

Innovative Application of Experiential Marketing: Offline Practical Strategies in the Catering and Apparel Industries

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ABSTRACT

The current state of offline retail marketing, both domestically and internationally, has not yet fully transitioned from a product-centered model to a consumer experience centered model. Existing experiential marketing strategies often shallow, highly homogenized, and rigid in form. To address the lack of creativity in current experiential marketing models and fill the gap in practical offline strategies, this paper proposes innovative applications of experiential marketing. These new approaches aim to deliver deep sensory stimulation and immersive interactive experiences, enabling consumers to naturally establish unforgettable emotional bonds with brands. Through literature review, analysis of ideal case studies, and a comparative examination of traditional and modern experiential marketing models—set against the creative rise of the metaverse digital fashion industry and new media interactive art—this research is grounded in delivering high-quality consumer experiences. It offers practical strategies for the Disneyfication of offline stores. Rather than following the monotonous transactional behavior of the past, this study advocates for an entertainment-driven approach, allowing customers to become players within the brand's storyline and deeply explore its narrative through creative offline experiential activities. By implementing the innovative model proposed in this study, brands can effectively enhance promotion and image-building, establishing a unique and lasting impression in consumers' minds. Furthermore, it helps to bridge the gap between the digital metaverse and the physical world, initiating a new wave of creative transformation in offline retail and ushering in a new era of consumer experience.

KEYWORDS

Experiential Marketing; Disneyfication; Immersive Experience; Apparel Industry; Catering Industry

1 Introduction

In both domestic and international markets, offline experiential marketing typically relies on the Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM) framework to enhance the consumer shopping experience. For example, in terms of sensory stimulation: stores play music with varying rhythms to engage hearing; use specific scents and aromatherapy to stimulate smell; allow customers to touch and interact with electronic devices in mobile phone stores for tactile engagement; offer product samples to appeal to taste; and utilize bold color schemes or eye-catching installations to attract attention and encourage photo-taking for visual impact.

However, these so-called sensory activation methods often lack integration with the product itself and brand identity. They fail to bring about a fundamental shift from traditional transactional behavior—where customers merely observe and select products—to a deeper engagement where consumers interact with and become a part of the brand narrative.

This shift—from customers passively observing products to becoming active participants in the brand experience—has yet to be fundamentally realized. According to the SEM model's dimensions of "Act," "Think," and "Relate," many offline stores attempt to build customer engagement by organizing communities, holding member events, or staging thematic scenes. However, these efforts often bypass the product itself and serve as short-term strategies to attract consumer attention, making it difficult to achieve sustained sales growth.

Such activities tend to treat consumers merely as price-sensitive shoppers. They offer a low level of immersion, limited brand relevance, and minimal entertainment value.

The innovative experiential marketing model proposed in this study advocates for deeper sensory immersion across all five dimensions of the SEM framework. This approach represents a practical strategy for implementing "Disneyfication" in offline retail environments. Under this model, consumers are no longer passive browsers engaged in transactional shopping. Instead, they are invited into a new and uniquely crafted space that departs from their everyday retail experience. Within this immersive environment, consumers explore brand narratives in entertaining and interactive ways, forming meaningful emotional connections with the brand's philosophy and identity. The product then emerges as a crystallization of that joyful and memorable experience.

2 Application of the Catering Industry

2.1 Analysis of the Current Situation of Experiential Marketing in the Catering Industry

Within the catering industry, the application of experiential marketing can be roughly categorized into three levels.

The third level aligns with the catering model advocated in this paper and serves as an enhancement and supplement to the second level.

The first level represents the foundational tier—functional restaurants. These establishments occupy the lower end of the market and do not employ experiential marketing strategies.

The second level represents the mid-tier category. These restaurants combine both aesthetic and practical functions, and currently popular themed restaurants fall into this group^[5]. They primarily target middle-income consumers and are known for their creative interior designs centered around specific themes that capture customer attention. Examples include simulating tropical island environments to create a relaxing seaside vacation atmosphere, or collaborating with popular anime IPs such as Hello Kitty or Naruto, using distinctive visual installations to offer customers a sense of novelty.

