

PROS AND CONS OF EXPERIENTIAL MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING: THE CASE OF A MICRO SIZED IMPORTING COMPANY

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Abstract

In today's management and marketing world, new trends show their positive influence and negative effects on organizations. Technology and social media appear among the foremost new trends that shape the establishments' structural and functional performance. Though technology and social media look like taking the place of the real world, it is thought that both of these trends seem to offer the users differentiated experience platforms and they play complimentary roles for real-life experiences. When it comes to experiential management and marketing, organizations may prefer different combinations of real-life and on-line activities or shares. How they do this combination, why they do this combination and what makes the difference among the organizations resulting from these choices suggest the possible sources of inspiration for theory and practice. This paper mainly and briefly covers information management activities related to the subjects of experiential management and marketing with the support of the case of a micro sized importing company.

The study focusing on a unique example of a family company, and its one-to-one and mass marketing applications for the imported products, includes the extraordinary traces of both customer relationship management and managerial decisions. The literature review of the study emphasizes the subjects of experiential management and marketing from the point of customer relations, technology and social media versus real-life experience, micro organizations and the international dimensions of the prementioned headings. For the methodology of this study, the case study method and interview technique are preferred. For the findings, the important characteristics of this company in relation to experiential and customer relationship management (CRM), marketing and managerial decisions are summarized. In spite of the fact that the research is limited with only one firm, the paper is a special one on its own with its findings' originality for future studies that will concentrate on the irreplaceable role of experiential efforts in management and marketing.

Keywords: CRM, decision, information, management, marketing, social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

New trends in consumption patterns have changed from the past "agricultural economy", to "industrial economy", then to "service economy", and now to "experiential economy" (Tsai & Yeh, 2012).

Organizations' responses to new trends play an important role in their management and marketing strategies. Management and marketing activities appear to be in need of considering these responses to new trends for the success of sustainability.

For the sake of sustainability, development of information technologies, behavioural profiles of customers, their buying inclinations, preferences, and decisions (Bartáková, Gubíniová & Briestenský, 2014) also take part in the list of “must be responded” in modern marketing management. The development of information technologies may cover the developments both out of the organization –e.g. the use of social media or networks- and inside the organization –e.g. the use of information databases.

When it comes to the changes in behavioural profiles of customers, in their buying preferences, and decisions, customer relationship management (CRM) issues are matter of subject. The combined approaches of information management (IM) and CRM reveal the new trend that is the importance of personalized approach to every customer (customization).

Personalized approach to every customer should be enabled by a customer database management system targeting long-term relationships with customers leading to greater marketing performance and efficiency (Gregurec, Vranešević & Dobrinić, 2011).

CRM, personalized approach, experiential management and marketing activities, IT and social media usage may differ from organization to organization and the size of the organizations reveal changing potentials about these subjects.

For instance, in a micro enterprise the role of the owners' personal values and preferences that play a part in the evolution of the business (Holt, 2012) and in the evolution of the prementioned issues is thought to be a part of entrepreneurial viewpoints. These viewpoints give information about the owners' and the enterprises' potentials of being open to new experiences. Being open to new experiences may also trigger the developments in the evaluation success of experiential processes related to management and marketing. That's why this study, focusing on a micro sized company, also exemplifies the owners' personal values' and choices' reflections to managerial decisions in experiential matters.

Micro enterprises, experiencing problem in marketing realm, may be supported with technologically prepared structure adjusted e-commerce and word of mouth marketing via the internet and social networks (Syuhada & Gambett, 2013).

When it comes to international business, managerial decisions in importing organizations should consider international dimensions such as cultural issues and international representativeness. For example, four key work values (Honesty, Fairness, Concern of Others, and Achievement) are known to take part in businesses across cultures, and the values and the principles of the workplace play a significant role in managerial alignment and global social responsibility for international businesses (Williams, 2011).

