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Addressing the Gap between Theory and Practice

A Marketing-as-Practice Approach

by

Sofie Molin
Annie Sjöberg

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Supervisor
Andrea Lucarelli

Examiner
Clara Gustafsson





Abstract

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Keywords: critical marketing, marketing-as-practice, marketing practices, action-based research, experiential marketing

Problematization: The authors recognized the need to integrate theory and practice within the marketing discipline, embarking from the values of critical marketing. It was further emphasised how current research is argued to not portray a comprehensive understanding of the complex marketplace and current marketing practices, affecting the relevance and use of marketing literature. Thus, there exists a current need to assess diverse ways of knowledge creation.

Research Aim: The research aim was to explore the marketing-as-practice approach's ability to critically assess the gap between theoretical and practical understandings of marketing activities. The aim was operationalized by conducting marketing-as-practice research on the concept of experiential marketing practices.

Methodology: Emerging from a qualitative and abductive approach, this study investigated the relationship between arguments in theory and practice accounting for experiential marketing practices. Data was collected in form of six in-depth interviews with experiential marketing practitioners as well as 31 pieces of influential marketing literature. Based on collected data, argument analysis was performed where the relationship between theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices was assessed.

Findings & Analysis: Findings and analysis portrayed both a balanced relationship, where theory and practice shared a mutual understanding of experiential marketing practices, as well as an imbalanced relationship, where theory was lacking representation of concepts or portrayed a divergent focus or objective than practice. This study thus illustrated a gap within theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices, through performing a marketing-as-practice approach.

Discussion & Conclusion: This study shows, through the example of experiential marketing practices, the ability of the marketing-as-practice approach to address the gap between theory and practice. The values of adopting this approach further constitutes in developing relevant knowledge, meeting the demands of a complex and dynamic marketplace and assisting the integration of theory and practice.

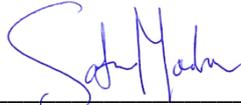


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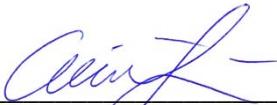
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Sofie Molin



Annie Sjöberg



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1. Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the reader to this study by portraying a current problematization within marketing literature. First, a prologue is provided to captivate the reader's interest. Thereafter, background regarding the concept of critical marketing which has emphasized the need to pursue action-based research is briefly described. From this, the problematization builds upon the need to study marketing practices in the current dynamic marketplace, which leads to the introduction of the marketing-as-practice approach. Following, the concept of experiential marketing is explained, portraying the unit of analysis which will be critically assessed on practical and theoretical dimensions through the marketing-as-practice approach. From this, the aim and objective which have together formed the research question of this study, are presented. At last, the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Prologue

*"There is a need to integrate theory and practice in marketing
as theory drives practice and practice spurs theory development."*

(Kumar, 2017, p. 2)

The statement above is from a recently published editorial written to encourage the integration between theory and practice within the academic marketing discipline. Even though the integration was considered to be the most pressing issue as early as the millennium shift, (Ankers & Brennan, 2002), the practitioners' standpoints still seem to lack appropriate attention in academic marketing literature (Cornelissen, 2005; Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander & Laine, 2011), which subsequently calls for new approaches for knowledge creation. This is needed as it is argued that contemporary marketing literature is currently conceptually rich but empirically thin (Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander & Laine, 2011); lacking empirical, inductive research geared specifically towards studying marketing practices. This view thus provides an understanding of the marketplace which is not reflecting current activities in the marketplace (Gummesson, 1991).

Following this discussion, authors are advised to more extensively include critical thinking in the marketing discourse, which will guide research to incorporate multiple perspectives and engage with current market movements (Burton, 2001; Hackley, 2009). In line with this, responding to the postmodern shift, Alvesson (1994) introduced Critical Theory's role in marketing, stating that it provides a contrasting view to traditional marketing theory and opens up for new insights and approaches to gain knowledge. This is highly relevant today due to the rapid development of new marketing concepts growing on the marketplace. Adopting this approach is argued to generate relevant knowledge and enable researchers to theorize in-line with market demands, with an emphasis geared towards the importance of



studying actual marketing practices through action-based research (Tadajewski, 2010b). As the issue of integrating theory and practice within the marketing discipline remains unsolved (Kumar, 2017) there is a current need for new approaches of knowledge creation within the marketing discipline, making action-based research more relevant than ever.

1.2 Background

The shift from a modernist to a postmodernist society created fundamental challenges within marketing. The marketing landscape changed remarkably, especially due to the introduction of new technologies as well as the rise of the Web 2.0, which made the market vastly dynamic and complex (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005). The new, postmodern era thus demanded marketers to think differently; where concepts such as complexity, diffusion and collaboration replaced the traditional managerial, centralized and ordered practices. It was thus clear that marketers faced multiple challenges where they could no longer expect to see the same patterns as before (Firat & Venkatesh, 1991; Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Ever since this shift, the complexity of real-life marketing work has been argued to not fully be represented in academic marketing theory (Svensson, 2007), and the practical understanding of the marketplace is rather questionable (Hackley, 2003). Taken together, marketing academics have since then been criticised by authors outside the discipline for failing to acknowledge alternative viewpoints and descriptions, thus to lack significant critical standpoints. It is argued that without the acknowledgement of multi-dimensional explanations and settings, academic work tend to produce rather novel problematizations. This further questions if traditional logic and theories can fully explain today's markets (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005) as well as creates an evident tension between theoretical and practical understandings of the marketplace (Smith, Williams, Lowe, Rod, & Hwang, 2015).

Tackling this critique, Tadajewski (2010a) has stated for a long time that in order to produce practically relevant research, academics are required to actively engage with marketing practices. The combination of critical theory, marketing and action research is conceptualized as Critical Marketing, argued by Tadajewski (2010b) and Alvesson (1994) to demand researchers to adapt an experiential reflexivity and an understanding of the need to co-create meanings with market actors through research and shared experiences. Critical marketing thus demands action and involvement outside of academia (Murray & Ozanne, 1991). This combination is additionally needed due to that marketing scholars are nowadays not the sole producers of the marketing concept; market practitioners and even consumers play an important role in knowledge creation, which thus further enhances the role of engaging with marketing activities (Tadajewski, Chelekis, DeBerry-Spence, Figueiredo, Kravets, Nuttavuthisit, Peñaloza & Moisander, 2014).



1.3 Problematization

1.3.1 The Need to Engage with Marketing Activities

In line with Alvesson (1994) and Tadajewski (2010a), Skålén and Hackley (2011) argue for the need to more extensively include a reflexive approach in practice research, stating that theory would otherwise risk providing a false picture of the marketplace by theorizing without regards to the basis of concept formation; ultimately affecting its relevance. Academics thus need to progress along with quick developments and changes in the marketplace to challenge dominant discourses and further deliver and represent accurate understandings of new marketing strategies (Prahalad & Ramasway, 2004). This progression can also create many opportunities as well as huge interests across many sub disciplines to be able to explore new topics occurring on the marketplace and thus truly understand which strategies that create economic performance (Polonsky & Ringer, 2012). There is evidently a need within the academic marketing discipline to engage with activities occurring in the marketplace. From this, if theory increasingly incorporates and understands current activities and power structures in the marketplace, its chances to contribute to the formation of marketing activities and thus be a part of market developments are increased (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006). Further, if engaging with marketing activities, theoretical subjects and areas will be developed along similar parameters as the marketplace and thus thrive in the same direction, which increases its relevance. This in turn increases possibilities for new approaches to theory development, which emerges from studying practices and reflecting actual market activities and growing trends in the marketing industry.

Portraying the prominent relevance of this thesis, Dr. Kumar, currently editor-in-chief of *Journal of Marketing*, published an editorial during the time period this research was undertaken. This editorial, in line with the initial statement of this chapter, calls for a more rich and nuanced perspective within marketing research, to spur into newer areas and truly understand the benefits of an integration of practical relevance and theoretical contributions. The aspiration of the editorial is thus to inspire future marketing research to bridge the gap between substantive contributions and practical relevance, by studying new marketing practices in society (Kumar, 2017). Therefore, demanded by the complex and dynamic marketplace, there exist a current need to assess diverse ways of knowledge creation, to integrate the gap between theory and practice.

1.3.2 Introducing the Marketing-as-Practice Approach

Embarking from these realizations, there is a need for marketing to adapt to new methods of knowledge production - by rethinking itself at practical levels to ensure successful interpretations of ever-changing phenomena (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005). Several authors have vastly discussed the lack of emphasis on studying actual markets and organizations through action-based research (Skålén & Hackley, 2011; Penaloza & Venkatesh, 2006; Tadajewski, 2010b). The importance of studying marketing practitioners as well as marketing practices is a focus of attention, explained by Hackley, Skålén and Stenfors



(2008) as the need for research to move away from studying *marketing-to-practice* into a new form of research; *marketing-as-practice*. This implies critically studying marketing practices, further clarified in three-fold by Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould (2009), to include studying procedures, develop new understandings and actively engage with market actors as to gain an understanding of what is currently occurring in the marketplace. This approach emerges from critical marketing, where marketers are argued to engage in critical thinking as to see knowledge in a new light. The intention with critical marketing is not to criticize what has previously been written, but rather empathize new ways of assessing marketing concepts. This implies featuring both positive and negative outcomes to account for why something works or contrastively is poorly accurate (Cottrell, 2011), and can thus rather help to yield new insights previous research has not highlighted or discussed in a certain ways (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). From this, critically reviewing theory to assess its market relevance, through a marketing-as-practice approach, might guide researchers to challenge dominant thinking to ultimately reveal new and valuable insights.

1.3.3 Exploring Experiential Marketing

Spurred by the addressed needs of an increased production of action-based knowledge which is highly reflecting current marketing activities, this thesis will address a prominent marketing concept through a marketing-as-practice approach; experiential marketing. Experiential marketing is a growing trend among practitioners, which have emerged following the realization that marketers are struggling to get the attention of their customers in the cluttered marketplace. This is for example due to customers being exposed to numerous marketing messages on a daily basis, which has led to some level of resistance to traditional marketing. To address these challenges, the method of using experiences as an integrated marketing concept is increasingly implemented by marketers, which is where experiential marketing emerges (Smilansky, 2009; Yazıcı, Koçak & Altunsöz, 2016).

Experiential has its roots in the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and refers to actively involving consumers in experiences (Selig, 2016), through authentic interactions between consumers and brands (Smilansky, 2009). A key element in experiential is to engage consumers through addressing emotions, and thus create highly personal interactions (Schmitt, 1999). The marketing industry has seen a rise of brand experience agencies, which help businesses and brands to make their customers want to listen to what they have to say (Smilansky, 2009; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Schmitt, 1999). However, even though there is an evidently increasing use of experiential strategies in the marketplace, the academic marketing discipline seems to lack thorough understanding of experiential marketing strategies being used by current practitioners (Yazıcı, Koçak & Altunsöz, 2016). Therefore, referring back to the need of new forms of knowledge creation, with an emphasis on action-based research, experiential marketing illustrates an evident example of a rapid development of an emerging marketing concept which has developed as a consequence of a highly dynamic marketplace. The concept thus forms an exceptional area to explore through a marketing-as-practice approach, as integration with marketing practitioners is needed to fully understand the current experiential marketing practices taking place in the complex marketplace.



1.4 Research Aim & Question

Following the above problematization regarding the need to integrate theory and practice, the aim with this research is to explore the marketing-as-practice approach's ability to critically assess the gap between theoretical and practical understandings of marketing activities. The aim is operationalized by conducting marketing-as-practice research on the experiential marketing concept.

In order to understand the relationship between theory and practice regarding experiential marketing practices, the following research question was constructed:

How are experiential marketing practices portrayed in theory vis-a-vis practice?

1.5 Thesis Outline

The research will commence with a literature review, accounting for the need to adopt a critical and action-based approach in research. To explain the foundations of the need, critical marketing literature is elaborated upon to further clarify the need to question dominant thinking. Further on, a specific approach emerging from critical marketing, especially portraying the need for action-based research is presented; marketing-as-practice. Reasons for this approach's importance are portrayed, specifically through the changing demands of a dynamic marketplace. The authors have then chosen to operationalize the marketing-as-practice approach through investigating a current marketing trend; experiential marketing. Experiential marketing thus forms the unit of analysis, which the authors justify by portraying the current representations of what the marketing concept entails, and emphasise the rising popularity of the concept. Simultaneously, through the abductive stance taken, the authors present the choice to investigate the arguments of practical implementations represented in theory vis-a-vis practice regarding this marketing concept, for the ability to conduct this research through a marketing-as-practice approach.

Following addressing the literature, the methodology of this research will be presented. The unit of analysis will be clarified, through a presentation of the experiential marketing concept in combination with a marketing-as-practice approach. The philosophical assumptions of this research will then be presented, accounting for epistemological and ontological considerations as well as research approach. Thereafter, the research strategy will be illustrated, including the choices made regarding data collection and analysis. The authors have chosen to collect two types of data, which will be presented separately along with the sampling methods. Following, the trustworthiness section accounts for the credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of the study. Concludingly, delimitations, choices that the authors have actively made which have limited this study, are accounted for.



The findings chapter presents data derived from primary and secondary research, and is assessed in the light of accounting for marketing practices. The structure of this chapter is built upon thematization of collected data, further elaborated upon in the methodology. Following, the analysis evaluates the relationships portrayed in findings, and thus addresses the research question proposed by this thesis. Thereafter, a discussion of the analysis is initiated, with the ambition to address the research aim. This is done through presenting the analysed findings in the light of the bigger picture; the value of marketing-as-practice research and concludingly the importance of critical marketing studies when attempting to respond to the current demands of the academic marketing discipline regarding the integration of theory and practice. Following, concluding points derived from conducted research are presented. Lastly, reflections, limitations and future research possibilities are accounted for.



2. Literature Review

This chapter introduces the reader to the emergence of critical thinking and the concluding implications of this for the academic marketing discipline. Critiques of the marketing discipline are accounted for as well as the resulting emergence of critical marketing, portrayed as a combination of critical theory and marketing. After this, concrete implications are explained where the marketing-as-practice approach, a concept emerging from critical marketing, is described to highlight the need to address the imbalance between theoretical and practical understandings of marketing practices. At last, the reader is introduced to the area of study this research investigates to operationalize the proposed aim; experiential marketing, where additional emphasis is put on the need for theory to further address this emerging concept in the marketplace.

2.1 Critical Marketing

2.1.1 Critical Thinking in the Marketing Discipline

The shift from a modernist to a postmodernist society demanded fundamental changes in marketing, leading to a new paradigm. Marketing would no longer represent traditional norms, but reflect diversity and differences on both cultural and individual consumer levels. The new, postmodern era demanded marketers to think differently; they could no longer expect to see the same patterns as before (Firat & Venkatesh, 1991). Postmodern marketing is therefore in opposition to mainstream marketing's views of a functionalistic, objective and rather positivistic ethos (Brown, 1995); explained by Burrell and Morgan (1979) as the new, interpretive paradigm. Further, emphasis is put on the challenges the postmodern shift, caused by the cultural changes, addressing both marketers and academics (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Taken together, these challenges require marketers to adapt to the postmodern thought; where concepts such as complexity, diffusion and collaboration replaces the traditional managerial, centralized and ordered practices (Firat & Dholakia, 2006).

