

CUSTOMER DELIGHT: THE BEAT OF A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

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ABSTRACT

This paper extends current research on customer satisfaction by addressing the construct of customer delight. We view consumption as performance (e.g., Deighton 1992), acknowledging that customer delight can result from product/service performance or the enactment of the consumer's performance in a consumption venue. In addition to the expectations-confirmation model of customer satisfaction, we apply social facilitation theory to the study of customer delight. Specifically, social facilitation theory provides an alternative explanation of the arousal → positive affect → customer delight sequence in that the exogenous catalyst of customer delight is the consumer's performance versus the product's performance. Research propositions are delineated and field notes from participant-observation of a woman's drumming workshop serve as a preliminary exploration of consumption performance and delight. In essence, this paper explores the delight of a different drummer.

INTRODUCTION

Deighton (1992) theorizes that consumption can be viewed as performance: consumers attend performances, consumers participate in performances, consumers perform with products, and products perform for consumers. The performance of a product can be evaluated through an attribute analysis or the consumers' emotional responses (Oliver 1980; Cadotte, Woodruff, and Jenkins 1987; Westbrook and Oliver 1991). In either case, the relationship traditionally of interest in the customer satisfaction literature is that between the consumer and the product's performance. Yet, by shifting the focus of inquiry to the consumer's performance, a company may be evaluated not only in terms of the ability of its product performance to satisfy or delight, but also in terms of its ability to provide a venue for the enactment of the consumer's own performance.

In this paper, we argue that in addition to choosing and evaluating products and services,

consumers also choose and react to venues that provide an opportunity for the enactment of their own performances. In viewing consumption as performance, the paradoxical situation may arise in which a marketer can be successful even if its staged product does not particularly "satisfy" or "delight" its customers. The enactment of consumers' own performances may be the catalyst for customer satisfaction or delight. This explains, for example, repeat customer patronage of sporting events for losing teams (Holt 1995). It is the opportunity to "be a fan" and interact with other fans that enhances the consumption appeal.

This paper responds to the call for more customer delight research (e.g., Oliver and Rust 1997). We explore customer delight from two perspectives -- the expectations-confirmation paradigm and social facilitation theory. The expectations-confirmation paradigm provides a perspective on consumer delight based on the product's performance. Social facilitation theory provides a perspective on consumer delight based on the consumer's performance through a particular consumption venue. Our paper is divided into four sections. First, we review extant customer delight and product performance research. Second, we extend existing research by applying social facilitation theory to the study of customer delight. Third, we present preliminary analysis of customer's response to product and consumer performance at a drumming workshop for women. Finally, we provide suggestions and implications for future research.

CUSTOMER DELIGHT AND PRODUCT PERFORMANCE

Traditional customer satisfaction research has focused on satisfaction as a function of product-attribute performance (or service quality) and customer expectations (Oliver 1980; Oliver and DeSarbo 1988; Bolton and Drew 1991; Cronin and Taylor 1992). Some researchers have conceptualized satisfaction as a judgement of performance levels as compared to expectations using a better-than/worse-than heuristic, called the disconfirmation model of consumer satisfaction

(Oliver 1977). Substantial evidence for the disconfirmation process is documented in the consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction literature. Other researchers have conceptualized satisfaction based on the emotional response to the judged disparity between product performance and a corresponding normative standard or expectation (Cadotte, Woodruff, and Jenkins 1987). A growing body of literature supports the inclusion of affect in the analysis of customer satisfaction (Westbrook and Oliver 1991).

An implicit assumption of existing models of customer satisfaction is that satisfaction states exist along a unidimensional continuum of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. A unidimensional view of customer satisfaction indicates that consumer expectations can be met (simple confirmation), unmet (negative disconfirmation), or exceeded (positive disconfirmation). Thus, high levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction can exist along the continuum. Similarly, from an affective perspective, emotional responses to the disparity between product performance and expectations may range from unemotional to highly emotional. For example, Westbrook and Oliver (1991) found that automobile owners experienced varying levels of satisfaction. Emotional responses to automobile purchases ranged from surprise to contentment or unemotional responses.

