

Between lived and endured experience: the role of space in a sensitive consumption experience field

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Abstract

Our research explores the sensitive consumption experience of an urban space, the Place Saint Pierre in Toulouse. We introduce the notion of consumption experience field to respond to the specificities encountered in the field: the co-presence of consumers and non-consumers in the same consumption space. We analyze the structures and mechanisms of the production of a sensory experience, both lived and endured, in a given consumer experience field. The notion of space is important to the analysis and invites us to propose the following theoretical questions: what are the different modalities of the studied experience? In a given field of experience, does the configuration of space determine the sensitive modalities of the experience?

To answer these questions, we first review the literature relating to the space experience in marketing. The literature on experiential marketing presents an active consumer. Its action is analyzed through the notion of "co-production" of experience. This notion refers to the idea that a consumer experience is generated by the encounter between consumers and various environments. How then to account for those who are not invited to the consumer experience, passive individuals and non-consumers yet present to the consumption experience? The notion of field of experience can provide an answer, by decentering the perspective of the researcher of subjects to the field of experience.

We then present the field study, based on an ethnographic approach. This method offers interesting perspectives: a global approach through the intersection of several investigative techniques, a researcher's view that aims not to isolate factors in order to establish causal relationships, but seeks to grasp the significant structure of the situation, behind the proliferation of individual and collective behavior. The data collection is designed to produce qualitative data from the studied situation, so as to seize it according to several points of view, of which that of the researcher.

The data are analyzed according to the principles of phenomenology. This philosophical path explores the human experience, the relationships we have with our environment and especially space. We refer to a structural conception of phenomenology, according to which it is not limited to a description of isolated experiences, but articulates them within a more global structure. We analyze the experience on the sensitive dimension to understand the role of space and try to identify the articulations between the different modalities of possible experience, including endured experience. Data analysis involves going back and forth between the sensitive perspectives of individuals and a vision of the field of experience as a whole.

The results are structured as follows: The consumption experience field is analyzed as « spatial unity », « bar cluster » and « struggle field ». Into this consumption experience field, consumers and non-consumers are co-present? Four modalities of sensitive experience are identified, using a semiotic square to analyze the data: 1) positively lived experience; 2) negatively lived experience; 3) endured experience; and 4) non-endured experience. The definition of the consumption experience field, including non-consumers within it, allows us to identify the endured experience: the way non-consumers endure the consumer experience, because they live where the experience takes place.



This study enriches the existing literature on experience by developing the concept of consumer experience field. It is defined as the lived space - physical and media - relating to a consumer experience. We have shown how, within a given field of experience, four sensible modalities of experience are structured. We have identified endured experience as a new modality of the sensitive consumer experience. Two major mechanisms have been identified: the first is that of the adjustment of the individual to space, according to the four modalities of sensible experience; the second is that of visibility and invisibility, a dimension that has emerged as essential through participant observation and phenomenological analysis.

The notion of field of experience completes previous theoretical propositions that articulate four dimensions of space: space as a signifying place, as a territory of power, as a level in a scale and finally as a node in a network. These four dimensions are conceptually relevant in the case we studied. As we have shown, the Place Saint Pierre is a place of consumption imbued with local meanings, a territory of power struggles, a level in the vertical territorial echelons (square, city, metropolis, etc.) and a node in the horizontal network of places of the city. The notion of consumption experience field distinguishes itself and completes these spatial dimensions, because we define it as a space invested by a consumer experience. In this perspective, following the phenomenological theory, there is inseparability of the organism and the world, which the mechanisms of adjustment to the field of experience account for. These mechanisms are formulated in terms of appropriation of space and visibility of individuals or groups. The space of an experience of consumption is not then an objective datum of the external world, but the fruit of a sensible co-production. In this, a field of consumer experience is distinguished from the notion of servicescape, by which the "objective" physical elements of an experiential framework are described.

Finally, this study contributes to the knowledge about consumed spaces. This notion of consumed space is specific to our hyperconsumption societies, in which consumption structures a large part of the aspects of our daily life. In this perspective, a consumed space is



both structuring and structured by an experience of consumption, thus constituting it as a field of consumer experience. The modalities of living fields can then be analyzed. We report on how consumption confers a particular structure on an urban public space and on the structure of a field of consumer experience. We emphasize the importance of studying the role of space in consumption, taking into account all potential experiences, including the less visible ones.