This study attempts to summarize and emphasize the pros and cons of experiential management and marketing with respect to CRM approaches affected by new trends related to technology, social media, e-commerce and real-life experiences. Since personalized and niche approaches are thought to be needed more frequently and are thought to be more frequently adopted in small organizations, a micro organization has been examined from an international point of view. This case study highlights the priorities and the prior values of the family company owners who shape and make the managerial decisions in relation to experiential issues for CRM and IM.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Experiential Management and Marketing

The importance of experience and experiential issues plays a vital role in decision making processes and in decision-related areas. Decisions concerning management and marketing fields are no exception (Kara & Çiçek, 2015).

Experiential marketing has been accepted as one of the innovative approaches of marketing in order to reach and connect with customers, specifically young customers, and this approach is different from the traditional forms of advertising such as television and print. Experiential marketing is defined as ‘a live event or experience that gives the target audience the opportunity to see a product and experience it for themselves` (Heitzler, Asbury & Kusner, 2008; quotations from Schmitt, 1999b: S188). In other words; though, experiential marketing-created-memorable experiences provided to consumers may show similarity for all customers, the assimilation process is deeply personal (Srinivasan & Srivastava, 2010: 193,194). From this point of view, experiential management can also be defined as a real-life/live happening that gives the managing personnel the opportunity to see a product, service or process and experience the managerial decision making process themselves and personally.

There are two extremes for experiences about products and services; at one end functional products, with low experience coverage such as machines and at the opposite end pure experience services such as activities related to entertainment are located. Between these two extremes consumption experiences' production is triggered by three managerial components: first component as settings, second one as narratives including histories and stories built around products and services and thirdly as actions concerning the relationship between the consumer, the product and/or service (Chanavat & Bonet, 2014: 326-327; quoted from Filser, 2002).

It is seen that studies about experiential management have taken place for a long time past in literature and this subject has been related to subjects like training and learning (Burke & Hornstein, 1967; Long & Jinks, 1982; Maher & Hughner, 2005; Cannice, 2013). Since new experience may change old experience's effect, not only youngsters like students but also professionals in management in enterprises are seen to continue learning by experiential methods and experiential applications.

This experiential approach for management and marketing is somehow reflected in managerial outcomes related to customers like those of the outcomes in long-term sales and customer loyalty (Cuellar, Eyer & Fanti, 2015; Luo et al., 2011; Tsai & Yeh, 2012).

For the target of long-term sales, the experience must be a pleasant and an informative one. That's why, how to train the staff who takes part in the experiential marketing and management activities is thought to be of vital importance. The experiential activities have critical roles for brand awareness and brand loyalty, as well. Here, cost-benefit analysis should also be taken into consideration (Cuellar, Eyer & Fanti, 2015: 535, 547). For instance, since experiential marketing tactics typically reach fewer people and often have a higher cost per person ratio compared to traditional mass-media tactics (Heitzler, Asbury & Kusner, 2008; S192), the managerial and marketing decisions should be made accordingly. In this sense, the success of an experience is seen as dependent on its ability to touch the customer's senses and capture the customer's loyalty (Luo et al., 2011).

In literature, the impacts of experiential values are also among the focused research subjects. In a study, four experiential value types – aesthetics, playfulness, customer return on investment (CROI), and service excellence – have been emphasized. In that paper, in addition to these value types the e-retailer's website personality dimensions of enthusiasm, genuineness, solidity, sophistication and pleasantness are taken into consideration. The findings pointed out the importance of the appropriate combinations' need for the desired website personalities (Shobeiri, Laroche & Mazaheri, 2013).

Experiential marketing modules have also been observed during literature review process. In a research considering tourism sector, for modules, the five groups of sensual(sense), emotional(feel), mental/cognitive(think), behavioural/physical and lifestyle(act) and relational(relate) experience modules were mentioned. In the paper, the critical role of the experience module design's and its presentation's being in harmony with consumer/customer values has been emphasized for the marketing strategy success (Kara & Çiçek, 2015: 196).

In another study, modeling relationship between experiential marketing focusing on how customer sense, feel, think, act and relate their experiences; experiential value types of aesthetics, playfulness, customer return on investment (CROI), and service excellence and purchase intentions was focused on. The findings of that study showed that experiential marketing was an important driver that could influence experiential value and purchase intention (Nigam, 2012: 70, 77).

