



6

The Consumption Side of Entertainment

We have stressed early on in this book that the hedonic nature marks a key characteristic of entertainment products. Our discussion of entertainment consumption in this chapter builds on this unique nature which not only describes the specific products that entertain us, but also the fundamental human needs and processes that give them meaning for us as consumers.

On the following pages, we transform the fundamental insights on hedonic consumption and its key facets of emotions and imagery into a more holistic, multi-layered framework of entertainment consumption. The framework follows a “means-end” logic, tracking the link from a product’s attractions to the pleasure they provide a consumer. We label it the “sensations-familiarity” framework, as it assigns the sensations that consumers perceive in an entertainment product along with the product’s familiarity focal roles for this transformation process.

We will now first overview the “sensations-familiarity” framework, explaining how sensations and familiarity help the entertainment product’s “objective” elements to create pleasure, as the “end state” that is usually desired by an entertainment consumer. We then take a deeper look at the emotional and cognitive processes that are triggered by such sensations and familiarity. We end the chapter (and Part I of this book along with it) with an analysis of the *process* of entertainment consumption, disentangling its different stages.

Why We Love to Be Entertained: The Sensations-Familiarity Framework of Entertainment Consumption

When we introduced the notion of entertainment products being hedonic, we argued that experiencing a pleasure state is the main aim for consumers spending time, and often money, for entertainment products. We cited scientific research that makes it clear that entertainment consumption can lead to pleasure by activating two different areas of our mind: by triggering emotions, but also by activating cognitive processes, the latter often in the form of what psychologists often call “imagery.”

Let us now refine this perspective by adding some more psychological layers. Figure 6.1 extends our previous model of hedonic consumption into a full hierarchical framework of entertainment consumption. With pleasure

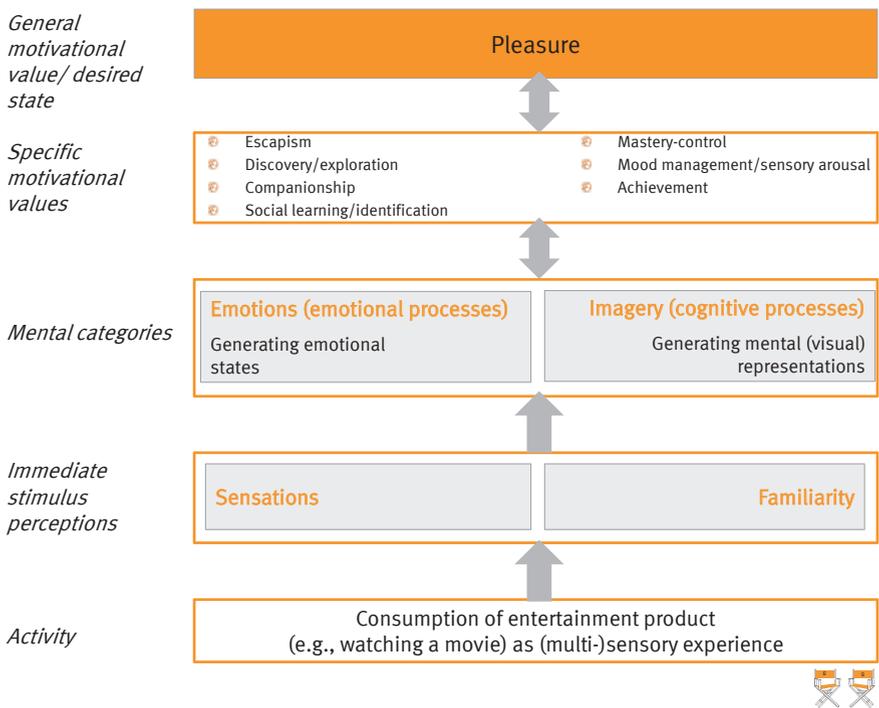


Fig. 6.1 The sensations-familiarity framework of entertainment consumption
 Note: Authors’ own illustration.

being the desired end state and the ultimate reason for entertainment consumption, let us start from there, the framework's top layer.¹⁰⁴

A central argument here is that pleasure does not *immediately* result from emotional or cognitive processes. Instead, pleasure is perceived by a consumer when one, or many, consumption motives are fulfilled by the consumption activity. As we discuss below, whereas pleasure is the highest, most general motivational value that consumers seek through entertainment, it is a broad and pretty abstract concept; scholars have identified several more concrete and specific motivational values, or motives, that drive entertainment consumption. One example specific motive is escapism—consumers trying to (temporarily) trade their realities and routines for those of the entertainment experience, such as the galaxies of the STAR WARS saga (e.g., Henning and Vorderer 2001). If a consumer strives for such escapism, then experiencing it is the path to experience pleasure, as the ultimately desired state.

How can entertainment products fulfill such specific consumer motivations? This is where emotions and imagery cognitions matter. Both are the key mental consumer categories (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982) that must be activated by the entertainment product if it is to connect to consumers' motivations. All entertainment motivations require a certain amount of *both* emotional and cognitive processing. The relative importance can vary though—whereas one category can be important for certain motives (such as escapism), the other may be more crucial for other motives.