The shift additionally implicated the development of critical thoughts, resulting in questionable relevance of research, which consequently presents implications for marketing theory and research. Hackley (2009) clarifies a lacking critical standpoint in the marketing discipline, by stating shortcomings in ethical, practical and intellectual areas, resulting in homogeneous and uncritical work. Marketing academics have been criticised to neglect critical theoretical approaches in their work, especially by academics outside of the discipline, and specifically due to other disciplines being predominantly criticised (Burton, 2001). The criticism highlights lack of appropriately acknowledging weaknesses, which further encourages critique from outside the field (Hackley, 2009). Brownlie and Saren (1997) emphasise resulting impacts of this on knowledge production, where the narrow frame of the marketing discourse moderately fail to incorporate multiple perspectives. The discourse is



thereby argued to some extent result in novel problematization, which calls for a need for including critical thinking in marketing discourse (Burton, 2001).

Alvesson (1994) addresses this issue through introducing the combination of critical theory and marketing; presenting opportunities to conceptualize marketing in new ways in order to emphasise interesting, new dimensions of research. He synthesizes the combination to lead to having a significant stance in reality and a more reflective approach to research. Additionally, introducing critical theory in marketing has strong theoretical and cognitive reasons, where the combination presents a contrasting view to conventional marketing theory (Alvesson, 1994). Shankar (2009) addresses these implications by recognising the importance of multiplicity in marketing knowledge; continuously looking to purposively suit the needs of different demands. He further explains that the potential lies in pluralism, inviting a more pragmatic approach to marketing knowledge. While highlighting these issues, Shankar (2009) draws further implications of critical thoughts in marketing as a reflexive knowledge, with emphasis regarding the dominant focus on sole production for academia. He portrays the benefit of a combination of multiple thoughts within marketing, attempting to account for a multidimensional perspective of theoretical viewpoints; overwriting the greatness of single, explanatory theories and views (Shankar, 2009).

2.1.2 The Emergence of Critical Marketing

Following the introduction of critical perspectives, the critical and diverse point of view is increasingly accounted for (Alvesson, 1994). Tadajewski and Maclaran (2009) explains the shift of marketing as developing from a controlled into a liberated science, where the production of knowledge moved from supporting pre-existing power structures into creating new understandings. In line with this development, marketing theory has increasingly been directed towards a managerial orientation, closely related to marketing management and issues related to practitioners. This constitutes the emergence of critical marketing, which demands scholars to actively engage with marketing practices (Tadajewski, 2010a). Critical marketing especially emphasises critiques of the marketing discipline regarding power structures, and more specifically the role of the consumer and society (Saren & Svensson, 2009). Critical marketing is a thus reflexive knowledge, as it embarks from the criticality presented but further combines it with an experimental approach and a critical stance, thus emphasising the practical aspects and implications of critical theory. Hence, this requires a different approach to theory, as it questions dominant thinking (Tadajewski, 2010a). Tadajewski (2010b) further address the need by contrasting mainstream marketing theory and critical marketing, where critical marketing conversely refuses social and moral imperatives, forming critiques of the performative emphasis in marketing. Critical marketing rather adopts a critical performative manner, aiming to present opportunities for increased relevance. Critical marketing should further entail addressing all stakeholders, including an openness and tolerance to practitioners, which is not always performed in reality (Tadajewski, 2010b). In line with Shimp (1994), Tadajewski (2010b) further stressed the point of interacting with market practitioners, which consequently requires an altered relationship between researchers and practitioners. This view thus represents a highly reflective and practical view.



2.1.3 Critical Marketing Research

Conducting critical research thus entails not only a subjective and objective understanding of phenomena, but requires a program of action and involvement outside of academia (Murray & Ozanne, 1991). This development has implicated researchers to more intensively engage in action-oriented research (Murray, Ozanne & Shapiro, 1994). Embarking from a critical perspective, Shimp (1994) discusses this issue by addressing the importance of relevance in academia, and argues that there is a lack of managerial relevance in research. Research should thus contribute to solving managerial problems, emerging from methodological suitability and conceptual domains (Shimp, 1994). Taking upon an experiential approach further recommends a mutual respect between both parties and a willingness to learn from each other. Critical marketers should thus learn from rather than judge market actors, and adapt a form of experiential reflexivity where meaning is co-created through research and shared experiences. This is beneficially performed through participatory action research (Tadajewski, 2010b). Tadajewski et al. (2014) further questions marketing scholar's role as sole "missionaries" and engineers of the marketing concept. Concluding, performing critical marketing research requires researchers to engage with practice, which requires micro-emancipations for academics in order to engage in theoretical and practical interferences (Saren & Svensson, 2009; Tadajewski, 2010b).

2.2 Marketing-as-Practice

2.2.1 The Need to Study Marketing Practices

Critical marketing literature has evidently emphasized the need to engage with marketing practitioners and study marketing practices to provide an accurate picture of the marketplace (Penaloza & Venkatesh, 2006). Still, there is a lack of engaging with the critique of empirical research in how marketing is actually done in organizations, and to study markets and people in what they actually do (Skålén & Hackley, 2011; Penaloza & Venkatesh, 2006). Skålén and Hackley (2011) argue the current description of what marketing work is in conventional marketing theory is far more complex in real-life. In line with Alvesson (1994) and Tadajewski (2010a), Skålén and Hackley (2011) thus argue the need for a more reflexive approach in studying management practice, to avoid theorizing marketing without having investigated the natural basis of how concepts are formed. As the marketing landscape is usually far more complex than what generalized academic marketing theory allows (Svensson, 2007) literature should therefore be challenged regarding if it truly reflects practical understandings (Hackley, 2003). Factors such as changing consumer behaviour, emerging technologies as well as the introduction of novel marketing practices are continually challenging existing conceptualizations of marketing which forces researchers to look for knowledge beyond the textbook (Laurell & Parment, 2015). Due to these concerns, marketing theory is argued to lack significant recognition of marketing practice's diversity (Smith et al. 2015) From this, there is a need for theory to study diverse practices carried out by practitioners to gain true knowledge of how the world works (Skålén & Hackley, 2011). Without this approach, and thus engaging with critical perspectives to open up a more



enriching dialogue, theories run the risk of describing a more abstract and rational world, which may conceal the actual lived experience (Smith et al. 2015). Similarly, Hackley, Skålén and Stenfors (2008) also encourage researchers to study marketing practitioners and what actions are performed in organizations when enacting marketing. As academic research has focused mostly on how organizations should conduct marketing and less research on how it is actually performed, research should thus move away from studying *marketing-to-practice* and towards a *marketing-as-practice* approach, where the latter refers to studying and observing actual marketing practices to avoid describing a false picture of reality (Hackley, Skålén & Stenfors, 2008).

Studying marketing practices is further essential to challenge dominant thinking as marketing practices consist of a domain of heterogeneous practices (Araujo, Kjellberg & Spencer, 2008; Araujo, 2007). To understand the principles of marketing practices, Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould (2009, p. 30) define these as “an anatomy consisting of 1) procedures—explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions called “discursive knowledge”; (2) understandings—knowledge of what to say and do, skills and projects, or know-how; and (3) engagements—ends and purposes that are emotionally charged insofar as people are committed to them”. In general, marketing practices refer to what is done in the market and performed by studying concepts and actors on a micro-level in order to understand the situational and specific context of actions (Hackley, Skålén & Stenfors, 2008). Ardley (2009) implies there exists dominant discourses in marketing theory where predetermined structures lack the validity in explaining marketing phenomena based from the nature of managerial action. This creates an evident tension between theory and practice, as marketing knowledge does not work as a pre-programmed technology but is rather dependent on human activity (Ardley, 2009). Research should therefore aim on more inquires on detailed and empirical research (Cornelissen, 2005). Therefore, studying markets as a social construction (Penaloza & Vankatesh, 2006) will enable researchers to study science-in-action rather than ready-made science, which in turn defines markets as driven by a vast majority of diverse and ever-changing actions rather than stable and pre-structured entities (Araujo, Kjellberg & Spencer, 2008).

Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006) further emphasize the need to study marketing-as-practice as it enables theory to better understand what market-shaping processes as well as actions are currently creating economic performance. Many theories originating in marketing and strategy can be expected to influence practices and therefore participate in the shaping of markets. From this, narrowing the gap between how academic researchers and market practitioners understand markets becomes crucial to understand what influences and shapes markets. Through studying market practices and what actors do, it can enable theory to understand emergent structures and reflect on current marketing practices to be able to contribute and influence the process. As part of the integration, marketing-as-practice research also creates an opportunity for practice to take multiple theoretical influences into account and understand how they are applicable within the marketplace (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006). Therefore, by assessing the gap between theory and practice, through a marketing-as-practice approach, may help both academics and practitioners to thrive in knowledge and create substantive contributions and practical relevance within marketing (Kumar, 2017).



2.2.2 The Demands of a Dynamic Marketplace

The current marketplace is complicated and does not follow a linear direction as it is tangled up with different webs of meanings and relationships, making the marketing-as-practice approach more relevant than ever. The market is extremely dynamic, as it consists of numerous complex actions (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005). Thus, Roberts, Kayande and Stremersch (2014) imply how even though the first step toward investigating the link between market science and market practice has been taken; there still exist multiple unanswered research areas. Marketing especially, unlike many other scientific inquiries, is very context dependent. This suggests theory to enhance micro-level studies within marketing to gain a true description of the current complex marketplace. It is argued that the absence of these studies may otherwise result in multiple explanations where people are forced to interpret reality themselves. As a consequence, marketing theory can fail to recognise the diversity of the complex set of marketing practices taking place where an understood reality of the current marketplace is missing (Smith et al. 2015). Taken together, this may question if traditional logic and theories can fully explain today's markets, their forms and dynamics, where change is dominant and actors are constantly changing identities as well as becoming more influential due to the mass of individual preferences (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005). Investigating marketing today involves trying to capture an empirical world that is not given but constructed by constantly evolving practices. Marketing-as-practice research can therefore be useful as behaviours need to be studied and interpreted on an individual level, and cannot be grouped as a homogenous mass. From this, it might be even more crucial for contemporary researchers than before to more intensely direct their research toward a marketing-as-practice focus, due to the current demands of society with shifting power structures and rapid development of market movements and technology. Academia is thus advised to review an understanding of new and future marketing strategies to stay relevant and to reflect upon current critical issues. From this, marketing is argued to rethink itself at a practical level, by for example adopting the marketing-as-practice approach, to increase the possibilities of interpreting the phenomena constantly taking place and stay relevant for future knowledge creation (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005; Hackley, 2009; Skålén & Hackley, 2011).

Addressing this issue, current editor-in-chief of Journal of Marketing, Dr. Kumar, published an editorial during this thesis process, in which he stressed the need for marketing research to integrate the gap between theory and practice. The piece argues for the relevant and urgent need to emphasize the issue of differences in theory and practice, with an emphasis on the specific relevance for the marketing discipline. Kumar (2017) implies as the current business evolves, marketing theory's understanding of marketing practices needs to evolve as well. He thus argues in line with Håkansson and Waluszewski (2005), Skålén and Hackley (2011), Penalosa and Venkatesh (2006) and others for an increasing need for more managerially relevant research, through approaches like marketing-as-practice, which focus is not restricted to merely advancing sophisticated research methods, but creating rigorous and impactful research by spurring into newer areas within marketing to represent the current business landscape.



2.3 Operationalizing Marketing-as-Practice

To respond to the needs addressed through critical marketing and the call for increased action-based research, the authors have chosen to adapt a marketing-as-practice approach to evaluate the relationship between theoretical and practical understandings of a specific marketing concept; experiential marketing. The marketing-as-practice approach will be operationalized by critically assessing practices of experiential marketing, through a comparison of arguments in theory and practice specifically stating these practical implications. The combination of the marketing-as-practice approach and the comparison of arguments thus form the analytical and theoretical framework upon which this research rests. To clarify, the authors will adapt a marketing-as-practice approach by looking at what arguments practice makes regarding experiential marketing practices and compare it to arguments in theory, to assess the relationship between theory and practice.

This is performed to explore the value of the marketing-as-practice approach, where experiential marketing acts as the unit of analysis. The choice of unit of analysis is endorsed by the current prominence of the concept, as it is currently developing at an intense pace and has become an evident, growing trend worldwide (Yazıcı, Koçak & Altunsöz, 2016). The development is provoked by the increased understanding among marketers of the powers and benefits of integrating experiential elements (Smilansky, 2009). It is simultaneously caused by the realization of difficulties in successfully reaching consumers through traditional marketing methods, which has led marketers to integrate experiential strategies (Experiential Marketing Trends, 2014).

2.3.1 Experiential Marketing

Its origins can be linked to Pine and Gilmore's (1999) field-changing work, which stated that the world was moving from a service-based economy to an experience-based one. Goods were changing from being simple commodities into processed products, while similarly additional service features were added onto the product offering. The competitive landscape thus required producers to make their products stand out; to deliver something extra to the consumers (Monika, 2017). As a result, society moved into the experience economy, where experiences became the new economic offering (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A shift in the economic landscape additionally generated a novel view on consumption, where the act of consuming evolved into a holistic experience, actively involving consumers (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007). This view also extended experiences from being an economic phenomenon into a source of value creation and new motivations for consumption (Yazıcı, Koçak & Altunsöz, 2016). Thus, companies are nowadays increasingly involving delivering experiences as part of integrated marketing strategies (Pandey & Pattnaik, 2016).

The concept of utilizing experiences as a strategic tool has gained significant attention in the field and formed a distinctive marketing concept; experiential marketing (Yazıcı, Koçak & Altunsöz, 2016). The concept have in recent years gained significant attention in business, looking at the increasing number of agencies specializing in experiential strategies, but has



not yet received similar consideration from the academic marketing discipline (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2006).

Experiential marketing is seen as an innovative approach to create and maintain competitive advantage, with the ultimate goal to generate memorable experiences and long lasting relations with consumers (Pandey & Pattnaik, 2016). In experiential marketing, everything is personal. Experiential strategies entail immersing consumers in active experiences where personal touch and sense of belonging are central elements (Selig, 2016). Monika (2017) defines three important elements in experiential strategies; delivering a holistic experience, constructing an unforgettable experience and incorporating co-creation of value. Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) further emphasise the importance of generating means for co-creation, where companies strive to provide contexts in which consumers create their own experiences. Smilansky (2009), a contemporary lead author within the field, construe experiential as a real-time interaction between brands and consumers. She further stresses the importance of constructing the experience around one main idea, communicated via live events, in line with the brand's core values. Furthermore, it is about bringing the brand personality to life and to generate brand and consumer advocacy. Experiential is portrayed to benefit repeat purchases, but most importantly generate word-of-mouth (Selig, 2016).

As brands are struggling to seek attention in an excessively competitive, cluttered landscape, experiential marketing can be the strategy needed to successfully cut through the noise and make consumers not only notice the brand, but to build a personal relationship with it (Srinivasan & Srivastava, 2010; Eventmagazine, 2016, Experiential Marketing Trends, 2014; Event Institute, 2016; Clarke, 2016). Brands are increasingly addressing this issue through making consumers think, feel and act with the brand, in line with experiential values (Srinivasan & Srivastava 2010). In a content-driven marketing landscape, experiential has additionally emerged as an effective platform where consumers not only create but share their own experiences (Event Institute, 2016). Another reason for the rising popularity is through the increasing possibilities following technological developments together with a millennial driven experience culture, where participants often wish to share content from their experience on social platforms (Clarke, 2016). Therefore, there is a growing understanding of the importance of involving consumers with products in real-time events through experiential marketing (MarkDebrand, 2016).

Similarly, experiential marketing represents an evolving area within the academic marketing discipline, with limited practice-oriented research currently conducted within the stream. Even following an increasing use of experiential strategies, the academic marketing discipline is argued to lack a fully comprehensive understanding of the practicalities of this phenomena (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2006). Thus, this presents a challenge for the academic field, where a lack of the responsiveness demanded by a dynamic marketplace is evident. Interestingly however, the area has conversely gained significant attention among practitioners, where numerous authors have published work aimed for other practitioners (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Hence, experiential marketing may represent an area where academics are struggling to address practical implications at a similar phase as marketing practitioners (Tynan &



McKechnie, 2009). Several academic authors have thereby argued for the need to further extend beyond theorization of this phenomena; to, in line with the ideas of critical marketing and marketing-as-practice, address the practicalities of experiential marketing strategies (Ismail, 2011).