In terms of cuisine, dishes are not only carefully prepared and artfully presented but also deliver a satisfying taste experience. From a marketing perspective, these restaurants excel at using price-based strategies and rely heavily on social media to attract traffic. Tactics include offering group-buying discounts on platforms like Douyin (TikTok China), guiding users to follow mini-programs to receive coupons, providing gifts in exchange for positive reviews on Dazhong Dianping, encouraging membership recharge rewards, and launching full-reduction promotions.

However, despite their visual appeal and smart marketing, interaction between customers and staff remains limited. These restaurants rely mostly on unique atmospheres and themed settings to sustain customer interest, which appeals particularly to younger demographics. While some elements of experiential marketing are present, they remain at a superficial level. For example, Haidilao occasionally hosts light-hearted activities like "Draw a Cow" contests or laughter challenges, offers manicure services, or games where customers can win free meals by jumping a certain distance. Some old Beijing-style themed restaurants also feature live crosstalk (traditional Chinese comedic dialogue) performances.

Due to the inherent immediacy of food consumption, these restaurants typically provide pre-prepared dishes with minimal interaction tied directly to the product itself. As a result, they fail to engage other human sensory dimensions or form meaningful emotional links with consumers. Diners primarily participate as spectators or passive experiencers, which may satisfy creative dining needs to a certain extent but does not deeply explore the essential relationship between product, brand, and consumer. The third level of restaurant is the immersive experience restaurant^[6], which utilizes new media technologies to create virtual embodied experiences and immersive, interactive dining environments. For example, the Shelanous restaurant in Melbourne is highly praised for its strong interactive and fun customer experience. Another excellent example is the Le Petit Chef restaurant in Shanghai, which uses naked-eye 3D projection technology to deliver entertaining and artistic visual performances with an adorable cooking little chef.

2.2 Comparison of the Application of New and Old Experiential Marketing Models in the Catering Industry

Taking "The Witch and the Yeti Ice Cream" as an example, if following the operational approach of a mid-level themed restaurant, the business would create a mysterious, witchy cabin snow scene as the thematic setting. The layout of the scene, even the staff's attire, would align with the mysticism theme. Then, they would offer special dishes related to witches and magic, as well as magic-themed props for purchase (which can be used in conjunction with a subsequent interactive serving ritual). Through exquisite plating and mini interactive serving rituals, along with heavy promotion on social media to drive traffic, the restaurant would successfully attract customers to dine. It also encourages customers to follow a mini-program to make appointments for tarot readings. In this process, the relationship between the ice cream products and customers remains one-dimensional—based on affection, admiration, and being admired. The experiential activities do not naturally integrate with the cultural brand of the restaurant.

In the experiential marketing innovation scenario proposed in this paper, the theme of "The Witch and the Yeti" would be realized as follows: the ice cream shop would combine ice cream with tarot divination. To heighten the sense of anticipation and mystery, the physical store would feature only a narrow time-travel machine that seats five people per session. Before the adventure begins, a young witch character provides each guest with a personalized storyline.

Once guests are seated inside the time machine, a combination of interactive visual art powered by new media technologies^[4] and motion-platform effects creates the illusion of traversing parallel universes, though the machine itself remains stationary. The journey culminates in an arrival at the witch and yeti's cabin—a space filled with astonishing visual scenery and a deeply immersive, mystical atmosphere. There, a liveaction legend of the Witch and the Yeti is performed using 3D and holographic projection.

After understanding the plot and their tasks, guests decide—based on their individual storylines—whether to stay on the time machine. Each guest has a unique narrative arc: some require independent action, while others must collaborate with those whose storylines intersect. For example, those who stay aboard the time machine move along a track that gradually leads them to different compartments within the cabin, where they must search for keys or tokens. These may involve challenges such as hypnotizing and taming an owl to retrieve a clue hidden in its beak, or deciphering esoteric symbols to unlock the witch's chamber.

Others might be directed to the cellar beneath the cabin, where they engage in a wand duel with a three-headed lion guarding a gemstone. Only by collecting all the gems can a secret mechanism be unlocked to gather further clues and open the witch's door. Some players may also interact with the Yeti, participating in the magical ice cream brewing process.

At various checkpoints, players will have the chance to consult with the witch on different questions using tarot cards, crystal balls, sand readings, or charm readings. For example, they might ask: "What does your ice cream think of you?" These insights are combined with the guest's astrological chart and elemental attributes to create a custom ice cream flavor that aligns with their personal fortune.

