
30 Consumption experiences as escape: an application of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique

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In the early 1980s, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) drew attention to the study of experiential consumption and, over the past two decades, numerous scholars have contributed to furthering our understanding of aesthetic, as well as physically challenging and risky, consumption experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Belk, 1988; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989; Celsi, Rose and Leigh, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; McCracken, 1988; Mick and Buhl, 1992; Shouten, 1991; Thompson, Pollio and Locander, 1994; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Recent work by Arnould and Thompson (2005) proposes a theory of consumer culture that focuses on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption, and greater interest has been directed to managing customer experiences (Gobé, 2001; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Lindstrom, 2005; Schmitt, 1999, 2003). Thus understanding more about consumption experiences in the context of consumers' everyday lives is an important undertaking.

The intent herein is to contribute to the literature on consumers' experiences using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET). ZMET is a hybrid methodology grounded in various domains, including verbal and nonverbal communication, visual sociology, visual anthropology, literary criticism, semiotics, mental imagery, cognitive neuroscience and phototherapy (Zaltman, 1997, 2003; Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). The tenets – thought occurs as a pattern of neural activity, not as words; most human meaning is exchanged nonverbally; much cognition is embodied; emotion and reason are equally important and commingle in decision making; most thought, emotion and learning occur without awareness; mental models guide the selection of, processing of and response to stimuli; cognitions are socially shared, and non-literal language and especially metaphor is central to cognition – suggest that ZMET is an appropriate tool for investigating customer experiences. The method involves semi-structured, in-depth personal interviews centered on visual images that the informant brings to the interview (Denzin, 1989; McCracken, 1988). Because ZMET data are informant-driven rather than researcher-driven, the ZMET interview affords researchers an opportunity to have consumers more freely express and expand on their thoughts and feelings, attitudes and perspectives.

The context of our investigation is consumers' Broadway theatre experiences. Acknowledging that experiences may be different according to frequency and loyalties (Schmitt, 2003), our study involved interviews with 21 US consumers, nine who attend a Broadway show at least once a year (i.e., Frequenters), and 12 who attended within the last five years, but not within the last two years (i.e., Infrequenters). We begin with a description of the ZMET methodology, as well as of our analytical procedures. Subsequently we report our substantive findings and discuss them in relation to a variety of literature streams.

Using ZMET to understand the Broadway experience

As noted, ZMET uses informants' pictures as the stimuli during in-depth one-on-one interviews to explore and probe informants' thoughts and feelings. The use of pictures is grounded in the facts that most information reaching the brain does so through the visual system, that much communication is nonverbal, and that informant-selected pictures can serve as entry points for exploring customer concepts (Weiser, 1988). Pictures typically represent, not only basic lower-order concepts, but also higher-order constructs that contain extensive information or defining attributes. Owing to the expressive power of pictures, it is not surprising that photographs have been a central part of counseling, sociology, psychology and anthropology (Becker, 1980; Collier and Collier, 1986; Denzin, 1989). Consumer behavior researchers also have employed photographs as stimuli to elicit consumers' subconscious thought processes and/or develop theories relevant to their work (e.g., Belk, Ger and Askegaard, 2003; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). Validation studies of ZMET applications indicate that four to five depth interviews that are focused on identifying and understanding core themes can provide up to 90 per cent of the information available from a larger set of interviews (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995).

Twenty-one informants from the greater Boston area – nine Frequents and 12 Infrequents – participated in this study of Broadway experience. Both samples included more women, five and eight, respectively; ages ranged from 30 to 50, with an annual income of at least \$100 000. Half of the Frequents and Infrequents have attended a Broadway show in New York City; the other half have enjoyed a Broadway show in another city.

One week prior to the interview, participants were sent a letter stating, 'We are interested in your thoughts and feelings about Broadway theatre, and the role that Broadway theatre plays in your life . . . Please bring 6 to 8 pictures that represent these thoughts and feelings about Broadway theatre productions and the role they play in your life.' The images could be pictures from magazines, newspapers, pieces of artwork and/or photographs taken specifically for this assignment or retrieved from photo albums. Each informant was paid \$150 to participate in a two-hour, one-on-one audio-taped interview.

Table 30.1 lists six steps in the ZMET interview as related to understanding participants' Broadway experiences. A detailed discussion of ZMET procedures, evaluative criteria and theoretical underpinnings is available in Zaltman and Coulter (1995) and Zaltman (1997).