3. Methodology

In this chapter the research design is presented and discussed. First the unit of analysis, experiential marketing practices, is clarified to justify the choice of the unit exemplified to fulfil the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the philosophical assumptions the research has adopted are explained. After this, the research strategy as well as the methods chosen for data collection are accounted for. The next section comprises an elaborate description of the choice of analysis method, to provide the reader with a systematic and comprehensive illustration of how the collected data was analysed, where specific examples of analysis material are portrayed in Appendix B. Prominently, throughout each section of this research design, the link between the choice of method and purpose of the study is enlightened. Finally, at the end of the chapter, the trustworthiness as well as delimitations of the chosen methods are discussed.

3.1 Unit of Analysis; Experiential Marketing

As accounted for above, experiential marketing represents an increasingly recognized area in the marketing field, but still lacks theoretical attention regarding practical experiential marketing methods due to its recent emergence. Thereby, to theorize and academically account for practices, used in this current and increasingly popular concept by numerous marketers, is needed for the marketing discipline to stay relevant and to address current issues in the field. Previous research in experiential marketing has accounted for theoretical understandings of what constitutes experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), benefits of involving consumers through addressing emotions (Schmitt, 1999) and the need for a two-way interaction in experiences (Smilansky, 2009). However, as experiential is a concept which is continuously striving towards delivering new and unexpected experiences (Yazıcı, Koçak & Altunsöz, 2016), the field is ever-changing and requires extensive market knowledge in order to generate understandings of pursued strategies. This calls for a need to address this issue through adapting a marketing-as-practice approach, to discover how practitioners deliver these experiences strategically. Experiential marketing practices in this paper thus stands for the practices which experiential marketing consists of. Therefore, experiential marketing practices was chosen as the unit of analysis, as the authors strive to examine experiential marketing through a marketing-as-practice approach to consequently explore the ability of these studies to assess the gap between theory and practice.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Patton (2002) underlines the essence of clarifying the research philosophy of a study in order to understand which reality the researcher embarks from. In this study, a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology stance was taken. As the objective of the study is to critically assess different understandings, it implies how the author's believe there exists



multiple views of current identification or unexplored aspects of reality, which is in line with these research philosophies. The objectives of these stances are further addressed below, prior to the specific methods and techniques used for the research.

3.2.1 Ontology; Relativism

The ontological consideration in this research took a relativist position. This approach views social reality as an ongoing process of creations where reality is continually being reshaped. (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). A relativist approach was taken as the authors imply how markets as well as social actors are in constant change and thus need to be continually studied to renew the truth, in line with the marketing-as-practice approach. This can be referred to as subjectivism, an aspect of ontological assumptions, indicating how actions of social actors need to be studied in detail in different situations to truly understand and gain knowledge of the reality (Saunders et al. 2012). This further supports the marketing-as-practice approach which implies how markets contain a diverse set of practices and thus need to be studied on micro-level to avoid being grouped into a homogenous mass (Cornelissen, 2005; Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005; Hackley, 2009). A relativist approach further allowed the participants to define their perceived reality of experiential marketing practices and from this the authors gained a rich description of what represents the current reality of the market.

3.2.2 Epistemology; Social Constructionism

A relativist ontological position is closely connected to the social constructionist view, reflecting the epistemological stance in this study. This view states how the world is socially constructed and thus continually changing; creating a need to constantly revise and study the world (Burr, 2015; Saunders et al. 2012). As social constructionists, the authors took a subjectivist and transactional approach, which involves interacting with the research participants (Appleton & King, 1997). This was crucial as interacting with the market is one of the pillar stones within the marketing-as-practice approach (Skålén & Hackley, 2011). Methodologically, the constructionist view takes a hermeneutic and dialectic approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), reaching an understanding of various constructions, to recognize divergent thinking and conflicting ideas between theory and practice (Appleton & King, 1997). This stance thus requires researchers to accept how others may hold different views of reality from their own (Burr, 2015; Appleton & King, 1997). This is further in line with the critical marketing values, which aims to question dominant thinking to see concepts and actions in a new light (Tadajewski, 2010a).

3.3 Research Strategy

Designing a clear research strategy was crucial, as it involves organizing the research activity in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aim (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Therefore, prior to explaining the data collection and analysis of the study, the decisions of conducting a qualitative and abductive method are accounted for. These were



chosen in preference to other options, as they allowed for a circular and flexible process (Saunders et al. 2012). The approaches are also in line with the underlying philosophical positions, which is of essence according to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012).

3.3.1 Qualitative & Abductive Approach

The logic of this study follows a qualitative and abductive research approach. Appleton and King (1997) state that a qualitative and abductive research approach is particularly important in a social constructivist inquiry, as it is a flexible way of gathering data. In relation to the research aim and the philosophes affecting the study, an inductive approach would also have been represented as appropriate for this paper. However, the authors were already aware of current experiential marketing practices as well as had obtained an understanding for the marketing-as-practice approach as a branch to the critical marketing concept. Thus the abductive approach allowed the researchers to start with an initial understanding and then spiral away to seek further knowledge (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012) which was considered more appropriated to this research. The authors also realized that in order to understand the value of marketing-as-practice research, knowledge concerning previous studies were extremely useful as a starting point and solid base for the research. Accordingly, a certain extent deduction was applied, by using as starting base of knowledge built on existing literature on marketing-as-practice derived from critical marketing. Furthermore, at the same time, an amount of induction was applied by adjusting and revising initial knowledge according to the insights and findings generated from theoretical and practical understandings on experiential marketing practices. Therefore, the approach combined both elements of induction and deduction, and thus reflected the abductive approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012) as well as combined the philosophical and axiological positions accordingly (Saunders et al. 2009). By using a combination of these approaches, the rigidity and superficiality of the deductive reasoning (i.e. in terms of avoiding pre-assumptions of what experiential marketing practices entailed) was overcome (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, by relying on marketing-as-practice research as a starting base, increased the chances to overcome the main inductive reasoning limitations and, specifically, the difficulty in building knowledge from a purely unstructured research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In fact, as stated by Saunders et al. (2009), “with induction you have constantly to live with the fear that no useful data patterns and theory will emerge” (p. 127) which, considering the quality and quantity of the already available theories and literature, would have been an unnecessary risk for this study.

3.4 Data Collection

In order to serve the comparative nature of this study, two methods of data collection were appropriated to collect both primary and secondary data for subsequent analysis. To collect primary data, concerning market practices, the method of in-depth interviews was chosen. Regarding secondary data, collected in order to form grounds of theoretical academic comparison, relevant experiential marketing literature was collected using specific sampling



criteria to ensure valid analysis. Both data collection methods as well as sampling methods chosen are accounted for below.

3.4.1 Primary Data; In-depth Interviews

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews, which allow the researchers to gain an elicited depth of information from a relatively small sample of interviewees (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2001; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012), and is thus the main motivation for method choice in this research. Prior to conducting interviews, a thorough understanding of what constitutes an in-depth interview was gained. The multiple purposes of the technique are portrayed by Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2001); to assess needs, refine programs, identify issues and plan strategically. They further describe what characteristics that define in-depth interviews, including the importance of having an open-ended and semi-structured format together with the search for understanding and interpretation (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2001). McCracken (1988) also explains the in-depth interview, including the interview design, cultural categorization, cultural discoveries and analytical categories. It is also important to throughout the interview be open-minded, flexible, patient and observant (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2001). All these points were thus taken into consideration when conducting the in-depth interviews in order to acquire profound information from a limited number of participants.

In combination with above interview components, Kvale's (1996) in-depth interview framework was applied. Initially, the stream of information needed was thematised along with the purpose of the research. The authors decided to focus on collecting information regarding the planning and execution of experiential marketing strategies. After deciding what information needed to be collected, the interview was designed. From this, the authors decided to adapt the format of semi-structured interviews, to lead the interviewees to the area of interest, but to not exclude possibilities of new realizations of unexpected phenomena. Topics and main questions were formulated, allowing the participants to speak freely, rather than answering a set of specific questions where they might feel constrained to express their subjective standpoints. The interview design did thus rather take the form of an interview guide, with the addition of a limited number of questions, enabling new understandings to be made. The interview guide is illustrated in Appendix A. Following the establishment of the interview design, the interviews were conducted. Due to geographical distance, only one interview was conducted face-to-face, and the remaining via remote interviewing. Primary data was recorded and later on transcribed, to ease the analysis process. The next and final steps undertaken involved the reporting of the data and sharing it with relevant stakeholders. All these steps represent the interview framework described by Kvale (1996), which were used to ensure collection of rigid data as well as to provide the authors with a structured and logical path of conducting in-depth interviews.



3.4.1.1 Sampling Strategy

In order to serve the research purpose and thus find participants working with experiential marketing, interviewees were sampled upon using a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling requires the researcher to have a clear idea of what units are needed, to approach relevant participants, where the ones meeting the set criteria are selected for participation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). It initially enables the discovery of various constructs and an illumination of studied phenomena (Appleton & King, 1997). Purposive sampling further allows the authors to use their own judgements in knowing what cases that will best suit the research objectives. This sampling technique was used, as it is efficient when collecting rich description from small samples (Saunders et al. 2012). Additionally, the information needed for this research could only be acquired from specific people who possess the knowledge within the area of study. The specific purposive sampling strategy chosen was typical-case sampling, where the interviewees were selected upon representing typical brand experience or experiential marketing agencies (Saunders et al. 2012). Thus, representatives from agencies specializing in experiential marketing, was selected upon the fulfilment of specific criteria. The following criteria were set in order to acquire the right knowledge needed to fulfil the purpose of the study. Interviewees needed to have significant experience and knowledge of the brand experience concept and industry, and to show evidence of having participated in the creation of experiential marketing strategies. The interviewees were further selected upon representing influential brand experience agencies with considerate heritage in the industry, in which they have positions including with either strategic planning, concept creation or strategic executions of experiential marketing productions.

Following the decision of limiting primary data collection according to above sampling criteria, in-depth interviews were conducted with six representatives from highly regarded brand experience agencies in Sweden and the UK. The choices of agencies as well as their representatives are presented in Table 1 below. The number of agencies were chosen due to time constraints but also as the researchers realized after the fifth interview how the same themes and similar practices were continuously described, thus reaching a level of saturation, providing sufficient enough material for a justified analysis to answer the research question of this study.

Country	Organisation	Representative	Medium	Date
UK	Avantgarde "Creating Fans" www.avantgarde-uk.com	James Barnes	Remote	12 April 2017
UK	Avantgarde "Creating Fans" www.avantgarde-uk.com	Katie Peake	Remote	5 May 2017
UK	TRO "The Experience Agency" www.tro.com	Nicky Morgan	Remote	6 May 2017
Sweden	NineYards "The Brand Experience Agency" www.nineyards.se	Mats Nilsson	Face-to-face	12 April 2017
Sweden	Minnesota Communication "Brand Engagement" www.minnesota.se	Olle Nyström	Remote	18 April 2017
Sweden	Brand Creative "Design and Communications Agency" www.welcometobrand.com	Emelie Palmcrantz	Remote	19 April 2017

Table 1 Interviewees

3.4.2 Secondary Data; Literature

In order to portray the level of practical elements and practical relevance in experiential marketing literature, to investigate the representation of experiential marketing practices, numerous of articles and textbooks related to the experiential subject were collected. The main argument for collecting additional data from secondary sources was to serve the research purpose of portraying the relationship between theoretical and practical understanding of experiential marketing practices. Literature thus serves as the academically representative party and thereby forms one side of the comparative grounds for analysis.

3.4.2.1 Sampling Strategy

In order to serve the research purpose and to collect relevant data, similarly to the sampling method described in the previous chapter, a purposive sampling technique was adopted here as well. The sampling technique was further specialized into critical case sampling, where the authors looked for a small number of important, representative samples. Critical case sampling allows the authors to conduct a thorough analysis on a small number of samples, concluding from the rich material those samples allows (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012), favourable for this research. The literary critical case samples were chosen due to having generated numerous narratives and discourses within the marketing field, thus being highly influential pieces of literature. The sampling criteria thereby included narrow parameters in order to collect highly justified data for analysis. Initially, the sampling criteria included solely academic literature, published in English. Additional criteria included how the academic piece had to be strongly correlated to the subject of experiential marketing practices. To further ensure access to the most critical cases, the sampling of academic literature was divided into two parts; via general and specific search. The general search was



conducted via Google Scholar, and focused on collecting academic literature throughout the whole academic discipline, according to above criteria. The criterion in the general search was further designed to generate samples with high outreach and impact. Thus, a citation-based criteria was set, limiting the number of sampled literature to exclusively include pieces with over 100 citations. To further strengthen the basis of influential pieces, the second and specific search in field-leading journals (Moussa & Touzani, 2010) *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* and *Journal of Consumer Research*, accessed through Lund University’s collective library database LUB Search, was conducted separately to ensure a thorough coverage of the area, equivalently collecting pieces according to initial sampling criteria. Additionally, the specific search included articles in *Harvard Business Review*, which were considered as this journal addresses current issues within the marketing field. The combination of collecting top cited literature within Google Scholar, four of the major credential and influential marketing journals as well as Harvard Business Review articles concluded in 31 articles, and was considered by the authors to being representative of the academic representation of experiential marketing practices. The table below portrays the collected secondary data.

