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Consumer Resources and THEF Experiences

■ Introduction

This chapter develops the ideas presented in Chapters 3 and 4 by further exploring how individual consumers utilise a set of resources to negotiate and form their experiences with THEF products and activities. Specifically it provides much more detail about the nature and composition of the resources that consumers bring to bear in their consumption and value creating activities. The traditional *exchange* approach of marketing normally locates the consumer at the Macro level, whereby assumptions are made that all members of a demographic, socio-economic or similar group possess the same or similar resources, and in so doing, approach the market and consumption in very similar ways. However, in following the logic and ideas of the *service and interaction* perspective, this chapter demonstrates that individual consumers possess different resources of various kinds which, when deployed, produce unique and differentiated forms of value and meanings. It is therefore important that we locate the consumer of THEF in a Micro theoretical framework of resources and practices, as only then can we truly begin to understand the consumer's relationship to marketing and THEF products more broadly, and how they create value and meaning through their consumption in particular.

■ An outline of the theory of resources

As explained in Chapter 3, the service logic of marketing is predicated on the idea that value is created through interaction as consumers integrate their own resources with those offered by the THEF marketplace (products, activities, deeds, and communications etc.). Furthermore, as illustrated in Chapter 4, this interaction based approach also mirrors the theories of the cultural perspective which maintain that marketers produce *cultural* resources that consumers incorporate into their lives through the deployment of their own resources and consumption practices. However what these chapters do not fully show or explain is the distinction between the types of resources that consumers bring to bear in their consumption, and how these in turn influence and shape consumption of products in the sector. Therefore we will commence this chapter by distinguishing between the two specific forms of consumer resources that have been theorised in the literature, and follow by describing in detail the range of resources that are integral to these concepts. Accordingly we will first draw on the seminal work of Vargo and Lusch (2004) who demonstrate that consumers essentially draw upon combinations of resources that can be situated in relation to two principal forms, which they call *operand* and *operant* resources. The differences between these are as follows:

- **Operand resources** are made up of the physical and material assets that a consumer allocates or uses to create value and would include the marketplace object or activity itself, as well as their own money, time, spaces and/or material resources (Arnould, Price & Malshe, 2006).
- **Operant resources** on the other hand, are composed of the personal cognitive assets and physical capabilities that a consumer deploys to act upon operand resources to create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In this chapter these specifically include a consumer's stock of knowledge and skill (Arnould, Price & Malshe, 2006). However, we would also include a consumer's relative endowments of cultural capital resources and taste within this framework, which we discuss in depth in Chapter 7.

So for example, a consumer staging a dinner party will draw upon their ability to cook (resources of knowledge and skill) and utilise their kitchen appliances, cookbooks and utensils (material resources), alongside the kitchen and preparation area (spatial resources) to produce a meal for their friends (social resources) using items they purchased from the supermarket (marketplace resources) using their money or vouchers (financial resources). In this respect a combination of operand and operant resources are integrated alongside those offered through the marketplace during the consumption of THEF to create personalized meaning and value.

Having outlined the role and significance of consumer resources we now turn to describing the nature of each of these and their relevance in producing THEF experiences. We will begin by looking at consumer operand resources, which, to reiterate, include financial resources, time, material resources and space, and follow with an examination of the knowledge and skills that constitute the consumer's operant resources.

■ Financial resources

The financial resources a consumer possesses have a blunt and direct impact upon their behaviour, as the type and range of THEF experiences a consumer may engage in are broadly dependent upon how much money they have to spend in the marketplace. Money is therefore a scarce allocative resource, and consumption is both enabled and constrained simply through its availability. That is to say, a consumer either has the discretionary or disposable financial resources to allocate to THEF experiences or not. Importantly, it is discretionary spend that is of most interest to marketers of THEF experiences, because for most people, other than basic food provision, these sit outside the realm of normal everyday experience, are non-essential, and in some cases even considered luxuries.

In the first edition of this book, which we wrote subsequent to the credit crunch and in the midst of the global financial crisis, we also emphasized the important role that credit cards and other forms of