Determinants of the perceived quality of a creative experience in a group context: The case of Cultura's thematic creative workshops for adults

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Paper from the 50th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, May 25-28, 2021

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Abstract:

Retailers use group creativity activities to educate consumers about their products, or to build consumer loyalty by providing a positive and entertaining experience. However, little is known about the determinants of the quality of the creative experience in this context. To identify them, we conducted a series of qualitative interviews with clients who participate in these activities, based on the self-determination theory. Our results contribute to the marketing literature by showing that the group plays a central role in the perceived quality of the experience, particularly through mutual help, constructive criticism, inspiration, friendliness, and the building of self-confidence. These results complement those of Dahl and Moreau (2007) and have important managerial implications.

Keywords: Consumer education, Creative experience, Group creativity

Track: Retailing & Omni-Channel Management

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1. Introduction

The creative leisure market has been on the rise in France for many years under the combined effect of three complementary trends: (1) the broadening of the range of creative activities linked to fashion cycles and the constant renewal of the offer (e.g., fine arts, home decoration, scrapbooking, sewing, modeling); (2) the growing popularity of creative activities with an increasingly diverse range of users (from children to seniors and young adults); and (3) the multiplication of marketplaces, blogs, and social networks for sharing visual inspiration and new ideas (such as Pinterest, I-make, and Etsy). Sometimes referred to as *Do It* Yourself (DIY), this market had a value of 1.25 billion Euros in France in 2017 (source: Xerfi, 2018), and has rather benefited from the period of confinement. According to an Ipsos survey, creative hobbyists practice on average six different activities. The contours of this market might vary from one research organization to another, but all of them stress that the development of these activities is part of underlying sociological trends, reflecting economic and ecological concerns (combating waste through upcycling, for example), but also driven by a need for individuals to express their individual creativity.

To maintain and, if possible, grow in this market, distributors are "*moving towards new avenues, such as getting closer to toy retailers, or strengthening the offer of paid services (creative workshops, courses, etc.)*"[1]. This proliferation of new initiatives, designed to train customers in products and services through a differentiating service offer, is nothing new. In France, the "IT Saturdays" offered by Cora Mondelange for buyers of IT products or the DIY Moocs and in-store training courses provided by Leroy Merlin are all illustrative examples of these activities offered by retail chains to increase customers' knowledge of products and their ability to use them. In the area of creative hobbies, Toys'R'Us offered in 2015 free edutainment workshops for children in stores, and the creative hobbies products retailer Cultura offers a range of courses, workshops, and group workshops for all levels, supervised by a facilitator, to "*improve your technique and push the limits of your imagination even further*" (source: Cultura website).

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[1] https://www.lsa-conso.fr/les-loisirs-creatifs-un-marche-porteur-mais-complique-pour-les-enseignes-etude,258552

In this context, the present research is situated through the following questions: What are the determinants of satisfaction in a creative experience in a group workshop? More specifically, what is the role of the group in this satisfaction? What are the consequences of this satisfaction on the use of associated products and brand loyalty, a key element of marketing performance? To answer these three questions, a qualitative study was conducted among participants of collective creativity workshops organized by the Cultura brand. The study will be presented after laying out our conceptual framework (focusing on the determinants of satisfaction in a creative experience and customer training and its effects) and will then be discussed in light of the results obtained.

2. Conceptual framework

Consumer education (CE) involves informing and training customers (Bell, Auh and Eisingerich, 2017) to increase their level of skills and knowledge about products or associated technologies (Hennig-Thurau, Honebein and Aubert, 2005). CE can take a variety of forms (instruction manuals, documentation, videos, online tutorials, or face-to-face seminars/workshops) (Auber & Gotteland, 2010). The concept of CE is based on a simple principle: the success of a product depends on a customer's ability to use it. Thus, by being trained, a consumer will be able to take full advantage of the product, which in turn will increase his or her satisfaction and loyalty (Bell *et al.* 2017). According to work by Aubert and Gotteland (2010), conducted in the field of digital cameras, the dimension of "*knowledge and skill development*" has a positive effect on the frequency of use and the functions of use of the product, which in turn have a positive impact on the resulting satisfaction. In a similar vein, it has been shown that the same dimension of CE experience enhances brand confidence and the perceived quality of the product concerned (Hennig-Thurau, 2000).

The CE can be declined in many ways depending on the type of support and the individual *vs*. collective nature of the proposed activity. Fast *et al.* (1989) make a distinction between courses and workshops. Auber and Gotteland (2010) differentiate between self-training, mass training, individualized training, and experiential training. The literature on CE has focused essentially on its pedagogical and utilitarian dimension, with a view to optimizing the use of products; however, as Salerno (2009, p. 87) points out, "*in the face of trends of consumer disengagement or resistance (Roux, 2007), the appeal to consumers' skills and creative motivations can be a vector for re-engagement, and this*

represents a real opportunity for investigation". Therefore, it seems essential to understand more precisely the influence of the CE in the context of creative experiences.

