

CONSUMERS AND EXPERIENTIAL REVERSE PRODUCT PLACEMENT:  
TO ENGAGE OR TO AVOID?

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

When marketers commercialize a virtual product that is transferred from a fictional environment into the real world, such a tactic is called reverse product placement (RPP). Compared to the widely used practice of product placement, RPP is relatively unused and unexamined. This study addresses opportunities for RPP and explores consumer motivations to engage with or to avoid a special form of RPP—experiential products. Data from consumer interviews are used to develop a conceptual model of consumer interaction with experiential RPP. Findings highlight the role of consumer involvement with the entertainment content from which a RPP is derived, the influence of perceived sacredness of the fictional domain on one's motivation to consume an experiential RPP, as well as the potential sources of value that consumers attain or hope to attain by experiencing a “live” version of a “fantasy” context.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yutong Meng began her study at Cornell University in 2016. She is currently pursuing the Master of Science degree in Hospitality Management with the concentration in marketing. Prior to Cornell University, Yutong Meng graduated from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University with Bachelor of Science in Hotel Management with First Class Honors.

This document is dedicated to all Cornell graduate students.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Have you seen the popular American TV show in the 1990s called *Friends*? The show was about six young people living close to each other in Manhattan, and each episode told a story in their lives. One very typical place that appeared repeatedly in the show was a café called Central Perk, where the six main characters always hung out together. Now imagine that a marketer announces that he will replicate this Central Perk and open a café that anyone can visit. If you are a fan of the TV show *Friends*, do you want to visit it? As a matter of fact, a Chinese fan named Du Xin indeed replicated the Central Perk in Beijing, and the real world café was a hit among the *Friends* fans. This is not the only success of such a marketing tactic, and it has drawn the attention of marketers and researchers.

This tactic is called reverse product placement (hereafter referred to as “RPP”). It is the marketing tactic of transferring a virtual product from a fictional environment into the real world (Muzellec, Lynn & Lambkin, 2012). A virtual product is defined as the non-existing product that first appears in artistic or entertainment productions (McKechnie & Zhou, 2003), while a fictional environment can be different forms of entertainment programs such as movies, TV series, games, books, or songs. In our later discussion of RPP, a real product refers to the product in the real world that is made based on the virtual product. RPP is regarded as an extension of product placement and potentially makes use of a well-established audience of the virtual product to become consumers of the real product (Muzellec, Lynn & Lambkin, 2012). A few examples of RPP are given below. The background of each entertainment

program, virtual product, or real product mentioned in the examples in this paper can be found in Appendix A.

One example of RPP is the Gryffindor House scarf that appeared repeatedly in the British book and movie series *Harry Potter*. Harry Potter and all his fellow students from the Gryffindor House are required to wear the scarf every day during the winter. The scarf is now reversely placed in the real world with the exact same shape and color, and is available for purchase through a variety of shopping channels. Another example is the British detective story *Sherlock Holmes*. Sherlock Holmes is a famous detective character in UK, who lives at 221B Baker Street in London in the story. His apartment is full of interesting and yet peculiar objects, and the apartment is also where Sherlock does most of his thinking to solve difficult crime cases. In the real world, the Sherlock Holmes Museum is also located on Baker Street in London, and the museum is actually an apartment that is decorated based on the descriptions in the books to replicate Sherlock Holmes' apartment. Visitors can walk around in the room, take pictures, or even role play.

The examples given above have shown that RPP products can come in the form of materials or experiences. However, the scope and boundary of RPP are vaguely defined in past research. RPP can range from creating an entirely new experience based on the virtual one to merchandising, which is the action of creating or licensing to create media-related consumer products and introducing them to the market (Lubbers & Adams, 2004; Mjø, 2010). When RPP is represented in the form of materials, it is very hard to draw a specific boundary between RPP and merchandising. If you see a keychain with a *Disney* logo on it, do you think it is RPP? Probably no because there was no such keychain from any *Disney* animations or movies. However,

if you see a stuffed toy in the shape of a “minion”, which is the yellow creature from the animation *Despicable Me*, do you think it is RPP? Probably yes because there really is a minion in the movie that looks just like the toy, or probably no because a stuffed animal is not a living creature.

However, this paper focuses on the experiential form of RPP. Compared to materials, experiences can engage consumers in memorable ways (Chun & Hiang, 2016). Experiential purchases also provide more enduring happiness than material purchases (Kumar, Killingsworth & Gilovich, 2014). Yet experiences are more difficult to compare or measure (Rosenzweig & Gilovich, 2012). Since experiences have these features, we find service-dominant logic a good framework to explain experiential RPP. This framework will later be elaborated in the literature review section.

We tried to seek insights from former research studies to understand the experiential form of RPP, and yet RPP has rarely been examined in academic research. Here are a few studies in recent years that are trying to explain RPP. Muzellec, Lynn and Lambkin (2012) introduced the academic domain of RPP and classified branding in real and virtual worlds into four categories: product placement (real brand in virtual world), proto-brand (virtual brand in virtual world), real brand in real world, and reverse product placement (virtual brand in real world). Patwardhan and Patwardhan (2012) laid the foundation for RPP and assessed the potential benefits of RPP. They pointed out that RPP reduces time-to-market and costs in the new product development process, and also accelerates new product adoption (Patwardhan & Patwardhan, 2012). Muzellec, Kanitz and Lynn (2013) later took a quantitative approach and constructed a structural model to test factors that could influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions towards RPP. They pointed out that

consumer attitudes towards the TV program, perceived service quality, and identification with the fictional service brand can positively impact consumer attitudes towards the fictional service brand, which subsequently have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions of the fictional service brand (Muzellec, Kanitz & Lynn, 2013)

However, none of these studies answer our most fundamental question: Why do consumers engage with experiential RPP? When considering what we want to know about experiential RPP, we as researchers may come up with questions like: What motivates consumers to engage with experiential RPP? Do they have to have watched the entertainment program and been deeply involved with the program in order to be motivated? If they regard the entertainment program as something sacred, will they still want the experience to be reversely placed and attached a dollar sign? Can their memories of the entertainment program affect their motivations? Will they be demotivated because they have a wonderful fantasy about the entertainment program and are afraid to ruin their fantasy? All of these are the kind of questions that one may ask in order to understand experiential RPP. And yet, none of these questions can be answered by former research or existing literature. This is what drives us to conduct this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 A Service-Dominant Logic View of Experiential RPP

As we mentioned above, experiences engage consumers in the process of service delivery, and yet experiences are hard to compare or measure. We found that some components of service-dominant logic (hereafter referred to as “S-D logic”), such as value co-creation by consumers and marketers, and measurement by value in use, can help explain these features of experiences. This section will review the formation and key elements in S-D logic, with application of S-D logic to experiential RPP.

S-D logic was initiated by Vargo and Lusch (2004) as an evolving and new dominant logic for marketing. Vargo and Lusch (2004) argued that the dominant logic of marketing has shifted from exchanging tangible products to intangibles, such as skills, processes, and knowledge (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), which highlights the importance of experiential products. This new dominant logic integrates products and services to lay a richer foundation for both academic research and industry practice in marketing. The service dominant view centers on intangibility, processes, and relationships, and opposes the traditional idea that services are a residual or addition to goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Rather, services are viewed as the “application of specialized competences through deeds, processes and performances” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 2). There are four key elements in S-D logic: value, product and service, consumer, and marketer. Each will be further elaborated in detail below.

**Value** The value in S-D logic has three key features: consumer-defined, value-in-use, and contextual. First, in the S-D logic point of view, the value of a product is not absolute or objective, neither is it determined by the marketers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Consumers are the ones who define the value of a product; the value of the same product may be different on an individual basis. For example, an adult may think it is low value to wear a Cinderella princess dress and walk in Disneyland, because she enjoys business attire. But a girl with the dream of becoming a princess may attach high value to the opportunity of dressing up as Cinderella and walking in Disneyland, because it feels like her fantasy to become a princess is fulfilled. We will further discuss fantasy protection and fulfillment in later sections. Essentially, consumers need to find the value embedded in the product that is useful to themselves (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Second, value creation and definition happen during the consumption process rather than during manufacturing or upon the point of sale (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). The value of a product is depended on how consumers use the product, and the value of an experience is depended on how consumers engage themselves. Only when consumers use the product, can they create and determine the value of it, and how consumers choose to use the product also differentiates the value they define. For example, someone who walks into Central Perk with no knowledge that the café is reversely placed from the TV show *Friends* may simply treat it as a regular café. But the café has much higher value to a fan who dresses up as Monica, which is one of the leading characters from the show. The fan can sit in the same spot as Monica usually does, and order the same drink as Monica does.