Another research about the modules, mentioned the marketing activities having turned to create pleasing experience for the customers in the era of "Experience Economy" (Sheu, Su & Chu, 2009: 8494). So, the main focus of experiential marketing may be summarized as being in response to senses, influences, actions, and relationships (Anggie & Haryanto, 2011: 90).

For optimal results, marketing strategy combinations are used. For instance, in a research, the strategy covering marketing tactics designed to reach large audience with little personal involvement by the target audience and another strategy covering tactics designed to reach smaller audiences but with high personal involvement by the target audience were combined (Heitzler, Asbury & Kusner, 2008: S189).

2.1.1. Information Technology and Social Media versus Real-Life Experience

The developments in information technology (IT) and social media add new experiential dimensions to real-life experience. As the products and the services of newly born and developed business –e.g. that of the sectors and business related to and concerning online games (Sheu, Su & Chu, 2009), simulations (Luo et

al., 2011), and social media (Syuhada & Gambett, 2013) - become more popular and more preferred by the customers, experiential dimensions occur as being in need of reviewal and research considering the advances in technology and related sectors.

In the research of Luo et al. (2011: 2163), concerning online retailing and emphasizing the opportunities caused by the advances in information and web technologies, five virtual experiential marketing (VEM) elements (sense, interaction, pleasure, flow, and community relationship) and customer intentions were examined.

VEM, embracing the internet and its various channels covering blogs, chat rooms, interactive images, virtual communities, multi-play game playing and technology creates an enriched environmental experience. It relies on interfaces that act as surrogates for direct real-world experiences in contrast to a physical experience that plays to the senses in a direct way (Luo et al., 2011: 2164; quoted from Li et al., 2001). Experiential marketing plays an important role in this subject, as well. Among the studies, there exists a specific study concerning the improvement of customer website involvement through experiential marketing. In that study, how provision of experiential values by an online store improved involvement of customers in the e-retailer's website was investigated. The findings of the study confirmed that aesthetics, service excellence, and customer return on investment were effective experiential values and added experiential benefits in terms of improving e-retailer's assistive image and enhancing customers' involvement in the website. (Shobeiri, Mazaheri & Laroche, 2014).

Either IT, websites, social media or real world, these are all kinds of environmental tools for experience formation. Good use and better application of existing technology make the difference.

Good use of the tools for experience formation is about its relation to the customer, but not about simply bombarding the senses (Srinivasan & Srivastava, 2010: 195; quoted from Holbrook, 1993).

2.1.2. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Managerial Decisions

Considering the advances in IT, the operational and analytical implementation of information systems (IS) may initiate the market strategy and CRM performances of a company. In a study, the role of IS was emphasized as a strategic supporting role and the study pointed out that collecting more information about customers provided opportunities to be prepared to personalize service for a customer in advance (Ku, 2014). Since the main objective of the CRM approach is to encourage long-term relationships between the enterprise and the customer, it also requires investments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and also an intensive use of these ICTs in order to improve the efficiency of the internal processes and the management of relationships with customers (Llamas-Alonso et al., 2009: 29) So, IT and IS can be accepted as platforms in order to record experiential issues about customers and CRM.

As a result of the increasing level of competition, for new sources of differentiation, firms have started a new positioning based on the experiences of customers (Shobeiri, Laroche & Mazaheri, 2013: 102). For meeting the rising demands and expectations of an increasingly discerning range of customers, experiential marketing may be accepted as the nexus for developing effective survival strategies (Leighton, 2007: 124).

Managerial decisions related to persuasion of customers on their purchasing choices are also among the critical subjects related to CRM. The experiences of customers not only make the way to persuasion but also lead the related decisions concerning both the corporations and the customers.