The layer of the framework that precedes emotional and cognitive processes, and that also most immediately follows the consumption activity, is the one after which we name the framework: sensations and familiarity are the central concepts for understanding consumers' reactions to entertainment (Bohnenkamp et al. 2015). Why is this layer so essential? For the

¹⁰⁴We have to concede that, although pleasure is the desired state behind almost all kinds of entertainment consumption, it can be complemented by another fundamental motivation: a purely social one. Lee and Lee (1995) find that TV viewing can be driven by people's interest in talking with others about the program, and our own results (from Pähler vor der Holte and Hennig-Thurau 2016) show that the ability to chat with others during and after watching a new drama series is a driving force for consumption. Similarly, Schäfer and Sedlmeier (2009) show that music provides "the opportunity to meet other people," and Yee (2006) finds for games (where the product itself can connect consumers) that socializing and being with other MMOG players are influential motivations. In all these cases, the value of consuming an entertainment product is not solely determined by the pleasure the product itself provides, but the product rather serves as a vehicle for experiencing fundamental social needs. It is entertainment's symbolic nature that makes it so well-suited to offer not only pleasure, but also to connect people. Whereas an entertainment producer can certainly gain from providing social benefits, it is not specific for entertainment, and interested readers are recommended to the extensive general literature on social motivation and needs, starting with Maslow (1943).

framework to be useful for entertainment producers, it must shed light on which kinds of product stimuli trigger emotional reactions and the creation of imagery in the mind of the consumer. Simply telling a producer that his or her product must generate a satisfactory level of emotions and imagery to result in consumer pleasure would be too vague of advice to be of any practical value.

Sensations and familiarity, which we define and discuss in detail below, are consumers' immediate perceptions of any *key attractions* provided by an entertainment stimulus. In turn, sensations and familiarity determine, either in isolation or together, how the entertainment product impacts the consumers' mental categories of emotions and imagery. Because we expect producers of entertainment to be able to estimate or predict the degree to which their products will offer consumers sensations and familiarity, including these factors adds usability to the framework.

Let us note that the hierarchical structure of our framework also carries meaning for producers by itself: it informs us that neither familiarity nor sensations are self-sufficing, but only lead to success if they manage to trigger the next layer of the framework, namely emotions and imagery, which requires them to be linked to consumer motives. This is why sensational explosions do not guarantee enjoyment, but can be numbing instead. As Tom Rothman, as Sony executive, noted: “[m]aking the audience care is a lot harder than making things blow up” (quoted in Ford et al. 2017). The hierarchy of the sensations-familiarity framework explains why doing the former is essential for offering pleasure.

In summary, our framework implies that the degree of pleasure a consumer experiences from consuming an entertainment product is the result of a multi-layered process. Pleasure can only result when a product first offers a sufficient level of sensations and/or familiarity (“key attractions”), which are perceived as such by the consumer. Sensations and familiarity, then, can trigger emotional and cognitive processes that are essential for fulfilling the specific motivational values that drive consumption. Pleasure only emerges if those desired specific motivations are fulfilled.¹⁰⁵

We also want to stress that the links between the different levels of our framework are not one-directional; instead, feedback loops can exist (e.g., the fulfillment of a motivational value can intensify the emotional reactions via cognitive appraisals), and the overall process can be triggered from both

¹⁰⁵In particular cases in which the consumer aims for mood adjustments rather than pleasure, however, it is possible for the emotional reaction to function as a motivation itself, as we will show below.

the top (the consumer's desire to experience pleasure) and the bottom (by turning on the radio or TV). We also need to keep in mind that whereas the framework describes what happens when we encounter an entertainment product, our decision whether to spend time and/or money for a certain product usually happens before (entertainment products are dominated by experience qualities)—which means that our *anticipation* of what we can expect from a product in terms of sensations and familiarity, of emotions and imagery, of motive fulfillment and pleasure also matters, and does so big time.

In the following, we dive into the key concepts of the framework. We start with an overview of what leads humans to consume entertainment (the specific motivations or motivational values) and what we mean when we describe sensations and familiarity as key entertainment attractions. We then turn our attention to the “heart and mind” of entertainment consumption: the emotions and the imagery triggered by entertainment's sensations and familiarity, which, at the end of the day, determine our reaction to experiencing it.

The Specific Motivational Values that Lead Us to Consume Entertainment

“I sell escapism.”

—*Musician Jimmy Buffett (quoted in Leung 2004)*

Trying to understand what inner powers make consumers indulge in entertainment, beyond recognizing just the general motivating desire for pleasure and enjoyment, has kept *Entertainment Science* scholars busy.¹⁰⁶ As is the case for research on consumer motivations in general, structuring the motivations for entertainment consumption is a far-from-trivial task. Whereas boundaries between motivations and other psychological concepts (such as

¹⁰⁶An important substream of such motivation-focused research carries the label “uses and gratifications.” Its roots go back to the early days of radio and television where the uses-and-gratifications approach was developed to understand people's engagement with mass communication; Katz et al. (1973) provide an early overview. Whereas our discussion of entertainment motives in this part of the book encompasses findings from a number of uses-and-gratifications studies, our perspective differs somewhat in that we do not assume entertainment consumers make choices actively to achieve a consciously chosen “goal” (an important tenet of uses-and-gratifications research that has also inspired models of consumer decision making; see Palmgreen and Rayburn II 1982). In contrast, we also allow for subconscious, passive consumer behavior. In a pointed way, the uses-and-gratifications approach is tied to a “rational,” heavily cognitive view of consumer behavior, which reflects the approach's historical roots; the approach was developed long before the hedonic consumption models, on which our own perspective of entertainment behavior in this book is based, shifted the scholarly view toward emotions and imagery.

feelings, attitudes, processes, behaviors, or states) are fuzzy and definitions of the motivational concepts are not consistent, a number of key motives have crystallized from the research. Some of them are relevant *across* different forms of entertainment, while others have been more closely tied to specific content.¹⁰⁷