Metaphor and analyses

A metaphor is the representation of one thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and the importance of metaphor in understanding consumer behavior has received increased attention in recent years (e.g. Belk, Ger and Askegaard, 2003; Burroughs and Mick, 2004; Cotte, Ratneshwar and Mick, 2004; Coulter and Zaltman, 2000; Coulter, Zaltman and Coulter, 2001; Joy and Sherry, 2003). The ZMET interview is grounded in the perspective that metaphor is central to thought (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Ortony, 1993) and generates numerous types of metaphors. Of specific interest to this study are image-based metaphors (i.e., visual images participants bring to the interview, sensory images they discuss, and digital images they create). Frequents (F) and Infrequents (I) brought in an average of seven visual images and each created a digital (summary) image. Additionally, the interview transcripts are the source of deep metaphors (i.e., basic, core metaphors that structure consumers' thinking in very fundamental ways and serve to organize a system of concepts); thematic metaphors (or conceptual metaphors that represent consumers' broad

Table 30.1 *Steps in the ZMET interview*

<i>Storytelling</i>	The informant describes how each image represents his thoughts and feelings about the Broadway experience. Interviewer probe: 'Please tell me how this image relates to your thoughts and feelings about your Broadway experience.'
<i>Missed images</i>	The informant is asked if there were important ideas he wanted to express but for which he could not find relevant images. Interviewer probe: 'Were there any thoughts and feelings for which you were unable to find an image? Please describe the thought or feeling, and tell me about an image that you would use to represent the thought or feeling.'
<i>Metaphor probe/expand the frame</i>	The informant is asked to widen the frame of a selected picture and describe what else might enter the picture to better understand his thoughts and feelings. Interviewer probe: 'If you could widen the frame of this picture in all directions, what else would I see that would help me better understand your thoughts and feelings about Broadway theatre productions and the role they play in your life?'
<i>Sensory metaphors</i>	The informant is asked to express his ideas using various sensory images: color, taste, smell, touch, sound and emotion. Example of interviewer probe: 'What sound could I hear that would represent your thoughts and feelings about Broadway theatre productions and the role they play in your life?'
<i>Vignette</i>	The informant is asked to create a story about the Broadway experience. Interviewer probe: 'I would like you to use your imagination to create a short story. The story should express your thoughts and feelings about Broadway theatre productions and the role they play in your life. Please include at least these characters: (1) you, (2) Broadway theatre productions, and (3) a similar form of entertainment you might enjoy.'
<i>Digital image</i>	The informant, with the skilled assistance of a computer graphics imager, creates a summary collage using his images and supplemental images from a database, as needed.

meaning themes and reveal various aspects of deep metaphors); and metaphoric expressions (or surface metaphors, the spoken metaphors consumers explicitly mention). The average transcript word count was 11 770 for Frequents and 10 170 for Infrequents (approximately twice the word length of this chapter).

The analysis of informants' Broadway experiences was iterative. To better understand participants' Broadway experiences, the author first conducted narrative analysis of the stories contained in the transcripts (Riessman, 1993), followed by a metaphoric analysis grounded in qualitative data analytic procedures (Spiggle, 1994; Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989).

Findings

Our analyses reveal that informants perceive the Broadway experience as an escape from their daily lives. Although this finding is not a surprise, our analyses reveal very interesting dimensions of escape in terms of deep and thematic metaphors (see Table 30.2). In this section, we use participants' verbatims and images to discuss four aspects of the escape: framing the escape; planning, preparing for and anticipating the escape; the escape; and revisiting the escape.¹

Framing the escape

The escape is multifaceted: although the focal point is the Broadway production, informants frame the evening more broadly – dinner precedes the theater, and coffee and dessert or

Table 30.2 Summary of deep metaphors and thematic categories

	Deep metaphors	Thematic metaphors
Planning, preparing for and anticipating the escape	System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dirty work ● Getting ‘all dolled up’ ● Anticipation
The escape	Container	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sanctuary ● Museum
	Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cognitive stimulation ● Sensory stimulation
	Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Escape from daily life ● Escape to flow experience
	Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self ● Friends and family ● Other theatergoers ● Performers
Reflecting on the escape	Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good mental health
	Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self ● Others

drinks follow. ‘The dining is important, too. If I couldn’t go out to eat before a show, it doesn’t mean I wouldn’t go to a show, but dining adds to the whole experience. I find it important to be able to enjoy a dinner with my husband or my family beforehand’ [F7]. These sentiments were echoed by others: ‘You don’t just go to a play, you go out for the evening’ [F4], and ‘When you go to a play . . . you plan from mid-afternoon until the play . . . Where are you going to eat? Where are you going to park? . . . it’s the whole evening’ [I5].