Third, consumer value is phenomenologically determined (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The value defined by consumers is unique and contextual according to individual experiences (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). This means for the same consumer, different reversely placed products may not be defined with the same value. For example, for a fan of the American TV series *How I Met Your Mother*, visiting the MacLaren's Pub reversely placed from the TV series has high value, because it can remind him of interesting stories from the show; but visiting the bar reversely placed from the American TV series *Cheers* means low value because he has never watched the show and thus has no memory of it. We will further talk about memory protection and enhancement in later sections.

**Product and Service** In S-D logic, goods and services are inseparable and are combined into one solution as realization of consumer value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004); just like in experiential RPP, marketers utilize tangible and intangible cues to create a reversely placed experience. The solution may consist of tangible products, intangible services, or combining both. From a service-centered point of view, goods are viewed as a distribution mechanism which renders services, and services create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The difference between services and goods is that intangible services are offered interactively, but tangible goods are only interactive if consumers interact with the product for an extended period of time beyond the transaction (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This expands the concept of product in RPP from physical goods into both tangible and intangible products, including brands, physical products, and services. S-D logic creates a broader definition of product that is not defined by the form of the product but by the value to consumers. For example, in the American TV series *Cheers*, the servers and customers always call the character Norm's name out loud as soon as Norm enters the bar. If you go to a bar reversely placed from *Cheers*,

the server might dress up in the same uniform, which is the tangible, and call your name out loud, which is the intangible. These integrate together to make you feel like walking into the *Cheers* bar in the TV series.

**Consumers** S-D logic views consumers not as the recipients of products and services, but as co-creators of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Consumers have to engage themselves in the experience in order to create value. This is why many experiential RPPs provide props and costumes for consumers to create their own experiences. For example, the Sherlock Holmes Museum provides Sherlock's daily amenities, such as a violin and the clothes, for consumers to create experiences of their own. Visitors can put on Sherlock's hat and pretend to be Sherlock solving a case, because this can fulfill their fantasy of becoming a detective; or visitors can simply sit in the couch and recall different stories that Sherlock Holmes solved in the book. Through these co-creations, consumers are able to realize the value that they embed in the products. However, this also means that the target consumers for experiential RPP should be those who are passionate and who interact with the entertainment programs in order for the co-creation to happen.

**Marketers** Marketers are on the other end of value co-creation with the consumers. From the S-D logic point of view, co-creation with consumers is more than being consumer-oriented (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Marketers need to continuously collaborate with consumers, learn from them, and adapt to the dynamic needs of each individual (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

## 2.2 Audience Involvement and Sacredness

Since we are trying to understand consumer motivations, the first question we ask ourselves is: who are more likely to be motivated to engage with experiential RPP? Can those who have never seen the entertainment program be motivated to engage with experiential RPP? Even though no research has directly answered this question, former research has shown that media-induced products are more likely to attract those who have high involvement with the media content. This section starts with a discussion of the definition, scope, and effects of audience involvement and sacredness reported in previous research, followed by how these factors could be applied to experiential RPP.

Audience involvement refers to the audience's imagined connectedness and intimacy with the content of the entertainment program (Kim, 2012). Even though there is no universally agreed upon conceptualization of audience involvement due to its complex nature (Kim, 2012), the most widely applied framework divides audience involvement into four dimensions: affective/emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and referential/critical (Bae & Lee, 2004; Papa et al., 2000; Sood, 2002; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Sood (2002) offered the most comprehensive definition of each dimension, which is used in this study. According to Sood (2002), affective/emotional involvement is the audience's level of self-identification with the character or other salient features of the entertainment program, for example an audience feels that he has similar experiences and that he understands how the character feels. Behavioral involvement is the amount of effort that the audience dedicates to increase the exposure to the program, for instance an audience watches the show every day at 7pm (Sood, 2002). Cognitive involvement is the amount of attention that the audience pays

to the program during and after watching it, for example an audience tries to solve a crime case from a detective story independently instead of jumping to the end to learn the truth (Sood, 2002). Referential/critical involvement is the degree to which the audience projects the program content to personal experiences, such as relating a setting to a real living environment or a character to a friend (Sood, 2002).

Former research in the film-induced tourism reveals that audience involvement can positively impact tourist intentions to travel. In a recent study on reality TV and destination marketing, Fu, Ye and Xiang (2016) tested the behavioral, emotional, and referential dimensions of audience involvement and discovered that these factors have a direct effect on tourist behavioral intentions to travel to the destination featured in the reality TV. The authors also found that audience involvement can impact travel intentions through the affective and cognitive image of the destination formed while watching the reality TV (Fu, Ye & Xiang, 2016). Kim and Kim (2017) further investigated the direct effect of audience behavioral, emotional, and referential involvement on travel intentions through research on the mainland Chinese audience who watch Korean TV dramas. Results confirmed the hypothesis that a higher level of involvement leads to higher behavioral intentions to travel to the destinations featured in the TV dramas (Kim & Kim, 2017). Kim and Kim (2017) also argued that involvement can be influenced by audience perceived values, such as celebrity in the show or backdrop in the film. Based on former research on media-induced products, we may say that as the level of involvement with the entertainment program increases, consumers may be more motivated to engage with experiential RPP.

As the level of involvement increases and reaches a point where the value of the product transcends the significance of consumers themselves, sacredness comes into

being (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989). Sacredness is defined as consumers regarding the product as “more significant, powerful, and extraordinary than self” (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989, p.13). The concept of sacredness was first initiated in the realm of religion, which was characterized by twelve properties: hierophany, kratophany, opposition to the profane, contamination, sacrifice, commitment, objectification, ritual, myth, mystery, communitas, ecstasy and flow (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989). As described by Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989), in the realm of consumption, sacredness is manifested in the form of places, times, tangibles, intangibles, persons, and experiences as a way for consumers to differentiate from the profane. Examples of sacred consumption can be a special sports event for fans, a vacation with one’s significant others, or a personal collection of sculptures.

Since sacredness only occurs when the level of involvement is high, a high level of involvement is necessary but not sufficient to form sacredness (Kunchambo, Lee & Brace-Govan, 2017). Kunchambo, Lee and Brace-Govan (2017) argued that a product may not arouse sacredness from the consumer even if the consumer experiences a high level of involvement. For example, a consumer may watch a TV program every day, which is a form of high behavioral involvement. However, the consumer may do so simply because he thinks the TV program is interesting, but he will not treat the entertainment program as more significant, powerful, and extraordinary than himself. Therefore, enduring involvement is necessary but insufficient to form sacredness (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989).

The effect of sacredness on consumer motivations towards engaging with experiential RPP can be two-fold. On the one hand, when consumers perceive the virtual experience to be sacred and perceive the experiential RPP to enhance the sacredness of

the virtual experience, consumers are more motivated to engage with experiential RPP. For example, if one has been to one of the Disneyland parks and considers collecting *Disney* experiences as sacred, she might be highly motivated to visit other Disneyland destinations. Under such circumstances, visiting one more Disneyland can contribute to the completeness of the Disneyland experience collection, and thus maintains or even enhances the sacredness of Disneyland experiences (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989).

On the other hand, sacredness may have negative effects on consumer motivations towards engaging with experiential RPP. Arnould (2004) argued that when a sacred possession is resold, sacredness is lost. The product then becomes secularized, as it is now commercialized and perceived as profane as any other commodity. This dynamic may apply to experiential RPP as: when consumers perceive the virtual experience to be sacred and perceive the experiential RPP to reduce the sacredness of the virtual experience, consumers are less motivated to engage with experiential RPP. For example, a consumer may not want to engage in an RPP experience that charges him money, because in his opinion, when adding a dollar sign to the real experience, sacredness of the virtual experience is lost. Sacredness may also decrease if the perceived authenticity of the product is low. Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) pointed out that perceived authenticity is achieved through fitting the real experience into prior imaginations or images of a virtual experience rather than a factual measurement. Therefore, it is likely that it is not the absolute level of sacredness but the incremental change of sacredness that may impact consumer motivations to engage with experiential RPP.