Escapism. Among the most often-cited reasons for consumers to engage in entertainment is the desire to escape something unpleasant or worrisome, to get away from problems and pressures. This escapism motivation can relate to a person's immediate social environment, his or her general work and life situation (and (dis)satisfaction with the same), or the sense of emptiness that is perceived when there is nothing to do (Henning and Vorderer 2001). Ernest Cline's literary alter ego Wade Watts practices escapism in his *READY PLAYER ONE* dystopic world by logging into the "OASIS," a fictional MMOG, because it allows him "to instantly slip [his worries] away as [his] mind focused itself on the relentless pixelated onslaught on the screen" (Cline 2011, p. 14), and the Saturday audience of Billy Joel's *PIANO MAN* enjoys his music because it helps them to not think about their lives for some hours. Escapism has been empirically linked by scholars to various forms of narrative entertainment, including television, film, and novels (e.g., Hirschman 1987 in a study of 364 behavioral science students). It is found to be the best predictor of gaming intensity (in Yee's 2006 survey of 3,000 players of MMOGs).

Discovery and exploration. Consumers also spend time with entertainment to explore and discover "worlds" that differ from their everyday environments. Such exploration is not driven by real-life misery, but by consumers' curiosity to discover something new and inspiring. Writer Almond (2006, p. VII) describes it as opening "the gates to an unknown city" or "the lid of a treasure chest." Empirically, Addis and Holbrook (2010) study all 440 movies nominated for a Best Picture Oscar between 1927 and 2003 and find higher consumer ratings for movies that take place in a setting that consumers have not experienced personally. In his MMOG study, Yee (2006) finds that joy of discovery and desire to role-play are primary gaming motives, above and beyond escapism. The discovery and exploration motive is closely linked to mental states that psychologists refer to as transportation and immersion.

¹⁰⁷Let us note that our list of entertainment motives, although including what we believe are the focal internal drivers for consumers, is far from comprehensive. Other motives mentioned by researchers are "moral disposition" (i.e., experiencing the good prevailing in the movie, and the bad suffering) and "social comparison" (looking at others, such as characters in a novel, who have it worse off than you do). Bartsch and Viehoff (2010) offer an overview.

Companionship and other relationship functions. People also consume entertainment because entertainment products provide a way to get emotionally involved with the characters, either the ones *in* the product (such as the heroine of a novel) or those *behind* it (such as the lead actor of a movie). Through these “relationships,” consumers can experience profound affection and sensitivity to others’ feelings (Hirschman 1987). Alan Rubin (1981), based on a survey of 626 consumers, stresses the contributions of entertainment content for companionship, finding that watching movies or listening to songs makes people feel less lonely. And he shows that such companionship has a significant influence on the amount of TV that people watch. Hirschman (1987) extends this finding to movies and novels. The companionship motive also provides the basis for our understanding of entertainment stars as “parasocial relationship partners.”

Social learning and self-learning. Only rarely do people consume entertainment products solely for learning “facts.” However, particularly for narrative forms of entertainment, consumption can often be driven by peoples’ motivation for *social* learning. Social learning is possible because entertainment products permit consumers to self-project into, or to identify with, a particular role or character (Hirschman 1983). The exact nature of the social learning motive spans a broad continuum; it ranges from concrete and pragmatic to abstract and fundamental.

Pragmatic social learning means that consumers observe how others (e.g., movie characters) deal with challenges that the consumer considers to be of potential personal relevance. Think about watching *CAST AWAY* as a survival guide or *SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK* as the parent of a young adult with a mental disorder. More fundamental social learning happens when consumers find role models and heroes who help the consumer visualize an aspirational self—who I really want to be—in entertainment content. The coolness of a James Bond or Eastwood’s *Man With No Name* gives assertiveness to a self-doubting boy; *HARRY POTTER*’s Neville Longbottom offers the ability to stand up to a bully; Katniss Everdeen, Jennifer Lawrence’s *HUNGER GAMES* heroine, inspires an adolescent girl to be brave and daring.¹⁰⁸ Such social learning is not limited to narrative entertainment—Schäfer and Sedlmeier (2009) find, based on a survey of 507 German consumers, that some of the most important motivations for consuming music deal with issues related to the self, with music being an embodiment of one’s identity and values.

¹⁰⁸This motive can be linked to the personal relevance of entertainment.

Mastery-control. Psychologists have long argued that consumers derive value out of the ability to be in control of a situation, as it enables us to make autonomous decisions and manipulate the outcome (e.g., Ryan and Deci 2000). *Entertainment Science* scholars have adopted this logic to explain the use of entertainment products. Hirschman (1987) provides evidence that consumers' mastery-control motivation is correlated with choices of books, television content, and movies—despite the fact that these are *non-interactive* forms of entertainment through which the control motive can only be fulfilled in an imaginary, fantasized manner (Mansell 1980). Ryan et al. (2006) show that (self-)control perceptions are of particular importance for users of *interactive* games in which consumers can actually determine the course of the experience with their actions; their sample consists of 730 members of an online community. In gaming, the fulfilment of the control motivation is closely tied to the consumer's experience of a "flow" state.

