004; Darmer and Sundbo 2008; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008; Christensen 2009). Consequently, investigating experience marketing and experience consumption related issues is gaining bigger importance in order to have a better grasp of many successful contemporary marketplace strategies, as well as contemporary consumer behavior. Specifically, understanding the characteristics of certain experiences that consumers find more significant is important for creating market encounters that are substantial and successful.

Following on the suggestion by Poulsson and Kale (2004) to investigate intensity as a key characteristic of experiences from which consumers derive a high level of value, the purpose of this research was to explore and test the antecedents of the experiences consumers find to be

intense. This purpose was accomplished by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Qualitative research methodology was utilized to gain deep and culturally informed insights into the antecedents of experiences that contemporary consumers perceive to be superior. Based on qualitative data that was collected through using different data collection techniques to assure triangulation, a theoretical framework and hypotheses were developed. Scale items of each measure that were employed to test the hypotheses were also developed based on the qualitative data. Las Vegas was the context chosen for the qualitative study. Qualitative data was analyzed in the light of the review of literature from the multidisciplinary fields, such as marketing, sociology, anthropology, museum studies, and gameplay studies.

Qualitative data revealed that managers of experiential settings build their contexts, and consumers evaluate the experiential contexts primarily based on two design elements: stories and sensory stimuli. Sensory presentationality, multiple modalities, and spectacularity were found to be the dimensions based on which contemporary consumers evaluate the meaningfulness of the sensory stimuli presented to them (textuality). Narrative presentationality, readability, and appropriability were found to be the dimensions based on which contemporary consumers evaluate the meaningfulness of the stories presented to them (texture). Literature from the various fields mentioned above also supported the significance of these dimensions of the design elements for contemporary consumers.

Qualitative data further revealed that when consumers find the stories and sensory stimuli that are mainly created and provided by marketers meaningful and significant, they are more willing to physically partake in the context, and engage in social interaction with other actors in the context. Furthermore, the findings suggest that when consumers find high level of meanings in stories and sensory stimuli, and when they actively partake in the context, they tend to

experience a sense of immersion. In other words, the experiential setting becomes the sole reality for them at the moment they are inside it. This sense of immersion is found to be the fundamental deriver of consumers' intensity perceptions of their experiences of the context when they leave the setting. Overall, qualitative research methodology allowed grasping the deeper, culturally informed meanings of each of these constructs and the ways they relate to each other.

By demonstrating the pivotal role of immersion in experiential contexts from which consumers derive intense experiences, this research provides some insights into the "reality" perceptions of consumers in market settings. It thus provides insights into the meaning and significance of authenticity for consumers in deriving value from what they experience in consumer environments. It empirically supports Fırat's (2001) proposition that consumers are less interested in the "authentic" when deriving value from many experiential market settings, than in the intensity of what they lived through in the setting.

An important contribution of the present research is that valid and refined scales for each of the constructs proposed in this research and in some other previous research were developed. Utilizing quantitative research methodology, the measures representing the constructs that were proposed based on qualitative research were identified and tested. Quantitative research methodology was utilized also to test the hypotheses about the relationships between the constructs. Las Vegas Strip, Walt Disney World-Florida, and Disneyland-California were selected as the experiential contexts for the quantitative research. The target population included people over 18 years of age and who had been to one of these contexts within the last two years.

Evidence regarding the unidimensionality, reliability, and validity of each of the proposed first order-factors was provided as a result of the quantitative data analysis. Furthermore, evidence regarding the dimensionality, reliability, and validity of the second-order

constructs, texture and textuality, and the third-order factor, context design perception, was provided.

Analysis of quantitative data revealed that even though texture and textuality are distinct constructs whose measures are discrete, they both are primary dimensions that indicate consumers' overall evaluations of experiential context design. Consequently, as might be expected, their correlation with each other is higher than each one's correlation with any of the outcome constructs. The suppression effect that results from this condition made testing the hypotheses of the initially developed model concerning the direct relationships between texture and the outcome variables, and textuality and outcome variables problematic. Consequently, two alternative structural models that are theoretically meaningful were developed and tested. Initially proposed hypotheses about the relationships between texture and textuality, and participation and immersion were restated. A new construct, *context design perception* was added in both alternative models.