In a recent research, emerging and developed markets were taken into consideration and two ways of persuasion were examined concerning the commercial ads; a functional route emphasizing the features and benefits of a product and an experiential route evoking sensations, feelings and imaginations. That study figured out the experiential route as mostly driving persuasion way in developed markets and on the other hand, in emerging markets, the functional route came forward as the relatively more significant driver (Zarantonello, Jedidi & Schmitt, 2013). These routes, concerning the commercial ads, may also be evaluated in managerial decisions related to other experiential marketing and CRM activities.

All related activities concerning marketing and CRM directly impact the implementation of CRM.

To maintain patience and energy to continuously repetitive cycle of "collection and accumulation of customer information", "analysis of customer information", "customer approach based on analysis", and "measurement, evaluation, and feedback based on the results of approach" is among the matters of importance for this implementation (Yamaguchi, 2009: 473). The personal differences among the customers are critical for the implementation processes, as well. This personal dimension shows that the impact of extraordinary experiences can change considerably according to consumers and their consumption profiles.

This emphasizes the crucial role of segmentation for implementing experiential marketing strategies (Chanavat & Bonet, 2014: 338).

2.1.3. Micro Organizations and International Dimensions

Most micro, small and medium enterprises have not been able to adapt to all technological changes; e.g. they have not been able to completely adopt the e-commerce due to lack of technological preparedness and adjustments (Syuhada & Gambett, 2013). There also exist micro and small enterprises that commonly are informally planned and managed as the entrepreneurs have very basic knowledge of accounting, manufacturing-production practices and local market behaviour. For the market, there may be the introduction of large foreign enterprises, too. In this case, the use of computer-aided modelling and simulation can be a cost-effective tool to support the planning and managerial decisions of micro and small enterprises (Caballero-Morales, 2015: 382).

Either micro, small, medium or large, for organisations, international dimensions cover issues like international markets; either emerging or developed, local/global differences, cultural influences; e.g. traditional/modern trends. When it comes to experiential processes, the processes seem like being under the differential impacts of all these issues (Zarantonello, Jedidi & Schmitt, 2013) and when viewed from the CRM perspective, in today's global marketplace, the drive for the consumption and choice of brands is thought to be all about feel, relate and act (Srinivasan & Srivastava, 2010: 193).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

For the research method of this study, the case study method and interview technique were applied. Brief information about the company and the company's first imported product's brand is as follows:

Inditoys; INDI Ltd. was established in 2007 in Istanbul, Turkey, with the aim of presenting explorative, amusing, mental and physical skill developing supportive education materials to education/training and toy sector. The enterprise not only provides the brands it represent to the education/training organisations and retail, but also supplies training/educating activities and services to organisations such as schools, universities, corporations, museums, etc. using these brands/products. Indi Ltd. has two founder-owners and also has project-based temporary employees. KAPLA is among the imported products of INDI (www.inditoys.com).

KAPLA, an awarded worldwide brand, is an original wooden educational tool which doesn't have the characteristic to be attached to each other in any way. No magnet, no connection aparey, no glue, etc. is used but just balance and skills related to science and art hold these wooden pieces together. Kapla has a history of 27 years in the world and a history of 8 years in Turkey in the field of education and training sector. With the help of its durable, healthy, high quality structure, Kapla helps youngsters in meeting the world of objects and dimensions and also helps adults and elders to explore and learn more about the magical universe of arts, physics, and mathematics. It also psychologically triggers the personality characteristics related to patience, psychological endurance, focusing on thought and action, creativity, curiosity and courage (www.kapla.com, www.inditoys.com).

For the research period, joint approach of both face-to-face and on phone interview technique in addition to an on-line questionnaire with open-ended questions formed by the author were used.

The questions used during the research period that took place in November 2015 and the related answers have been summarized in the following section.

4. FINDINGS

The related questions and the answers of the owners are as follows:

Question 1: How long have you been applying and in which fields have you been using experiential management and experiential marketing?

Answer 1: "Since the foundation date, we have been using experiential marketing. This marketing method has been a fundamental choice for our company in order to position our enterprise in the market, in order to overcome the barriers such as entry barriers of the market, ongoing competition, bargaining power of retailers in the market, the product's unpopularity, its being simple, lean and without decoration. We faced these barriers because of our lack of experience history in the sector. Experiential approach had lots of advantages such as being able to be included in the distribution channels, being able to communicate with the end-user, and being able to develop networks."