Mood management and sensory arousal. Consumers also spend time with entertainment to regulate their moods (Zillmann 1988). According to mood management theory, consumers use entertainment products as a source of external stimulation. By consuming exciting content, consumers can increase their arousal level and escape a "bad" mood state that had been present because of "under-stimulation" (i.e., boredom). Bad mood can also result of "over-stimulation" (or stress), a constellation which "soothing" entertainment content can improve by reducing arousal. But the right entertainment product can also further strengthen an already existing good mood (Bartsch and Viehoff 2010). Empirical evidence for mood management exists for music consumption (Schäfer and Sedlmeier 2009), as well as for consumers' TV viewing patterns (e.g., a survey of almost 2,000 viewers by Lee and Lee 1995, and also Hirschman 1987), and for movie and book preferences (Hirschman 1987).

Achievement. For video games, in which consumers play a very active (versus observational) role, personal achievement has been highlighted as another influential motivation. *Entertainment Science* scholars have collected evidence that gamers are often driven by a strong desire to have a high level of competency (i.e., "be good at") when playing. Achievement can be measured with regards to absolute criteria, such as the advancement in the game, as well as to relative criteria, such as performing better than others (Coursaris et al. 2016, based on survey data for 202 gamers; see also Ryan et al. 2006). The achievement motivation is closely tied to the psychological state of flow, which itself depends on consumer skills.

Our discussion of entertainment motivations so far has shown that motives vary, to a certain extent, between the different forms of entertainment: people might play games for other reasons than they watch TV or listen to music. However, Hirschman's (1987) study puts such variations in a different light: she shows that it is also the *genre* of an entertainment product that determines the level of influence of a particular motive across forms of entertainment. For example, she finds that whereas a mastery-control motivation plays little role in the choice to consume either comedy books or movies, this motive plays a strong role in consumers' preferences for *both* erotic books and erotic movies. And Hirschman shows that entertainment motivations differ substantially based on one additional factor: the consumer's gender. Whereas men enjoy science-fiction movies and history novels for their social learning potential, Hirschman (1987) finds that women are much more likely to consume romantic content for a companionship motive.

Of Sensations and Familiarity

Two factors link entertainment products with consumers' reactions in our framework, constituting the product-consumer interface: the sensations that people experience when consuming the product, and the familiarity it offers them. Both are crucial for triggering the emotions and imagery that address consumption motives and eventually result in pleasure. What exactly are these factors, and what do we know about them?

In consumption, *sensations* are the sensory reactions a consumer experiences as a result of exposure to an external stimulation (Zuckerman 1979). Sensory reactions are bodily, physiological processes and are distinct from cognitive processes such as thinking and interpretation that they can trigger. Sensations can be described as the arousal one feels when nerves are activated and hormones, such as dopamine, are produced. Movies, TV shows, songs, novels, and video games, as the products this book deals with, involve sights, sounds, and tactile sensations that are perceived by consumers' basic senses (via the human "hardware devices," such as ears, eyes, and fingers).

With regard to a consumer's desire to perceive pleasure, not all kinds of sensations are equally well suited. According to Zuckerman's (1979) research, consumers value sensations that are different, new, and rich. Humans have innate preferences for variety (e.g., McAlister and Pessemier 1982), and thus prefer to experience different sensations over time, rather

than having the same sensation constantly repeated. In addition to variety over time, humans also have a basic desire for new stimuli (e.g., Hirschman 1980)—we find things stimulating simply because they provide a sense of novelty. Finally, stimuli that are “rich” and multidimensional cause more intense bodily responses than do simple, one-dimensional sensations.

Thus, entertainment products need to be rich, sufficiently innovative, and/or varied enough from previous products to cause sensations in the consumer, thereby avoiding a “same old-same old” feel (Busch and D’Alessandro 2016). Because it is the sensations that consumers are looking for when consuming entertainment (as a vehicle for pleasure), sensations are closely tied to satiation effects; if a product produces only weak sensations, consumers will quickly experience satiation. The potential for sensations differs systematically between types of entertainment products, such as original creations and extensions of existing works (e.g., sequels and remakes), which has major implications for their respective marketing and success potential.¹⁰⁹

Familiarity, the second factor through which an entertainment product can create pleasure, refers to a consumer perceiving a sense of connection with an entertainment product and/or its elements and characters. This familiarity is based on previous encounters with the product/element or similar others (Bohnenkamp et al. 2015; Green et al. 2004). A consumer’s pleasure from a new Nintendo video game featuring Mario comes partly from the new challenges, but also from the familiarity of the beloved character. The character James Bond in the movie *SPECTRE* will be highly familiar to those who have seen other Bond films; he may even be familiar to others based on his cultural popularity and prominence. People can perceive a new movie starring Daniel Craig as familiar because they know his previous works as an actor. And some might recall memories of other films because of a new film’s storyline (“The villain!” “The shootout!”) or setting (“I’ve seen those red sandstone buttes before! They remind me of...”) Like the concept of sensations, familiarity is not relevant for narrative forms of entertainment only: songs also strike consumers as sounding more or less familiar (e.g., Ward et al. 2014).

Familiarity is an essential element on the road to entertainment pleasure because it can activate memories and emotions of positive (or negative!) experiences the consumer has had during previous encounters with the familiar product elements and *transfer* them to the new product, thereby sparking positive (or negative...) emotions toward the new entertainment product. On a more fundamental level, familiarity also helps the consumer to cognitively

¹⁰⁹We discuss the sensations potential for the different product types and also how the richness of sensations can be influenced via technology in earlier chapters.

categorize a new entertainment product, i.e., it helps us to understand and make sense of what the product will be about, or even fantasize about the new product. When consumers can place a new product in their existing “mental maps” of entertainment products they know, they can draw on well-developed cognitive associations. Then cognitive processing is much simpler (a.k.a. of “higher fluency”) and takes less effort—a fact that consumers value and which biases them toward familiar choices (Reber et al. 2004).