### 2.3 Memory and Fantasy Protection

As we have mentioned when using S-D logic to explain experiential RPP, memory and fantasy can be a source of value when consumers engage with experiential RPP. Previous research has investigated the formation and effects of memory in other consumer contexts, and yet none of these factors have been explored under RPP. This section reviews the definition, source, effects, and protection strategies of memory and fantasy in previous research findings, followed by their applications in experiential RPP.

Consumer memory refers to the process that consumers record and retrieve information and experiences that are related to products, services, and experiences (Mercurio & Forehand, 2010). Information and experiences that consumers encounter could contribute to the construction of memory, and this can be applied before, during, or after consumption. Consumer memory is not only formed during the actual consumption, but can also be shaped through pre-experience and post-experience information (Braun-LaTour, Grinley & Loftus, 2006; Cowley, 2007; Kumar, Killingsworth & Gilovich, 2014).

Previous research has found that pre-experience expectations have a positive effect on forming enjoyable memory. Chun, Diehl and MacInnis (2017) found that consumers who savor a product have greater real-time, as well as post-experience, enjoyment than those who do not savor the product before consumption. Kumar, Killingsworth and Gilovich (2014) found the effect of savoring to be more prominent when the product is experiential than material. In the context of experiential RPP, consumer memory can be constructed through consumers' interactions with the virtual product

in the entertainment program before the product is commoditized in the real life: consumers may read about the descriptions of the virtual product in books, hear song lyrics, or see the fictional product in games or movies. These consumer interactions with the virtual product are the consumer experiences, and consumers can construct memory during these experiences. Memory can also be influenced by pre-experience marketing activities, such as a pre-release press conference of a book, the poster of a game, or the trailer of a movie, etc.

Research also discovered that consumers who are exposed to post-experience marketing information may reconstruct their memory and even form false memory. Braun-LaTour, Grinley and Loftus (2006) found that tourists who were exposed to the false information “spotting Bugs Bunny in Disneyland” after visiting Disneyland reported seeing Bugs Bunny in Disneyland during their visit, even though Bugs Bunny is not a character from *Disney*. Memory can be distorted and false memory can be constructed to interfere with memory recall, and thus consumers may desire to engage in strategic memory protection. In the context of experiential RPP, the commodification of a virtual product may be perceived as a form of post-experience information by consumers who were previously involved with the virtual product and who have already constructed memory about it, and thus consumer motivations to engage with experiential RPP may be subjected to consumer memory protection efforts.

Unlike consumer memory, which is what consumers remember experiencing, consumer fantasy is what consumers imagine that they could experience. For example, if a consumer once slept in a castle for a night, that experience is a memory; but if the consumer watches a *Disney* animation and imagines herself sleeping in a castle, that



imagined experience of sleeping in a castle is a fantasy. Such imagined experiences are different from the experiences described in the Zauberman, Ratner and Kim (2008) study when consumers experience the product in person.

Consumer fantasy is “stimulated by the various forms of information about the product, such as text information, product images, and sample products” (Song, Fiore & Park, 2007, p. 555). The more complete the information about the product is, the clearer the fantasy will be (Song, Fiore & Park, 2007). For example, consumers may form a clearer picture about the same café if it appears in a movie than in a song. Consumer fantasy is not directly contrasted to reality, but many scholars argue that there is a gap between fantasy and reality, and fantasy should be taken seriously as a desire that requires fulfillment (Ang, 1982). This is the reason why consumers continue to seek products to match their imaginations (Jhally, 1987; Kanner & Gomes, 1995).

Even though consumer fantasy differs from consumer memory, they share similarities in formation and effects. Consumer fantasy can be formed before, during, or after consumption, as long as consumers are exposed to information about the product (Song, Fiore & Park, 2007), just like consumer memory. Both consumer fantasy and consumer memory are subjected to protection, and consumers seek to fulfill fantasy similar to enhancing memory (Ang, 1982). Due to these similarities, in this study we argue that the desire to protect memory and the protection strategies are analogous to fantasy. Consumers form expectations based on both their memory and fantasy to assess the reversely placed experience.

Zauberman, Ratner and Kim (2008) formulated two memory protection strategies: avoidance and acquisition. The first strategy is avoidance to taint memory. It is revealed that participants who recall special experiences have a higher tendency to avoid a second chance to experience the same thing, as compared to those who recall ordinary experiences (Zauberman, Ratner & Kim, 2008). This is because participants are afraid the second chance will taint their memory of the first one (Zauberman, Ratner & Kim, 2008). Similarly in experiential RPP, when consumer involvement with the entertainment program is high, consumers perceive their memory and fantasy with the virtual experience to be special, and thus they may be less motivated to engage with experiential RPP because they are afraid the experiential RPP will taint their memory or fantasy. The second strategy is acquisition of a reminder, and yet, the effect of acquisition may only apply to material RPP, which will not be discussed in this section.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Data Collection: Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenological interviews were utilized in this study to obtain an in-depth understanding of consumer motivations to engage with experiential RPP.

Phenomenological interviews are an effective approach to study consumer experiences in detail (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). This research method has been applied to various research contexts where the phenomenon is emerging and understudied (Reading & Jenkins, 2015; O'Halloran et al., 2016; Chen, 2017; Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg & Pollio, 2017). The aim of phenomenological interviews is to obtain consumers' first-person descriptions of experiences in some specific domains that researchers are interested in (Bevan, 2014; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989).

Phenomenological interviews are usually unstructured or semi-structured in an ever-developing conversation context, and respondents have greater freedom in what they want to express in this dialogue (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Høffding & Martiny, 2016). The questions to ask are not pre-set but are spontaneous to interviewee responses. Unlike question-and-answer interviews, respondents feel an equal position in phenomenological interviews, rather than being less powerful or less knowledgeable than the interviewers (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Høffding & Martiny, 2016). In this study, phenomenological interviews were used to assist respondents to recall their experiences that are relevant to the study, and thus the researcher could obtain sufficient details to gain insights into consumer motivations to engage with experiential RPP.

Snowball sampling was used because it is easier to find people who share the same interest of watching entertainment programs and spending money on RPP (Noy, 2008). Referrals from people within the same circle also help to build trust between the interviewer and interviewees (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Such trust is crucial since the aim of phenomenological interviews is to create an atmosphere where respondents are willing to share as many details about their experiences as possible (Hoffding & Martiny, 2016). The researcher posted a description of the research on social media and asked people who were interested to contact the researcher. Participants were also recruited through referrals of interviewees who participated in the study. A total of 15 participants were involved in this study, and the examples provided by the informants are summarized in Table 1.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one in person, and all content was audio-recorded after seeking approval from the participants. Each interview lasts about 30 minutes. The interview follows the process suggested by Bevan (2014) in three stages: contextualization, apprehension, and clarification. In contextualization, the interviewer briefly introduced what RPP is and asked participants to recall specific RPP examples they know by asking questions like, “Is there any movie, TV program, song, book, or game that you like very much? How did that affection start?” and “Do you know if any of the products or scenes from the movie are brought into the real world?” In apprehension, the interviewer focused on key factors such as audience involvement with the entertainment program or consumer fantasy, by asking questions like, “You said when you entered the café, it was like a dream come true and everything was so unreal. Would you like to tell me what your dream was like?” In clarification, the interviewer gave hypothetical scenarios and asked participants to think about how they

would behave in these situations, such as “If the investigation headquarter from that movie is made into a restaurant in the real life with the same decorations, do you think it is authentic to you, even though it is now a restaurant but not a police office?”