Planning, preparing for and anticipating the escape

Planning the escape to a Broadway production is best characterized by the deep metaphor, *system* (the set of activities and feelings that precede attendance at a Broadway production) and three thematic metaphors: ‘dirty work’, ‘getting all dolled up’, and ‘anticipation’. ‘Dirty work’ has similar meanings for Frequent and Infrequent theatergoers, and includes making arrangements to attend a production: ticket purchase, hotel, travel and childcare arrangements, and related logistics. The complexities, aggravation and related concerns of preparation are captured in the following expression: ‘I can dread it, again, because of the money, because of the parking. Is it going to be a rainy night? Are we going to get dinner reservations?’ [F6]. Others talk about the effort, as well as the commitment to the particular evening: ‘It’s something that you definitely need to plan ahead of time . . . you have to actually put effort into it, and a lot more money into it, and you pretty much have to think, “Is this something that I really want to do? Is this something I really have time to do right now?” So, it’s also something that like if you buy tickets so far ahead of time, you have to make sure that you’re not going to miss out on the opportunity because something else comes up’ [I8]; and ‘I associate going to a show with having dinner. I associate it with a more planned event . . . It’s just more time consuming to get tickets, [and] because you have to go, and you have to plan the event which means you have to put aside a night and you have to say, “Okay, we’re definitely doing this on this night”’ [I9]. Another participant, using a picture of a man



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.1 Preparing for the escape to Broadway

who was climbing a mountain, remarked: 'Preparing for Broadway is a production in itself . . . It's tough, hard work to get there' [F2] (see Figure 30.1).

An important aspect of preparing for the escape is 'getting all dolled up' for the production; extra energies are put toward self-presentation as part of the escape from the ordinary. Women participants, in particular, acknowledged the importance of their dress to attend a show, reporting: 'Everybody knows it's a dress-up event' [F1]; 'You want to dress up . . . to go above and beyond your typical outing kind of stuff. You want to feel classy, a cut above the rest, refined' [I6]; and 'You want to look good for the show. You don't have to get dressed up, but most people do. It's part of the culture' [I1].

Frequents and Infrequents, alike, look forward to their evening out with great 'anticipation', expecting a unique and exciting experience. Numerous participants used the gift metaphor and images of presents and holidays to reflect their anticipation and not knowing quite what to expect of a show: 'I was actually looking at a gift box. I don't know what's in here . . . So you're excited . . . that's what I was thinking, anticipating' [F5]; and 'A show you've never seen before is like a wrapped-up gift, you don't know what you're going to get' [I12]. Another informant, referring to his image of a fisherman (see Figure 30.2), commented: 'He is anticipating a huge fish. That is the anticipation I think of when I think of the fun at the theatre. You don't know what to expect. That makes it exciting' [I7].

Anticipation, one of the fundamental emotions, fuels escape. Our findings suggest that anticipating the escape for Frequents is related to the opportunity to replenish and revitalize themselves:

The woman in the boat represents the cyclical process where my life started with the introduction of culture, and the exposure to it led to other curiosities. It led to my education, my refinement,



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.2 Anticipating the fun of Broadway

and my being able to accomplish a great number of things in my life. Those accomplishments afforded me the life experience of being able to afford to do things like taking my family to a show, carrying on this elegant affair, and giving to the grandchildren – just continuing that whole process. [F1] (See Figure 30.3.)

Both Frequents and Infrequents anticipate their escape as a rare treat, as an indulgence, and a reward, particularly given the high Broadway ticket price, coupled with the costs of pre- and post-theater activities. F4 summarizes:

It's really so expensive, so you have to really appreciate the theatre to drop \$100 just for the ticket alone. It's a special treat to myself, like I went recently to get Lion King tickets. I wanted the best seats, and they were a hundred whatever dollars but, I said, 'I deserve this.' . . . It's like a reward



Source: Olson Zaltman Associates.