Now, how influential are sensations and familiarity for consumers’ entertainment choices? Schäfer and Sedlmeier (2010), in two experiments with 53 and 210 German students, provide empirical evidence that consumers’ musical preferences (i.e., the degree to which they like certain songs) are strongly influenced by music’s ability to create *sensations* (namely, to stimulate arousal and activation), as well as to offer *familiar* content and structure. Ward et al. (2014) offer further support for the critical role of familiarity. Also conducting two experiments in which they asked a total of 434 students to choose between pairs of songs (one familiar, the other unfamiliar), they find that the familiarity of a song is closely linked to song choice, even when controlling for consumers’ liking of and satiation with a song. In their regression analyses, familiarity is nearly as powerful for explaining song choice as is liking of the songs. And whereas we have said earlier that Askin and Mauskopf (2017) find that being too similar to previous hits can hurt a song’s hit potential, this only happens in their study after a critical similarity threshold value is passed. Before this satiation threshold is reached, more similarity with hits *enhances* a song’s commercial success—the song is perceived as more familiar by consumers, which the consumer generally considers a good thing (at least until satiation sets in).

For movies, we use more than 6,700 consumer ratings of sensations and familiarity of 648 film trailers to investigate how sensations and familiarity perceptions regarding the trailer relate to the rater’s intention to watch the actual movie (Behrens et al. 2017). Using OLS regressions (with watching intention as dependent variable, or DV), we find that the levels of sensations and familiarity that consumers experience when watching a trailer increase their willingness to see the movie. Sensations and familiarity perceptions are also linked with the assumed quality of the film, when we use that variable as our DV. In both cases, although both factors have a strong impact, we find trailer sensations to be even more influential than familiarity.

Our results also offer some richer insights about how sensations and familiarity affect consumers. Figure 6.2 illustrates the courses of the regression functions: whereas trailer-related sensations affect consumers’ movie assessments in a linear manner (Panel A), satiation effects seem to exist for familiarity, as the positive impact of familiarity gets smaller as the level of familiarity increases

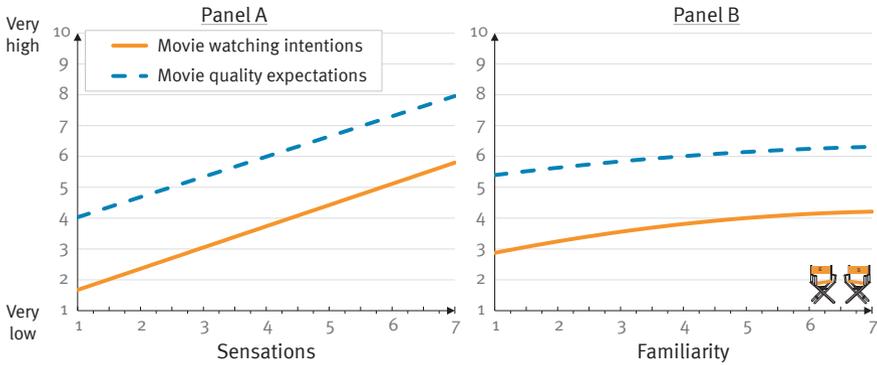


Fig. 6.2 Sensations, familiarity, and consumers' movies assessments

Notes: Authors' own illustration based on results in Behrens et al. (2017). Results show regression functions based on unstandardized parameters of OLS regressions with sensations and familiarity as independent variables. We set the variable that is not shown in the respective figure to its mean to visualize the effects. Movie watching intentions are measured on a 1–7 scale, based on 6,760 viewings of trailers for 648 movies. Quality judgments are movies' mean consumer ratings on Moviepilot.de (scale ranging from 1 to 10).

(Panel B).¹¹⁰ Interestingly, this is essentially the same as what Askin and Mauskapf found for music, despite the different forms of entertainment and methods.¹¹¹ And just in case you wanted to know: sensations and familiarity are significantly correlated, but they do not affect consumers' assessments *jointly*, as adding an interaction term does not affect results.

The Emotional Facet of Entertainment Consumption

“And when thou in the feeling wholly blessed art.
 Call it, then, what thou wilt, -
 Call it Bliss! Heart! Love! God!
 I have no name to give it!
 Feeling is all in all”

—*The character Faust in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1808) novel FAUST: A TRAGEDY*

Emotions are one of the two cornerstone concepts of hedonic entertainment consumption. Our associations with favorite entertainment products

¹¹⁰Actually, higher familiarity even leads to *lower* movie assessments after a threshold is reached—but this threshold value lies outside the scale limits.

¹¹¹We will inspect satiation effects more closely as part of our discussion of information strategies for new entertainment product samples (such as movie trailers).

are almost always closely tied to the experiencing of intense emotions. Sometimes entertainment even takes a meta-perspective on the role of emotions, holding up a mirror: such as when actress Rita Wilson's character bursts into tears in the movie *SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE* while recounting the plot of the classic drama movie *AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER*, just like Tom Hanks' character is touched by the lethal end of war actioner *THE DIRTY DOZEN*...

Whereas each of us has an intuitive understanding of emotions, the processes underlying the concept are certainly far from trivial. In this section, we first take a look at how emotions work and present a typology of the key emotions at play. We then report empirical findings regarding how, and which, emotions affect consumers' entertainment choices. When doing so, we pay special attention to something that fascinates us, as it has other *Entertainment Science* scholars: why do we, as consumers, pay for entertainment to make us cry or to scare us out of our wits? Why do we enjoy experiencing *negative* emotions?