Table 1. Summary of RPP examples shared by informants

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Entertainment Program</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Media Format</b>	<b>Real Product</b>
Informant 1	Death Note	Japan	Comic, animation, movie	Notebook
Informant 2	How I Met Your Mother	US	TV series	Bro Code, Playbook
Informant 3	Chengdu	China	Song	Little Bar
Informant 4	Forrest Gump	US	Movie	Bubba Gump Shrimp
Informant 5	Marvel	US	Movie, TV series	Iron Man suit
Informant 6	Sherlock Holmes	UK	TV series, movie	Sherlock Holmes Museum Sherlock Holmes Café
Informant 7	Harry Potter	UK	Book, movie	All flavor bean
Informant 8	Xuan-Yuan Sword, World of Warcraft	China US	Game, movie	Themed café
Informant 9	Coffee Prince No. 1	South Korea	TV series	Café
Informant 10	Doctor Who	UK	TV series	Supersonic screwdriver
Informant 11	Yiji Kong	China	Book	Xianheng Tavern
Informant 12	Goblin	South Korea	TV series	Sword, fried chicken restaurant
Informant 13	Let's&Go	Japan	Animation	Mini racing car
Informant 14	Harry Potter	UK	Book, movie	Cloak, wand, scarf, glasses
Informant 15	Harry Potter	UK	Book, movie	Universal Studios

### 3.2 Data Analysis: A Manual Approach

All recordings from the interviews were subsequently transcribed for content analysis. A manual content analysis approach was adopted due to the reasonable size of the data. Codes were developed and attached to identifiable and meaningful content in the scripts. For example, the code “Mimicry 0013” was attached to the content “I pretended to be the character in the animation and wanted to see if I could give the same oral order and let the car follow it, but it turned out not,” and the code “Cognitive Involvement 12” was developed to affix the content “I enjoyed discussing the storyline with my friends as I watched the TV series.” Codes were then transformed or merged into categories and labels, based on similar patterns, phrases, and relationships in the data content. For example, “Every time I go there, I feel like I’m in the movie, and I’m eating in the main character’s restaurant” was merged with, “When I first entered the café it was great because I thought I was entering the movie scene. I felt surprised, because I didn’t expect it to be with so many details” into the same category, “Authenticity.” Categories and labels were then further analyzed to discover relationships, commonalities, and differences in the consumer experiences of RPP.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Summary of Findings

Figure 1 displays a summary of the findings in this study. Participants who demonstrated the intentions to engage with RPP, no matter in the form of materials or experiences, were all involved with the entertainment programs in one or multiple forms. However, when the level of involvement is high, perceived sacredness of the RPP product can moderate the effect of involvement on consumer motivations.

When deciding whether to engage with the experiential form of RPP specifically, participants have two common reasons. The first one is that experiential RPP can bring consumers into a virtual world and separate them from their ordinary life. The second reason is that consumers want to live in the moment; if they are no longer highly involved with the same entertainment programs in the future, they do not need to throw away experiences like they do with souvenirs.

When it comes to specific experiential products, participants will first evaluate the authenticity of the product, yet what it means to be authentic may vary. When engaging in the experiences, participants show the following sources of value: to protect their memory and fantasy, to seek social belongingness, and to mimic. Each factor will be discussed in the next section in detail.

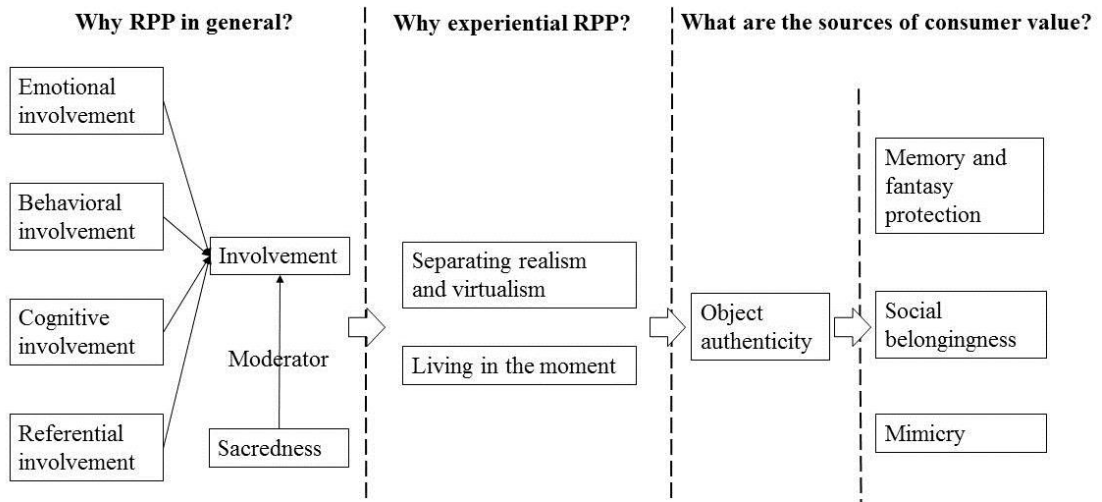


Figure 1. Summary of research findings



## 4.2 Why RPP? Involvement and Sacredness

All informants who participated in this study demonstrated some level of audience involvement with the entertainment programs they chose to share. Among the 15 informants, 12 of them demonstrated strong purchase intentions for some or all types of reversely placed products. These 12 informants showed a high level of audience involvement in either emotional, behavioral, cognitive, or referential aspects, which will be elaborated later with specific examples. Yet, among the three informants who were not willing to purchase any reversely placed products, two of them expressed a low level of audience involvement with the entertainment programs, while one of them showed a high level of audience involvement but also perceived the entertainment program to be sacred. The following section will elaborate on the effects of each factor.

### 4.2.1 Emotional Involvement

Informants who demonstrated strong emotional involvement with the entertainment programs perceived themselves to be either the same or the opposite as the characters from the entertainment programs. On the one hand, when informants identify themselves to be similar to the characters, they see commonalities of experiences, beliefs, and dreams which create a unique emotional bond between the informants and the characters from the entertainment programs. For example, informant 1 described that she was bullied in high school, just like the female character Misa from the Japanese movie *Death Note*. In the story, Misa was bullied in high school and was nearly murdered, but the male protagonist named Light saved her by killing her murderer. She then joined the evil side with Light and killed many people. A detailed

description of the entertainment program and all upcoming examples can be found in Appendix A. Because informant 1 and the character Misa both had the experience of being bullied, informant 1 felt that she was the one who truly understands Misa, and this created a strong emotional bond between Misa and her. Informant 1 described her emotional bond with Misa as:

“From Misa, I saw myself. Misa was also bullied in school because she was different. I was bullied at school because I was obviously very different from all my classmates. I didn’t want to say anything but just let them do what they wanted to do. Misa was kind of doing the same thing. Light saved her so she wanted to sacrifice everything to Light. I think she’s not perfect, she was bullied, she definitely did stupid things that she’s not supposed to, but I saw that in me.”

On the other hand, some informants demonstrated strong emotional involvement due to opposition of the experiences, beliefs, or dreams with the character. For example, informant 11 commented that the character Yiji Kong from the Chinese novel *Yiji Kong* stood for nearly everything that she hated. The character Yiji Kong was a supporter of the feudal society when the Chinese society was in transition to a new era. He was a scholar who could not keep up with the changing society, who was arrogant in his speech, and who ended up abandoned by the society in a miserable way. Informant 11 felt the urge to be a person that keeps up with the change of the world, as she described during the interview:

“The key message I got from the novel was that the society was corrupted and those were a generation of people who were abandoned by the times. I felt sorry for those

people, but I also felt that I must not become the type of people who couldn't keep up with the times.”

#### 4.2.2 Behavioral Involvement

Informants showed high level of behavioral involvement through wholeness, repetition, and eagerness. Wholeness refers to finishing the entire series of an entertainment program, including all different releases of a movie series, or all forms of programs under the same collection, such as books, movies, and musicals of *Harry Potter*. For example, informant 5 said that after she became a fan of *Marvel* superhero movies, she went back to watch all the published movies, and afterwards she never missed one, even the TV series. Informant 5 described her behavior as:

“I'm a super fan of *Marvel*, and I watched all *Marvel* superhero movies, like *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, and *Spider Man*. I also watch *Agents of Shield*, huge fan! I'm still on the Season 5 now. I started watching *Iron Man* when I was in middle school, and I totally fell for Tony Stark. Then I watched *Avengers*, and when I was in university, I started searching for all *Marvel* movies and I just watched all of them. After that, I never missed a single one.”

Repetition is when consumers re-visit the entertainment programs multiple times. For example, Informant 3 shared that he still plays the Chinese song *Chengdu* repeatedly and even recently, especially when he is working on projects. Repeatedly playing the song calms him down and brings back the same feelings, which makes him want to call his friends.