Question 2: What are the reasons for your preference of experiential marketing and management?

Answer 2: "In addition to the items mentioned above, the reasons for the products' need to be presented and the limits of the budget made us choose this method. When the cultural characteristics and the abstract properties in the nature of the products are taken into consideration, experiential marketing has come forward to challenge the unknown and indefinite with its discovering characteristic."

Question 3: What kind of changes has taken place in your organization as a result of experiential approach?

Answer 3: "A concrete change is not seen because we have been using this approach from the very beginning. We think that perhaps traditional approaches would have made us introduce INDI and Kapla to the market more rapidly if we had moved with the help of those approaches. On the other hand, maybe we wouldn't have empowered our position this much in the market."

Question 4: In what sense and scope has experiential approach positively contributed to Customer Relations Management and Information Management Database? Have you experienced any negative effect of this approach on management and marketing?

Answer 4: "In the beginning, since the customer database covered mostly B2B, and we had no physical shopping place, etc. our contact opportunity with the end-users was limited. Experiential marketing helped us share and exchange information with the end-users and form networks related to both business life professionals (like schools' managers, teachers, consultants, instructors, shopping-mall responsables) as well as end users."

Question 5: How and in what ways do technology, developments in information technologies and social media affect your establishment's organizational structure, functions and performance?

Answer 5: "Direct marketing and especially internet usage have been a basic need. Our website has been an advantage while introducing our brands. When it comes to e-commerce, e-commerce has helped us to meet the Turkey-wide demands in a rapid way. Social media is a must for sure but it is not a very value-adding channel unless you have a physical presence in real-world."

Question 6: Do you appreciate the new trends e.g. technology, social media and database/information management system of the enterprise and how do you make use of these trends in experiential management and marketing issues?

Answer 6: "We don't think we are able to use the above mentioned trends coordinated enough. We have been working on this to improve it."

Question 7a: When compared, what are contributions of the experiences in real-life/face to face customer relations and technology/social media, network based customer experiences, network based customer relations to your managerial decisions like those to CRM and why do you think there exist different levels of contribution?

Answer 7a: "Face to face interaction and its influence is always greater than the other. Social media doesn't provide enough depth in communication. The nature of the product also doesn't provide this without face to face interaction. Turkish people prefer the experience of 'touch and feel'. Social media contributes to moving attention like a "teaser" and contributes to create interest and to direct attention. Internet is good for information gathering and for formation of database."

Question 7b: How is the combined ratio of real-life and electronic environment activities decided by your organization's management? Are there any specific steps you consider for this issue? For you, is one environment more important than the other? Is there a specific reason for this selection? If yes, name the reason.

Answer 7b: "This ratio is not planned. It is formed as a result of needs. The presence in the virtual environment should be continuous. This channel is a rapidly used one which is continuously updated with informative-content. People mostly chat about the experiences they find amusing but this doesn't mean sales. For brand awareness and demonstrations, the applications in real-world make the way to the sale-results."

Question 7c: From your point of view, in what aspects do your experiential management and marketing applications in the real-life and electronic environment make your enterprise different from the others?

Answer 7c: "There exist not many organizations that prefer to use animation activities or workshop sessions for marketing strategy. These make us introduce ourselves and our brands to the potential customers. We

don't remain as just names on a page but become actually existing for the customers. This is how we gain the confidence of the customers in us and in our brand."

Question 8: From your company's foundation date to the time being in what ways have your customers profiles, purchasing aims/preferences/decisions changed? How have this change affected your enterprise?

How do you use the experiential information you gather from one-to-one and mass marketing applications in your managerial decisions, in CRM and in IM systems?