Authors	Year	Title	Publication
General Search			
Addis, M. & Holbrook, M.B.	2001	On the conceptual link between mass customisation and experiential consumption: an explosion of subjectivity	Journal of Consumer Behaviour
Atwal, G. & Williams, A.	2009	Luxury brand marketing—the experience is everything!	Journal of Brand Management
Berry, L.L., Carbone, L.P. & Haeckel, S.H.	2002	Managing the total customer experience	MIT Sloan Management Review
Carù, A. & Cova, B.	2003	Revisiting consumption experience: A more humble but complete view of the concept.	Marketing Theory
Carù, A. & Cova, B.	2006	How to facilitate immersion in a consumption experience: Appropriation operations and service elements	Journal of Consumer Behaviour
Gentile, C., Spiller, N. & Noci, G.	2007	How to sustain the customer experience: An overview of experience components that co-create value with the customer	European Management Journal
Gilmore, J.H. & Pine, B.J.	2002	Customer experience places: the new offering frontier	Strategy & Leadership



Holbrook, Morris B., & Elizabeth C. Hirschman.	1982	The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun	Journal of Consumer Research
McCole, P.	2004	Refocusing marketing to reflect practice: The changing role of marketing for business	Marketing Intelligence & Planning
Moor, E.	2003	Branded Spaces The scope of 'new marketing'	Journal of Consumer Culture
Petkus, E.	2004	Enhancing the application of experiential marketing in the arts	International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing
Ponsonby-McCabe, S. & Boyle, E.	2006	Understanding brands as experiential spaces: Axiological implications for marketing strategists	Journal of Strategic Marketing
Prahalad, C.K. & Ramaswamy, V.	2004	Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation	Journal of Interactive Marketing
Schmitt, B.	1999	Experiential marketing	Journal of Marketing Management
Brakus, J.J., Schmitt, B.H. & Zarantonello, L.	2009	Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty?	Journal of Marketing
Tsaur, S.H., Chiu, Y.T. & Wang, C.H.	2007	The visitors behavioural consequences of experiential marketing: an empirical study on Taipei Zoo.	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing
Tynan, C. & McKechnie, S.	2009	Experience marketing: a review and reassessment	Journal of Marketing Management
Verhoef, P.C., Lemon, K.N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. & Schlesinger, L.A.	2009	Customer experience creation: Determinants, dynamics and management strategies	Journal of Retailing
Walls, A.R., Okumus, F., Wang, Y.R. & Kwun, D.J.W.	2011	An epistemological view of consumer experiences	International Journal of Hospitality Management
Yuan, Y.H.E. & Wu, C.K.	2008	Relationships among experiential marketing, experiential value, and customer satisfaction	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research



Smilansky, S.	2009	Experiential Marketing: A practical guide to interactive brand experiences	Kogan Page Publishers
Specific Search			
Shah, Anuj K., & Adam L.A.	2014	Consuming experiential categories	Journal of Consumer Research
Holbrook, M.B. & Hirschman, E.C.	1982	The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun	Journal of Consumer Research
Rajagopal, P. & Montgomery, N.V	2011	I imagine, I experience, I like: The false experience effect	Journal of Consumer Research
Biswas, D., Labrecque, L.I., Lehmann, D.R. & Markos, E.	2014	Making choices while smelling, tasting, and listening: The role of sensory (dis) similarity when sequentially sampling products.	Journal of Marketing
McAlexander, J.H., Schouten, J.W. & Koenig, H.F.	2002	Building brand community	Journal of Marketing
Xu, J. & Schwarz, N.	2009	Do we really need a reason to indulge?	Journal of Marketing Research
Goode, M.R., Dahl, D.W. & Moreau, C.P.	2010	The effect of experiential analogies on consumer perceptions and attitudes	Journal of Marketing Research
Orth, U.R. & De Marchi, R.	2007	Understanding the relationships between functional, symbolic, and experiential brand beliefs, product experiential attributes, and product schema: advertising-trial interactions revisited.	Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice
Bonchek, M. & France, C.	2016	Build Your Brand as a Relationship	Harvard Business Review
Lachel, C.	2015	The Brand Benefits of Places like the Guinness Storehouse	Harvard Business Review
Rayport, J.	2017	Advertising new medium: human experiences.	Harvard Business Review

Table 2 Literature



3.5 Data Analysis

To increase the possibilities of producing a qualified analysis, the analysis of the interview should commence during the early stages of the interview investigation (Kvale, 2007). Thus, prior to commencing data collection, the data analysis technique, for both primary and secondary data, was chosen. For the purpose of this research the authors have chosen a linguistic analysis; Argument Analysis, initially proposed by Toulmin (2003) and further revised by Phelan and Reynolds (2005). Toulmin (2003) argues critical thinking contains justification of beliefs where argumentation is the one vehicle by which justification is offered. Thus argumentation works as the ‘train of reasoning’ where claims and supporting reasons are linked to establish a position of knowledge. From this reasoning, argument analysis was considered an appropriate method as it enabled the authors to gain knowledge of experiential marketing practices and truly understand how theory and practice argued for their knowledge positions within this research area. Further, assessing arguments is a central element in critical thinking processes and especially used when exploring, interpreting and comparing data (Blair, 1988; Kuhn, 1991; Cottrell, 2011). The modified version by Phelan and Reynolds (2002) is further especially considered to be effective when appreciating the interplay between ideas and evidence in academic and practical debates, which further justified the usage of this method. Moreover, this method proves valid for this study as it is commonly used when enhancing critical thinking skills (Phelan & Reynolds, 2002), also in line with this study as it embarks from a critical marketing stance. The modified version thus enabled the authors to, in a thoroughly structured manner, critically compare and contrast arguments between theory and practice and from this gain theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices in order to understand the relationship between theory and practice.

3.5.1 Argument Analysis Framework

To understand the elements of argument analysis, the characteristics of an argument are initially portrayed. Toulmin (2003) proposes an extensive framework where arguments are built by a variety of different components. In this study however, the authors have chosen to adopt a modified version of Toulmin’s (2003) framework, an influential and effective revision proposed by Phelan and Reynolds (2002) The revised version was chosen as the authors determined Toulmin’s extensive framework to possess too many components, only complicating the process of analysis for this study considering the timeframe. This modified version focuses on two components of an argument; *Reason* and *Conclusion* (Phelan & Reynolds, 2002), portrayed in Figure 1 below.

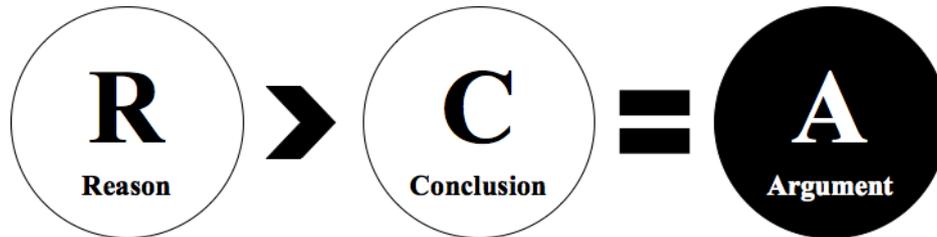


Figure 1 Argument Components

First, there needs to be a *Conclusion*, which is an arguable statement, portrayed by Peter et al. (2002) as “a challengeable assertion”. This implies how the art of making a case lies in the persuasion of how others sense the conclusion is rational because it is sound (Peter et al. 2002), in other words it defines a judgement which is reached by reasoning. Thereafter, the data to support that conclusion is called *Reason*. The persuasion relies on the reasons being accepted, and the conclusion must thus be supported by the reasons (Phelan & Reynolds, 2002). As the research question of this study aimed in studying theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices, the authors concluded how just studying *Conclusions* of an argument would not give an accurate understanding of experiential marketing practices and thus the component *Reason*, explaining the conclusions, needed to be included. Thus by focusing on the relationship between *Reason* and *Conclusion* within an argument, provided sufficient grounds for the process of finding valid arguments and thus a justified picture of the understandings of experiential marketing practices. The modified version by Phelan and Reynolds (2002) was thus considered by the authors to be more than enough to provide a sufficient analysis, to answer both the research question and aim of this paper. This method also enabled the researchers to exclude non-grounded arguments in the collected data as well as understand why some arguments were not valid due to the absence of either a reason or conclusion in their construct.

3.5.2 Conducting Argument Analysis

Analysis was initiated by breaking down citations and statements derived from primary and secondary data into *Reasons* and *Conclusions*, concluding in the formation of evaluated and supported arguments (Phelan & Reynolds, 2002). Exclusively arguments serving the purpose of this research were included, i.e. arguments stating practical implementation of experiential marketing. Thereby, statements made in literature and interviews without the complete structure of an argument were disregarded, and solely complete arguments formed the material for subsequent analysis. The process concluded in close to 300 valid arguments, extracted from primary and secondary data, sufficient for analysis.

Following the formation of arguments, the technique of cutting and sorting (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) was implemented to thematise the arguments, into groups representing the main points in collected data. This was done due to the need of processing and sorting collected data to consequently form thick analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This can be referred to as initial



coding (Rennstam, 2017), where all valid arguments were divided into groups with similar arguments, forming initial themes. Initial coding was performed separately on primary and secondary data to prevent bias regarding looking for similarities in thematic formations. An illustration of how the process of finding valid arguments, consisting of a reason and conclusion, subsequently creating themes, can be found in Appendix B. The initial themes derived from arguments both in primary and secondary data were then compared and contrasted in order to find larger themes representing similarities and differences in theory and practice, referred to as focused coding (Rennstam, 2017). This was done to form an understanding of the major themes within theoretical and practical representation of experiential marketing practices. At last, the focused coding themes were reduced, as suggested by Rennstam (2017), based on number of arguments supporting the theme as well as relevance and interest to answer the purpose of study. In total, the thematisation concluded in seven themes. The derived themes were then described and analysed to generate an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice within each theme. The themes presented are supported by differing amounts of arguments and therefore differ in substance, but were evaluated to be of equal weight regarding impact. The themes are thus accounted for in similar degree as to the number of arguments supporting the themes, leading to different diameters of each presented theme. The analysis was conducted in the light of evaluating the relationship between theory and practice to address the research question, which concluding formed the basis for addressing the research aim.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four benchmarks; transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability, to enhance the rigorousness of a research study. In accordance to this, the authors have addressed all four to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. This further includes reflexivity to avoid personal biases interfering with the interpretations as well as includes ethical concerns (Alvesson, 2003). All four benchmarks are described below as well as in what ways this study countered them.

3.6.1 Transferability

Transferability concerns to which extent findings can be applied to other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a social constructionist can only understand phenomena within the context which it is studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) the findings in this study cannot be generalized to another setting, but rather aims to increase knowledge obtained in a context to inspire authors to utilize certain concepts initially developed and spur into new areas of research. This is due to how this qualitative research is idiographic and emic, where the focus lies on a few individuals and finding categories of meaning from the phenomena being studied (Morrow & Smith, 2000) rather than collecting large samples of data to generalize over settings. Further, this study does not contain any statistical analyses; therefore data cannot be generalizable in the conventional sense. The research should rather be interpreted as an illustrating example of theoretically induced phenomena rather than an introduction of generalizable theory.



3.6.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to how congruent the findings are to the reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved in this study through prolonged engagement with participants, by conducting in depth interviews allowing the participants to speak freely without being steered toward a specific area. This further allowed for thick description of the data, which is an interpretive approach to convey the true meaning behind a phenomena (Geertz, 1973). Participants were also asked the choice of being anonymous, which further enabled the participants to feel less constrained in their answers thus revealing an enhanced picture of reality. After the paper was finished, it was also sent to the participants to ensure them that the study was in accordance to their thoughts as well as portrayed a fair analysis of their answers. This was also done to give participants the choice of removing confidential information before publication.

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability addresses the issue of whether the study can be repeated in the same context, with the same participants, and obtain consistent results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research design as well as the process through which findings are derived in this study were thus described as clearly and thoroughly as possible for future researchers to be able to implement the processes and repeat the study. For this reason, an audit trail was kept during the whole process, a detailed chronology of research activities and processes as well as influences on the data collection and analysis, emerging themes, categories and analytic memos. This audit trail is stored and available for peer researchers. Yet, it should be noted how observations of the conducted research is dependent on situational factors and could differ between different marketing practitioners, limiting the ability to replicate the study and impossible to create identical outcomes.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results are biased and intruded by the researcher's values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As qualitative studies implies a certain subjectivity (Alvesson, 2003), the authors took a reflexive approach into account; the ability to remain objective in the interpretations as well as aimed to avoid personal biases to avoid the risk of being naive and favouring a single, favoured angle vocabulary. This entailed avoiding naivety to simply believe how data revealed the reality as well as enhanced the author's' creativity to appreciate the richness of meaning in complex empirical work (Alvesson, 2003). As this study had two authors, a dialogue was thus continually established to develop complementary and divergent understanding to reveal hidden beliefs, values and assumptions possibly affecting the research. When interpreting the data, a reflexive approach was also taken to understand how the interview situation affected the content. Therefore, the aim of the interviews was not to collect a vast amount of information from different interviewees and literature but rather evaluate each individual interview as well as literature piece very thoroughly to obtain a genuine description of the phenomena being studied.



3.7 Methodological Delimitations

Attempting to pursue marketing-as-practice research, with the addition of considering academic contributions in a specified marketing field, during the time frame of 10 weeks required the authors to set delimitations in order to generate solid analysis within set parameters. The most prominent delimitations in this research are caused by the time constraint, which affected the data collection significantly. Delimitations for methodological choices are further accounted for below.

3.7.1 Research Approach

The choice of an abductive approach was found necessary as it allowed the authors to constantly revise their reasoning and thus make changes in interpretations when additional data was found. The abductive approach also enabled the study to overcome delimitations with the inductive and deductive reasoning, even though these approaches may have been more easily to follow being more linear in the process (Bryman & Bell, 2009). However, a great weakness with the abductive approach concerns confirmation biases (Bryman & Bell, 2015), where the themes found in this study may risk being biased as to serve previous found knowledge. Yet the enhancement of the rigidity of the study justified the choice of an abductive approach.

3.7.2 Data Collection

Delimitations in collected primary data especially concerned the number of interviews conducted together with the choice of limiting primary data to solely include agencies in Sweden and the UK. The choice of including Swedish and English agencies is however justified by the importance of language as well as the agencies significance in the brand experience industry. Additionally, the quality of conducted interviews was affected regarding the inability to perform the majority of interviews face-to-face, due to geographical distance. Limitations regarding mediated interviews include, for example, the lack of depth understanding following the inability to incorporate non-verbal communication as well as immediate contextualization (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012), which was considered by the authors throughout the interviews by careful reflection on collected material. Sampling criteria set regarding primary data further affected the type of information collected, as all interviewees were active within the same area of the industry, thus emphasising similar crucial features and failing to represent the industry at a whole.

The time constraint further affected the choice of forming narrow sampling criteria of secondary data, resulting in solely collecting a small proportion of available experiential marketing literature. The authors are therefore aware of that relevant, possibly more modern, literature might have been disregarded due to the criteria set regarding number of citations. This was considered following the realisation of new publications' inability to reach set number of citations from publication date to data collection period. Additionally, literature



outside the academic marketing discipline was disregarded, which if included might have shown stronger evidence regarding practical implications.

3.7.3 Data Analysis

The choice of analysis method was justified by stating the need to evaluate solid arguments made by practitioners and theory. However, the analysis led to possible statements of practical implications being disregarded due to lacking the complete structure of an argument. Furthermore, the authors decision to sort and reduce number of themes found in collected data in order to provide thick analysis on a limited number of themes affected the research, as possible relevant themes were disregarded. The authors are aware of the impact this might have caused the analysis, but still justifies the choice of analysis method by referring to the incorporation of solely solid and underlined statements and thus the limited amount of data sufficient for analysis, well-suited with the time frame of this research.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings derived from collected primary and secondary data. These are presented following comparing and contrasting arguments in theory and practice. As described in the methodology, these arguments are categorized according to themes found within the evaluated material. Below, these themes are presented and aim to represent the illustrations of arguments in theory and practice regarding experiential marketing practices. As explained in the methodology, the themes differ in substance due to being supported by a differing amount of arguments. However, all themes are valued to have equally significant impacts on the area of research and are therefore included in the evaluation, regardless of weight. To further portray each theme, quotes which represent the relationship are initially portrayed. Thus, these themes present thematised data upon which the following analysis will address the proposed research question.