Other informants also demonstrated behavioral involvement by showing eagerness, for example, watching the earliest screening session when a new *Marvel* movie is released, setting up alerts to be the first one to know when there is an update about a new movie in the series, or finding it hard to stop once they started watching a multi-episode show. For example, informant 9 said she finished a 20-episode TV series within two days, and each episode takes almost an hour to watch. She just found it hard to stop, and she was so eager to know what happened next that she could not wait until the next day.

#### 4.2.3 Cognitive Involvement

The informants in this study demonstrated cognitive involvement in two ways: by drilling down on the details in the entertainment programs and by searching for external information that is related to the entertainment programs. On the one hand, some informants enjoyed the process of studying the content of the entertainment programs in great detail; for example, informant 11 described how she studied the Chinese novel *Yiji Kong* sentence by sentence in order to understand the subtle meaning that the writer tried to express: “I read that novel for countless times and tried to understand the subtle underlying meanings of each single sentence.” On the other hand, informants may seek external information about the content in the entertainment programs in order to enrich their knowledge and enhance their understanding, like informant 8 when he played the game *Xuan-Yuan Sword*. *Xuan-Yuan Sword* is a series of online role play games, and each game in the series is based on a specific Chinese dynasty, with a mix of historical and made-up events. Informant 8 said he would look up the history of that dynasty after playing the game.

“If there were historical stories in *Xuan-Yuan Sword* that I didn't know before, I'd look them up after playing the game. This made that part of the history more meaningful to me.”

#### 4.2.4 Referential Involvement

Only one informant out of 15 expressed referential involvement in the interviews.

Informant 3 referred to a song named *Chengdu*, which describes the romantic story of the singer and his girlfriend. They used to take a walk on the street in Chengdu and do not want to separate with each other until all street lights are out. They also hung out at the Little Bar at the end of Yulin Street where they had a lot of memories. The lyric, “Walk with me on the street in Chengdu,” made informant 3 recall the memories when he also hung out on the street with his close friends on New Year's Eve. This created a bond between the song and his real life, and gave him the sense of reliving his memories, as he described:

“There was a lyric, ‘Walk with me on the street in Chengdu.’ I remember when I was in high school, I had a group of very close friends, who I still keep in close touch with and get together regularly. When we hung out in high school, we used to take a walk on the street a lot. Every time I hear the lyric, it recalls my memories of that time. There was a time when we all got out of home and gathered on the street at midnight right after the Lunar Chinese New Year Eve. I could still well remember it snowed very hard that night. There were neither people nor cars. We had such a good time back then.”

As is discussed above, the majority of the informants demonstrated a high level of involvement with the entertainment programs; yet such involvement is manifested in the emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and referential forms. Apart from informant 3, all other informants who demonstrated a high level of involvement with the entertainment programs also expressed the intentions to interact with the reversely placed products. Informant 3 was influenced by the perceived sacredness towards the entertainment programs and thus expressed no intention to interact with any reversely placed products, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2.5 Sacredness

When the product is perceived to decrease the sacredness of the entertainment programs, informants tend not to purchase. Even though informant 3 has demonstrated high behavioral and referential involvement as we mentioned before, he has no intention to engage with experiential RPP due to the moderation effect of sacredness. He mentioned that the Little Bar in the song *Chengdu* gave him a sense of quiet and comfortable. To him, it is a lifestyle and a spiritual symbol rather than a specific location. Yet, the idea of opening a bar for profit and knowing that it is going to be crowded and noisy decreases the sacredness of the Little Bar, and therefore informant 3 has no intention to get an experience in the Little Bar. When purchasing and consuming the product shifts the sacred to the profane, consumers tend to avoid purchasing in order to protect the sacredness. Informant 3 strongly expressed his opinion against visiting the Little Bar that was reversely placed from the Chinese song *Chengdu* and explained:

“I have no interest in spending money there. To me it’s just a normal pub the same as others and it has nothing special attached to it. I think the song itself communicates a very comfortable lifestyle in Chengdu, but I don’t like the behavior of opening up a pub for profit. To me, the Little Bar exists as a symbol but not for profit-making. The Little Bar is more of a spiritual symbol to me than a real place; I know it’s somewhere out there but I don’t necessarily need to know where it is. I don’t want to end up finding out that my spiritual symbol is somewhere with a crowded group of people talking loudly about boring topics.”

### 4.3 Why Experiential RPP?

Even though many informants are highly motivated to spend money on RPP, they are not motivated to all forms of RPP products. From the interview results, we have concluded two reasons why consumers prefer to engage with experiential RPP rather than material products: to separate realism and virtualism, and to live in the moment. We will now discuss each one with examples.

#### 4.3.1 Separating Realism and Virtualism

Some informants prefer investing in experiences over material products because they want to separate their real life from their virtual one. When informants engage with experiential RPP, they feel like living in another world and having a different life, which is a virtual life. They can pretend to be another person and do not have to worry about this “other person” or “other life” messing their ordinary life. However, informants find it awkward to purchase a material product and place it in the real world, because they think the product will mix their virtual life with the real life and will eventually confuse both lives. Yet, when they have an entertainment experience and are surrounded by the tangible and intangible cues of the entertainment program, they successfully escape their real life, where they are fully committed to the virtual life. Informant 15 commented that when he was in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, the elements around him created a world where he could temporarily forget about his ordinary life and live a virtual life the way he imagined when he watched the movie, as he explained:



“I think when I’m watching movies, I have this ‘being placed in that world’ kind of feeling, but if I buy the virtual products placed in the real life, I feel weird and incompatible. A *Harry Potter* product showing up in the real life is messing my real life with the virtual life I had when watching the movie; yet, a *Harry Potter* experience is taking me away from my real life and bringing me back into my virtual life again. When I’m in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios, every element there and all the people around replicate the virtual world; yet if I buy a material product and bring it back home alone, it feels awkward.”

#### 4.3.2 Living in the Moment

Other informants foresee that their preference for an entertainment program might change over time. They may be crazily in love with a show now, but may have very different tastes several years later. Purchasing a material product and keeping it for long does not sound appealing to them because they will grow tired of it and eventually give away or throw away the material product. Rather, they want to live in the moment and enjoy the time while they are having an entertainment experience, and that is why they prefer an experiential RPP over a material one. Informant 14 commented that she knew her preference changes over time, like she used to like the movie series *Harry Potter* but now she thinks it is too childish. That is the reason why she does not want to purchase any material RPP but rather live in the moment and engage with experiential RPP, like she described:

“I think the event is more fulfilling for people who are passionate because they live more of the experience. I think a product is just material, so it will give them happiness for the moment of buying, but it’s better if they go to the event and interact

with the people with the same interest. So I think an experience is better than the material. The material things might be ten years ago and I have changed my preferences; maybe I don't feel that passionate anymore. That's why I would rather live the experience in the moment than keeping something material, because with time we all change and we will not appreciate the material things that we buy today for tomorrow."

#### 4.4 Source of Value

One common source of value for all informants who are willing to engage with experiential RPP is object authenticity, yet informants' opinions on what authenticity means differ. Apart from object authenticity, other sources of value that informants seek include memory and fantasy protection, social belongingness, and mimicry. This section will explain each of these factors in further detail.

##### 4.4.1 Object Authenticity

Authenticity has been a controversial term in research for many years and is divided into two parts. Object authenticity refers to the realness and genuineness of objects or events (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), while existential authenticity is defined as “a human attribute signifying being one's true self or being true to one's essential nature” (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 299). Informants in this study demonstrated strong desire for object authenticity when comparing the reversely placed experiences with the virtual experience in the entertainment programs.

**Full authenticity** Two informants expressed their desire for full authenticity when describing their expectations for experiential RPP. By full authenticity, they mean that the experience has to be the same in every single aspect to replicate the same experience of the characters. For example, informant 2 said that if the marketers reversely place the MacLaren's Pub from the American TV series *How I Met Your Mother*, every single detail has to be the same as in the TV series, including the menu, the decorations, how servers dress up, and even the appearance and the haircut of the servers. The MacLaren's Pub is where the five main characters in *How I Met Your*

*Mother* always hung out together. Only when all details are the same can informant 2 have the feeling of walking into the TV show and maybe having the chance to meet the characters from the show. Informant 2 described his desire for full authenticity as:

“I think the meaning of the pub is for people to get into the TV series, so in my opinion it should be 100% the same to the TV series. It’s not like souvenirs. Because when you walk into the pub, it’s like the environment in the TV series, so it should be 100% the same. And it is the similarity that makes you feel ‘Oh I’m in the TV series. I’m in the bar. I will have an opportunity to talk to Barney and other characters.’ But if the decorations or the menus are different, it will ruin this feeling.”