In contrast to the established streams of research on customer satisfaction, vague reference is made to customer delight. Consumer behavior research alludes to findings of high positive affect, pleasant surprise, and elation. However, a search of the marketing literature indicates that customer delight is examined as a distinct theoretical construct in only two recent academic publications.

The two existing academic publications in marketing that examine customer delight support an explicit distinction between satisfaction and delight. Kumar and Olshavsky (1997) presented the results of an empirical study of customer delight and satisfaction at the 1997 Advances in Consumer Research Conference. Their investigation was designed to examine how consumers defined and experienced satisfaction and delight. Results indicated that satisfaction was associated with subjects' expectation being met, subjects feeling they got "fair" value, and subjects feeling contented, while delight was associated

with subjects feeling surprised, their expectations being exceeded, and feelings of elation.

Oliver and Rust (1997) offer an initial exploration of the measure of customer delight by integrating disconfirmation theory and theories of affect and emotion. They define consumer delight as a function of surprising consumption (arousal) and positive affect. Based on two service field studies (at an amusement park and music concert), they modeled delight and satisfaction as parallel outcome of surprising satisfaction and disconfirmation. They found support for the proposition that unexpected high levels of satisfaction or performance initiate an arousal → positive affect → delight sequence. However, mixed support is found for the hypothesis that delight is a combined result of pleasure and arousal. Also, the effect of delight on intentions appears to be moderated by the service context.

As evidenced in customer satisfaction research and the seminal work on customer delight, consumer attribute response is predictive of customer delight. Traditionally, product/service attributes are the determining factor of customer satisfaction in that consumers, practitioners, and researchers find benefit in an attribute-level product evaluation. Consumers are likely to render evaluations of their information search and post-purchase experience of satisfaction at an attribute level. Practitioners are likely to find diagnostics of customer feedback more useful at the attribution level. Researchers are afforded a higher level of specificity using product attributes.

The attribute level analysis is critical to an understanding of whether and how a consumer achieves satisfaction (Bolton and Drew 1991; Hanson 1992; Wilkie and Pessemier 1973). For example, Mittal and Ross (1998) explore the asymmetric relationship between attribute-level performance, overall satisfaction and repurchase intentions in marketing. Their study results indicate that attribute satisfaction significantly affects overall satisfaction with the product or service and attribute dissatisfaction has a larger weight than attribute satisfaction.

We propose that an asymmetrical relationship exists between customer delight and product attributes. Specifically, surprising performance on an expected attribute versus surprising performance on an unexpected product/service

attributes will have an asymmetrical impact on customer delight. Cognitively and emotionally, positive performance on attributes that are **not** part of the consumer's prior knowledge or attribute set have the most potential for increasing the experience of delight. For example, in renting a hotel room at the beach, a consumer may go in with expectations about price, room service, food services, location (e.g., beachfront), transportation (e.g., van travel from the airport). If the hotel lives up to the consumer's expectations on these dimensions, the consumer will be satisfied with his or her consumption experience. However, the consumer may not know that the hotel provides free use of snorkeling gear, rafts and surfboards, and on-the-beach food and beverage catering services. The surprise and satisfaction these unforeseen attributes bring to the consumption experience are more likely to result in a feeling of delight above and beyond satisfaction.

P1: Positive performance on an unanticipated satisfying product/service attributes will have a significantly greater impact on customer delight than positive performance on an anticipated or expected product/service attribute.

CUSTOMER DELIGHT AND SOCIAL FACILITATION

There is considerable evidence in the social psychology literature that individuals perform better in a group situation than when they are alone and this phenomena is referred to as social facilitation. Social facilitation theory (Zajonc 1965, 1980) assumes that the presence of other people increases the energy of performers, makes them more alert and more motivated, and will result in positive affect because others fill the time in distracting and/or entertaining ways. Higher performance levels are achieved because the presence of others in a performance situation increases arousal and positive affect, and, in turn, affects performance outcomes.