4.1 Find What Engages Your Consumers

Practice:

*You need to understand what engages the consumer,
since you can no longer buy your way into consumer's consciousness.
(O. Nyström, interview, April 20, 2017)*

Theory:

*Create personally relevant and engaging experiences to fulfil consumers' expectations.
(Tynan & McKechnie, 2009)*

The initial theme, which multiple arguments within both theory and practice argued for, portrayed how engaging consumers when creating an experience is an essential factor within experiential marketing practices. Examples of thematised arguments can be found in Appendix B.1. According to Olle Nyström, the activation of customers requires marketers to rethink their strategies, where he means you can no longer buy your way into consumer's consciousness, but instead need to understand what it is within a brand that truly moves the consumers. From this, he argues agencies need to start acting like strategic partners to actively involve consumers in the process (interview, April 20, 2017). In line with this, James Barnes believes it is crucial that marketers move beyond the 'event marketing' mind-set where agencies act as production companies, where there is no interaction between the brand and customer (interview, April 12, 2017). This is further supported by Mats Nilsson who entails how being successful today within marketing does not lie in providing the best information, but engaging people. In other words; switching from a B2P, business to people, to P2P, people to people, approach (interview, April 12, 2017). Nicky Morgan states, as a valuable example, how it is easy to walk past a billboard but when you get a consumer to participate in an experience, the service becomes real and authentic (interview, May 8, 2017). Katie Peake



further portrays the need to personally engage consumers, which experiential enables by creating an experience that is specifically for them. She further emphasises that interaction is crucial, as people remember what they have interacted with (interview, May 5, 2017). From this, Emelie Palmcrantz argues for the importance of creating incentives to make people engage (interview, 19 April, 2017). Therefore marketers need to understand in what ways they can generate incentives for people to actively engage in the experience (M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017). M. Nilsson (interview, April 12, 2017), N.Morgan (interview, May 5, 2017) and E. Palmcrantz (interview, April 19, 2017) specifically state the importance of listening to the consumer. M. Nilsson states the importance of immersing into the consumers' world, including their world view and means of communication, to ultimately reach a full understanding of consumers and thus what engages them (interview, April 12, 2017). O. Nyström further argues how robots and machines are replacing monotonous work. He means this implies the social interplay between people will increase in importance, as this is what will be left over when technical algorithms replace functional work. Therefore, he argues the revolution going on is not digital, but social. He further stresses that involvement from the consumers is valuable because it engages consumers through making them feel that they want to be a part of the brand, which in turn creates personal engagement (interview, April 20, 2017). E. Palmcrantz supports how connecting with the audience in this way creates a sense of community where the consumer feels the brand is a friend to turn to, which brings the humanity of a brand to life (interview, April 19, 2017). Taken together, primary data evidently showed, through numerous arguments, the importance of engaging customers regarding experiential marketing practices.

Engaging the consumers through interactivity and interaction is accordingly widely acknowledged within the literature (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007). Rayport (2013) argues yelling louder to gain attention is no longer a suitable strategy. Instead, by engaging through experiences creates an extreme revenue growth and thus it is important to synchronize experiential attributes to increase repeat sales and successful results (Pine & Gilmore, 2002; Orth & De Marchi, 2007). Experiences should be shared according to Tynan and McKechnie (2009) and thus interaction and including the customer in the process is key (Prahald & Ramamsway, 2004; Addis & Holbrook, 2001, Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Organizations can only create an environment for the experience but it is the consumers who add the final link to actually create a valuable experience (Walls, Okumus, Wang & Kwun, 2011). From this, the literature argues for a beneficial understanding of consumers through an experiential view (Addis & Holbrook, 2001) and to manage the experience through that in-depth knowledge (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). The knowledge should focus on how consumers live (Rayport, 2013) and be used to create value over time (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Authors further emphasise the importance of creating personally relevant and engaging experiences that fulfil consumers' expectations. This is performed through addressing consumer's imagination, associations and meanings, recognizing what they bring into the experience and knowing that consumers always expect more (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Caru & Cova, 2006; Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Addis & Holbrook, 2001). Orth and De Marchi (2007) indicate that consumers value a brand because it relates to their own personality and self-concept.



Therefore experiences, where people use their senses, create a strong connection to the brand which enriches their brand perception (Rajagopal & Montgomery, 2011; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Biswas, Labrecque, Lehmann, & Markos, 2014). Additionally, the understanding of the diversity of consumers, different personality constructs, personal exchange dynamics, possible unpredictable effects and lastly paying attention to consumer's reactions are addressed (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Moor, 2003; Tsauro, Chiu & Wang, 2007; Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros & Schlesinger, 2009). As a concluding remark from the literature, Walls et al. (2011) argues how the success of experiences is based on the quality of engagement with the consumer.

Conjointly, the initial theme found both within arguments from primary and secondary data entails how understanding what engages consumers is extremely important as engagement is an essential aspect of experiential marketing practices. From this, experiential marketing requires enhanced creativity to create innovative, new concepts and approaches to engage customers in the long-run (Schmitt, 1999, Addis & Holbrook 2001; Atwal & Williams, 2009). Every experience should be treated as a distinct economic offering that engages the consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 2002; Walls et al. 2011). It is therefore important to recognize how experiences are not simply staged, but co-created (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Within this theme both theory and practice share a mutual understanding in how understanding what engages their consumers when creating an experience is key within experiential marketing.

4.2 Deliver the Reason for Your Brand's Existence

Practice:

*A successful experience needs to understand the why of a brand
to successfully connect with the audience.*
(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)

Theory:

- Absence of arguments supporting the theme -

The next theme was only found within primary data and concerns the importance of delivering the reasons behind a brand's existence within experiential marketing practices. O. Nyström means that the difficulty in creating an experience is finding the deeper meaning of a brand and truly understanding why it exists and what drives the specific brand (interview, April 20, 2017). This is also stressed by E. Palmcrantz who says a successful experience needs to understand the why of the brand to be able to successfully connect with the audience. Therefore different channels require different approaches (interview, April 19, 2017). In all the interviews the marketers highlight the importance of how every project and experience needs to be treated as unique, exemplified in Appendix B.2. Both J. Barnes and K. Peake, heavily accentuated the fact that there is no overall strategy for delivering experiential marketing (Interview, April 12, 2017; interview, May 5, 2017). J. Barnes particularly stresses this, indicating how there is no strategy or process to follow as people are different and thus



experiences need to be constructed differently depending on what the specific brand stands for (interview, April 12, 2017). This emphasizes practitioners view of a flexible approach to experiential strategies which ultimately emerges from understanding the brand. In line with this, N. Morgan argues the strategic process entirely depends on what the brand stands for and thus represents (interview, May 5, 2017), demonstrating the importance to find out what the specific brand is trying to deliver. Even though literature highlights the importance of engaging and connecting with the consumers, the necessity to truly understand why the company or brand exists, as a strategic starting point, is not argued for in theory.

Thereby, a difference between the collected literature and interviews concerns the divergent focus of the need to understand the ‘why’ behind experiences. Even though this theme represents one of the minor themes regarding substance, it is considered valuable. The imbalance of representations of this concept in theory and practice might be intertwined due to the ability for literature to solely emphasize general practical implementations, and it does not normally represent this level of detail as it rather aims for theoretical generalizations. Yet, arguments within theory do not highlight the necessity of understanding what the brand stands for and thus there is an imbalanced relationship between theory and practice within this theme.

4.3 Create Holistic Experiences

Practice:

A memorable experience needs to be connected with a coherent image of the brand.
(M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017)

Theory:

Delivering coherent themes is essential to build consistent consumer impressions.
(Tynan & McKechnie, 2009)

Another theme literature as well as practice accounts for is how creating an experience should go hand in hand with creating a holistic view of the brand, as exemplified in Appendix B.3. E. Palmcrantz stresses the need to obtain a general impression of the experience, especially as today there exists so many channels of information. Therefore, to make an experience memorable it has to obtain consistency (interview, April 19, 2017). M. Nilsson develops this and emphasises the importance to connect the experience with a coherent image of the brand (interview, April 12, 2017). The brand perception must be consistent and clear throughout the experience, as stated by K. Peake; the successful brand experience happens when the consumer walks away feeling that they know the brand (interview, May 5, 2017).

The literature also argues that delivering coherent themes is essential to build consistent impressions for the consumers (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). Further, consumption as a holistic experience must be taken into account for consumers to remember the most important elements of the experience (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Lachel (2015), for



instance, argues that the experience should describe a destination and take the consumers on a journey, being coherent throughout the whole experience while Tynan & McKechnie (2009) supports the argument in how communication within the experience needs to be coherent and coordinated to fully integrate a clear and memorable message to the consumers. Thus, the believed importance of through a holistic approach creating a consistent experience for consumer is supported by both theory and practice, even though the substance of the theme is subordinate, which thus represents a balanced relationship.

4.4 The Foundation of Experiential Processes

Practice:

Strategic development considers context dependency, knowing the audience, creative concept formation, strategic use of channels, evaluation and measurement.

(O. Nyström, interview, April 20, 2017)

Theory:

Experiential strategies entail developing a cohesive theme, providing memorable aspects and engaging all the senses.

(Petkus, 2004)

Furthermore, findings showed similar representations of what the process of developing experiential marketing entails between theory and practice. Evidence of strategic experiential processes was found in both theory in practice, portrayed in Appendix B.4, however with a slight variance in amount of details in the described processes. Practice portrayed examples of practical but rather abstract business application, and literature provided more generalized procedures applicable to this development. Primary data showed evidence of different business practices used to develop experiential strategies, in-line with theory. J. Barnes further emphasised the context and goal dependency, and described a general process; including establishing the admired change of consumer behaviour, investigating information and concept creation, followed by creative and production work (interview, April 12, 2017). The process described by O. Nyström, included similar elements of context dependency, knowing the audience, creative concept formation, strategic use of channels and evaluation and measurement (interview, April 20, 2017). M. Nilsson further presented a general framework, with an emphasis on finding the dynamic between the client, the audience and the surroundings. He moreover sympathised a three step strategic process which includes find, create and activate. The strategic and research work takes place in the first step, followed by concept creation and creative work. The activation step entails the introduction of the actual experience to the market and audience (interview, April 12, 2017). Further emphasised by K. Peake is to develop strategies that demonstrate one strong aspect of a brand, and how delivering experiences that works cross channels is essential for spread through different medias. If the experience is not shareable by the audience, and the customers have not been given something to take with them from the experience, the experiential strategy has failed (interview, May 5, 2017).



While addressing the findings derived from literature, multiple suggestions for experiential processes were found. Schmitt's (1999a) initially states that experiential methods depend on the objective and portrays four general key characteristics of experiential; a focus on customer experience, providing a holistic experience, having a rational and emotional view on consumers and an eclectic approach to methods and tools. He presents different forms of experiential marketing, Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM's). These represent different types of experiences and should be evaluated and used appropriately; sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences and social-identity experiences. The experiences are further implemented using different experience providers (ExPros), including communications, visual identities, product presence, media etc. (Schmitt, 1999). Petkus (2004) draws upon Pine and Gilmore's (1999) steps of staging an experience to be used as a checklist, including; developing a cohesive theme, forming impressions, eliminating distractions, providing memorable aspects and engaging all the senses. Atwal and Williams (2009) present Smith's (2003) strategic framework; conducting an experience audit, creating a brand platform, designing the brand experience, communicating the brand internally and externally and monitoring the performance. They furthermore state that experiential strategies entail customer segmentation, touchpoints and finding priorities. Caru and Cova (2003) suggest to surprise the consumer, generate appropriation and to stimulate the five senses. Anuj and Alter (2014) accentuates the importance of creating categories within an experience to guide the consumers through, as it affects the information processing and generally constitutes in positive experiences. Additionally, Tynan and McKechnie (2009) suggest to address all touchpoints between the consumer and company and to innovate continuously. Further, authors emphasise the importance of the physical location or venue for the experience (Moor, 2003; Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle 2006; McCole 2004). The final and most practical implementation framework is provided by Smilansky (2009), who presents the SET MESSAGE model. The model includes evaluating the background, objectives, audience, message, strategy, location, measurement, action measures, effectiveness and finally evaluation of the experience. In combination, these frameworks provide an overall view of what experiential strategies entail. The general interpretation of these framework is consistent with findings derived from primary data, where both theory and practice showed evidence of using objectively appropriated strategies, which in turn are highly context dependant.

Further, a common similarity within theory and practice, concerning the experiential process, alarms similar concerns for the difficulties in measuring experiential marketing outcomes. Primary data showed an agreement of the difficulties in measuring the success of experiential, as there is no set industry standard (J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017; M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017). N. Morgan, for instance, argues how measuring experiential marketing practices is possible but extremely difficult to pursue. She indicates how you can measure the social spread and ultimately sales increase following the experience, yet this does not provide sufficient judgement (interview, May 8, 2017). On a similar note, secondary data stated that experiential includes consumer satisfaction and agrees in how it is extremely difficult to measure consumer's perceptions (Yuan & Wu, 2008). Therefore there is a need to



develop better measurements of responses (J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017; M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017; Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Literature also states a need to measure each experiential module and the experiential value by perceptions (Walls et al. 2011; Tsauro, Chiu & Wang, 2007), but no means are provided regarding implementation of measurement.

All in all, both theory and practice show a balanced approach to context dependency in strategic experiential formation, with different levels of detailed explanation of what overall experiential strategies entail. Findings in secondary data do emphasize different approaches to experiential processes and strategies, resulting in different versions of processes described by several authors, but is established upon similar thoughts. Further, the call for better measurements within experiential marketing is also shared within theory and practice. Concluding, this theme demonstrates a favourable relationship of the foundation of experiential processes.

4.5 Divergent Focus; Products or Consumers

Practice:

*Experiences do not need to display products,
as it is the consumers' brand perception that should be of importance.
(J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017)*

Theory:

*Experiences should be tangible to guide consumers
in their perception of their gain of a product.
(Atwal & Williams, 2009)*

Findings showed a shift in focus regarding the experience and what it should include, where primary data pointed towards a sole consumer focus and secondary data emphasised a product information focus, exemplified in Appendix B.5. Primary data emphasised the ultimate importance of focusing on consumer's experiences over product specificities and environment requirements (M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017; J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017; E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017). Findings showed that an experience does not need to be set in a specific venue or space and does not entail a product focus or even a need to display product features; it is consumers' brand perceptions that should be of importance, which can be influenced without the presentation of products. Furthermore, primary data stated that there is no set of elements to include in an experience, as it all depends on the creative process, the ultimate goal and most of all - the client and consumers (M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017; J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017; O. Nyström, interview, April 20, 2017). It is rather more important to focus on the brand and find the human truth which resonates with the target audience of the brand (N. Morgan, interview, May 5, 2017). N. Morgan states, for example, how sometimes they even provide the product after the experience (interview, May 5, 2017). This is contrasted to secondary data where it is stated



that experiential is recommended include, atmospherical components, consumption rituals, branded artefacts and referents (Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006; Caru & Cova, 2006).

Literature thus rather suggested specific elements to include in the experience, contrary to primary data, as stated above, that everything is context and solution dependent and that there are thus no specific elements to include. Theory emphasised the importance of emerging from a product-oriented view; integrating cues about the brand, highlighting the essence of a product and the interaction with an object. Experiences should be tangible and consumers should be guided in their perception of their gain of a product (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Atwal & Williams, 2009; Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006; Addis & Holbrook, 2001). Experiences should be provided in appropriate venues and spaces, on physical levels, and delivered through appropriate channels (Moor, 2003; Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle 2006; McCole 2004). The setting is further emphasised by Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007), who state the criticality of delivering a correct setting for the aimed experience and value creation. Furthermore, it is stated that including branded artefacts generates memorable experiences, and presentation of objective and informational functional product features generates competitive advantage (Moor, 2003; Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007; Addis & Holbrook, 2001). A lack of this representation is argued to lead to ambivalent perceptions (Caru & Cova, 2006). However, it is stated that the experience is more effective if no product purchase is made, as it makes the consumers enjoy the experience without purchase concerns (Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006).

These findings thus represent a clash in theory and practice, where different focuses are emphasized. Theory argues for the need to include certain features, and the importance of physical experiences and locations. Settings are argued to be important and the brand and/or product should be in focus. Contrary, practice do emphasize the importance of brand perceptions, but the role of displaying actual brand features, or even products, in the experiences and its effect on customer perceptions and willingness to engage with the experience is questioned. Ultimately, practice emphasizes the importance of changing consumer behaviour, which there is no set recipe for. It is stated in practice that everything should be focused on the consumer's' experience, not setting and product focused as argued in theory, which calls for an imbalance of representations.



4.6 Create Internal Engagement

Practice:

If you can't motivate your employees, you are in trouble.

