

**Marketing of risky sports: Modeling the role of emotion in service trial using an artificial climbing wall**

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**Poster  
Abstract 247**

Emotions have received a great deal of attention in consumer behavior literature. For instance, recent studies suggest that emotional responses evoked by marketing stimuli can impact various consumer behaviors (e.g., attitude and intention) over a range of retail environments (e.g., Foxall & Greenley, 1999; Laroche, Teng, & Chebat, 2005). Particularly, affect takes on particular importance in the study of experiential/hedonic consumption, such as leisure/sports services (Hirschman & Stern, 1999). In any sector, however, marketers have endeavored to manipulate the marketing mix in order to better appeal to consumers' emotion. This will subsequently induce product and/or service trials as well as possible repatronage (Spratt & Shrimp, 2004; Steenkamp & Gielens, 2003).

The participation in risk sports is one of the hottest trends among sports consumers in recent years (Shoham, Rose, & Kahle, 1998). One fruitful avenue or research on participation in risky sports has been to focus on socio-demographic (e.g., Kerr & Vlaminkx, 1997) and dispositional characteristics of customers (e.g., Shoham, Rose & Kahle, 2004). For example, similar Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL) constructs, such as sensation seeking (SS), have been found to influence exploratory consumer behavior (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1992), as well as being related to the consumption of risky sports (Shoham et al., 2004).

Although a number of studies have explored the link between various aspects of emotion and consumer behavior (e.g., Laroche et al., 2005; Sweeney & Weber, 2002) and others have focused on the relationship between personality traits and emotional state (e.g., Duhachek & Iacobucci, 2005), there is a need to examine the complex interrelationship between emotional states, personality constructs and consumption behavior. Thus, the current study bridges research on servicescape, sales promotion and risky sports consumption by investigating emotional response to service trials of an artificial climbing wall. Personality (Impulsive Sensation Seeking [ImpSS]; Zuckerman, 1994) and dimensional emotion paradigms (Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance [PAD]; Mehrabian & Russell, 1977) are applied to examine affective response and behavioral intentions (repatronage). Moreover, the current study is answering Steenkamp and Gielens's (2003) call for research on product trials in service settings, where novelty effects could appeal to certain personalities, provides an opportunity to further study affective response.

Data collection took place over a period of several months at an artificial climbing wall, which is part of an outdoor recreation facility at a large university in the eastern United States. The artificial climbing wall, which is 60 feet tall, offers a controlled setting to study "risky" sports consumption (c.f., Soham, Rose, & Kahle, 2004), while answering calls to examine consumer response to tangible sports servicescape factors, such as equipment (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). In an effort to focus on service trial phenomena, a stratified sampling technique was utilized to focus on novice climbers (n=294), who were 18 years of age and older (which is the legal age of consent to sign an IRB waiver). Climbing wall patrons were approached to volunteer for the study at "Beginners Night", a promotion used by sports service facilities, to attract/train new clientele. After screening attendees based on their age, they were then asked to report their level of climbing expertise, as well as their experience on both actual rock face and climbing walls. In addition to providing a brief history with the service category, subjects completed a questionnaire that was designed to capture key consumer characteristics, such as their sociodemographics and disposition. Immediately after completing their service trial, subjects provided self-reports of their subsequent emotional states and their behavioral intentions to use the climbing wall again (i.e., intentions to climb at similar and steeper angles).

There was a reasonable gender balance in the sample, which was 57% male (n=166) and 43% female (n=128). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 59, with a mean age of 26.2 years old (SD=10.19). To check the construct validity of ImpSS, a two-way (age x gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure was used to examine the effects of age and gender on ImpSS. The results showed that it is in line with previous research, ImpSS has negative correlation with age (F=4.64, p<.05); males reveal higher levels of the trait than females at every stage of the lifecycle (F=7.36, p<.05). Further, all internal consistencies for measured variables were .80.

Structural Equation Modeling with maximum likelihood estimation was used to analyze the hypothesized relationships among constructs. Values of kurtosis ranged between -.411 and .612. Skewness values ranged between -1.057 and -.138. Because there are two types of intentions (i.e., intentions to climb at similar and steeper angles), this study examined the proposed model twice to find the best model fit for both behavioral intentions. The initial structural model did not fit well statistically for either of the

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intentions. Model chi-square for intention to climb either at similar angles or at steeper angles were 47.425 (df=15,  $p < .000$ , RMSEA=.264, GFI=.935, CFI=.807) and 47.422 (df=15, RMSEA=.264, GFI=.935, CFI=.830), respectively. Examination of regression coefficients revealed that the paths from ImpSS to the Dominance, and from the Dominance to intentions to climb at similar angles were insignificant. Further, there exists covariance between the Pleasure and the Dominance in model for intentions to climb at steeper angles. After adjusting the aforementioned paths, the reformulated model indicated a significant improvement in model fit in both intentions and a considerable improvement in the magnitude of measurement coefficients (e.g., chi-square=12.85, df=10, RMSEA=.013, CFI=.953 for intentions to climb at similar angles; chi-square=208.89, df=15, RMSEA=.076, CFI=.941 for intentions to climb at steeper angles).

The findings of the current study imply several theoretical and practical implications. First, emotional response takes the role of a mediator between personality (ImpSS) and repatronage intentions. Second, service setting attributes (wall angle) had significant effects on climbers' emotions (Arousal & Pleasure) and behavioral intentions. Third, path coefficients suggest that the Dominance measure had the greatest effect on repatronage of steeper angle, but was insignificant in the model for intentions to climb at similar angles. Results also suggest service trials targeted at certain types of urban consumers, such as sensation seekers, can introduce them to potentially new experiences otherwise unavailable to them (e.g., "rock" climbing).

Our study has certain limitations which offer avenues for future research. One of the main limitations of this study is due to its quasi-experimental nature. The sportscape stimuli (i.e., climbing wall) in the current study was not created/manipulated. Likewise, other extraneous factors such as climbing hold setting or environmental stimuli (e.g., cheering from friends or staff) were not accounted for the study's design.