In the first alternative model, the context design perception construct was hypothesized as a third-order construct that is reflected by second-order texture and textuality factors, each indicated by three first-order factors. This model was based on the premise that consumers perceive the stories and the sensory stimuli of a context in accordance with each other in their overall evaluation of the context. In the second alternative model, the context design perception construct was hypothesized as a second-order construct that is reflected by all six first-order subdimenions of texture and textuality. In this model, texture and textuality constructs were eliminated from the model. Values of the goodness-of-fit indices demonstrated that the first model where context design perception was conceptualized as the third-order factor showed a more satisfactory fit to the data. Reliability and validity of the high level factors were further

assured. Overall, comparison of all the models, including the initially hypothesized model, showed that consumers evaluate an experiential context based on their perceptions of the meaningfulness of the stories and sensory stimuli provided in the context, but that they also view the meaning and significance of the overall context design as a higher order factor that captures a meaning common to both texture and textuality factors, and their subdimensions.

Concerning the hypotheses testing regarding the model that had the most satisfactory fit to the data, all of the restated hypotheses, and the hypotheses that were borrowed from the initially developed model were supported. Positive and significant relationships between context design perceptions of consumers and their participation level, and their immersion level were found. As well, relationship between participation and immersion, and immersion and experience intensity were found to be positive and significant.

The findings from both qualitative and quantitative studies in the present research as a whole suggest that designing a context that involves meaningful and significant stories and sensory stimuli in experiential consumer environments is pivotal in producing desired outcomes both for consumers and for marketers. These findings validate most of the notions about each of these dimensions suggested by researchers in previous studies concerning experience marketing and consumption. For instance, findings of this research confirm that both the stories and the sensory stimuli are influential in a consumer's evaluation of an experiential context (Kotler 1974; Dholakia and Firat 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Jensen 2006; Carù and Cova 2007b; Darmer 2008; Darmer and Sundbo 2008; Borghini et al. 2009). This study also demonstrates how meanings found in stories and meanings found in sensory stimuli reinforce each other in order to make the whole context more meaningful for the consumer (Dholakia and Firat 1998; Peñaloza 1999; Kozinets et al. 2002; Stapleton et al. 2002; Borghini et al. 2009, Lanier and

Hampton 2009). Findings of this research also confirm that marketer-created context design elements are both a trigger of consumer participation (Beardworth and Bryman 1999; Kotler 1999; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Kozinets 2001; Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Wikström 2008) and a sense of immersion (Addis and Holbrook 2001; Carù and Cova 2003; Fırat 2001; Kozinets 2003; Jensen 2006; Carù and Cova 2007; Carù and Cova 2007b; Lukas 2007b; Darmer 2008). Many propositions put forth about how participation leads to a sense of immersion in experiential consumer environments (Ryan 1994; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Brown and Cairns 2004; Pullman and Gross 2004; Ermi and Mäyrä 2005; Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Borghini et al. 2009) were also confirmed in this research.

This study makes three contributions. First, further than confirming many propositions suggested in various studies on experience creation and consumption, it provides an overall framework to understand the links between many of the propositions suggested in previous exploratory research.

Second, a further important contribution of this study is offering a practical definition of experience that can be utilized in measuring the characteristics of experiences. Even though many marketing scholars talk about the notion of experience, only a few provide a definition of experience in the market contexts (e.g. Pine and Gilmore 1999; Arnould 2007). Yet, these definitions are confounding, and are not very practical form which measures of characteristics of experiences can be developed. Therefore, this study is significant in terms of furthering the empirical investigations in experience marketing and consumption fields.

Finally, it broadens the literature on consumption experiences as ends in themselves. Even though some previous studies on experience marketing and experience consumption have focused on significant consumer experiences, they have mainly focused on experiences that are

spiritual, or transcendental in nature, in other words, which serve a higher level of self-related

goals in the life of the consumer who goes through the experience (Laski 1962; Maslow 1970;

Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Arnould and Price 1993; Jones et al. 2003; Schouten et al. 2007). Yet,

consumers might value and enjoy the experiences they go through in market contexts as ends in

themselves (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Hannigan 1998). The present study on experience

intensity is important as it provides a framework for understanding not only transformational

experiences, but also more mundane experiences which consumers enjoy as end in themselves.

Implications for Researchers

Today, experiential market settings provide a prototype for many market and non-market

settings, including the ones which seem not to be related to experience, such as hospitals or

churches. In many contemporary market settings experience is a differentiating element if not the

focal offering (Berger 1998; Sherry 1998; Peñaloza 1999; Kotler 1999; Pine and Gilmore 1999;

Kozinets et al. 2002; Kozinets et al. 2004; Lonsway 2007; Klingmann 2007; Hollenbeck et al.

200; Sundbo and Hagedorn-Rasmussen 2008). This research provides some potential answers to

the question of how and why experiential market settings provide a prototype to various market

and non-market settings in today's culture. Yet, further research into how different types of

settings utilize the various design elements of these prototypical settings in order to attract their

consumers to participate and to immerse is needed to have a better grasp of the phenomenon of

intense experience creation.