(N. Morgan, interview, May 8, 2017)

Theory:

- Absence of arguments supporting the theme -

An additional variance within literature and the interviews, slightly connected to the delivering the reason for your brand's existence and the product vs. consumer focus themes accounted for above, concerns creating internal engagement. The practitioners promote the importance of engaging employees and how sometimes creating an experience for the employees, not the target audience, is the recipe for success, as portrayed by examples in Appendix B.6. M. Nilsson stresses multiple times how it has never been easier to communicate but never more difficult to engage people. With this reasoning he argues people are astonishingly uninterested in the company or industry that they work for which in turn has a damaging effect on the brand perception outwards. Therefore, he highlights the need to create incentives and experiences for employees to start engaging with the brand internally (interview, 12 April, 2017). E. Palmcrantz supports this argument, as she believes the target audience is extremely affected by the employees of a brand. Ultimately, the employees represent the brand in the experiences, which makes internal engagement a crucial aspect of experiential marketing practices (interview, 19 April, 2017). N. Morgan underlines how if you can't motivate employees; you are in trouble, thus creating internal engagement through experiences for employees is almost essential today (interview, May 8, 2017). The literature, however, rather emphasize a brand outside-in engagement over an inside-out approach, where understanding what drives the consumers is more important than understanding the motivation of employees. The literature thus tends to focus on how to engage consumers, and lacks representation of what internal engagement might do to ultimately affect consumers' perception of branded experiences and concluding their willingness to engage.

There is therefore an imbalance of approaches regarding experience audiences; where there is lack of theoretical understandings of the potential of internal engagement and using experiential marketing practices for employees of the brand. The literature does however emphasize the importance of delivering the brand core values to the target audience (Smilansky, 2009), but does not address how that may be performed. Theory simply addresses the experience recipient, where practice tends to emphasize the new and important role of the experience messenger. This calls for an imbalance in understandings between theory and practice, of whom and how to engage, and for what purpose and ultimate goal.



4.7 Divergent Objectives; Trust or Loyalty

Practice:

Trust is the most important thing, which consumers do if they try and experience something themselves.

(J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017)

Theory:

Experiential marketing creates loyalty which increases sales.

(Smilansky, 2009)

Findings additionally showed different means of the ultimate issue of experiential, where primary data focused on gaining the consumers' trust and secondary data on consumer loyalty, showed in Appendix B.7. Trust is stated in primary data as the most important thing, generated through consumers' trying and experiencing first hand, and crucial to get consumers to engage in the experience (J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017). In the interviews, it was clear how all the marketers took a consumer focus, where they aimed to explain the reason for creating trust with consumers will benefit the consumer's connection and engagement to the brand, which subsequently increases possibilities for customer retention. N. Morgan, specifically argues creating trust is the beauty with experiential marketing practices as it is the key factor consumers gain by actually experiencing the real and authentic product themselves instead of being told by someone else of the value of a product or service (interview, May 5, 2017). M. Nilsson further stresses the need to create trust as a way to make the consumers feel the brand truly cares about their consumers and thus creates a stronger emotional connection to the brand (interview, 12 April, 2017).

Secondary data instead emphasised the goal of gaining consumer loyalty through providing real and authentic experiences, addressing common behaviours and making consumers emotionally invest in the experience (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; McCole 2004, McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002). Involving consumers in experiential brand spaces can thus guide the formation of loyal consumers, through linking consumers with the brand (Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006). Multiple authors also argued for the success loyal customers bring to the brand, with an emphasis on the effect of creating experiences. Smilansky (2009) argues experiential marketing provides better ROI than other marketing activities and thus by applying these principles will not only create loyalty but also commercial results. From this, Smilansky (2009) states a loyalty scheme needs to be implemented where reliable, punctual and high-performing brand ambassadors are given responsibility to represent the brand in an experience. This is important as loyalty drives word-of-mouth, drives traffic to websites and increases sales. This focus within theory, where generating loyalty is argued to increase the success for a brand is also emphasised by McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), who states experiential marketing builds loyalty and should thus be seen as an avenue to competitive advantage. They further argue creating experiences has a measurable impact which drives loyal customers and this is vital as these customers are more likely to make long-term investments in a company's stock, as loyal



customers are emotionally connected to a brand and thus willing to invest in the welfare and success of the company (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002).

Even though theory and practice argue on similar thoughts when it comes to creating trust and loyalty, the argument components, reasons and conclusions, differ within this theme which subsequently portrays divergent objectives. This constitutes in an imbalanced relationship between theory and practice.



5. Analysis

This chapter is provided to clarify the relationship between theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices, derived from the findings above. This chapter thus addresses the question of this research by accounting for balanced and imbalanced representations within the evaluated material. The analysis also extends upon imbalances in representations of argument components, and reflects upon on why the relationship between theory and practice is constituted this way. Taken together, this chapter clarifies the findings, to further portray the relationship between theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices.

5.1 Theoretical & Practical Balance

The findings, presented above, showed how some of the identified themes demonstrate a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. These themes are: *Find What Engages Your Consumers*, *Create Holistic Experiences* and *The Foundation of Experiential Processes*. Together they explain the experiential process and portray the basic grounds for experiential marketing practices, found through thematised and evaluated arguments of similar nature. From this, according to both theory and practice, when constructing an experience, the experiential marketing practices should put an emphasis on gaining knowledge about the consumers to be able to actively engage them in the experience as well as make it personally relevant. Further, even though practice provides more abstract applications while literature rather more generalized of the experiential process, both theory and practice argue for a context dependency in strategic experiential formation grounded on similar thoughts. Also, the experiential formation should aim for creating a holistic view of the experience which indicates how all the touchpoints of a brand should deliver the same message. As a final note, theory and practice agree upon the complexity of measuring experiences and thus argue for the need to develop and construct an industry standard measurement to include at the end of the experiential process formation. Taken together, within these themes, theory and practice use the same arguments, built by similar reasons and conclusions. In this sense, experiential marketing practices are based on the same ground within theory and practice, where theory seems to drive practice while at the same time practice helps construct theory development, implying a beneficial and balanced relationship.

5.2 Theoretical & Practical Imbalance

Findings also showed an imbalanced relationship between theory and practice as there is evidently an absence of certain themes within theory. The themes theory did not highlight were; *Deliver the Reasons for Your Brand's Existence* and *Create Internal Engagement*. Together these themes represent an understanding of the bigger picture of what drives experiential marketing thus portraying practice's ability to reflect upon the reason behind



working with experiential marketing. This was a surprising finding according to the authors, as a majority of the arguments found in the experiential marketing literature could not be included in the analysis as they were solely built on reasons. From this, theory seemed to focus more on the reasons behind their arguments, where understanding the question of why something is occurring was emphasised. Yet, even though the arguments within theory showed significant understanding of the reason behind their arguments, when it came to experiential marketing practices, theory was lacking arguments providing an accurate understanding of the reason behind conducting these practices. Even though this demonstrates practitioners favourable ability to understand the bigger picture of what drives experiential marketing practices, where every consumer should be treated differently, practice as a consequence lacked arguments of specific components in experiential strategies. Practitioners could therefore not elaborate on which certain elements within an experience were needed, as they argued for every project being unique and thus needs different treatment. Theory however eased this process and rather elaborated on the overall elements of what an experience includes. All in all, there were evidently areas of imbalanced theoretical and practical understandings of experiential marketing practices.

Findings also demonstrated how theory and practice sometimes state similar arguments but in different ways, leading into confusing interpretations. Both parties, for instance, state similar elements in the theme *Divergent Objectives; Trust or Loyalty*, yet the reason behind the argument varies. Theory focuses on creating loyalty to generate success for the brand, thus increase sales, while practice focuses on creating trust to enhance the consumer's engagement with the brand, to consequently generate customer retention. These differences present implications of the theoretical and practical gap, which would lead theory and practice to develop in different directions. It is especially problematic due to its ultimate impact on the practice or theory focus, which will guide the future theoretical and practical understandings. Further, theory and practice showed a disagreement within the theme; *Divergent Focus: Products or Consumers*. In this theme theory argues the need to include certain tangible elements, whereas practice argues an experience does not need to entail a product focus at all as the focus lies in the total perception of a brand. Yet again, surprisingly, theory emphasizes more specified practical implementations, in contrast to practice which addresses the flexible components of shaping experiences. Practice thus represents a more abstract approach where everything is context and purpose dependent. This can be drawn upon implications concerning a marketing landscape in which consumers on some level repel marketing messages, and might lean towards the benefits of providing an experience with a less obvious branding for the purpose of consumer's willingness to engage, which thus requires an extremely flexible approach.



5.3 Theoretical & Practical Relationship

To conclude, experiential marketing practices are evidently discussed and acknowledged within both theory and practice and even though they share a mutual understanding in certain areas they still lack a comprehensive understanding. Practitioners showed an overall focus on the individual project, whereas literature emphasised a more comprehensive image. The specificity of practitioners addressing the reasons, thus engaging in understanding the why, emerges from the idea of there being no set strategic steps of developing experiential, which is why they might tend to focus on the initial approach or way of thought, over following steps for execution, as it is the initial deciding factor for strategic decision making. As theory tends to state differently regarding strategic approaches, thus emphasizing general processes rather than initial approaches to tackling experiential practices, there is an evident gap between theoretical and practical understandings of the initial approach or mind-set to experiential strategies. To conclude, by adapting a marketing-as-practice approach, evident gaps between theory and practice as well as in which areas further integration is needed were found, portrayed in Table 3 below.

Themes	
Balanced Relationship	Imbalanced Relationship
Find What Engages Your Consumers	Deliver the Reasons for Your Brand's Existence
Create Holistic Experiences	Create Internal Engagement
The Foundation of Experiential Processes	Divergent Focus; Products or Consumers
	Divergent Objectives; Trust or Loyalty

Table 3 Theoretical & Practical Relationship



6. Discussion

This chapter addresses the aim of the research, through exploring the abilities of marketing-as-practice research and embarking from the critical marketing stance. The initial part discusses the findings and analysis presented in the light of marketing-as-practice's significance. The role of the approach is discussed upon to clarify the value of conducting these types of studies. Further on, the discussion is extended to reflect the importance of the critical marketing stance, which ideals inspired and guided the research. Lastly, the contribution of this research is clarified, building upon assessed analysis and discussion.

6.1 The Value of Marketing-as-Practice

It is evident how the changing structures in the marketing landscape has subsequently implicated knowledge production and the development of new marketing practices, such as experiential marketing, where academics are no longer the sole producer of the marketing concept. This consequently impacts the marketing discipline, and calls for a need to address practitioners and other actors in order to produce relevant, market-oriented knowledge. Thus, exploring the relationship between theory and practice regarding experiential marketing practices has portrayed an example of how to use the marketing-as-practice approach to address these needs. This specifically illustrated the value for future research to intensively study practice in line with theory in order to keep up with the dynamic marketplace. Thereby, the authors suggest the marketing-as-practice approach to comprehensively account for marketing practices along with theoretical development. The following section portrays the benefits of adopting this approach by drawing upon previous studies made within marketing-as-practice and relating it back to the findings and analysis derived from this study.

6.1.1 Produces Relevant Knowledge

First of all, an initial consideration of the value of marketing-as-practice research emerges from its ability to uncover missing practices and themes, which are solely brought to light by practice. As a consequence, theory is evidently not staying up-to-date with the current marketplace. Specifically one of the highlighted themes found within practice, *Delivering the brand's existence*, was missing argumentative support within theory. Following this realization, one major concern to raise is theory's overall ability to reflect diverse and complex industries and business practices, if it is not able to account for current market practices. This is further in line with previous researchers' concerns regarding traditional logic's ability to truly explain diverse marketing practices in the marketplace, where activities are currently being grouped into a homogenous mass (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2005; Hackley, 2009). This also correlates with Smith et al.'s (2015) claim of how current marketing theory lacks significant representation of the diversity of marketing practices. Drawing upon the bigger picture, the marketing-as-practice approach is therefore, shown within this study, a beneficial method when portraying the diverse and complex marketplace,



as it requires emancipations of academics and thus encourages research beyond existing theory to discover diverse sets of marketing practices on micro-levels, which theory might be missing out on. Through this approach, research can thus aim on more inquires on detailed and empirical research to find new insights and knowledge within new domains (Cornelissen, 2005; Tadajewski, 2010a). From this, the marketing-as-practice approach has the ability to challenge dominant discourses and deliver an accurate understanding of new marketing strategies (Polonsky & Ringer, 2012; Penalosa & Venkatesh, 2006). Subsequently, to include high levels of reflexivity and diffusion in research calls for the need to appraise diverse methods and approaches to knowledge, thus challenging existing power structures, which ultimately represents the complexity of reality.

Further, this study portrays the need for theory to adapt to detailed and diverse practices in order to reflect current practical and theoretical concerns and ultimately address relevant issues. The benefits of producing action-based knowledge through marketing-as-practice research are further demonstrated in this research as it showed its ability to produce highly relevant and up-to-date knowledge. Marketing-as-practice research is thus favourable as to reduce the risk of producing false knowledge. In line with Skålén and Hackley (2011), this is crucial to avoid theorizing marketing without having investigated the natural basis of how concepts are formed. This was especially portrayed by this study in how there existed divergent objectives in the *Products or Consumers* theme, where theory states arguments which practice does not agree with. From this, theories risk describing a more abstract world, which corresponds with Smith et al's. (2015) proposition of how theory then risks to conceal the actual lived experience. Therefore, in order for theory to stay relevant, it must address current issues and growing concepts in the marketing landscape, and most importantly; reflect upon the reason behind those. Contrary, the gap between theory and practice, found within experiential marketing practices, complicates this issue as there are different understandings of the parameters of the marketplace on academic and practical levels. Theory therefore needs to find a balance between addressing marketing practices but still produce applicable as well as reliable knowledge.

This is necessary as the knowledge of experiential marketing practices in academia is currently not complete or does not seem to truly understand the foundational importance of experiential marketing practices, which consequently, in line with Håkansson and Waluszewski (2005), is necessary if academia wishes to portray current critical issues for new future marketing strategies. From this, the absence as well as divergent objectives of certain themes risks theoretical understandings of experiential marketing practices to thrive in the wrong direction, consequently affecting both theory's and practice's understandings of future marketing implications. Thereby, the marketing-as-practice approach can aid these matters by guiding the research towards areas with sufficient stance in reality.



6.1.2 Facilitates the Integration of Theory & Practice

Marketing-as-practice research thus aids producing knowledge which incorporates both theoretical and practical understandings, thus integrating the gap between theory and practice. By this combination, both parties can benefit from this integration as it incorporates both perspectives. This study, for instance, revealed how practitioners working with experiential marketing practitioners can benefit from theoretical understandings in order to be successful in their strategies, by portraying theoretical views on what the overall strategy should entail through the lens of marketing-as-practice. Similarly, the marketing-as-practice approach enabled the authors to portray not only what areas theory has failed to address in experiential strategies, but the reason behind the importance of those areas. The approach thus enabled the production of knowledge reflecting different understandings of the same phenomena, crucial by the demands of today's diverse marketplace. The marketing-as-practice approach thus enables an improved understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, and how theoretical influences are applicable in the marketplace and vice versa (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006; Skålén & Hackley, 2011; Hackley, Skålén & Stenfors, 2008). It therefore provides an understanding for how to bridge the gap between differing theoretical and practical understandings of phenomena or practices, which concludes in larger sympathy and applicability of realizations. Similarly, it enables a comparison between concepts that build upon the same thoughts, but are reflected and used differently in theory and practice.