The experience of creativity: Despite a certain managerial interest, creativity remains unquestionably a poor relation in the literature on consumer behavior. According to Salerno (2009), research on consumer creativity has been the subject of three groups of work in consumer behavior: (1) focusing on the antecedents of cognitive creativity and creative performance, (2) focusing specifically on creative transgressions or appropriations, and (3) focusing on the experience of creative leisure, decoration, or recreation.

The literature on the creative experience has focused on the motivations to participate and distinguishes: (1) personal and identity motivation, which is similar to the notion of personal expressiveness (Waterman, 1992) and is defined as the "*state accompanying activities that reflect the central sense of self, the impression that the task suits us well and that it allows for our personal growth*" (Salerno, 2009 p. 78). This dimension is constitutive of consumers' creative experience (Salerno, 2009), as are the dimensions of competence and autonomy (Füller, Hutter and Faullant*, 2011); (2) social motivation, which remains under-explored, however, given that creative experiences have essentially been studied in situations of individual rather than collective creativity. Nevertheless, the perceived degree of group creativity is a component of consumers' creative experience (Damperat, Jeannot, Jongmans and Jolibert*, 2016). Through the social dimension, participants are motivated by sharing, self-esteem, and imitation (Monnot, 2009). In this sense, in the context of online co-creation, Füller *et al.* (2011) show that the relationship with others is a determinant of the quality of the experience. Moreover, feeling pressure, shame, or pride, or being encouraged or inspired by others is also a variable that potentially influences the consumer's creative experience (Salerno, 2009).

Furthermore, according to social determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 1985, 2000), motivation to take part in an activity is based on three key determinants: the need for autonomy, the need for competence, and the need for relatedness. The latter refers to a need to belong and connect with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT suggests that feeling close to other people and belonging to a social group promotes satisfaction because it contributes to a fundamental need that triggers motivation. While the need for autonomy and competence have been identified as determinants of the quality of the creative experience (Dahl & Moreau, 2007), the effect of relatedness has not, to date, been further investigated. This research work, therefore, focuses on the experience of group creativity, in the context of workshops organized by Cultura.

3. Methodology

The qualitative exploratory study was conducted in the form of semi-directive individual interviews with 12 subjects (12 women) recruited from a list of participants provided by Cultura, a brand specializing in the marketing of cultural and creative goods and leisure activities (*see* Appendix 1 - profiles of respondents). More specifically, the store studied was the Portet-sur-Garonne store, located on the outskirts of Toulouse (France). For many years now, this store has been offering paid creative workshops several times per week on various themes, such as mosaics, home decoration, watercolor, and scrapbooking. During a workshop, the customer can benefit from the advice of an animator who accompanies him/her in his/her creative project. These weekly workshops are done in small groups (two to seven people) and last 1.5 hour. The people we interviewed were long-time participants in the creative workshops (referred to as "regulars"). Respondents were interviewed by telephone (30–50 min) on a number of themes, including (1) the practice of creative hobbies, (2) the relationship to Cultura, and (3) the creative workshops offered by Cultura. At the end of the interview, each participant was thanked with a 10 Euro voucher offered by Cultura. The interviews were transcribed manually, and a thematic content analysis was performed, coding the motivations, obstacles, and dimensions of the quality of the creative experience until saturation was reached (Kirmani & Campbell 2004).

4. Results

Analysis of the results highlights multiple dimensions to participating in this type of workshop, such as (1) the need to learn, to discover new techniques and skills; (2) the perceived autonomy and sense of freedom of one's individual creativity (working on individual and personal projects, as opposed to traditional courses with imposed inputs/outputs); (3) the pleasure gained; and (4) the associated immersion. These initial elements confirm, in particular, the teachings of Dahl and Moreau (2007), who state that the need for competence and autonomy are determinants of the perceived quality of a creative experience. The results obtained in this research highlight the fact that participants feel they become more creative and know how to use products better, even to the point of increasing their sense of self-confidence.

Moreover, the corpus analyzed underlines that the social dimension (group effect) appears as an essential mediator of the relationship between participation and satisfaction of

the lived experience. The participants' discourse, as shown by a part of the content analysis proposed in Table 1, reveals several elements on the fact that the collective dimension reinforces entertainment, learning and the feeling of creative self-efficacy. Indeed, the diversity of the group provides many benefits to participants: (a) stimulates the creative fiber of individuals, (b) stimulates constructive criticism, (c) promotes mutual aid, (d) acts on self-confidence (by mirror effect of social comparison), and (e) offers a friendly setting and a relaxed atmosphere (informal exchanges, atmosphere of camaraderie, bonds of friendship). These elements show that the relationship with others is an essential determinant of the quality of the creative experience. The relationship with others is, thus, influenced by others and by the facilitator. It depends on trust, which in turn depends on the relational skills of the participants.

Table 1. The role of the group as an antecedent to the quality of the creative experience.