Furthermore, researchers can extend the use of the measures proposed in this research

into more mundane experiential contexts. Therefore, one future research implication is to

understand how antecedents of experience proposed in this study take place and interact with

each other in more mundane experiential contexts, and the level of intensity the consumers derive from their experiences in such contexts.

Another research implication might be that the scales developed and validated in this research can be employed together with other scales developed and validated in previous literature, such as service quality scale. Such an endeavor would contribute to a better understanding of consumers' reactions to various marketing contexts more fully.

Findings of the qualitative research also provide some insights into the "reality" and "fantasy" perceptions of consumers. It demonstrates how authenticity feelings are created by marketers, and perceived by consumers in the marketplace (Lukas 2007b) through an alignment of fantasy and reality as a result of designing stories and sensory stimuli of the context in certain ways. The feeling of "authenticity" created and perceived by consumers in the marketplace (Benedikt 2001) is a significant topic in consumer research field for developing an understanding of what consumers seek and desire in market settings. Intensity of experience might be investigated as a key source of this feeling. Consequently, further research can be undertaken to investigate the significance and creation of authenticity feelings in experiential settings based on the construct of experience intensity and its antecedent constructs discussed in this research.

Moreover, experience intensity may be related in predictable ways to other consumption-related phenomena. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggest that successful experiences are those that the consumer wants "… to repeat and build upon, and enthusiastically promotes via word of mouth." (p. 553). It is also suggested that consumers are willing to pay more for experiences that they find meaningful (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999; Diller et al. 2005). Consequently, these potential relationships between experience intensity and such outcomes offer additional suggestions for future research. In the qualitative data it was observed that some consumers who

were suspicious before their visit to the experiential context of focus were converted to satisfied consumers as a result of the intensity of their experiences. Therefore, one significant outcome of experience intensity to investigate might be the evaporation of negative preconceptions of consumers. As well, again regarding the experiential context of focus in the qualitative part of this study, it was observed that such contexts have the potential to exceed very high expectations of consumers. Therefore, it would be important to investigate the intensity of experiences consumer derive from a context as a key source of high level of consumer delight.

One other research implication might be exploring additional evidence regarding the predictive ability of the experience intensity measure versus other measures that focus on understanding significant consumer experiences (e.g. transcendental experience).

The relationship between certain consumer characteristics and experience intensity and its antecedents could also be investigated in future research. For example, autotelic personality of the consumer defined by Hoffman and Novak (1996) as "who is able to enjoy what he is doing regardless of whether he will get external rewards from it and who thus is more likely to experience flow for a given activity", or postmodern orientations of the consumer (Firat and Shultz 2001) could be investigated in relation to experience intensity perception of the consumer and its antecedents.

Implications for Practitioners

In today's intensifying competition in the market, managers must look beyond material products or services to differentiate their offerings from that of their competitors (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Verhoef et al. 2009). As discussed in detail in the introduction chapter, today experience has become a key offering for many marketers to attract consumers and make them return repeatedly, to grab the consumers' attention for a longer time, to make the consumers

spend more in their contexts, and to motivate them talk positively about what they live through in their contexts. As such, the findings of this research might be of important to marketers, of both experiential settings and settings in which the focal offering is not experience, to differentiate their businesses from the businesses of their competitors by creating contexts from which their consumers can derive intense experiences. Yet, it should be kept in mind that creating intense experience is not necessary for every business. When more practical and functional issues are the focus of the business and its competitive strategy, experience creation may be a waste of time and money.

Furthermore, different businesses might have different minor and major pursuits in their endeavors to create contexts from which consumers derive experiences. The antecedents of experience intensity and their sub-dimensions proposed and validated in this research might have different importance in different market settings. The practitioners need to ask which dimensions are more relevant for their specific contexts. If they already use some of these aspects in their contexts, they can ask how they can intensify their impact by utilizing some other dimensions in creating more positive contexts for their consumers from which they can derive superior experiences.

Consequently, to create the type of intensity that they want their consumers to feel during contact with businesses, marketers first need to ask at this point what kinds of superior experiences do consumers derive from the context their businesses provide to their consumer, and what the sources of the superiority of these experiences are. Managers can employ the instruments offered in this research to measure experience intensity and its antecedences for these purposes. Another question they need to ask is what they can do to help their consumers achieve superior experiences. The instruments provided in this research might also help them

with diagnosing their weaknesses on each of the dimensions and with deciding what aspects of their contexts or experiential offerings they can make stronger.