Social facilitation research has found, for example, that people in groups remained significantly longer in coffeehouses than did lone individuals (Sommer and Sommer 1989) and that the size of the drinking group determined time

spent in the pub (Graves, Graves, Semu, and Sam 1982). Granbois (1968) found that group shoppers tend to spend more time in retail stores than lone shoppers. Whereas these groups may be preselected (e.g., friends, professional colleagues), groups of strangers may also form for consumption purposes. Social facilitation theory suggest that, other things being equal, groups will remain longer in a setting than will lone individuals and will engage in more activities positively associated with the consumption experience (Sommer and Sommer 1989).

By viewing consumption as performance and acknowledging social facilitation effects, an alternative way of framing the consumer delight process emerges. When consumers perform, the presence of others can initiate the arousal → positive affect → delight sequence.

The presence of other people can also be intrusive, generating negative affect. Social intrusion is a term used to signify that performers did worse in the presence of others. When customers are waiting for many services, the groups that form are not always voluntary. If others are unwelcome, then a negative affective state may result. Models of over-stimulation (Baum and Paulus 1987) have suggested that environments that expose individuals to unwanted or uncontrolled intrusions are associated with negative affect. Customers may feel intruded on when others are engaging in behaviors such as smoking or loud talking or when a setting is perceived to be crowded (Hui and Bateson 1991).

Zajonc (1965, 1980) helped resolve the mystery of mixed results concerning performance and the presence of others. He noted that in social situations, people tend to perform better when their task is simple or well learned (e.g., something they could successfully accomplish with relative ease) but tend to do more poorly when the task is complicated (e.g., something that is difficult for them to perform). The following two propositions relate the presence of others and the performance ease/difficulty to customer delight:

P2: The more other customers in the consumption environment are welcomed by consumers the more positive the affect and the higher the customer delight.

P3: Easy (difficult) consumer performance in the presence of others will be associated with more positive (negative) affect and higher (lower) customer delight.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to examine customer delight from both the expectancy-confirmation paradigm and social facilitation theory, we needed a consumption setting in which product performance and consumer performance were salient. The consumption setting chosen for the study was a drumming workshop for women. The two-day workshop was advertised nationally on various web sites and through a variety of music stores. The workshop was held in North Carolina and scheduled for a Friday night (7pm-10pm) and Saturday (10am-4pm) during the month of March. A partial description of the workshop and biography of workshop facilitator, Ubaka Hill, taken from a flyer is as follows:

Drumsong workshop is the exploration of rhythm and vibrations. Learn complete drum songs based on various cultural rhythmic styles. We will focus on developing and improving playing techniques, breathing, tonal clarity, concentration, dexterity, tone, time and variation dynamics, creative inventiveness, vocalizing, and community drumming...

Ubaka Hill - native New Yorker, percussionist, vocalist, songwriter, poet, teacher. Her specific focus as a teacher is to encourage, motivate and create forums that will re-integrate womyn and girls into the varied experiences of individual and community drumming as a woman's birth-right; to re-connect with our ancient female-centered drumming traditions and reestablish ourselves as a part of this continuum.

Research Method

An interpretive method was chosen to explore the social aspects of the consumption venue and consumers' responses to their own consumption performance. We used introspection as a research method, specifically researcher introspection (e.g.,

Gould, 1991). Introspection research has a number of variations, all of which involve at least one individual providing verbal data on aspects of his/her experience that are consciously available to the introspector but not directly observable by another person. Researcher introspection is the form of introspection in which the researcher studies him/herself; the researcher and subject/informant are the same person, and there are no other subjects/informants (e.g., Hirschman 1990; Holbrook 1986, 1987; Lehmann 1987; Pollay 1987, Scammon 1987; Williams 1992). Although researcher introspection has several limitations (e.g., Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993), we apply it here to provide a beginning point in discussions about consumption performance and customer delight. Twenty-one women of various age and ethnic backgrounds attended the workshop. Direct quotes are reported although the participant names have been changed for confidentiality.