In the end, guests enjoy their magically personalized ice cream while holding beautifully designed tarot cards and small surprise gifts gathered during the adventure, before happily returning to the real world aboard the time machine. It is evident that the "Witch and the Yeti" restaurant, built upon innovative experiential marketing strategies, transforms the consumer into an active participant by integrating engaging storylines and interactive new media technologies. This shift from customer to player fosters deep interaction and emotional connection with the ice cream, delivering an immersive and interactive experience far beyond that of a typical themed restaurant. Not only does it offer a rich and diverse aesthetic experience, but it also evokes emotional resonance, leaving customers with memorable and delightful impressions.

2.3 Analysis of the Current Situation of Experiential Marketing in the Apparel Industry

Similarly, brick-and-mortar stores in the apparel industry can be categorized into three levels based on the degree to which experiential marketing strategies are applied. The first level consists of functional apparel stores that have not adopted any experiential marketing strategies. The second level includes upgraded themed stores that are designed around the brand or clothing style, often featuring eye-catching storefronts, installations, or sculptures to attract customers for photo-taking and social media sharing. These stores typically implement experiential marketing activities that have limited relevance to the core product or brand identity. Examples include celebrity fashion parties or pop-up events. Some stores, such as Nike, create simulated sports environments or personalized customization zones, and host activities like basketball shootouts where customers can win a pair of Air Jordans.

2.4 Ideal Embodiment of the New Model in Offline Apparel Stores

The third level of immersive experience stores represents the ideal implementation of the innovative experiential marketing model proposed in this paper. It also provides a breakthrough solution to the current challenge of integrating digital fashion with realworld experiences. For example, a fashion brand could use the seasonal inspiration behind its collection as the basis for a compelling narrative, constructing an immersive environment through new media interactive technologies and advanced scenic art installations. By allowing customers to step into the setting or era depicted in the storyline, and participate in engaging plot-driven interactions, they can experience the uninhibited flow of beauty and the spontaneous emergence of inspiration from the designer's perspective. Through visually stunning experiences and emotionally resonant aesthetics, the store can deeply captivate customers, while subtly conveying the brand's values and thematic essence within the flow of the story.

For instance, a brand committed to long-termism might create an environmentallythemed narrative focused on ocean pollution. Guests could become "plastic" travelers swallowed into the belly of a whale, embarking on a surreal underwater adventure—an allegorical critique of the burdens excessive consumerism places on the environment. Alternatively, a brand embracing maximalist aesthetics could invite customers to participate in a high-stakes medieval court banquet, where guests navigate a glamorous castle setting only to witness a premeditated fire—evoking themes of beauty, danger, and desire.

Or, a dystopian-themed brand might take customers on a time-travel journey from a post-apocalyptic future back to an arid, desertified Earth, immersing them in an awe-inspiring and hauntingly beautiful aesthetic landscape.

Through such experiential strategies, consumers' understanding of the brand's philosophy and aesthetics can be significantly deepened, thereby expanding brand influence and rapidly increasing visibility across social and cultural platforms. When consumers gain insight into the designer's inspiration and creative journey, they are more likely to develop a strong emotional connection with the brand, ultimately driving increased sales. A representative example is Gucci Cosmos: The Bamboo Legacy, an immersive exhibition that narrates the brand's story across time and space. Using the iconic bamboo-handle handbag as a starting point, the exhibition explores the secrets behind this legendary design, highlighting the evolution of the bamboo motif and its craftsmanship. Spanning historical heritage while envisioning future innovation, the experience not only elevates appreciation of Gucci's legacy but also inspires viewers on a personal level.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Future Prospects and Positive Significance of This Research

The experiential marketing innovation model proposed in this study effectively fills the creative experience gap in offline catering and apparel sectors. It provides strategic support for the "Disneyfication" of future offline retail spaces, extending customer dwell time, enhancing engagement and interactivity, and offering practical examples for integrating digital metaverse concepts into real-world environments. This approach holds the potential to usher in a new era of consumer experiences and to lead a wave of creative transformation in offline industries.

3.2 Areas for Optimization in This Research

Small brands with limited budgets may find it difficult to implement deeply immersive experiential marketing strategies. As experiential storylines require regular updates, installation design should emphasize sustainability to reduce costs when updating or replacing thematic elements. Developing multiple narrative branches from a single script can increase scene reuse efficiency and lower operational costs, while maintaining freshness and appeal for returning customers.

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