Investigating correlations between experience intensity, its antecedents, its outcomes and some demographic variables may increase the practical utilization of these constructs. For example, marketing communication strategies, where different promises are delivered for different segments, might be developed more effectively by taking the insights gained from exploring these correlations into consideration.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study concerns a limitation in the conceptualization of experience intensity. Even the concept of intensity might refer both to positive and negative experiences; in this research experience intensity is examined with respect to positive experiences. This limitation should be taken into consideration when making inferences based on the findings of this research.

Additionally, the limitations of the empirical research conducted in this study should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings and making inferences based on these findings. The limitations of the present research are mainly rooted in the research methods employed, selection of the informants for the qualitative data collection and respondents for the survey research, and the specific contexts chosen for the study.

The sampling method employed for selecting informants for the qualitative interviews was convenience sampling. Even though employing this method enabled selecting informants who were more knowledgeable and who were more willing to share their experiences, the data may not fully reflect the perspectives of the target sample.

Self-administered online survey methodology was employed for collecting the quantitative data for this study. Therefore, respondents for this research were constituted only of people who have Internet access. Yet, there might be consumers of Las Vegas, Walt Disney World-Florida, and Disneyland-California who are not Internet users and who could not be reached through this data collection method. Also, the problems the researcher encountered during collecting data online on social media sites, which were described in detail in the methodology section, constitute another source of limitations of this research. Non-response bias occurs when a significant number of people in the survey sample do not respond and have relevant characteristics that differ from those who do respond (Dillman, 2000). Some of the non-response groups, such as the oned who had been to one of these contexts more than two years ago, addressed in the methodology section are not of interest in this study, so that they are not considered to introduce a nonresponse bias. Yet, some of the non-repondent groups might have led to a non-reponse bias for this study. For example, people who had been to one of these contexts within the last two years, but are not enthusiastic about their experiences and sharing them, so did not respond the survey, might have created a non-response bias.

Overall, the impossibility of estimating the exact response rate and estimating the non-response bias by testing for differences between respondents and non-repondents is a limitation of this study that resulted from employing online data collection method. In addition, even though the researcher made every effort to randomize the selection of survey respondents, the groups from which the respondents were randomly selected were not randomly selected. These are groups that specifically focus on the contexts of interest in this study. Thus, the sample drawn from these groups might not completely be representative of the target sample. This is another limitation of this study.

Another limitation is that individual-level data was collected in this study. Yet, the focus is individual's perceptions, feelings, senses, and imaginations; therefore, the researcher asserts that the data of the present research is valid.

Another limitation relates to data collection at a single point in time, which does not allow for capturing the changes in perceptions and attitudes over time. For this reason, a longitudinal study where consumers' multiple trips and their perceptions of their experience intensity are investigated are needed and recommended to further test the relationships found in the present study.

Lastly, since this study is mainly exploratory in nature, the contexts of focus were rather extreme experiential contexts. The unique characteristics of these contexts may have affected the results. As suggested in the implications for researchers section, extending the use of the measures developed in this research into some other mundane experiential contexts is recommended to further validate the measures and to further test the relationships found in the present study.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER

Dear *Name or Nickname of the visitor as stated on Facebook or in the travelblog*:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Texas-Pan American. I am conducting my dissertation research on visitors' X experiences. As I have read on your Las Vegas Facebook Page / on your travel blog entry, you have been to Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland within last year and you are above 18 years old. I would appreciate a lot if you help me by answering the questions in my survey in the link that you can find below. The survey takes approximately 8 minutes to fill out. This research is purely for academic purposes, it has nothing to do with businesses in Las Vegas and I am not earning any money for conducting this research. Your responses may be shared with other researchers in the future, but will not contain any information that could identify you. Thank you and please let me know if you have any questions.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

LAS VEGAS / WALT DISNEY WORLD / DISNEYLAND TRIP

1. Have you taken this survey before?   Yes   No

Page 1 Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland Senses

Please click the number that best represents your reaction to each statement below (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neither Agree, Nor Disagree, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Agree, 7=Strongly Agree)

Please think about the ELEMENTS THAT STIMULATED YOUR SENSES (VISUALS, SOUNDS, SMELLS, TASTES, AND THINGS YOU TOUCHED) during the attractions, events, activities, sites and shows you explored on the Strip. The words "THEY" and "THEM" that take place in the following statements REFER TO THESE ELEMENTS (VISUALS, SOUNDS, SMELLS, TASTES, AND THINGS YOU TOUCHED) you explored on the Strip.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They were unique							
My senses were aroused in ways I cannot remember experiencing in other places							
My senses were pleasantly surprised							
I would not have believed many of them if I hadn't encountered them							
Each of them used many detailed elements							
Each of them was rich in its features							
I found great variety in each of them							
Each engaged my senses in multiple ways							
They were exciting beyond words							
X was like a dream world of sensory wonders							