To further keep an interest for academic work outside of the marketing discipline, authors should aim to present work that is relevant for both practitioners and other actors. Similarly, they need to address issues in a way that is understandable by other than academics. The findings and analysis showed numerous themes which both practice and theory addresses, but that there are still differences within those themes regarding understandings and viewpoints of concepts and issues. Marketing-as-practice research can thus increase academics to better grasp which actions are currently creating economic performance (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006), by engaging with actual marketing practitioners to reflect issues in a way that is approachable by the larger audience. By using the marketing-as-practice approach, researchers are beneficially able to reflect upon issues in similar ways as they are actually occurring in practice; which ultimately opens up their work to a larger audience. This similarly bridges the gap previously addressed, as it makes academic publications more relevant for practitioners to incorporate in their work. The integration is further beneficial as academics and practitioners can simultaneously learn from each other and thus develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex market actions. Thereof, the marketing-as-practice approach evidently creates connections between theory and practice, as it approaches both parties from a reflexive stance.

From this, derived from the author's' reflections of the findings and analysis of this study, in order to produce shared, explanatory and diverse knowledge, there should further be a common understanding or use of similar vocabularies. The vocabulary used needs to address both theoretical and practical meanings in order to generate a mutual understanding of important concepts and issues. All and all, theory and practice must speak the same language



in order to enable successful integrations of theory and practice. Approaching these issues through marketing-as-practice research enables the production of academic work which is closely correlated to vocabulary used by practitioners, and thus enhances the possibilities of increased mutual understandings of the subject. A similar implication, is the issue of the different categories of literatures appealing to different audiences, which further addresses the problem in getting the attention of both academics and practitioners. If academics and practitioners are speaking different languages, arguing for divergent objectives, aimed at different audiences, how can theory and practice possibly integrate? This further portrays an additional reason to engage in marketing-as-practice research.

6.2 The Importance of Critical Marketing

The preceding discussion raises marketing-as-practice's significance through assessing experiential marketing, drawing upon examples from conducted research. Below, the authors wish to expand the discussion presented above and link the evaluations back to critical marketing, which inspired and guided the research. By drawing upon the benefits of conducting marketing-as-practice research, the authors extract evidence in evaluated material to further support the use of critical marketing studies. It is similarly spurred by the need for marketing academics to produce work reflecting the complex and dynamic marketplace (Firat & Dholakia, 2006).

6.2.1 The Relevance of a Critical Assessment

This study has showed the value for marketing literature to incorporate the natural basis of concepts through the marketing-as-practice approach, which is similarly addressed in critical marketing. The combination of critical theory and marketing, suggested by Alvesson (1994), leads to the production of knowledge that has a significant stance in reality which is highly reflected in this study. As critical marketing studies demands this approach, it ensures knowledge to be produced in line with real market practices, producing highly relevant and current knowledge. By embarking from a critical stance, the authors were able to reflectively account for differing marketing practices, and simultaneously address current marketing activities. The value of this stance is thus portrayed by this research, as it was vital for the authors' ability to reflectively analyse collected material to form understandings of why concepts emerge and what foundations they embark from.

Moreover, marketing-as-practice ability to ensure that theory is not missing out on diverse and important market actions can be further linked to the foundations of critical marketing; the ability to produce reflexive knowledge. The importance of producing knowledge which combines critical and experimental approaches, suggested by critical marketing, is supported throughout this research where evidence has shown the importance of the critical stance (Tadajewski, 2010a; Shankar, 2009; Saren & Svensson, 2009; Tadajewski et al. 2014). More specifically, through this viewpoint the authors were able to critically assess important aspects of marketing practices, including questioning the dominant thinking (Tadajewski, 2010a), accounting for multiple theoretical viewpoints (Shankar, 2009) and accounting for diverse



points of views (Alvesson, 1994); crucial for comparing theoretical and practical understandings. Especially through the ability to investigate practices on individual consumer levels, as suggested by (Firat & Venkatesh, 1991), the authors were able to discover unaccounted theoretical subjects. The critical marketing view thus enabled the knowledge production to reflect diverse understandings of marketing practices, crucial for the outcome of the research.

6.2.2 Combining Theory and Practice

Marketing-as-practice research's ability to combine theoretical and practical understanding of phenomena, can additionally be proved through the lens of critical marketing. Similar to marketing-as-practice, critical marketing studies demands engagement outside of academia (Murray & Ozanne, 1991) and specifically with marketing practices (Tadajewski, 2010a; Tadajewski, 2010b; Murray, Ozanne & Shapiro, 1994). Further, critical marketing specifically emphasise action-based research and addresses all stakeholders (Tadajewski, 2010b). Meanings derived from conducted research were thus co-created through these interactions (Tadajewski, 2010b), embarking from the realization from the critical marketing stance that marketing scholars are not the sole producers of the marketing concept (Tadajewski et al. 2014). This made the critical viewpoint necessary to form concluding analysis. The approach demanded by critical marketing (Tadajewski, 2010b) thereby guided this research to incorporate both parties in investigating experiential marketing practices, which is evidently favourable when concluding the relationship between theory and practice. As the research showed the weight of theoretical and practical interactions, which required intensive engagement with both parties, the benefits of the critical marketing viewpoint are further enhanced.

6.3 A Beneficial Approach to Assess the Gap

The authors wish to conclude this discussion by highlighting and specifying the contributions made by this research, where emphasis is put upon the value of taking a critical stance and pursuing the research through a marketing-as-practice approach. As the authors aim emerged from the current issue raised within marketing literature, the need to integrate theory and practice, the main contribution portrayed by conducted research constitutes in a suggestion of how to pursue research that integrates both theoretical and practical understandings of marketing practices, through the use of critical marketing and marketing-as-practice. Through these stances, the authors were able to uncover the gap between theory and practice within experiential marketing, which thus portrays the beneficial use of these approaches.

The critical stance taken upon the inclusion of critical marketing not only guided the formation of this research, but was crucial to question dominant thinking within the discipline. The values of critical marketing enabled the authors to assess current marketing practices through evaluating different viewpoints, which by this research is argued to be necessary when investigating current marketing actions, as the dynamic marketplace calls for a reflexive stance. Critical marketing guided this research to, through adopting a critical performative



manner, present opportunities for increasing the relevance of research. This portrays the benefits of these studies, which aims to critically review new opportunities for research that are in line with current market activities. Without the guidance of critical marketing literature, this research would have lacked the critical stance needed to successfully investigate current market phenomena, and thus to subsequently derive new findings upon marketing practices. The research was further produced in line with critical marketing values to solve problems in conceptual areas (Shimp, 1994) with an openness to practitioners (Tadajewski, 2010b), which enables this research to contribute to existing critical marketing literature as it is developed along the parameters of the critical stance. The contribution especially concerns proving the significant consequences of embarking from critical marketing, and how valuable it is for future researchers to adopt this stance in order to produce highly relevant knowledge.

The specific approach emerging from critical marketing adopted within this research, marketing-as-practice, was as previously assessed a necessary approach to evaluate the theoretical and practical gap, and thus to uncover what means that need to be addressed to fill the need in current marketing literature. The authors wish to highlight the contribution regarding marketing-as-practice, as they hope to have portrayed a compelling fit for evaluating complex marketing activities through the use of the marketing-as-practice approach. Thereby, the contribution specifically consists of portraying the significant benefits from adopting this approach when investigating theoretical and practical understandings, as it guides the researchers through reflecting upon relevant issues through an experimental approach. It additionally shows the important benefits gained from engaging with marketing practitioners outside of academia and how these interactions can uncover important concepts that theory lacks significant understanding of. The authors thereby wish to have, through the example of experiential marketing, portrayed means for how researchers should address current marketing issues and the importance of questioning dominant thinking through suggesting the marketing-as-practice approach. The authors still argue for the need to adapt knowledge creation along the lines with developing market power structures and complexity, and hope to have portrayed how to approach these issues by this research. The use of critical marketing and marketing-as-practice thereby constitutes in a theoretical and analytical approach, which the authors suggest to be appropriated accordingly in order to develop knowledge along with current marketing activities and values.

Further reflecting upon the specific contributions made by this research, the authors wish to underline that academics should consider larger movements in society, changes in power structures and knowledge influencers when approaching marketing concepts. As initially portrayed through the critical marketing perspective, there are different demands and structures in the current society, which researchers should not ignore. The dynamic marketplace calls for an increasing development of reflexive knowledge to progressively reflect the complexity of market issues, to accurately portray the diversity of marketing practices and reduce treating practices as homogenous masses.

By exploring experiential marketing practices through the marketing-as-practice approach, the authors have shown the ability of this approach to assess the gap between theoretical and



practical understandings of marketing activities. This study indicates, by adopting the marketing-as-practice approach, how researchers can better address current issues, produce relevant knowledge that reflects diverse understanding of marketing practices as well as present issues in a way that is approachable by a larger audience. Further, this study has also exemplified in which areas theory and practice need to integrate within experiential marketing practices. The marketing-as-practice approach has thus indicated its ability to help bridge the gap between theoretical and practical understandings and is thus seen as a beneficial approach for this need.



7. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the entire study. First, the authors highlight the main points from addressing the proposed research question, where arguments in theory and practice of experiential marketing practices were assessed. Secondly, the aim is concluded, where the authors draw upon the value of adopting a marketing-as-practice approach to respond to the current needs addressed by the academic marketing discipline of filling the gap between theory and practice. Thereafter, theoretical as well as practical contributions of the study are clarified, even though these go hand in hand with answering the research question and aim of this study. At last, personal reflections of the findings are discussed, together with limitations and proposals for future research within this research domain.

7.1 Concluding Remarks

7.1.1 Theoretical and Practical Relationship

To address the proposed research question, authors searched for representations describing elements of experiential marketing practices. The initial theme, similarly addressed by theory and practice, thus portraying a balanced relationship, regarded the crucial aspect of engaging the consumers. Engaging the consumers comprises creating experiences especially created for them, generating incentives for engagement and enable interactions between the brand and consumers. This is performed through significant understandings of consumers, and the value derived from the experience is generated by the consumers themselves through their engagement and interaction. An additional theme, portraying balances in theoretical and practical representation, concerns the holistic views needed in experiential. Experiences should portray a holistic view of the brand, where all brand touchpoints should deliver the same message. Further, the consumers must have a consistent perception of the experience throughout their engagement, which additionally accentuates the need for holistic creations. Furthermore, both theory and practice entailed elements of what the experiential process constitutes. Theory accounted for different representations of steps to consider when developing experiential strategies; including considering the experiential modules, cohesive themes, consumer appropriation, brand touchpoints, actions, consumer journey and locations. In line with this, practitioners adapted a different view but accentuated practical steps which constitute the development of experiential strategies, with an emphasis on the creative and concept formation processes. Further, context dependency of strategy development was heavily emphasized.

Findings and analysis also revealed how certain themes were only brought up by practice and thus seemed to be missing or not as underlined within theory. The first theme concerned delivering the reason for the brand's existence. This theme demonstrates how practitioners clearly stated the importance of considering every customer and project in an experiential process to be unique. From this, they indicated it is vastly important to understand the



customers of a brand in order to be able to engage with them, thus truly understanding why a brand exists and what it is that makes people believe in specifically this brand. Inspired by this, a second theme was realized, where the practitioners all highlighted the necessity to not only understand the external consumers of a brand and what motivates them but also turn to the internal employees and use experiential marketing practices to create internal engagement. Moreover, an additional theme which differed between theory and practice, was how there appeared to be a different focus as in what to include when creating an experience. Theory underlined the need to include specific elements when creating experiences while practice rather argued for no set way of doing things as every project and consumer is unique and needs to be treated differently. Therefore theory contained a product focus, arguing for different elements to include, while practice rather had a consumer focus, arguing to focus completely on the consumers' needs and desires, thus eliminating specific requirements. Further, an additional finding established a theme where it was found how both theory and practice argued for creating trust and loyalty toward their consumers. Even though the arguments implied certain variations, the authors concluded they still aimed to show the same meaning, which was how creating trust and loyalty are one of the major benefits of experiential marketing practices. Yet, more captivatingly was how the reasons behind the arguments in this theme varied, where theory focused on how loyalty builds success while practice focused more in what was in it for the consumer. All in all, surprisingly, practitioners showed an overall focus on the individual project as well as understanding the reason behind conducting experiential marketing practices, whereas literature emphasised a more comprehensive image of the process and focused more on strategic steps and which elements were required in the process. From this, even though theory and practice agreed upon the general approach within experiential marketing practices there was still a disagreement in certain domains.

7.1.2 Integrating Theory and Practice

The aim with this study was inspired by the current needs in the academic marketing discipline of filling the gap between theory and practice; to explore the marketing-as-practice approach's ability to assess the gap between theoretical and practical understandings of marketing activities. The aim was operationalized by conducting marketing-as-practice research on experiential marketing, as assessed above.

The authors addressed the aim by portraying the value of using critical marketing and marketing-as-practice, which contributed to a successful outcome of the research. The approach guided the authors to critically assess different understandings of marketing activities in theory and practice, concluding in a positive understanding of the gap between theory and practice. The approach further enabled the authors to uncover hidden aspects of the marketing concept through engagement with marketing practitioners. The authors could thereby account for different understandings of the experiential marketing concept, and present a reflexive and comprehensive picture of what the marketing concept entails; thus paint a picture of the theoretical and practical gap within experiential marketing. The authors



thereby hope to have accounted for the reasons future researchers should adopt a similar approach to investigate marketing concepts.

The authors wish to extend the benefits of adopting a critical marketing and marketing-as-practice approach through drawing upon the current demands of both marketing literature and the dynamic marketplace. The combination acts as an analytical and theoretical approach, which guides research to adapt to complex market dynamics and simultaneously produce relevant knowledge. The approach further benefits the creation of knowledge appropriated to a larger audience, as it addresses and presents issues and practices interpretable by actors outside the academic marketing discipline. To account for diverse and complex practices and issues is essentially important in today's marketplace as marketing literature must be produced along with existing and developing dynamics of marketing practices to fill the gap between theory and practice.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

As the purpose of this research included addressing theoretical and practical understandings of a specific subject, the authors stressed implications for both theory and practice while addressing the proposed research question and aim of this thesis. Thus, the subjects and implications considered in the analysis and discussion addresses issues which constitutes in theoretical contributions and practical implications. Nonetheless, to elaborate upon these and to further clarify the contributions of the research the sections below portray the specific inputs and implications of this thesis.

7.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

While addressing the significance of conducting marketing-as-practice research, the authors aim to portray the need for theorists to understand the importance and thus consequences of the changing marketplace. In the fast-moving, complex and dynamic contemporary marketplace, academics should consider incorporating this consideration of changes in knowledge development. Furthermore, the authors encourage academics to consider the benefits of involving actors outside the marketing discipline while conducting research. This incorporation constitutes in increasing divergent thinking and thus a more adequate representation of reality. Consequently, developing work that is considering actors outside academia additionally generates work approachable by a wider audience.

Considering the theoretical contributions regarding the approach taken, the authors hope to have guided academics to focus on developing theory that is closely correlated to reality, through the use of marketing-as-practice research, which can further extend the theoretical understandings of practices. Ultimately, this research presents a novel way of knowledge production, thus what previous research has not significantly incorporated. Further on, relating to the investigation of experiential marketing practices, the authors hope to have contributed with an increased understanding of a comprehensive image of experiential marketing practices. Even though there are further areas which needs exploring to essentially fill the theoretical and practical gap within experiential marketing, the authors hope to have



assisted this need by connecting certain areas of theory and practice and thus considerably presented areas which need further integration. Thus, one major theoretical contribution is directed towards experiential marketing literature.

7.2.2 Practical Implications

There are also several practical implications this study provides. First, this thesis can increase practitioners understanding of theory's role in knowledge development. By understanding how theory can benefit their work, it will most likely enable them to increase their theoretical understandings of concepts to incorporate in their strategy development. Further, by gaining a deeper and comprehensive understanding of marketing, outside the experiential marketing domain, practitioners who specifically work within this area can understand how researchers can contribute with a wide and thoroughly elaborated understanding of the general marketing environment. Specifically, this study shows how practitioners should reflect more on the overall image of experiential marketing practices rather than just focusing on specific projects. By doing this, marketers can use a more coherent and in-depth understanding of how to more easily develop their strategies when staging experiences. This study thus reveals how there is a specific need for practitioners to integrate with theory and motivates how the awareness of knowledge development within theory can be translated to the current marketplace and help when constructing marketing concepts and the general understanding of these.