Source of inspiration	*"It gives you ideas, for example, I don't know about techniques that we haven't yet seen, that we don't know, and if we see someone else doing it, well, we say to ourselves, why don't I do this too.* " #3 *"We learn many things by looking at others [...] it's important to ask questions and see how each one interprets or realizes something."* *"We can share our ideas, we can say to each other "here but you make a nice painting, maybe next time I will be inspired by it but by adapting the colors by putting the colors I like", and vice versa for the others"* #6
Constructive criticism	*"We can allow ourselves [...] to give opinions, to say "well, that's pretty like that", it's not at all in criticism; it's just construction.* #7 *"There are links that form. We look at the works of each one, we say that we should have done this or that and everything, there is a criticism which is established, it's nice"* #4
Mutual aid	*"When we're missing something, we don't hesitate to help each other out. For example, if we have a color that we know we're going to use only once and another one doesn't, we'll say to ourselves, "you can use it; there's no need to buy it when you're only going to use it once", so they help us out and vice versa, it's the same, each one of them, that's what's good too"* #6
Self-confidence	*"Humanly speaking, it allows you to have more self-confidence at a certain point in time"* #7 *"if she can do it, I can do it too."*
Entertainment, friendliness, camaraderie	*"it's not just about doing something; it's about being with others..."* #10 *"I think it's very good for me, rather than doing it at home alone in your corner"* #6 *"So we exchange a little bit about our personal lives"* #7 *"We go there, to do ourselves good, and to have fun. Plaisir quoi, it's an atmosphere that is created there, and we're really good; when we do workshops it's, it's fun, but it really creates an agreement and a privileged moment."* *"we exchange as well at the family level as at the painting level, as well as at the level... that's it, it's enriching what"* #4

Finally, the content analysis highlights that a positive, creative experience positively impacts the consumer's attitudinal and behavioral responses. Thus, Table 2 shows the effects of the creative experience on the brand and the point of sale (the store).

Table 2. The effects of participation on marketing performance.

Intention to purchase	*"It's rare when I leave the workshop that I haven't bought something!" #8*
Discovery of the offer in-store	*"(...) sometimes, I arrive 5 to 10 minutes before, I put my things down, I go for a walk, and I always find something" #10* *"It's necessarily true that the whole Creative Workshops side we'll mostly look at it when we leave the workshop or before going to the workshop what" #5*
The emergence of new needs through workshops	*"There were a lot of products that I didn't know about, all the materials that can be added to the paint to make effects, to make cracks. So there were a lot of things before I went to Cultura that I didn't know about." #11;* *"I discovered the crackle [...], then I reproduced it on trays [...]: it makes you discover products, so what do you buy?" #3* *"I think I know the store better, and I know my needs better" #2*
Broadcasting of WOM	*"It's an exchange outside; it becomes a topic of conversation."* *"I even brought back a lady, in my watercolor studio, who now comes to Cultura" #7*
Store Loyalty	*"I am very loyal to [this store]. I've moved: I'm further away, but I'm going anyway" #9* *"I don't have the reflex to go anywhere else. I don't think. I say, "I know they have it"" #2*

5. Discussion and implications

This research contributes to the literature on CE in the context of creative experiments by showing the pre-eminence of the social dimension of the experience. The link to others and group dynamics allow the individual to increase his or her own individual skills while developing his or her use of products. In line with self-determination theory, the results demonstrate, in the context of a group creativity workshop, that the need for relatedness is, alongside the need for competence and autonomy, a key element in the motivation and satisfaction of the experience. Thus, our results complement those of Dahl and Moreau (2007), by underlining the importance and usefulness of group dynamics. A climate of trust between the group members generates a positive emulation and an inspiring effect, without entering into a marked competition. This climate of trust seems to be linked both to the small size of the group and its stability over time, but also to the fact that each member works on his

or her own individual project. Thus, such conditions generate a high level of satisfaction with the experience, which leads to increased involvement in the activity, loyalty to the brand, and the generation of positive word-of-mouth.

The results offer interesting managerial perspectives. Indeed, practitioners need to be particularly vigilant to get the most out of these training workshops by limiting the size of the groups and promoting their stability. The person in charge of these workshops must play the role of facilitator, rather than a trainer, by allowing the participants' creativity to express itself. A heterogeneity of levels can allow exchanges, mutual aid, and progression, generating satisfaction, and limiting perceived competition. However, in future research, it would be advisable to extend the external validity of these initial results by looking at more varied participant profiles. Moreover, we only studied long-term participants, and it is not impossible that some participants might have dropped out of the study precisely because of problems integrating into the group. Therefore, it would be interesting to interview non-participants and dropouts.

Appendix 1: Profile of respondents.

Age	Occupation	Creative workshops attended	Workshops attendance since
>60	Retired	Painting (HomeDeco)	4 years
~55	Engineer	Painting	5-6 years
~70	Retired	Painting	-
>70	Retired	HomeDeco, Woodcraft	8 years
~40	Secretary	Scrapbooking	1-2 years
~50	Civil servant	Painting	-
~55	Engineer	HomeDeco	5 years
>70	Retired	Scrapbooking, Woodcraft	10 years
>60	Retired	Scrapbooking, HomeDeco	4 years
>60	Retired	Mosaic	4-5 years
>60	Retired	HomeDeco	7 years
~50	In activity	HomeDeco	3-4 years

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