Answer 8: "Our end-user customer profile hasn't changed since 2007. On the other hand, we have experienced some small changes in retail and other channels. For instance, previously, we only worked with small-scale toyshops but later as we became known and as demand increased, the chain groups of shops also started paying attention to us. In the beginning, we contacted the schools only via direct sales but then salesmen connected to schools also paid attention to us. The fact is that, indeed, when you create the demand of the end-user, all the others are attracted to you. For our strategic choice, we preferred 'pull' strategy instead of 'push' strategy for the channel. This was a consciously made decision. We are two owners and two employees of the firm. That's why there exist not many systematic processes. We, without doubt, use systematic approach, too but there isn't a specific method and this is why it cannot be weighed but it can be observed."

Question 9: For your organization, what are the items in the "pros and cons action-reaction" list related to experiential management and marketing?

Answer 9: "We experienced that these demonstrations were very promoting. Unfortunately, this process caused lots of quality-lacking imitations of the products and services in the market."

Question 10: What are your strategic updated plans about experiential management and marketing for 2016 about sustainability?

Answer 10: "Our target is to continue experiential marketing in a more profound way. We plan to use this approach both for school channel and for the other areas that we wish to be active in."

Question 11: What are the changes in the behaviours and decisions of the customers either related or not related to experiential management and marketing? In your opinion, what is the role of experiential approach in your organization's life cycle? What are the scope and guiding level of IT/knowledge management, database, social media and likewise formations for your organization's experiential management and marketing approach?

Answer 11: "We have gathered our customers this way but the market is very traditional and not open to change; that's why either innovation are too slow to be observed or they don't exist at all."

Question 12: Do you use personalized approach in experiential management and marketing? If your answer is yes, in what aspect? What are the advantageous sides of personalized approach for your database, social nets and information management?

Answer 12: "No. The fact is that our repetitive sales aren't yet many. That's why we don't have this type of personalized approach, but in the future, it should be used. As our direct sales base develop, this will happen accordingly. On the other hand, when it comes to our corporate customers, we make discoveries with the aid of exclusive applications. These applications don't have standards in common, and mostly they have the purposes of discovery and of understanding the market dynamics."

Question 13: How do the international dimensions affect your activities and applications in experiential management and marketing?

Answer 13: "The manufacturing firm abroad supports us in our activities and lets us be free in our marketing decisions. We make all the strategic and tactic decisions ourselves. By the way, we make use of the best practices from abroad. Success stories are discussed during each contact and we keep them in mind in order to utilize them after the process of adaptation when needed. "

Question 14: What do you think about being open to new experiences? In your opinion, as the owner of the enterprise how does the characteristic of being open to newness/innovations affect experiential marketing and managerial decisions in your company?

Answer 14: "As a firm, one of the most important characteristics is our courage while choosing the less used road among the two choices. Taking risks cover the potential for flexibility, leading and acting rapidly. For instance, our large-scale animation activities in shopping malls are the first ones in their category in Turkey.

For Turkey, we were informed that the success ratio in school channel was relatively very low. In spite of this opinion, one more time, with the help of experiential marketing we attracted the critical customers and we were able to continue this way. This experiential approach is a special marketing model. Here, your being open to new experiences is just a beginning. If the environment (culture, way of thinking/acting) isn't open to new experiences, it becomes difficult to continue.

Most people in our country aren't quite open to newness, they prefer to avoid the indefinite and they're fond of popular and attention-pointer products and services with striking appearance. When all of these lists are taken into consideration, we can say we are doing a difficult job. In conclusion, at the first look, we are marketing just a 'piece of wood'.

In order to overcome the obstacles, we use the power of creativity, patience, and hard-work. Despite everything, these make our job even more appetizing because you know, if you didn't exist in the market, this sample mechanism wouldn't exist. It is nice to know, this special market is created by you.

A generation has been brought up by KAPLA and is being brought up with it."

After receiving these answers, seven additional questions were also asked to the two owners of the enterprise but this time in an on-phone interview. The added seven questions and the related answers are as follows:

Question 15: For your enterprise which dimension of experiential marketing is characteristic for your marketing activities; dimension of playfulness or dimension of information?

Answer 15: "Aesthetics is characteristic of our experiential marketing activities, indeed. We take the dimension of information into consideration, too. However, real-life-experience-framed marketing form the structure of the process. Making the potential customers feel good plays a critical role in this experience. For the experiential marketing activities, there is no obligation but there is voluntary participation."

