UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

For the love of experience: changing the experience economy discourse

Snel, J.M.C.

Publication date
2011

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Snel, J. M. C. (2011). *For the love of experience: changing the experience economy discourse*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (https://dare.uva.nl)

Download date:13 Nov 2026

PREFACE AND

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An inspiring conversation is
as stimulating as espresso
and just as hard to sleep after.

AFTER ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH,
GIFT FROM THE SEA,
1955

This dissertation contains the result of almost 10 years of studying the experience economy. What started with a nagging feeling that there had to be more about this economy than what was often described in theory and discussed and implemented in practice has finally resulted in the answers I was looking for.

The title of this dissertation, 'For the love of experience', was not just chosen because love is often connected to the colour pink, so that I would have a good excuse to make a pink cover. Everyone who knows me also knows that I need no excuses to make anything pink. Instead, the title was inspired by the name that the artist Damien Hirst gave to his diamond-covered skull: 'For the love of God', allegedly based on a question his mother asked him: "For the love of God, what are you going to do next?"

'For the love of God' has evoked strong emotional reactions and controversy that reminded me of reactions to the experience economy. Reactions to the alleged sale of the work and the marketing around it spawned great controversy on the commercial nature of the art piece. The commercial focus of the experience economy has also been something that has often been met with strong negative emotions, for example when a piece of the public domain was fenced off to make it into a paid-for experience. Reactions to the exploitation of a piece of a human body, in the name of art, were in line with reactions to the alleged exploitation of human emotions in the experience economy. Finally, the idea of extravagantly decorating something that in itself is often considered ugly I recognized in the many efforts of organizations to 'funnify' or bling regular products and services and then call them experiences.

The critique on the commercial and marketing interpretations of what experience entails have often made me think seriously about dropping the term for once and for all. But every time in the end I decided not to do this. Notwithstanding the inflation of the word experience and the misuse of it in many cases, experience has been around for longer than the people who don't use the word in a proper way. Experience is about people, about meaning, about learning, about value. For the love of 'experience'

giving up on the term was not an option. Repairing the existing bias in the discourse on experiences was.

The 'love' in 'for the love of experience' also denotes one other important aspect of my fascination for the topic. Love doesn't only make the world go round, but it is also one of the things in life you can't control. It is my strong conviction that experiences cannot be produced, managed, sold or directed either. You can however do your best to support, facilitate, and help people in having their experiences. You can also do your best to hinder, prevent and ruin the experiences of people. This lack of complete control is not new but somehow many people are still under the impression that they do have control over things like these. I always use love to explain how I see it. You cannot force someone to love you; it is the loved one who decides whether he or she will love you back. You can however do many things that result in the loved one not loving you anymore. The same goes for experience. It is the individual who decides whether he or she has an experience and what type of experience it is. But you can do all sorts of things to make sure the experience will not happen or that it will be a bad experience.

And obviously: I could have never stayed focused and inspired and enthusiastic about this topic for all this time if it hadn't been for my love of experience.

As I will explain in this dissertation, basically an experience is an encounter of an individual with his or her environment. For the most part my experience was an encounter of me with my computers, books and articles, pens and paper and when I was completely lost a paintbrush and canvas, but fortunately my environment consisted also of many people that have made my experience into what it has been. I cannot name all, but I want to express my gratitude to some who have coloured my experience brightly and made it definitely more fun and meaningful for me.

I would like to start with Rik Maes, my promotor. I remember that at the beginning of this endeavor I thought that it would take me three years to finish. Unfortunately I expressed this thought, and not unconvincingly because I believe you even bet some wine on it. Sorry Rik, I owe you. But although it took me longer I always felt you trusted that I would somehow, one day, finish and I appreciated your trusting way of supervising. I also want to say thank you for starting the European Centre for the

Experience Economy together with Joe Pine and Albert Boswijk, which ended up financing the first couple of years of this study and brought me in contact with many people who are working in the field of experience. You know that I was kind of surprised about, but also very grateful for the trust you had when you asked me to coordinate the EMIM-program. This work gave me the opportunity to discover that I am much more organized than I thought I was and to execute the insights I had thanks to this research. The incredibly pleasant cooperation has given us the opportunity to get to know each other much better and I also want to thank your wife Simone for the immense hospitality all those times we had meetings at your house. I am more than glad that even though this dissertation is finished, we will continue to work together on making the world more meaningful and inspiring. And having a lot of fun along the way!
I am still waiting for my pink ostrich feather boa though…

Then there is Erik de Vries who in all these years I have always blamed for being the instigator of this whole project so the least I can do is to finally thank him for this. Erik has kind of been a linking pin for all sorts of events that have led up to today: our shared interest in the service economy after I came back from Italy, the guest lectures on online service quality and flow experiences you allowed me to give in your course at the University of Amsterdam, my filling in for you when Joe Pine became a visiting professor and came to present his book 'The experience economy', and bringing me into contact with Rik. I seriously think that the omission of just one of these things would have led to me never having done this research.