How Emotions Work

Emotions are studied by various sciences such as psychology, philosophy, neurology, as well as marketing and management; definitions vary substantially across perspectives and disciplines. For the purpose of this book, we take an integrative approach, speaking of emotions as psycho-physiological processes that combine cognitive, physiological, and response-related components (e.g., LeDoux 1996). The cognitive element of emotions refers to the consumer's *perception* of a certain stimulus, such as Alfred Hitchcock's legendary "shower scene" in *PSYCHO*. The physiological element describes a *hormonal* reaction of the consumer's body, such as the production of adrenaline in situations that are perceived as threatening. This element is central because researchers consider it to be the driver of the "feeling" sensations that are part of emotions. The third element is a response of the body to the two other elements—such as shutting your eyes or screaming in the face of Hitchcock's terror.

Scholars have provided different explanations of how these elements interplay in making up human emotions. "Appraisal" theories have been developed by cognitive psychologists such as Arnold (1960), who argue that

cognitive processes and assessments are focal for emotional reactions because they mediate a consumer's sensory perception of a stimulus and his or her experience of feelings, as expressed by a bodily reaction. Neurologists have provided support for such processing, showing that each stage involves a different part of our brain. Accordingly, the initial perception of sensory inputs takes place in the brain's hypothalamus region, whereas conscious cognitive processing happens mainly in the cerebral cortex of the brain—which then frames the eventual emotional response, which itself is orchestrated by the brain's amygdala region.

But appraisal theories are not the only explanation. A different stream of theories, motivated by Zajonc's (1980) work on "subliminal" processing of stimuli,¹¹² instead stresses the role of unconscious "affective" (i.e., emotional) processes and argues that emotional reactions do not require *any* cognitive processing, beyond perception. And indeed, Posner and Snyder (1975) showed empirically that reaction times to make an affective judgment can be faster than reaction times for the *recognition* of a stimulus. In other words, a person can have a positive emotional response to a photo of a person they love, even before they are able to recognize the person. Neurological findings are also consistent with this "unconscious affect" perspective—they have shown that an animal whose cortex has been removed is still able to exhibit emotional responses (LeDoux 1996).

So appraisal and unconscious affect theories offer conflicting explanations. We argue that this is because both ways of processing exist and it is their *combination* that provides a comprehensive explanation of what happens on the "road to the amygdala." Specifically, every time we encounter a stimulus, the brain's hypothalamus "decides" for us whether to take the "high road" proposed by appraisal theorists, thus involving the cortex in appraising a situation, or to take the "low road" instead (as suggested by unconscious affect theory's proponents), leaving out the complexities of cognitive evaluations, at least for the moment.

The brain will prefer the "low road" in situations in which it judges, in a split second, that there is not enough time for a thorough evaluation of a situation; choosing the "low road" allows a consumer to react immediately without full understanding. But because leaving out the appraisal element

¹¹²"Subliminal" refers to a kind of processing that takes place when a stimulus is presented to participants for such a short time frame that the participants cannot process it *consciously* and answer corresponding questions reliably.

is, as LeDoux (1996, p. 164) puts it, a “quick and dirty processing pathway,” the brain will subsequently re-assess its immediate, unconscious emotional response by taking the “high road.” If needed, it will then revise its original interpretation or reaction once it has sufficient time to do so.

Let us illustrate the different emotional “roads” by taking a closer look at what happens when two different people watch Hitchcock’s famous horror film.¹¹³ Whereas one of them (we call him “Frederick”) is an experienced fan of the genre, the other (let’s call her “Claudia”) has not seen many horror movies before. When watching *PSYCHO*, Frederick’s brain does not perceive the situation as immediately threatening and, in turn, takes the “high road.” There is simply no need for instant reactions for him. Frederick recognizes the combination of dramatic music and on-screen violence as part of a movie-going experience, and his amygdala lets him show dampened surprise when Janet Leigh is slaughtered in the shower with no fear; he grins about the director’s virtuosity and indulges in his popcorn.

Claudia, however, does not see room for a closer cognitive inspection of what is happening on the screen—her hypothalamus feels threatened and takes the short cut to avoid negative consequences for her health. As a result, she jumps directly to fear and outright panic, with her eyes wide as she takes in all the action and her body shivering.¹¹⁴ A moment later, though, she realizes that the artificial character of the situation does not personally threaten her with physical harm, and her neocortex “requests” a re-evaluation of the situation, as a result of which she starts grinning also, and even steals some of Frederick’s popcorn.

We have illustrated these basic human emotional reaction patterns to entertainment in Fig. 6.3. Panel A of the figure shows the “high road” (i.e., appraisal) and Panel B the “low road” (i.e., unconscious affect). Panel C, finally, depicts a combination of both processing patterns.

¹¹³In case you have not seen *Psycho* yet, please do yourself the favor and make up for this omission. If you want to take a shortcut (which we do not recommend for any ambitious entertainment student, scholar, or manager though!), you can still look up the iconic shower scene at several places on the Internet, such as <http://goo.gl/XfSvuQ>. Enjoy—but take care!

¹¹⁴An unconscious, purely behavioral reaction as a response to (scary) entertainment stimuli is also evidenced by neurologists in other areas of the body. For example, Nemeth et al. (2015) noted a significant uptick in blood clotting as a bodily response to watching a horror movie, but not other films. As with most unconscious processes, the explanation to such reactions refers to evolution: in frightening situations, our body prepares itself for the loss of blood, a threat that is countered by more rapid blood clotting.