Expectancy-Confirmation and Consumption Delight

I held expectations about the workshop in terms of drumming instruction, the workshop facilitator expertise, and the consumption environment. The workshop was held on the grounds of a church. One of the smaller buildings on the site was used as our drumming area; Saturday's lunch was catered in an adjacent building. We sat in a semi-circle with Ubaka Hill, the workshop facilitator, at the center. The building was not acoustically designed for drumming, but the space was clean, well lit, comfortable, with easy access to restrooms and the adjacent dining area. The landscaping was visually appealing with an abundance of mature trees and plants. Friday night's weather was clear and cool. Saturday was a warm spring-like day, sunny and bright.

Expected Workshop Attributes. As expected, over the course of the two days, we learned specific drumming techniques, the facilitator was friendly and knowledgeable, and the setting was pleasant. By the close of the workshop on Saturday we were able to play 4 different songs. We received proper instruction on

drumming techniques. Ubaka would instruct us on the three to five parts of any particular song. We would choose the part we wanted to play, with encouragement from Ubaka to experiment. I remember hearing our novice group play and it all coming together to make "drumsong."

We also discussed the history of women and drums. As promoted in the workshop flyer, we connected drumming with breathing and creativity. Workshop participants were encouraged to reconnect with the female-centered drumming tradition. As expected, I felt reconnected with my vital energy/spirit and a sense of community with the other workshop participants.

Unexpected Workshop Attributes. Before the Friday evening session began, women milled around the tables where "drum stuff" was on sale. The name of one of the manufacturers of the products displayed was actually "drum stuff." Through "small talk" I learned that the vendors were workshop participants who labeled themselves as beginner/intermediate drummers. On display were drum straps (for holding your drum), drum hats (for covering for your drum skin), and drummer's hand cream (for massaging hands and drum skins). One of the vendors/workshop participants was a drum-maker. She sat tightening the drum skin on one of her hand-made drums while answering questions from a number of workshop participants about the manufacture, price, and attributes of the drums for sale.

One of my unexpected experiences was building a drumming vocabulary. I was fascinated to learn that one could "dress" a drum and "talk" to a drum. To my surprise I was building a drumming vocabulary that would include popular and traditional terminology. Phatic communication, a special communication within cultural groups, understood by insiders, that provides a transcendent or special identity by signaling cultural membership (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993). Developing a drumming vocabulary was not an expected attribute of the workshop, yet I felt special and connected to the workshop experience and the larger drumming community because of my newly formed vocabulary.

I was surprised at Ubaka's level of self-disclosure in that she went beyond discussing her drumming background but also volunteered

information about herself and she volunteered to help with our drumming interest in various ways. For example, she shared her visions of a robust female-centered drumming community. On Saturday morning, after a short meditation and review of drumming technique, Ubaka shared with us her vision of an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey show. The enthusiastic group took up the cause, discussing how electronic mail could be used to show Oprah the level of interest in the community, and how drumming fits Oprah's "remembering spirit" theme.

The level of personal contact with Ubaka that was available to us was unexpected in other ways. She volunteered to look at our drums during the break to assess them for us if we desired such an assessment. She also offered to show us how to strap the drums on and care for the drum skin. At the end of the workshop, she autographed compact disc and audio-tape covers.

Social Facilitation and Consumption Delight

Social facilitation refers to enhanced performance in the presence of others. Field notes relating to the social motives for workshop participants are analyzed first. Then observations regarding the complexity of the drumming instruction and the resulting impact on customer delight are summarized.

Participants Social Motives. From the moment I heard drummers at an African Dance over a decade ago I had a desire to learn how to drum. The drumming that complemented the dance class was vibrant and moving. I have enrolled in a number of African dance classes in various cities. The drummers have always been male. I was left wondering if any drummers were women and if I could be a drummer.