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They were very sensational							
They were out of this world							
They had a 'wow' effect on me							

Page 2 Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland Stories

Next, as you respond to the following statements, please think about the ACTIVITIES, EVENTS, ATTRACTIONS, SHOWS, AND SITES YOU EXPLORED ON THE STRIP. The words "THEY" and "THEM" that appear in the following statements REFER TO THESE EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, AND SITES

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
They provoked new thoughts about things I already knew							
They informed me about things I didn't know before							
They made me have thoughts I never had before							
They made me imagine things I never imagined before							
They inspired thoughts impossible to express							
I clearly understood the messages they convey							
It was easy to associate them with what I already knew of similar events, activities and sites							
The messages communicated in them were easily recognizable							
The messages they had made a lot of sense to me							
It was easy for me to grasp the elements in their messages							
They had many features which I had learned about in movies, TV shows, books, magazines, and other media							
They allowed me to have my own interpretations							
I found that I could play with their meanings to create my own meaning							
They made it easy for me to make X experience my own							
I was able to create my own meanings for each of them							

Page 3 Las Vegas / Walt Disney World / Disneyland Behaviors

Now, please think about how you *behaved* and *felt* during your Las Vegas Strip exploration.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
I felt like I was a performer in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X							
I was highly involved in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X							
I was physically engaged in many of the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X							
I interacted with people in the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X							
I was active in many activities, events, attractions and sites in X							
When I was in X, the activities, events, attractions, and sites there became my only reality							
I lost track of time when I was experiencing the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X							
I lost sense of the rest of the world when I was experiencing the activities, events, attractions, and sites in X							
I found myself completely caught up in the events, activities, and sites in X							
I felt as if I was in another world when I was in X							

Page 4 After the Las Vegas/Walt Disney World/Disneyland Trip

Next, please consider your thoughts, feelings, senses, and imaginations AFTER YOUR TRIP to the Strip as you evaluate the following statements

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
My experience of X was extremely powerful							
After my visit, I felt extremely delighted for having Been at X							
My excitement after my visit to X was extremely powerful							
After my visit, I was left feeling that I thoroughly enjoyed the activities, events, attractions, and sites at X							

Page 5 About you

What is your sex?   Female_____   Male_____

What year were you born? _____

When was the last time you visited the Las Vegas Strip? _____

How many times have you visited the Las Vegas Strip?

1-3_____   3-5_____   5-7_____

7-10_____   More than 10_____

What is your total household income in US dollars?

$Under $20.000 ___ $20.000-29.999___ $30.000-39.999___

$40.000-49.999___ $50.000-59.999___ $60.000-69.999___

$70.000-79.999___ $80.000-89.000___ $90.000-99.999___

$100.000-149.000___ $150.000 and over___

What is your occupation?

Upper management___   Middle management___   Junior management___

Administrative staff ___   Support staff___   Student___

Trained professional___   Skilled laborer___   Consultant___

Temporary employee___   Researcher___   Self-employed___

Other___

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School or less___   Attended some college___

Undergraduate college degree___   Graduate Degree (Master's or Doctoral) ___

What is your marital status?

Single___   Married___

Divorce/Separated___   Widowed___

Living with a partner___

Which one describes where you live right now better?

Urban___   Suburban___   Rural___

What is your nationality? _____

What is your ethnicity?

American Indian / Native American___   Asian___

Black / African American___   Hispanic / Latino___

White / Caucasian ___   Pacific Islander___

Other__

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ebru Ulusoy Akgun was born in Istanbul, Turkey, on October 18, 1978. She grew up in Istanbul where she finished her high school education in 1996 and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations and Advertising from Istanbul University, School of Communication in 2000. She received her Master of Science Degree in Production Management and Marketing in 2002 from Marmara University, Istanbul. During her undergraduate and masters studies, she worked for a television channel as a Production Assistant and in a Public Relations Agency as an account representative. After she received her master's degree, she started the doctoral program in Public Relations and Advertising at Istanbul University. She worked as a Graduate Assistant at the same school until 2006. She decided to further her education in the United States and earned a doctoral degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing from The University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas, in August 2011.

Ebru has been an active member of various professional organizations such as Association for Consumer Research and American Marketing Association. She has presented her research at various national conferences in the Marketing field. She also has three journal publications in the Marketing field. During her graduate studies, she worked on different academic positions at UTPA such as teaching assistant, research assistant, and instructor. At present, she is working at The University of Maine in Orono, Maine as an Assistant Professor of Marketing.