Figure 30.3 Reflecting on the cultural experiences of Broadway

to be able to go see it. So that's how I think of it, as a treat to myself that I deserve. If the night costs me \$300, it was well worth, it's just I can't do it that often. I go and have a fancy dinner and have a couple of drinks, and I really go all out, because you deserve it so.

Figures 30.4 and 30.5 are also illustrative: 'Broadway is a rich extravagance that I can only have a little bit of at a time. I wouldn't want cake everyday, and I wouldn't want to see a Broadway show every day' [I3]; 'In the middle is a dollar bill with someone's eye kind of tearing it, and that's because the cost of the plays are prohibitive for you to go a lot and for us to take our kids to a lot of them' [I11].

The escape

Four deep metaphors capture the essence of escape via the Broadway production: container, force, resource and connection. Although each is discussed individually, the nature of the escape and these metaphors are inextricably interrelated.



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.4 *The rich extravagance of Broadway*



Source: Olson Zaltman Associates.

Figure 30.5 *The prohibitive costs of Broadway*

Informants escape from the everyday life *container* to the theater – the *container* or vessel holding the production. Our findings suggest that the theater acts as a sanctuary and a museum. With regard to the former, informants escape from the daily grind to a safe place where they can lose themselves, or protect themselves (and possibly others) from work, the phone, kids, parents, burdens and other travesties. F9's comment is indicative: 'When I think of Broadway, I think of the physical location of Broadway, but more than that I think of the experience of being at a Broadway play . . . It's a place of escape', as represented by the woman walking on a secluded beach (see Figure 30.6).



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.6 Broadway is an escape

Figures 30.7 and 30.8 and their expressions are also representative:

There is a safe sanctuary that I experience at the theater. Everyone's cell phone is off. There are no beepers. There are no interruptions. The guys in the bag are all the distractions that are trying to get to me from the outside world, but inside my sanctuary they are wrapped up in this plastic bag, and they can't get to me. [15]

I imagine the rat really running. Kind of looking back at the cat out there, the stress is out there, but hopefully this little guy is safe behind the couch and he may not be thinking about that cat anymore. He may feel safe and just not focus on the craziness that is out there . . . I was thinking the same thing when you are in a theater, and you are not focusing on what is outside the doors. You feel safe . . . I mean safe fun. That is escaping the rat race. [17]

Additionally, informants envision the theatre as a 'museum', a place to learn, to experience, to become more cultured, to meet people, to expand one's horizons. Pointing to her picture of a museum, one informant enthusiastically reported, 'When you go to a museum you feel cultured. When I go to a play, I feel I am getting some culture, learning something new, something interesting' [17]. Similarly, F4 commented, 'It's like going to a museum . . . it's just appreciating different things.' Broadway enables our informants to expand their perspectives, as suggested by I11: 'I want to make sure that I experience as much as I can . . . you might enjoy music and all of a sudden, there's a whole new chapter of music you've never considered listening to before . . . I know [attending Broadway productions] has made me a smarter and better person.'

Broadway is a well-orchestrated, captivating *force* that facilitates escape. Several informants employed cooking-related visual metaphors (e.g., cake and recipe) to connote the intricate integration of the many facets of a Broadway production. Referring to these images, informants respectively stated, 'The cake is the bringing together of different ideas or thoughts and presenting them in a new exciting way that people haven't thought of



Source: Olson Zaltman Associates.

Figure 30.7 *Broadway is a sanctuary, no one can reach you*



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.8 *At Broadway you escape the rat race*



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.9 Broadway captivates the audience

before' [I10], and 'the theatre is constructed of a recipe, with different ingredients, characters, songs, storylines and experiences going into it . . . when it's put together, it really comes together nicely and it can be really delicious or a total disaster' [F6]. The captivating nature of the production is evident in the following quotes: '[Broadway] captivates the audience and brings them right onto the stage . . . it keeps you involved' [I2]; 'I can only imagine what it takes to be up there and to captivate a live audience' [I6]; '[Broadway] assaults the senses' [I10] and image of the mesmerized owl (see Figure 30.9).