It was not until a year ago that I happened upon a compact disc recording of a female drummer -- Ubaka Hill. The compact disc was entitled "Shapeshifters" and had tracks with names like "sistory," "the womyn united," and "if the drum is a woman." The cover featured Ubaka, an African American woman with hair woven in nubian locks, surrounded by a mosaic of plant and animal life. Listening to Ubaka's compact disc confirmed my question of the existence of women

drummers and affirmed my interest in drumming. I thought drumming would be a creative pastime and a way of connecting with my higher self and other women.

The workshop facilitator also reinforced social linkages via her description of drumming history. She spoke of the history of women as drummers and referenced our mothers', mothers', mothers' legacy of drumming. She recommended a book by Layne Redmond (1997) entitled, "When The Drummers Were Women." Layne Redmond provides a perspective on the shared consumption legacy of women and drums:

"In modern times, drummers have been almost exclusively men, but more and more women are rediscovering their ancient birthright. Every year there are more professional women percussionists. And yet at the same time many women are returning to the drum not for a profession but to recover an important spiritual connection to health and to one another that has been lost - a connection buried but somehow instantly familiar (p.1)."

I observed how Ubaka managed group performance by emphasizing the importance of every "voice" and the interconnectedness of the drumming in the creation of drumsong.

During the lunch break on Saturday, I questioned a number of the workshop attendees about their interest in drumming and their motive for attending the workshop. Nicole, an African American female about 23 years of age, was a college student majoring in African American Studies at a predominately white university in North Carolina. She had written a story about Ubaka in the college newspaper. When I asked her about her interest in the workshop, she indicated that she was given a drum by a female acquaintance who said that she "should be drumming." Nicole said she wanted to improve her skill and also hoped she could get a job working with Ubaka as her assistant.

Although Nicole was the first participant that I questioned, as my inquiries proceeded, a similar pattern emerged generally. Many of the workshop participants spoke of social motives to attend as well as other unique motives. For example, Joan said she attended the drum workshop as an

alternative creative outlet. A knee injury prevented her from dancing. Joan was a middle-aged white woman who confessed a loved for dance and felt that she could still enjoy the music and rhythms associated with dance through drumming. She considered herself an intermediate drummer and had participated in a number of similar workshops. When asked what her primary goal was, she responded that it was "to improve her drumming technique." She continued stating, "I don't get the chance to drum with others as much as I would like to."

Patricia, an African American female in her early thirties, lamented that she "didn't want her drum to sit idle in a corner, like an unused piece of furniture." She had recently returned from a trip to Ghana where she had purchased her drum. She mentioned that this was her first exposure to a drumming workshop and was "ecstatic about the opportunity to connect with other female drummers." In addition to having a chance to play her drum, Janice wanted to start a drumming circle so she could play more frequently and thought she could recruit women at the workshop. Tanya, the drum-maker, was interested in connecting with potential clients as well as improving her technique.

In this consumption venue, it appears that other consumers were most welcomed and appreciated. Many of the participants explicitly desired a shared consumption experience. More explicit inquiry and analysis would be needed to fully explicate consumption goals (e.g., Houston and Walker 1996; Pervin 1989) and their differential impact on customer delight.

Complexity of the Consumption Performance. In terms of arousal and positive affect from consumption performance, my energetic and enthusiastic response to drumming with and without technique is consistent with an important observation by Zajonc (1965, 1980). As previously mentioned, Zajonc helped resolve the mystery of mixed results concerning performance and the presence of others. He noted that in social situations, people tend to perform better when their task is simple or well learned (e.g., something they could successfully accomplish with relative ease) but tend to do more poorly when the task is complicated (e.g., something that is

difficult for them to perform).

I had expected the first night to be mostly lecture with a little time for drumming at the end. To my surprise we commenced drumming very early into the night and we alternated drumming and discussion in equal, short intervals. Within 10 minutes of the opening session Ubaka Hill had the group drumming. We began with drumming to accompany our breathing, our centering, and our meditation on our personal participation goals. I found myself enthusiastically beating my drum (without any type of technique), enjoying the contact with the drumskin, and the idea that I was on the "drummers path."