7.2.3 Joint Benefits & Contributions

To conclude, both academics and practitioners, benefit from this study as it motivates both parties to take a step back and reflect on their understanding of the current knowledge. This thesis thus emphasizes the value of critical thinking, and argues that both academics and practitioners miss certain themes or important elements if lacking this critical stance, specifically by underlining how crucial it is for valuable and reliable knowledge creation. Thus, more studies as this one need to emphasize the value of critically elaborating the understanding of new marketing practices, where the need for integration between theory and practice is crucial. As a result, practitioners and academics will effectively display a more thorough and correct image of how the world works and develop their knowledge domains accordingly.

7.3 Reflections, Limitations and Future Research Possibilities

7.3.1 Reflections

After conducting the study, the authors clearly see the significance of marketing-as-practice based research and thus reflect on why more research has not been conducted within this approach. One reason may be how marketing-as-practice research might cause issues for academics concerning lack of extensive theoretical and abstract knowledge, which might be considered highly valuable, and even crucial, in theory. If authors aim their work towards



studying marketing practices, will their work be viewed as too simplified by the remaining discipline and thereof affect the impact and acceptance of their work? Therefore, is the production of marketing-as-practice research limiting the potential of the spread and use of academic theories within the academic discipline? Another contrast for the need to produce action-oriented knowledge is the role of theory in knowledge production - is there a need for theory to produce abstract to generalizations in order to serve its purpose? Finally, is practice and theory addressing different issues in different ways for a reason; do they serve different purposes? And is a contrast between them two needed to continue addressing new concepts in their own way and thus to prove their relevance? These considerations thus presents possible complications following the action-based research approach, and is worthy further attention to subsequently clarify the specific role of studying marketing practices.

7.3.2 Limitations

Limitations within this study concern mainly the limits co-existing with the qualitative nature of this research. Yet the choice of using a qualitative method was appropriate to answer the research question as to understand the relationship between experiential marketing practices. This in turn required a subjective analysis as well as methods, consequently enabling the authors to explore data and to be able to dig deeper into meanings and social constructs. Subjectivity however limits the generalizability of the findings as the interpretations and therefore the themes derived from the analysis and findings are partly biased by the authors subjective viewpoints. There is additionally a need to acknowledge that different interviewers can produce different outcomes and the possible influence power structures may have in the interview outcome (Kvale, 2007). Also, other researchers might have interpreted data differently, resulting in different conclusions. Therefore this research is also limited to draw causal conclusions, as this study is explorative, seeking to explain phenomena, rather than aiming to confirm or disconfirm a theory. However, the choice of a qualitative study enabled the authors to gain deep insight on practitioners as well as theorists viewpoints and perceptions, consequently describing an authentic reality of experiential marketing practices.

This research was also affected by a number of limitations concerning the data collected. Due to time restraints and geographical limits the authors were solely able to collect primary data from agencies in Sweden and the UK, which thus implicates the inability for this research to constitute in a representable image of the entire experiential marketing division of the marketing industry. Further limitations in data collection concerned difficulties in successfully approaching experiential and brand experience agencies and interviewees willingness to describe and way of portraying adapted processes by their representative agencies. One final limitation considers the choice of experiential marketing, as it represents a rather new area in both research and industry, which argues for research's inability to successfully account for experiential marketing practices up-to-date. Thereby, the choice of other marketing practices might have shown broader theoretical understandings of market practices due to increased amount of literature and thereby portrays a limitation of conducted research.



7.3.3 Future Research

As the purpose of this research was to assess an approach researchers can adopt while attempting to integrate the gap between theory and practice, one clear future research area implicates the possibilities for future researchers to adopt the marketing-as-practice approach while investigating other marketing concepts. The authors thereby hope to have inspired future researchers to produce relevant knowledge through adopting these approaches, while aiming to fill the theoretical and practical gap.

As this research is pursued by the marketing-as-practice approach, it fails to specifically incorporate theory's significance and the importance of the theoretical contributions affecting the formation of the marketing industry and thus marketing practices. In further research, the authors thereby present the opportunity to extensively consider theoretical contributions in line with marketing-as-practice research, to highlight theory's impact on marketing practices, and thus increasingly account for the significance of academic work while addressing marketing practices.



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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. **Approach:** Introduction, friendly greeting and explanation [e.g. who we are, verify sampling criteria selection (e.g. brand agencies working with experiential marketing), thank the interviewee for agreeing to the interview, tell about what is the purpose and use of the interview, description of the process of the interview]. Inform about the purpose to motivate them to participate in the interview. Mention the approximate duration of the interview.

2. **Ethical considerations:** Ask if they wish to be anonymous and if it is okay to record the interview, also let them know if they do not want to answer any questions this is okay, you are here to talk to them because of their involvement in a trial with qualitative research. At last ask if there are any questions before the interview begins.

3. **Screening questions on past experience to understand their reference point:**

- Tell us some brief history about the agency? What's the main reason for its existence?
- What's your role in the agency?

4. **Questions about specific dimensions based on experiential marketing (Topics constructed as to answer the research question) :**

Initial considerations: Move from the general to more specific topics, use probes (clarification, attention, elaboration), ask no more than 15 questions, focus rather on positive than negative responses from the interviewees, return to topics if unclarified.

Subject 1: Strategic Process

Example questions:

- What does the creative strategic process at _____ entail?
- Do you have a set process for creating brand experiences?
- What are the most important stepping-stones when creating an experience?

Subject 2: Research

Example questions:

- What is the first question you address while creating brand experiences?
- What type of research do you undertake?
- How do you relate to emerging market/consumer trends?

Subject 3: Consumers, Products and Brands

Example questions:

- What does it take to involve consumers in experiences?
What do you do to win them over?
- Is there a "winning concept" to engage consumers?



- What role does the product or brand have in the experience?
- What is important to include while promoting a brand or product?

Subject 4: Success & Future

Example questions:

- How do you measure the success of the experience?
- How do you envision the future for brand experiences/experiential marketing?
- How do you see _____ developing according to future market and consumer needs?

5. End of discussion:

Is there anything you feel like we have left out and would like to draw attention to? Is there anything else you'd like to add? What is the message you'd like the authors to really take away today? What would you like to see coming out of this study? Inform the participant about the date of hand-in and when you will send the final copy to them if they wish to make any changes or add any comments. Close the interview and thank the interviewee for their time and participation.



Appendix B: Examples of Thematised Arguments

The following tables show examples of thematised arguments derived from primary and secondary data, subsequently forming grounds for the analysis. Thematization initiated with dividing statements made into *Reasons* and *Conclusions*. The *Reasons* and *Conclusions* together formed an *Argument*, sufficient for analysis. The *Arguments* were thereafter grouped with similar ones through an initial coding process. The coded *Arguments* were subsequently focused coded, resulting in themes sufficient for comparative analysis between primary and secondary data. The number of themes was thereafter reduced, to solely portray highly relevant and supported themes. The data below is portraying examples of the *Arguments* which have shaped each of the focused themes.

B.1 Find What Engages Your Consumers

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“The physical meeting is so much better than other channels”	“Understand what consumers want to get them to engage”	Engage consumers through physical meetings by understanding what they want	(M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017)
“People remember something more if they have touched or interacted with it.”	“Consumer interaction with a brand experience is vital”	Consumer interaction is crucial to make people remember the experience	(K. Peake, interview, May 5, 2017)
“Work towards the client and audience to deliver thought-through solutions...”	“... to get the chance to engage people”	Focus on the client and audience to engage people	(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Authors
“To make experiential marketing work...”	“...it is crucial that the experiences you create be treated as distinct economic offerings ± not as a marketing exercise alone ± that engage your customers and create memories within them.”	Treat experiences as distinct economic offerings that engage your consumers to make the experiential strategy work	Gilmore & Pine (2002), p. 5
“Ambient marketing seeks to achieve a much more proximal relationship between consumer bodies and brands” /.../	/.../ “the more effectively an experience engages the senses, the more memorable it will be”	A memorable experience should engage the senses	Moor (2003), p.45
“To be successful...”	“...marketing experience should have personal relevance for the customer, be novel, offer an element of surprise, engender learning and engage the customer.”	Successful experiential marketing should be personally relevant for consumers, offer surprise and engage consumer	Tynan & McKechnie (2009), p. 504

B.2 Deliver the Reason for Your Brand’s Existence

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“To create engagement...”	“...you must find the core of your brand”	Create engagement by delivering core brand values	(M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017)
“To connect with the audience...”	“...you must deliver the why of a brand”	Connect with the audience by delivering the “why”	(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)
“...not really knowing who the brand was...”	“...if consumers walk away confused, the experience has failed...”	Deliver an experience which makes consumers know the brand	(K. Peake, interview, May 5, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Absence of arguments supporting the theme

B.3 Create Holistic Experiences

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“... to deliver a coherent experience”	“Make sure that everything is connected to the brand...”	Connect everything to the brand to create a coherent experience	(M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017)
“For an experience to be memorable...”	“...it has to be consistent”	Deliver consistent messages to create memorable experiences	(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)
“The market is shifting from informing and convincing into having an open dialogue with the consumers...”	“...therefore, all the channels need to collaborate intelligently.”	Due to market shift, brands need to focus on creating dialogues with consumers, which requires collaboration and consistency among all channels	(O. Nyström, interview, April 20, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Authors
“in creating a memorable event” /.../	/.../ “developing a coherent theme around which to stage the experience”	Deliver a coherent theme to create a memorable event	(Tynan & McKechnie, 2009, p. 504)
“when something is consumed, the experience depends not only on a single product but also on its holistic interaction with various other products as part of a consumption system.” /.../	/.../ “marketers should consider creating interrelations and relationships between experiences”	Deliver holistic experiences because of holistic interactions	(Addis & Holbrook, 2001, p. 62)
“To compete successfully” /.../	/.../ “Unlike many product or service enhancements, the holistic nature of these experiential designs makes them very difficult for competitors to copy.”	Compete successfully by producing holistic experiences, as they are difficult to copy	(Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002, p. 89)



B.4 The Foundation of Experiential Processes

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“There is no set strategy for experiential...”	“..it all depends on the goal and the client” “the client always expects something new”	Experiential strategies should be set according to customers and goals, not refer to set steps	(J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017)
“Because this is how the process is at Minnesota...” /.../	/.../ “... context dependency, knowing the audience, creative concept formation, strategic use of channels and evaluation and measurement”	The experiential process depends on context, audience, creative concept, channels, evaluation and measurement.	(O. Nyström, interview, April 20, 2017)
“It’s about finding a balance between all three parties...”	“.. you have to include the client, the audience and the surrounding world in experiential strategies.”	Experiential strategies entails a consideration of the client, audience and the surroundings.	(M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Authors
“These represent different types of experiences and should be evaluated and used appropriately; sensory experiences, affective experiences, creative cognitive experiences, physical experiences and social-identity experiences.”	“The experiences are further implemented using different experience providers (ExPros), including communications, visual identities, product presence, media etc. ”	Different types of experiences are delivered via experience providers.	(Schmitt, 1999, p. 53)
“...as it affects the information processing and generally constitutes in positive experiences.”	“creating categories within an experience to guide the consumers through...”	Create experiences which guides the consumers through processes as it constitutes in positive experiences	(Anuj & Alter, 2014, p. 11)
“Clearest implications for experiential marketing ... are in the design of marketing strategies”	“Identifying key customer segments is the first step. The second step is to develop a touchpoint chain and gauge those with the greatest impact. The third step is to turn findings into project priorities. The final step is to implement and monitor”	Experiential strategies entail customer segmentation, touchpoints, priorities and implementation/monitoring.	(Atwal & Williams, 2009, p. 343)

B.5 Divergent Focus; Products or Consumers

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“To connect with the audience...”	“... they must feel like we are doing this for YOU. It is about you and not us. They need to understand that you are a friend. It’s all about people and the humanity.”	To connect with the audience you must deliver personal messages	(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)
“Experiential enables brands to really target the audience they want to speak to...”	“by creating an experience that is specifically for them.”	Create experiences with consumer focus	(K. Peake, interview, May 5, 2017)
“People only care about their own needs”	“It’s all about considering the 7 fundamental needs”	Experiences must address consumer’s needs to be successful	(J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Authors
“taking the essence of a product and amplifying it into a set of tangible, physical and interactive experiences that reinforce the offer...”	“...describes marketing initiatives that give consumers in-depth, tangible experiences in order to provide them with sufficient information to make a purchase decision.”	Amplify the essence of product to deliver tangible experiences coherent for information for purchase	(Atwal & Williams, 2009, p. 341)
“Identify ... which sensorial component should characterize a new offer (in the light of its core functionalities)” /.../	/.../ “the different components of the Customer Experience depend on the characteristics of a given product.”	Identify which sensorial components that should characterize the experience, since they vary due to the characteristics of the products	(Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007, p. 405)
“Turning one’s attention from primarily verbal to nonverbal sensory cues requires a very different mode of presenting experimental stimulus objects” /.../	/.../ “experiential outlook must involve subjects in consumption-like experiences based on real—or at least realistic—product samples.”	Experiential must involve subjects based on products	(Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, p. 134)

B.6 Create Internal Engagement

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“...because the target audience is extremely affected by the employees of a brand”	“There is a need to engage internally...”	Engage internally because the target audience is affected by brand employees	(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)
“If you can’t motivate your employees, you are in trouble.”	“Creating an experience for employees is essential today”	Experiences are important to increase internal engagement	(N. Morgan, interview, May 8, 2017)
“There is a need to engage internally...”	“..create incentives and experiences for employees”	Create experiences for employees	(M. Nilsson, interview, April 12, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Absence of arguments supporting the theme

B.7 Divergent Objectives; Trust or Loyalty

Primary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Interviewee
“Consumer trust is built if they can try or experience something themselves”	“Trust is the most important thing”	Experiential should generate trust	(J. Barnes, interview, April 12, 2017)
“Trust is the key factor consumers gain by actually experiencing themselves instead being told by someone else”	“The key factor in experiential is trust...”	Experiential should generate trust	(K. Peake, interview, May 5, 2017)
“...so that consumers want to be a part of it”	“You want to personally engage, you want to become “one” with the consumers..”	Consumers must identify with the experience which is done by making them trust it, done through engagement	(E. Palmcrantz, interview, April 19, 2017)

Secondary Data:

Reason	Conclusion	Argument	Authors
“management is problematic because of the significant input of consumers into the brand building process, particularly in the development of brand association and building brand loyalty stages.”	“creating brandscapes can help to overcome these problems”	Brandscapes creates stages to build brand loyalty	(Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006, p.185)
“One way of doing this is through the provision of brand environments where these people can link together with the brand, because although they may have a preference or a liking for the brand, due to their lack of geographical proximity to one another, the brand consumption lacks a sense of place”	“cultivate customer loyalty and brand identification through supporting activities and events that involve participants in brand communities which are comprised of admirers for a brand “	Provide brand environments to cultivate consumer loyalty and involve participants, not limited to geographical proximity	(Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006, p. 183)
“The recognition of the importance of customer advocacy and the wide-scale adoption of the Net Promoter measure”	“motivated the adoption of experience marketing as personally relevant marketing experiences can generate brand advocacy, loyalty and word of mouth”	Consumer advocacy has motivated the adoption of experiences and experiences generate loyalty and WOM	(Tynan & McKechnie, 2009, p. 503)