The force of the performance facilitates *escapism from* the 'day-to-day grind' [I8] of work and home, from political and economic aspects of life, from societal problems. From this perspective, escape is very much linked to the theater as a 'sanctuary'. Dominant visual images include pictures of vacation spots and luxury cruise liners, coupled with quotations such as 'When I walk in there and they turn the lights down . . . I forget about work. I forget about home life . . . I forget about money problems . . . it's an escape route' [I1]; 'Going to theatre is like a mini-vacation. I chose a ship as opposed to like a beach scenario because when I'm in a theater, it's almost like I'm escaping. I'm in this little theater and the whole world's outside me, but I don't even notice it' [F6]; and 'You are escaping to someplace beautiful and enjoyable without a care in the world . . . enjoying it and shutting out the outside world . . . where you want no outside distractions' [F1]. I6 used an image of a woman in a yoga pose to illustrate: 'escape, and being able to go to a Broadway play represents escape from mundane day-to-day stuff and typical entertaining activities, like the movies. It's just an escape to something that's not a usual thing for me to do'.

The force of Broadway also facilitates *escapism to* a flow state. Many Frequents described their Broadway experience as flow: their visual images included people floating, soaring, diving and mountain climbing, and their metaphoric expressions referred to 'out of body



Source: Olson Zaltman Associates.

Figure 30.10 Broadway is an out-of-time and out-of-place experience

experiences' and reported on having lost all sense of time. One informant referring to the image of a diver points out, 'The diver represents a sense of surrender. You surrender your sense of disbelief to the artistic experience of being at the theatre . . . an experience of heightened senses' [F8]. Two other powerful images and metaphoric expressions follow:

The man floating means you get swept up in the emotion of what's going on onstage. You may get swept up in the costumes and the makeup and the sets, or . . . you get really sucked up in just the story itself, just get lost in what's going on, and forget about everyday mundane things, and you're just enjoying the fact that you're at this play. [F4]

Part of the feeling of a show is experiencing the feel of soaring or flying into the unknown, the anticipation of it, what you're going to see when you're up there, and benefiting from it emotionally, educationally, philosophically . . . you've given yourself permission to forget everything else . . . I won't let myself be interrupted. [F1] (See Figure 30.10.)

The Broadway experience is a *resource* to our informants, offering both sensory and cognitive stimulation, especially well-illustrated by the following image and metaphoric expression: 'You become enmeshed . . . a piece of the energy. Someone else is putting it out there for you but you become a piece of it, and just get very involved mentally and physically' [I10] (see Figure 30.11).

Informants' images representing sensory stimulation include, for example, pictures of fireworks and jumping off cliffs, and their metaphoric expressions reveal the multisensory nature of this escape: 'The Broadway experience involves all your senses. You get to see it. You get to taste it. You're talking to people. You're hearing music. You're listening to the sounds around you. You're in a very extravagant, glamorous setting usually, like in a theater. Most of those venues are very glamorous. It really livens up your senses' [I8]; and 'It's stimulating to the senses' [F8]. I4 titled her digital image, 'A sensory experience',



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.11 Broadway is unbounded energy

excitedly reporting, ‘Broadway plays are very stimulating, the lights, the singing, the dancing, the costumes . . . the firework display represents the sights and sounds of Broadway . . . unfolding before your eyes.’

With regard to the thematic metaphor, ‘museum’, informants discuss the cognitive and cultural resources related to attending the theater, noting that ‘It broadens your horizons . . . Broadway is more cultured. I feel like I am doing something positive, an experience where you’re learning or expanding your mind’ [I9]. One informant used an image of a light bulb to convey that Broadway represents ‘ideas and how plays, particularly ones that have books or history attached to them, affect your opinion or change your mind’ [I11]. Several informants also report that attending the theater increases their cognitive creativity, for example, ‘You can take this creativity with you from a Broadway show and apply it to every aspect of your life’ [I10]; ‘When I think if I want to reenergize myself, escape, enjoy myself and forget about whatever else. If I thought about five things I would do, Broadway would be one of them. It stimulates you in different ways, at different levels’ [F9].