It is relatively easier for marketers to replicate a virtual experience when there are visual references, such as a bar from a movie where all the decorations are visually defined. However, when the virtual experience is vaguely defined in a descriptive way, consumers’ imaginations can differ more significantly than when visual presentation of a virtual experience is available, and thus experiential RPP may grow harder. Informant 3 regarded this as a mission impossible and simply gave up trying as he described:

“No matter how delicate and detailed the Little Bar is replicated, it is still very hard to fully reflect my imaginations. I want my Little Bar to be 100% materialized perfectly, but if it’s not, I’d rather not go.”

**Partial authenticity** Most informants are not expecting full authenticity from the experiential RPP. On the contrary, they enjoyed the process of seeking what is the same and what is not. For example, informant 10 mentioned the TARDIS from the

British TV series *Doctor Who*. TARDIS is a time machine created by a scientist named The Doctor, which looks like a small police phone box on the outside, but is actually the size of a building on the inside with advanced technology. Informant 10 commented that it is fine for her if the marketers reversely place the TARDIS into a restaurant, because she does not expect someone to build a real time machine and carry visitors to travel in time. Besides, it is funny to see TARDIS become a restaurant and it is interesting to dine in there, as she described:

“Even if the replica might have changed the function into a restaurant or maybe an Airbnb room, I’d still want to visit because I don’t really think anyone can really create a time machine that looks just like TARDIS. Besides, I’m mainly drawn to the settings and the entire atmosphere rather than the food or whatever unrelated stuff they are selling.”

Yet, it is critical to determine what must be the same and what does not need to, and such decision should be based on what consumers define as the most representative features of an experience. Consumer inputs are required to determine what features of the virtual experience carry the most value. The criterion, as the informants described, is whether consumers who were involved with the entertainment programs could easily recognize the reversely placed experience, like informant 10 said:

“As long as a person who watched *Doctor Who* can recognize the replica, I think it would be enough for the replica to be considered authentic. It doesn’t have to be exactly the same in all details and I wouldn’t really check it against the show. Yet, if someone who watched the show couldn’t even recognize it, then it’s not tolerable.”

As Informant 10 described, every time the time machine TARDIS departs or arrives, it makes a unique “ge-zhi ge-zhi” squeezing sound; fans get very excited when they hear the sound because the sound signals that the leading character The Doctor is about to show up on the screen. Informant 10 mentioned that she would not mind dining in a restaurant decorated as a time machine and on a table that is supposed to be a control panel according to the show, because no one really paid attention to the control panel when watching the show. But if there could be the same squeezing sound every time a new customer enters the restaurant, it will make her experience authentic.

#### 4.4.2 Memory and Fantasy Protection

There are also other sources of value that may differ consumer by consumer. Many informants in this study mentioned that experiential RPP recalls their memory and fantasy of the entertainment programs. Some communicated the desire to enhance the memory of the content in the entertainment programs, or to strengthen the memories of themselves when they were watching the entertainment programs; others desired to protect the fantasies related to the entertainment programs. If there is the risk of ruining the memory or the fantasy, informants choose not to engage in the reversely placed experiences.

**Memory of content** Some informants engage with experiential RPP and seek memories of the entertainment programs. Such memories could include scenes from a movie, lyrics from a song, conversations from a TV show, storylines from a book, prizes from a game, or even just feelings similar to how much the characters were in love. Recalling these memories enables informants to relive the experiences and the emotions. For example, informant 4 mentioned that when she visited the chain

restaurant Bubba Gump Shrimp and saw the pictures posted on the wall, she tried to remember which scene each picture was from in the movie. Bubba Gump Shrimp is a chain restaurant reversely placed from the American movie *Forrest Gump*, about how a boy with low IQ made his way to success and happiness. When the main character Forrest Gump and his friends survived a sea storm and accidentally acquired a monopoly of shrimps, they opened a restaurant called Bubba Gump Shrimp Company in the movie. Informant 4 also mentioned that she recalled the inspiring lines from the movie to motivate herself. These memories are strengthened through visiting the chain restaurant in the real life. She described her experience at Bubba Gump Shrimp as:

“Every time I would look around, because the restaurant always put up pictures from the movie scene. I would try to remember which scene each picture was from and that was very interesting. I would also recall the inspiring lines from the movie to encourage myself.”

**Memory of self** Other informants seek memories not externally from the entertainment programs but internally from themselves. They wanted to be reminded of who they were at the time when they watched the entertainment programs, especially those who were involved with the entertainment programs years ago. Through experiential RPP, they were able to see a change in themselves over the years and cherish the experiences that they had been through. Informant 1 commented that visiting an Airbnb room that was reversely placed from the movie *Death Note* reminded her of herself when she was 15 or 16. It was the time when she watched the movie, and she loved how young and energetic she was back then. That memory is strengthened through engaging with experiential RPP, as she described:

“After entering the room, I will walk around and take pictures to bring back the memories and feelings, imagine that I was 15 or 16 again, and try to remember how energetic I was. That would make me really happy. I think I’m getting old now, so I really cherish the things I used to like.”

**Fantasy protection** There are also informants who established fantasies during their involvement with the entertainment programs and desired to protect or fulfill their fantasies through the interactions with experiential RPP. For example, informant 3, as we have mentioned before, perceived the Chinese song *Chengdu* to be sacred and refused to visit the reversely placed Little Bar. He mentioned that he did not visit the Little Bar even when he traveled to the destination because he had the feeling that the Little Bar would leave his fantasies unfulfilled or even ruined. He was one of the informants who desired full authenticity from experiential RPP, which means his expectation is close to his fantasies and that nothing misaligned is tolerable. With such a high expectation, he perceived the reversely placed bar not good enough to fulfill his fantasies, and thus he decided not to engage in the experience, as he described:

“I visited Chengdu this summer, but between staying in the hotel and going to the Little Bar, I decided to stay in the hotel. I didn’t go because I’m afraid it will ruin my imagination. I have imagined what it would look like inside, but my instinct is that the real bar cannot be as good.”

#### 4.4.3 Social Belongingness

Informants also seek social belongingness among those who enjoy the same entertainment programs as they do, and some informants even regard the marketer of



an experiential RPP to be a fan. This creates a special bond between the marketer and the consumer, because consumers treat the marketer as someone on the same side, rather than someone who is trying to gain profits. The desire for social belongingness also raises consumers' tolerance for object authenticity. For example, informant 1 commented that if someone decorates a room as the main character's bedroom in the movie *Death Note* and posts it on Airbnb, she will be willing to stay in that room even if the owner does not get all the details right.

“If the decoration isn't exactly the same and they alter something, that's fine for me, because I can see that the owner of this Airbnb is a fan and I can see the connection between me and the owner of the room, so I kind of want to be friends with her. If I'm gonna choose to give money to someone, I'm going to give the money to the owner of this *Death Note* Airbnb room rather than some random Airbnb owner. She deserves the respect of all these *Death Note* fans.”

#### 4.4.4 Mimicry

Many informants expressed their desire to mimic characters from the entertainment programs because they wanted to feel what it was like to be the character and live that virtual life. They would either dress up like the characters, do the signature postures of the characters, or role play episodes from the entertainment programs. Some informants even started mimicking during the interview when they described how they behaved during their RPP experiences. Some examples from the interviews are:

“I visited Xianheng Tavern in Shaoxing. I ordered the same set of food and used a bowl to drink wine like people did in the novel, even though nowadays we don't

normally do that anymore. We ordered the typical food that Yiji Kong ordered in the novel. The customers didn't really dress up completely, but most people chose clothes that were more classic than modern."