Within an hour of the start of the evening session we had moved on to drumming to the tune of the American classic, row-row-row-your-boat. We played together and were also staggered playing, as is traditionally done when performing row-row-row-your-boat. There was much laughter from the group and clapping as we acknowledged our successful rendition of this summer camp song. I was pleased that we began with such a familiar tune. My confidence increased as well as my consumption energy (Gould 1991).

We continued into the night learning drumming techniques, ending with a rendition of Oya's song, a tribute to the Goddess of Change, written and recorded by Ubaka on her first compact disc. The complexity of this song far surpassed that of row-row-row-your-boat. However, as we played together, each person choosing one of four possible parts to play, the song's melody was discernable and the harmony was clear. As I drove home that night, I remember feeling aroused - elated and thrilled as one might after completing a high risk activity (e.g., Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993). The experience was so memorable that I heard drumming in my sleep.

In this consumption venue, the performance task began as a extremely easy task of hitting the drum. The facilitator increased the difficulty in very small increments, moving from drumming without technique, to the rendition of a camp song, and finally to the rendition of a drumsong. Consistent with social facilitation theory, I found that the ease with which I could perform and claim being a successful drummer was associated with positive affect. The public nature of my performance was arousing. I was truly delighted,

aroused and feeling very positive about my experience at the workshop.

RESEARCH AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to the technical or functional aspects of a product or service, as evidenced in this exploratory study, customer delight is also affected by a customer's interaction with other customers. The customer-to-customer interaction had implications for marketing researchers interested in the study of customer satisfaction and delight and implications for practitioners. The following discussion of research and managerial implication provides some direction for the exploration of these two sources of customer delight.

Research Issues

Consumer delight research is in its infancy. Based on the wealth of information on customer satisfaction, we believe that the attribute approach has value in the study of consumer delight. As evidenced in the satisfaction research, consumers, practitioners, and researchers find benefit in an attribute-level product evaluation. Consumers are likely to render evaluations of their information search and post-purchase experience at an attribute level. Practitioners are likely to find diagnostics of customer feedback useful at the attribution level. Researchers are afforded a higher level of specificity using product attributes. Thus we believe that attribute analysis based on the expectations-confirmation paradigm can be appropriately applied to gain a better understanding the customer delight process.

Because the links between consumption as performance and consumer delight are relatively unexplored, a variety of methods will be necessary to test the propositions offered in this paper. Field studies, field experiments, and laboratory experiments all can make important contributions. Factors that influence the choice of research strategies include the researchers' access to field sites, cost, ability to provide adequate experimental control, and ease of manipulating environmental conditions. We need to learn what aspects and forms of consumer performance provide diversions

strong enough to override product performance (e.g., concerts versus parks). Control for interactions of various effects in the consumption venue is needed (e.g., friends versus strangers) and the possibility that one element may be so salient to consumers that it overshadows another element (e.g., the number of other consumers). In addition, an examination of the effects of consumer characteristics such as race and gender on the relationship between consumption performance and consumer delight is needed. For example, individual differences in affinity-seeking may moderate the relationships between consumption performance and customer delight.

Managerial Issues

Other customers become the audience or participants in an enacted consumption performance. Thus, customer compatibility (or lack thereof) has real effects on consumer delight and is a matter of concern among customers and for marketing practitioners. The consumption venue can be used to foster compatible customer-to-customer relationships. As a foundation to managing customer interactions, the more homogeneous the market, the less likely conflicts will occur between customers. Therefore, firms that serve more than one market will want to minimize interaction between different groups of customers.

Firms can manage customer performance by engineering the environment to maximize the probability of interaction between "similar others." For example, seating can be arranged in small circular designs to promote conversations. Areas can be designated for consumers with similar issues. For example, Pediatricians often will designate a sick-child waiting room versus a well-child waiting room. Practitioners may also need to enforce codes of conduct for customers based on the consumption setting as done, for example, in fitness centers and restaurants. Finally, employees may also need training to manage potential customer-to-customer contact and conflict.

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