Connection is a prominent deep metaphor in our data, with several connection-related thematic metaphors: connection to self, connection between theatergoers and friends/family/other theatergoers who are attending the production, and connection between theatergoers and performers (present, as well as past). As we noted, the escape to Broadway provides a quiet and focused time, and informants (particularly Frequenters) reported taking this time to reflect on their connection to self, proffering pictures of mirrors: ‘Looking in the mirror represents looking into a play, seeing similarities that may happen in your life and others’ lives, something that you can relate to’ [F3]; ‘The mirror is relating it to yourself. It’s that, “Oh my gosh, I have experienced that in my life, and so I can relate to it”’ [F1]; ‘I’ve seen a play and it’s made me think of life, my life and relate to my life, but it gives it a different perspective too’ [F6]; and ‘It’s sort of a mirror on our own experience’ [F8].

Escaping to a Broadway production represents a connection to family and friends, an opportunity to have that ‘special evening out’ with special people. This connection is illustrated primarily with pictures from family albums and discussion about the importance of having quality time, and building a tradition with family members. The salience of having time to appreciate one another was emphasized by numerous participants: ‘[This is my] family doing something together . . . Broadway was something we did as a family when I was a child and we continue . . . we’re sharing something . . . not a routine . . . a ritual’ [F1]; ‘I would go with my family. Family is important to me and enjoying time with my family is important . . . the core of everything’ [F7]; ‘What I think of theatre [is] gathering my buddies together and having a good time’ [I7]; and ‘We’re going to go as a family, because although I’ve been before, it’s something that I want to share with you guys’ [I6]. All theatergoers, even though they may not be acquainted, co-create a communal experience, collectively experiencing a unique moment in time.

Our theatergoers also sense a strong connection to the Broadway performers, recounting that it is the audience *and* the performers who co-create a forceful experience. Informants enthusiastically reflect, ‘They see you. You see them. You are laughing, and they are enjoying themselves. You are part of [the energy] together. You feel you are in the loop’ [I7]. The relationship between the deep metaphors, connection and force, is vividly apparent in I2’s image (see Figure 30.12) and metaphoric expression:

It becomes electrifying through the crowd. It is a give and take. It is a relationship between the audience and the performers . . . The adrenaline starts to flow, and I think it makes their performance better because they are going to feed off the crowd.

Interestingly, some Frequents take this connection one step farther, acknowledging their connection to Broadway actors and actresses in general: ‘There’s a spirit of all the previous actors; you feel a certain energy. All these theaters being next to each other and you’re going into one theater, and these people are going into another theater and we’re all having this communal experience’ [F8].

The meaning of connection to the performers is also informed by informants’ stated disconnect with performers. Our theatergoers compliment and admire the unique and extraordinary skills and talents of the performers: ‘So, I just become amazed with it. Just in awe. It is something that you don’t see [every day] and you appreciate their talent’ [I7]. Interestingly other informants reported being somewhat envious of these talents: ‘It’s different and exciting and [I am] slightly jealous. When they get up there, they have beautiful voices and this ability to embrace a character, and I couldn’t do that’ [I10]; and ‘I have some jealousy . . . I work in corporate America, and I like what I do, but what I do is not all that different. I admire these unique talents who do something very different for a living’ [I9].

Revisiting the escape

Two deep metaphors, *balance* and *connection*, capture informants’ reflections about their escapes to Broadway. The sanctuary and museum, as well as the force of escapism, provide a countervailing balance to our informants’ everyday experiences. I8’s digital (summary) image incorporates many images to portray managing mental health through escape:



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.12 Broadway electrifies the crowd

You do need a little bit of balance in your life, like you can't work all the time, and again, because it is a special treat to [go to a] Broadway show. You're balancing your hectic life with a sense of taking your life down a couple of notches and giving yourself an opportunity to get away . . . I've done everything I need to do to make this time my time now. You've fulfilled all your obligations to have that time for yourself. (See Figure 30.13.)

Frequents and Infrequents concur about the importance of taking time to escape and to create balance in life. F4 reflects, '[Attending Broadway is] a sort of mentally refreshing – I mean, if you have a stressful job and you have kids, and you say, "I'm going to do this for myself and I'm not going to feel the least bit guilty" . . . so when I do actually do it, I enjoy every second of it and I don't regret it.' I7 echoes the sentiment: 'You work really hard; you have to play hard, too. It is the balance [of] work with play. (*Why is it important to balance those two things?*) Just because the scale will tip and then you will tip . . . I definitely know when I am working too hard and I need to treat myself. I guess that is a way of telling how the balancing goes.' Suspended animation as related to balance is evident in F9's response: 'Just escape into that two-hour performance and really feel it . . . it creates balance in one's life . . . It helps relieve the monotony of doing the same thing always, every day, over and over again without any escape from work or school or whatever it is that we might spend the majority of our life doing.'