Informant 2 imagined how he would mimic the character Ted or Barney if he visited the bar reversely placed from the American TV series *How I Met Your Mother*. "I will order some food that they ordered in the TV series and try to sit in the same booth, like I'm getting into the TV series and having a really good experience. I will hold the cup like Ted or Barney, take a lot of pictures, and post on my social media to let everybody know. It's like I can get into this TV series; I can be part of the casting crew or the storyline."

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Consumer Motivations towards Experiential RPP

Across the data analysis, consumer motivations towards experiential RPP are mapped out. First, consumers who demonstrate high involvement with the entertainment programs are more likely to engage with experiential RPP. Such involvement can be manifested in the form of emotional involvement when consumers feel the same or the opposite as the characters from the entertainment programs; behavioral involvement when consumers strive to finish the entire entertainment programs as a whole, repeatedly, or demonstrate eagerness about a new release; cognitive involvement when consumers drill down on the details or search for external information to deepen their understanding of the entertainment programs; and referential involvement when referring the content of the entertainment programs to the real world. Yet sacredness influences audience involvement when the level of involvement is high. If consumers possess high involvement towards the entertainment programs and yet perceive the reversely placed experience to reduce the sacredness of the entertainment programs, consumers are less motivated to participate.

Next, consumers decide what type of RPP they are willing to purchase. Consumers are more attracted to the experiential form of RPP if they desire to separate realism and virtualism, or to live in the moment. Consumers then evaluate the experiential RPP for object authenticity. Some consumers expect full authenticity; yet most consumers expect partial authenticity for the most representative features of the virtual experience defined by consumers. Consumers also look for other sources of value such as

protecting memories of content, self, and fantasies, seeking social belongingness among those who share common interest, and mimicking characters from the entertainment programs.

## 5.2 Categorizing Experiential RPP

As we mentioned before, object authenticity is a common source of value that all our informants mentioned. When consumers are comparing the virtual and the real experiences, whether the virtual experience is clearly or vaguely described in the entertainment program plays an important part. The less clear the virtual experience is described, the harder for consumers to evaluate the authenticity. Experiential RPP can be categorized by a matrix of object authenticity and the vagueness of the description in the entertainment programs. Examples are classified based on informants' evaluations.

The upper right corner is for products that appeared in clear descriptions in the virtual environment and then possess high object authenticity in the real environment, such as the Central Perk which formerly appeared in American TV series *Friends* with full visual details, and in the real life all decorations, uniforms, and atmosphere in the café are very similar to the entertainment program. The upper left corner is for products that appeared in clear descriptions in the virtual environment but then achieve partial authenticity in the real environment, such as the Sherlock Holmes Café which looks like Sherlock's apartment but instead offers dining services. The lower right corner is for products that appeared in vague descriptions in the virtual environment but then are fully replicated with added details to match consumer imaginations, such as the Bubba Gump Shrimp from the American movie *Forrest Gump*. The lower left corner

is for products that appeared in vague descriptions in the virtual environment and also do not live up to consumer imaginations, such as the Little Bar from the Chinese song *Chengdu*.

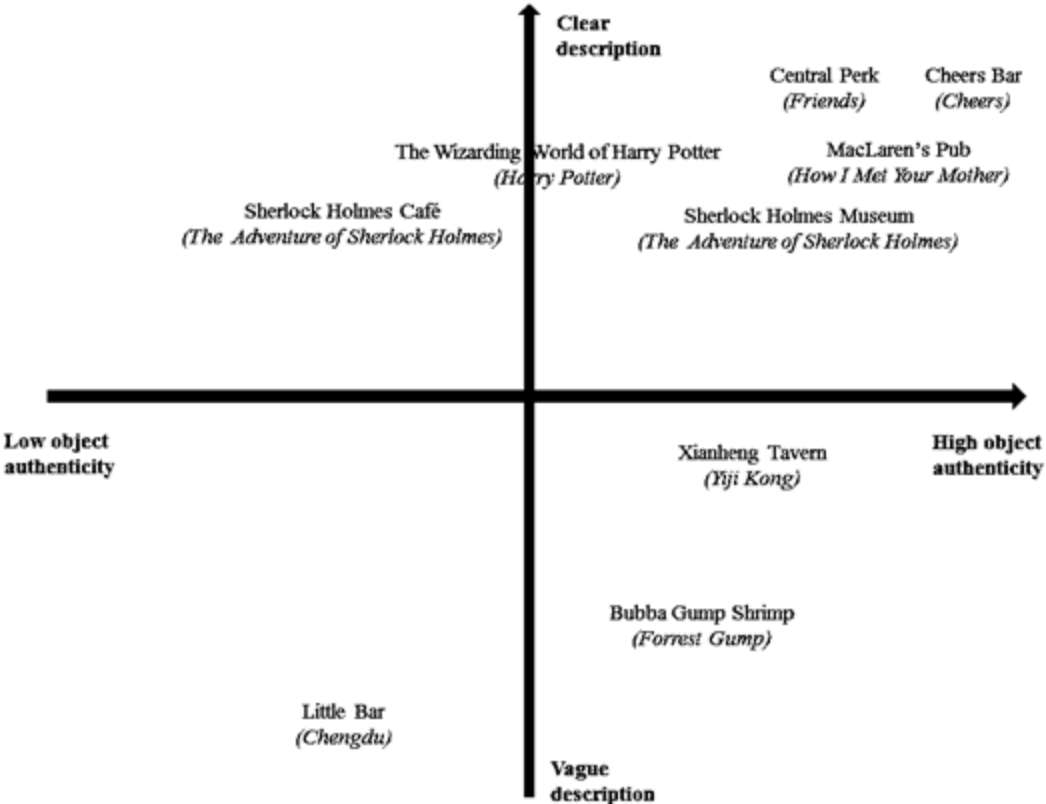


Figure 2. Categorization of experiential RPP

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Contributions

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the literature of RPP in two folds: by defining the scope and categorization of experiential RPP, and by understanding consumer motivations towards engaging with experiential RPP. Previous studies were conducted under a research climate where RPP was vaguely distinguished from other marketing activities such as merchandising. This could confuse researchers as what RPP really means and how certain products should be categorized. This study is one of the first that aims to focus on the experiential form of RPP, and lays the foundation for future studies in this research area. Moreover, the study provides a deeper understanding of consumer motivations by identifying different sources of consumer value, and by examining the role of involvement with the entertainment programs and the influence of consumer perceived sacredness on consumer motivations to engage with experiential RPP. The methodology of phenomenological interviews helps to elicit spontaneous responses from consumers. In addition, the study also expands the service-dominant logic by applying the framework into RPP.

From a managerial perspective, this study provides a fundamental overview of experiential RPP, and offers marketers implications on product design and marketing techniques for RPP. Three major managerial implications are provided to marketers. First, marketers should engage consumers in the process of designing RPP experiences. The RPP experiences should incorporate what consumers perceive to be special about

a virtual experience. Second, it is critical to effectively separate the reversely placed experience from ordinary living environment through integration of tangible and intangible cues. All details such as decorations, uniforms of employees, and the way service staff behave should be incorporated into an entity to create a virtual environment, which consumers can clearly distinguish from their ordinary life and feel like walking into the entertainment programs. Third, products can be marketed through consumer community channels such as fan club or online forum. When consumers discover that peers within the same social group indicate willingness to engage, they can be more motivated to participate due to the desire for social belongingness.

## 6.2 Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations in this study that need to be attended. First, the number and variety of RPP examples used in this study are limited, due to the small sample size of interviewees. These examples demonstrate some representativeness of the reversely placed products that are popular and available in the market, and yet a larger pool of examples could contribute to the generality of the categorization matrix. Second, informant responses are not towards one common product but each informant may respond to a different product. The differences in products may affect the way each informant responds. For example, even though both the Little Bar from the Chinese song *Chengdu* and Bubba Gump Shrimp from the American movie *Forrest Gump* are vaguely described, it is hard to directly compare their relative vagueness, and thus consumer responses from both examples are hard to compare. Third, Individual differences and especially cultural differences are not accounted in this study, as consumer personality and cultural background may also affect their response towards

experiential RPP. For example, informants from a culture with high collectivism may value social belongingness more than someone from a culture background with high individualism.

For future research, it would be interesting to test the relationships depicted in this study with a quantitative approach, especially the moderation effect of sacredness. Moreover, further research should be conducted to enrich the categorization matrix with more examples, and to explore more sources of consumer value in further depth. The research area of RPP is new and underexploited, especially the experiential form of RPP, which leaves great opportunities for researchers. While this research focuses on consumer motivations, future research could focus on consumer attitudes, decision making, consumption experiences, repeat purchases, etc.