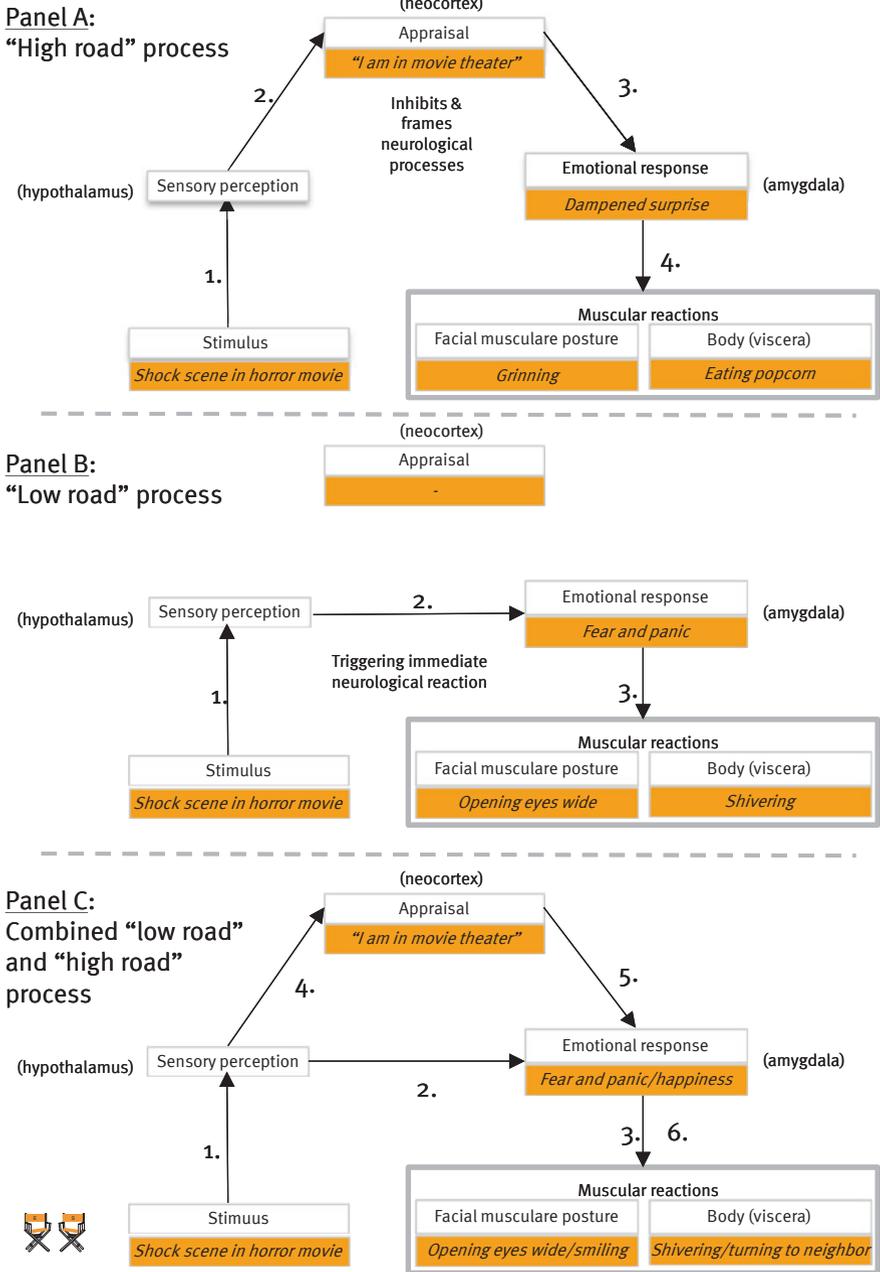


Fig. 6.3 The different roads to emotions when consuming entertainment
 Notes: Authors' own illustration based on ideas reported by LeDoux (1996). The numbers in the figure show the order in which the different paths are activated. Terms in parentheses are the parts of the consumer's brain in which an action takes place.

Whether a consumer's brain takes the low or high road when exposed to an entertainment stimulus depends on many factors. The design of the stimulus certainly plays a key role (think about what separates movie scenes that make us cry, laugh, or scream from those that don't provoke such emotions), along with the consumer's idiosyncratic genetic make-up and socialization. For example, some of us have a higher level of empathy than others which makes us respond more strongly to human suffering on the screen. Have you cried when the *GLADIATOR* is reunited with his family in the afterlife, or when the aged *PRIVATE RYAN* asks his wife whether he has led a "good life"? You might want to consider this as a litmus test of your empathy repertoire.

But let us not forget the artificial nature of entertainment, which always stages (fakes or simulates) the experiences that it lures us to—there is almost always no actual reason to be afraid or sad when listening to a song, reading a book, or watching a movie. This illusory nature ties the experiencing of emotions closely to the actual situation in which entertainment is consumed: a single misplaced laugh, word, or ring tone from another person in a movie theater or on the sofa at home can prevent us from getting emotionally involved.¹¹⁵

Still, why do we react emotionally at all to entertainment stimuli when we know it is all simulated/fake (we pay for the experience, so we should know)? Zacks (2015) compares entertainment stimuli with "supernormal," exaggerated stimuli that have been shown to be highly effective in triggering emotional behaviors. He concludes that it is the "exaggerations of features of emotional expression, dialogue, physical action, setting, color, sound, and so on" that produce our emotional responses to them (Zacks 2015, p. 82). He notes that there are parallels in the animal world, such as when Tinbergen's experiments reveal that a baby gull begs for food more intensely to an exaggeratedly large "parent" gull than to a gull of normal size. Maybe such evolutionary programmed innate responses to the supernormal also offer an explanation of people's fascination with superheroes or with "superproportioned" Disney princesses (Gardner 2013).