Source: Olson Zaltman Associates.

Figure 30.13 Broadway brings balance to everyday life

In reliving their escape, informants refer to their memories, as well as their interest in sharing their experiences. The vibrancy of the Broadway experience, the sensory and cognitive stimulation, make for vivid, easily recalled memories. I3 reveals that Broadway ‘sticks out . . . [memories] feel more permanent . . . I tend to remember exactly where I was and who I was with. I remember the specific music to it. It gives you a memory to put your finger on’; I8 reports that Broadway ‘gives you something to think back on, an enjoyable experience you can relive in your mind, you can share with your friends’. Pictures of people talking, enjoying a party, or a family outing were reflective of informants’ interest in sharing their memories. F4 used ‘screen beans’ to depict a range of emotions and topics that Broadway has to offer noting, ‘These little people could also represent the different things you talk about afterwards, which is a big part of it . . . You want to share in it, talk about it, discuss it afterwards.’ F2’s description is typical: ‘After you’ve gone to see a show, you might have a discussion . . . the idea that [people are] talking and having a mature conversation . . . You can have that conversation about a shared, communal experience.’ (See Figure 30.14.)



Source: Shutterstock.com.

Figure 30.14 Sharing the escape to Broadway

Discussion

This chapter illustrates the use of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique to understand consumers' Broadway experiences. Huffman, Ratneshwar and Mick (2000, p. 20) might cast attending a Broadway production as a consumption intention – as a doing goal – one that involves 'allocation and depletion of resources – primarily money, time, and energy – available to the consumer'. Our substantive findings illustrate that the Broadway experience is concurrently an aesthetic (Joy and Sherry, 2003), extraordinary (Arnould and Price, 1993) and flow (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990) experience. Broadway performances provide consumers with multisensory, cognitive stimulation, an embodiment such that they are able to escape their everyday lives. Informants willingly expend time and effort to create the escape for which they express intense anticipation. Escape is an indulgence, a treat, as well as a source of reinvigoration, nutrition for the body and soul. Our informants' descriptions give meaning to Thompson's perspective on postmodernist consumer goals (2000, p. 129): 'consumers take flight from the entanglement . . . They seek temporary respite in liminoid spaces offering magic, communion, spiritual enrichment, and the sublime aura of the authentic'. We find inklings of several differences between Frequent and Infrequent in their Broadway experiences that other methods might fruitfully explore. Importantly escape as consumption is worthy of additional investigation.

The temporality of experiential consumption, from the planning stage to the reflective stage, is evident in our findings. Collectively our findings and those across a variety of consumption experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Joy and Sherry, 2003) affirm that experiential consumption is much more broadly experienced than simply 'the encounter'. The experience (in the form of preparatory activities and anticipation) creeps into consumers' daily lives well before the actual encounter (or performance). Moreover the commanding nature of the Broadway performance provides vivid and dominating memories, long-lasting and easily recalled, that serve to be self-seducing, memories that lurk well after the experience and are also a source of fodder for discussion among family

and friends. Future research might examine the broader implications and effects of these experiences, and the balancing of self relative to consumers' everyday lives.

The consumer, co-creator of the Broadway experience, is pre-eminent at all stages, engaging with customer service representatives, baby sitters and reservationists to plan their experiences, with the performers to create their experience, and with their family and friends to plan, create, and remember their experience. They engage in consumption as a means of self-definition (Belk, 1988; Levy, 1981; Schouten, 1991; Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989) and escape to create and maintain balance, making time for one's self and important others. Consumers take control, investing the psychic energy to create the optimal experience, offering a gift to self (Mick and DeMoss, 1990).

Being able to access customers' thoughts and feelings, conscious and unconscious, is crucial to elucidating marketing and consumer behavior phenomena. Informants' metaphorical expressions and images of mirrors, floating men, fireworks, vacation spots, decadent cakes and the like offer invaluable insights into the meaning of the Broadway experience, specifically, and escape experiences, more generally. The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique offers a means to hear the voice of the customer, see through the eyes of the customer, and keep the customer and their experience as a focal point in our research.

Note

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