APPENDIX A  
BACKGROUND OF EXAMPLES (IN ALPHEBETICAL ORDER)

*Cheers*

*Cheers* is an 11-season American sitcom between 1982 and 1993 that is set in a bar named Cheers, where people who live in the neighborhood come to drink and socialize. Many funny stories happened in the Cheers bar and are closely related to people's daily life. A key feature of the Cheers bar is that whenever the character Norm Peterson enters the bar, the server near the door will call "Hi, Norm" out loud, followed by all customers calling "Hi, Norm."

*Chengdu*

The Chinese song *Chengdu* was composed in 2016 by a Chinese singer Lei Zhao. The song tells the romantic story between the singer and his girlfriend when they live in the city of Chengdu. The Little Bar is reversely placed from the lyric in the song, "Walk to the end of Yulin Street and sit in front of the Little Bar." The Little Bar in the real world is located on Yulin West Street in the city of Chengdu, and has now expanded into a chain business of three bars. Many tourists come to take pictures after the song gets popular, which makes the quiet street very lively and crowded.

*Death Note*

*Death Note* is a collection of Japanese comics between 2003 and 2006, which is later made into a series of animations and movies. Death Note is a notebook owned by the God of Death, who deliberately leaves the notebook in the human's world. Once a name is written on the notebook, the person will die in 40s. The protagonist named Light Yagami is the first recipient of the notebook, who uses it to kill prisoners at the

beginning but later starts to kill innocent people. Misa, a female character in the movie who was bullied when she was in high school, was nearly murdered but was saved by Light. She then falls in love with Light and helps him to kill people.

### *Despicable Me*

*Despicable Me* is a series of animations produced since 2010 by Universal Pictures and Illumination Entertainment. The most recent release is *Despicable Me 3* in 2017. It tells the story of how Gru, a supervillain who plans to shrink the moon and steal it, gradually changes for the better under the influence of the three girls he adopted. The minions refer to the yellow ellipse-shaped creatures in the movie with unique language and childlike behavior. The minions have grown very popular and become the mascot of Illumination, a division of Universal Studios.

### *Disney*

*Disney* is an American diversified multinational mass media and entertainment company. It started in film production in 1923 and later expanded into a chain of media and entertainment business. It is well-known for animation production and theme park operations, the latter known as Disneyland Parks and Resorts. Famous cartoon characters from *Disney* include Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Mickey Mouse, Ariel the Mermaid, Winnie the Pooh, and Elsa from Frozen, etc. *Disney* is also a representative of merchandising, who has developed a relatively complete collection of material products stamped with *Disney* logo or characters.

### *Doctor Who*

*Doctor Who* is a British science fiction TV program produced by BBC since 1963, and the series still continues with the upcoming 13<sup>th</sup> season in 2018. The leading character,

The Doctor, is a Time Lord, an extraterrestrial species from the planet of Gallifrey. Twelve actors have starred as The Doctor so far, and the transition from one actor to another is called regeneration, as The Doctor will change his appearance during this process and the show will change an actor. The Doctor travels in time and universe using his time machine called TARDIS, exploring and saving the universe. TARDIS looks like a blue police phone box on the outside, but is the size of an entire building on the inside, thanks to the Time Lord technology from Gallifrey.

### *Forrest Gump*

*Forrest Gump* is an American romance drama movie produced in 1994 based on a novel of the same name. It describes the life of a slow-witted but athletic man named Forrest Gump. He witnessed several decades of defining events of America in the late 1900s, and in this process he pursues success and happiness with a kind heart. The movie has generated many famous quotes, like "Life is like a box of chocolate; you never know what you're gonna get." Bubba Gump Shrimp is reversely placed from the movie and is the name of the company in the movie that Forrest and his friend opened after they survived a sea storm and accidentally got a monopoly of shrimps.

### *Friends*

*Friends* is a 10-season American sitcom produced in 1994 by NBC. The show features the stories of six young people living close to each other in Manhattan, Rachel Green, Ross Geller, Monica Geller, Chandler Bing, Joey Tribbiani, and Phoebe Buffay. The six characters always get together in Monica's apartment or in a café downstairs called Central Perk. Central Perk has been reversely placed in the real world several times in different cities, in a pop-up or standalone form.

### *Harry Potter*

*Harry Potter* is a famous British book and movie series since 1997, with seven book and eight movie releases. It creates a world of magic, and tells the story of a boy named Harry Potter whose parents died to save him and who accidentally injured the greatest villain of the magic world, Lord Voldemort. Harry grows up and studies at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry with his two close friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. The series pictures a completely different school environment, and many audience and readers are attracted by the way the characters dress, go to classes, or spend spare time. For example, students at Hogwarts are divided into four houses: Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin. They wear robes to school, play chess that can move on its own, use a wand and spells to grab stuff or light the bulb, and play Quidditch as a sport. Harry fights against all kinds of teenage problems, struggles to be strong and righteous, and most importantly defeats his old enemy Lord Voldemort in the end. Universal Studios opened the Harry Potter themed amusement park The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Florida and Japan in 2014 and in Los Angeles in 2016.

### *How I Met Your Mother*

*How I Met Your Mother* is a 9-season American sitcom between 2005 and 2014. The story is about the love and life of five friends, Ted Mosby, Barney Stinson, Robin Scherbatsky, Marshall Eriksen, and Lily Aldrin. The two leading roles are: Ted, who believes in soul mate and is constantly looking for “the girl” in his life; and Barney, who doesn’t believe in true love and is hooking up with random girls. The MacLaren’s Pub appears repeatedly in the TV series as a place where the characters frequently hang out.

### *Marvel*

*Marvel* started as an American comic publisher in 1939 and was later acquired by Walt Disney Company in 2009. *Marvel* creates its own line of superheroes, such as The Fantastic Four, Hulk, Iron Man, Captain America, Black Panther, Thor, Spider Man, etc. Marvel Cinematic Universe films are now an American series of superhero movies based on characters that appeared in the Marvel Comics. Popular ones include: *Captain America, Iron Man, Spider Man, Hulk, Thor, Guardians of the Galaxy, Agents of Shield, and Avengers.*

### *Sherlock Holmes*

*Sherlock Holmes* is a British fictional story created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887, about a private detective named Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock is famous for his proficiency in observation, logical reasoning, and forensic science. He's been helping the Scotland Yard as a consulting detective and has solved many peculiar cases. Sherlock himself is also an odd person. His room is always messy; he enjoys doing chemical experiments in his room which create blasts from time to time; he likes playing the violin but is not good at it; he has a unique dressing style with a long coat and a double-edge hat; he often sits in his couch when he enters his "hall of thinking", as he calls it. His apartment is located on 221B Baker Street in London, and in the real world a Sherlock Holmes Museum is opened on Baker Street as well to replicate his apartment. Multiple crime scenes solved by Sherlock in the story are also replicated in the museum.

### *Xuan-Yuan Sword*

*Xuan-Yuan Sword* is a series of Chinese online role play game started in 1990 and so far the 6<sup>th</sup> and the most recent release was in 2016. Each game in the series is based on

a specific Chinese dynasty, with a mix of historical and made-up events. Each player selects a character, follows the storyline and completes tasks. In the end, based on their performance in the game, players will get different endings.

### *Yiji Kong*

*Yiji Kong* was a famous Chinese novel published in 1919 and written by Xun Lu, the founder of modern Chinese literature. The story of *Yiji Kong* is based on the Chinese history in the 1900s when the society was at the edge of feudalism. The leading character in the novel is Yiji Kong, a scholar who failed the government exam. He supports the outdated feudal culture and is arrogant in speech, while the society is in transition and adopting new ideas. He ends up beaten to death miserably because he is unable to repay his debts. In the novel, Yiji Kong often visits Xianheng Tavern, where he orders the same food every time, makes his arrogant speech about supporting the feudal society, and where he owes most of his debts. Xianheng Tavern is now reversely placed in the city of Shaoxing, the hometown of the author Xun Lu. People who dine there still adopt the traditional way of dining, such as using bowls to drink alcohol.

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