The same thing of course goes for Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore. I have never met Jim but have been assured that he exists, and I have had the chance to meet Joe Pine on several occasions during this period. If you hadn't coined the term experience economy and written an article and book about it, I seriously doubt that this dissertation would have ever seen the light of day. Often the thought crossed my mind: what if this experience economy proves to be a hype, a passing fad, what will I do then? But I believe we can safely say that experiences are here to stay, which also shows from the update on your book 'The experience economy' that you have published this summer.

Persons who have without a doubt changed my perspective on experience were of course the alumni I interviewed who had completed their educational experience at SIOO, Kaos Pilot or the EMIM-program. I have promised you anonymity but you know who you are and I want to thank all of you for inviting me to your homes and offices and for the time you all took, up to 4 ½ hours (!), for telling me about your experiences, sometimes on a very personal level for which I am incredibly grateful! I hope I have done justice to what you have taught me!

Mijke, Anniek, Marjolijn and Edith: you were my checks and balances for the coding process of the interviews. Thanks for all the work you have put in this process, to give feedback on the themes, and I wish you all the best with your own research. Hope to see you soon in the Netherlands again!

Then there are the recent and current participants in EMIM who I sincerely want to thank, together with all the people who work hard at making this a wonderful program, like the organizers, teachers, the supervisors and coaches, the examination committee and the Creative Board. You all have been a great inspiration for the ways in which many of the ideas and insights that were derived from the interviews were implemented in practice. My work often seems like leisure with all the fun, inspiration and beautiful moments we shared and it has been and still is a privilege to know you all. I hope, as I say at the end of chapter 8 that we will stay in touch for a long time to come. And for those who haven't finished their Master Proof yet: chop chop!

I am grateful to the students that have followed courses I have taught at the University of Amsterdam. You can read about learning and teaching for the rest of your life but this will never teach you as much as the experience of standing in front of a class of students and trying to motivate, inspire, enthuse and educate them. Before I never knew that I would love teaching so much and that I was a proud owner of a 'juffenhart'.

Also the students of the Executive Courses of the European Centre for the Experience Economy have been a great audience. They have helped me during the very first years of this research to understand the field and to develop my line of thinking. All the examples from practice have absolutely helped in getting my initial ideas in order.

I want to thank the PhD committee for their very valuable feedback on my work. All have, knowingly or unknowingly, influenced my thoughts and insights on experience through the years: Prof. dr J.J. Boonstra in the context of change processes in which the individual is put in the centre of business, Dr A. Huizing in the context of how meaning is shared in communities and the importance of immaterial values, Prof. dr L. Introna in the context of phenomenology and technologically mediated vicarious experiences, Prof. dr M.W. de Jong in the context of the service economy and Prof. dr A. Klamer in the context of cultural and social values.

Monique Beemster was the first designer who understood immediately what I meant when I told that I wanted "a design for my cover, I don't know, something with pink and experience". She has not only designed the cover and everything that's pink in this dissertation but has also relentlessly worked with me to finish the project. You probably know more about Word now than you would have liked to know but you have succeeded in making the stressy completion of this experience a lot more relaxed for me and I absolutely love the result, Monique!

My friends deserve the credits for keeping me kind of sane this whole period. It's very easy to have all the fun sucked out of parties and events when there's someone in your midst who keeps explaining how a venue could be much more successful if they would only change this or that, or who tries to recognize parts of theories everywhere. But you have always listened patiently to my brainwaves and acted like you completely understood my enthusiasm about "brilliant" Eureka-moments, even when I didn't fully understood yet what they meant ;-).

A special thanks goes to my paranymphs Patricia and Berry. Patricia has been my partner in crime for almost 20 years when it comes to everything that is over the top, and has been the source of many very memorable experiences. Our 'therapeutic painting' session has been the cause of me grabbing my paintbrush and canvas every time I got completely lost in the details of my research so you are partly responsible for the many Eureka-experiences that I have had. But above all, you are a wonderful friend, a beautiful person and I hope we'll enjoy many more over the top experiences together!

Berry has without a doubt been the most precious gift that the study of experience has given me. We met because of Zumba, got to know each other because of our mutual interest in the world of experience and became friends because of all the hilarious fun and the many things we have in common. Thanks for always being there for me, for sharing your eye for detail and experience in the world of events, for helping me with my website, for not hanging up, for kickstarting many of my days with a soundtrack, for sending me out of the Pijp and giving me directions in Amsterdam as if I were a tourist, for lack of words: thanks for being you and thanks for being my friend.

Last but certainly not least I want to thank my family. Robert and Natasja who have always been supportive of my endeavors and who have given me the great honour to be the aunt and godmother of Rosan, Rolf and Noud, three little persons who put everything in perspective. Finally I will have more time to spend with all of you! And of course my parents who have had the patience while I was studying as well as while I was doing this research, two periods in which I have absolutely not been worthy of my last name ;-). You definitely are the most supportive parents anyone can have. I know how proud you all are and I love you dearly.

These and many more people, too many to name them all explicitly, have made my experience unforgettable and I want to thank them all. I also kind of hope that some of them will be able to answer the question, to paraphrase Daniel Hirst's mother: For the love of God, what am I going to do next?

Anna Snel
July, 2011