Question 16: Which one of the experiential value types has priority for your experiential marketing activities? (Aesthetics, playfulness, customer return on investment (CROI), or service excellence)

Answer 16: "Aesthetics and playfulness. We have yet no special promotions. Service excellence is also important. Trying to make the participants feel that they're part of a pleasing experience initiates the experiential marketing activities' flow."

Question 17: Which one of the experiential marketing module groups is characteristic for your related activities: sensual, emotional, mental, behavioural or relational?

Answer 17: "We can't separate one from the other. They form our modules' approach altogether."

Question 18: What is the age interval of the potential customers who participate in your experiential activities?

Answer 18: "There is no separation for age intervals. People from different age intervals; either youngsters with their parents, adults or even elders take part in these activities."

Question 19: What are the advantages of experiential marketing from the angle of "Business Information Management"?

Answer 19: "Generally, contact with customer is limited in marketing activities. Opportunities related to one-to-one contact and closely knit communication is more common in experiential marketing activities than in daily marketing ones. Thus, there exist opportunities to gather information about customers' reactions to the products and about their perceptions with respect to their experiences in the activities. These activities also play a critical role in forming networks. They are effective in our target-customer oriented sales and in reaching the segments. As a result of these experiential marketing activities, intermediary customer segments have been reached and experiential marketing activities have made the process be oriented towards sales."

Question 20: In your opinion what are the disadvantageous sides of experiential marketing?

Answer 20: "It takes time. It doesn't result in sales immediately. It is a kind of long-term investment. You may coincide with profiles that gather information from you and try to make copies/imitations. If we had used the same design and the same content for our experiential marketing activities, that would have been a real risk. On the other hand, since the specialty of the way the work is done and sometimes even the exclusiveness of the activities and the alteration/variety of the content lessen this risk.

Question 21: What are the critical points that you take into consideration for the training of the project-based personnel/staff who attend the experiential marketing activities?

Answer 21: "Positive approach for KAPLA, openness to improvement in talent and skill areas such as analytical skills, harmony in team dynamics, creativity, success in human relations, motive for responsibility, playing a complementary role in taking part in the subtasks in the teamwork, and also being at an advanced level of providing the required information about the product(s) while introducing it/them and while answering the questions. We accept all of these criteria as the critical reference issues for the training of the project-based personnel who attend the experiential marketing activities."

5. DISCUSSION

When the answers were analysed, the overall evaluation revealed that when pros and cons of experiential management and marketing were taken into consideration the owners of this micro sized importing company emphasized the following points for their enterprise and the findings could be summarized and highlighted as follows:

- Several advantageous sides and roles made the experiential approach to be used continuously as an irreplaceable strategy for management and marketing.
- The approach empowered the position of the company in the market by the help of its exploring and discovering character.
- This approach supplied high contact opportunities with different profiles of potential customers.
- The explorative side of the approach provided opportunities to perform and to situate the first extraordinary experience applications in the market and provided opportunities to learn more about present and potential customers.
- Furthermore, this approach helped the staff to be trained about product, service properties and customer relations in a practical and applicable way.
- This approach took time and caused time loss when compared to traditional approaches.
- This approach was risky with its high probability in contacting different profiles of competitors/rivals and had the risk of strategic information leakage. For this micro company, standardized approach for experiential issues was not seen or mentioned. The answers showed that this company was on the way to start standardized and personalized processes but had not yet started. The standardization process of experiential activities was found risky by the owners of this company
- When it came to IT; internet, website usage, e-commerce and social media, the owners pointed out that website usage and e-commerce provided geographical and speed related advantages. Social media was accepted just as a value-adding support channel to real-life management and marketing activities, as advantageous for information gathering and database formation and wasn't accepted as an empowering channel for the enterprise in supporting the outcomes related to sales and customer attraction when it was utilized on its own since face to face interaction was defined as like a diagnostic for customer decisions. Experiential issues gave the power to be concrete when compared to the virtual aspects of internet, social media and likewise IT possibilities.
- International dimensions and cultural issues were effective in experiential issues, and in designing the experiential management and marketing activities. For instance, having the opportunity to learn about successful applications from abroad and feeling free in taking initiatives in experiential issues were the additional advantages for this importing company. One of the owners emphasized that being open to newness and new experience could trigger the success of experiential issues only if the surrounding culture was open to newness and new experiences.

As a support for the findings of this research, in literature review, it was seen that the strong relevance between product brands and certain culture or image was mentioned and for the implementation of experiential marketing strategies, the necessity to think about whether the method could effectively improve customers' experiential value at the same time or not was emphasized. When making marketing plan, the importance of the provocation of customers' positive experience was highlighted, and customers' satisfaction and relationship quality were focused on, as well (You-Ming, 2010: 207).

6. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The shift towards experiential marketing has occurred firstly as a result of simultaneous developments related to the omnipresence of information technology meaning the connections and shares of people and companies via an experiential universe with one another at any time; secondly the supremacy of the brand focusing on a world which brands rule but products are not bundles of functional characteristics anymore but they are rather means to provide and enhance customer experiences; and thirdly this shift has taken place as a result of the ubiquity of communications and entertainment; the emphasis of everything becoming branded and becoming a form of communication and entertainment (Schmitt, 1999a: 53-54).

Based on the limitations and above findings, the author came to the conclusion that in order to appreciate the advantageous sides of experiential management and marketing, the enterprise included in the search was detected to have taken experiential management and marketing as a part of their management and marketing philosophy. The flexibility of the content design and the sustainable performances of the experiential marketing activities seemed to make this approach a strategy on its own but not a tactic. That's why it is thought that pros and cons of this approach can only be evaluated better if the outcomes about subjects such as sales, brand awareness, customer loyalty, information management, return on customer (ROC) and return on investment (ROI) are included in further considerations.

There were some limitations to this research. This research article examined and analyzed the aspects of experiential management and marketing only from the marketer's/enterprise's point of view and just for one enterprise which is eight years old. This study was limited with the general evaluation of the experiential marketing issues from the perspective of the entrepreneurs, so the study did not concentrate on any specific experiential marketing activity of the related company and no numerical data was included in the paper.

For further considerations, the aspects of experiential issues can be researched both from the marketer's and from the customer's point of view in the same research.

Investigations of motives of consumers for participating in experiential marketing activities and motives for buying the products may reveal what constitutes the consumer 'experience' (Leighton, 2007: 119). Specific experiential marketing activities can be taken into consideration, numerical data/ results can be included, and also the potentials and the final results can be examined for different periods of time for different company age intervals.

This study, hoping to influence related future research, covers the unique experience of a micro scale importing company on the way to success with the help of the partnership of experiential management and marketing. This case study has showed an example of how the real-life experience in experiential marketing activities and technology assisted experiential marketing communication have been combined. The subject of why this combination has been shaped looks like both being dependent to cultural, strategic issues and to issues related to the entrepreneurs' personal choices, product and market characteristics as well. The answers of the owners have shown that in the above combination real-life experience is critical for their experiential marketing approach which hasn't yet been designed with personalized content but has been designed in such a way that it continue with alterations in the content considering the feedbacks from the participants.

The interactions of the potential customers with each other during voluntary involvement to experiential marketing activities and the experiences and observations of the personnel of companies during these events may also include influencing information for future studies.

The overall picture figures out that the real-life & real-time activities related to experiential marketing designed with altering contents and these contents' being the first in that field has made this company a unique one in its class. Entrepreneurs' personal managerial decisions considering cultural and market based issues have made the company different from its competitors. For further research, the relationships between experiential management/marketing issues and different profile characteristics of entrepreneurs can also be examined in a profound way.

Author's Note: The indications of today's trends look like the prerequisite signs of a transition stage from "Experience Economy" era (Schmitt, 1999a: 54; quoted from Pine II & Gilmore, 1998) to an era of instant creations of consumer-driven composition which is called "Transformer Economy" in the author's wording.

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