What Kinds of Emotions Exist?

A Simple (but Meaningful) Typology of Consumer Emotions

We have mentioned a number of specific emotions in our previous discussion, some of which steer the reactions of the protagonist of Pixar's *INSIDE*

¹¹⁵Please also see our discussion in this chapter of the determinants of being "transported" by entertainment.

OUT movie: joy (the “golden” one), sadness (blue, of course!), anger (red), fear (purple), and disgust (green). But a more comprehensive list of consumer emotions, that would ideally would not only name emotions, but also organize them based on their similarities and differences, would certainly be helpful to more fully understand consumers’ reactions to entertainment products. Psychology scholars have aimed to create such a typology of human emotions for quite some time; prominent approaches include those by Silvan Tomkins, Robert Plutchik, and Paul Ekman.¹¹⁶ However, their typologies are essentially one-dimensional and enumerative, which limits their practical usefulness.¹¹⁷

Other emotions researchers have tried to overcome this limitation by exploring the fundamental “dimensions” that characterize the various emotions and that explain their differences. None of the resulting typologies is problem-free, but they shed more light on the phenomenon of emotions and help to reduce overlap and redundancies. One particularly powerful approach, named “pleasure-arousal” theory, suggests the existence of two dimensions: a “valence” dimension, which is linked to the positivity (or pleasantness) that characterizes an emotion, and an “energy” dimension that refers to the emotion’s level of activation, arousal, or the degree to which it triggers alertness (e.g., Posner et al. 2005).

How are the different emotions positioned in such a model? Whereas most emotions scholars follow Russell (1980) in placing emotions at the outer rim of an emotional circle (or “circumplex”), Reisenzein (1994) took a less restrictive approach: He placed various emotions in a two-dimensional valence-energy space, based on their respective pleasure and arousal levels as rated by 35 psychology students. The resulting positions in Fig. 6.4 show the mean ratings for a number of key emotions.

The figure gives us a deeper understanding of what characterizes each emotion and how they differ one from another. For example, whereas joy is a highly positive, highly aroused emotion, contentment is also experienced as positive (although not as much as joy), but with low arousal. In contrast

¹¹⁶Tomkins (1962) suggested eight “basic” emotions (namely anguish/sadness, disgust, fear, joy, interest, rage/anger, shame, and surprise), Plutchik (1980) also eight, with anticipation and acceptance instead of interest and shame, and Ekman (1999) named a total of 15 emotions, with new additions including contentment, excitement, and guilt.

¹¹⁷Another question, although one which is mainly of *conceptual* relevance, is whether each concept from one of these lists should be considered an emotion or something else. Take “excitement,” for example. The fact that Tomkins and Plutchik do not include it in their list of emotions does not mean that they question whether people get excited, but that they consider it to be an affective state or feeling that is just not complex enough to be considered a unique emotion (which would imply a link to unique bodily responses).

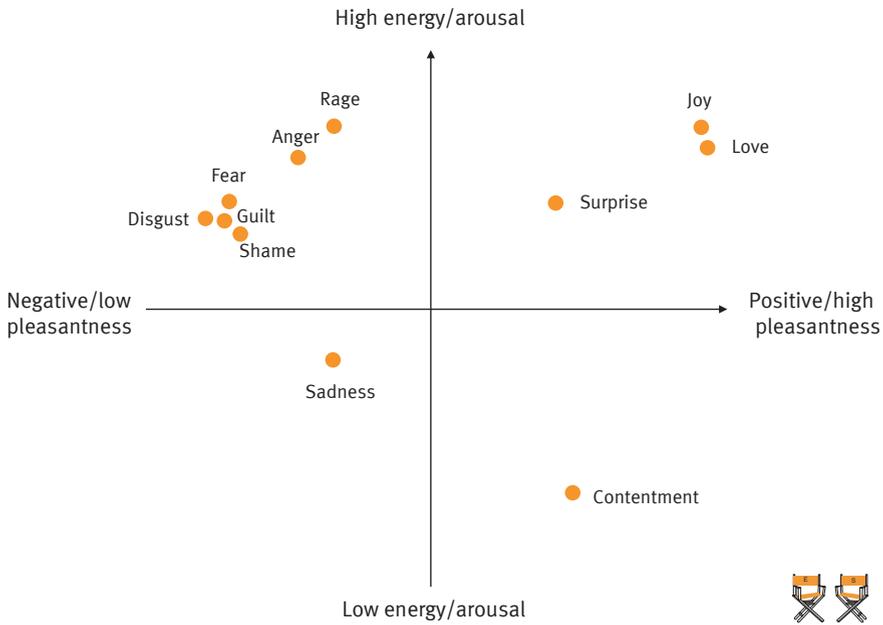


Fig. 6.4 A two-dimensional representation of some key emotions

Notes: Authors' own illustration based on results reported in Reisenzein (1994). The positions of the emotions in the space approximate their respective "typical" intensity levels.

to sadness, which is negative and low arousal, rage is equally negative, but implies a much higher arousal level. The emotions' positions in the figure also show us which emotions share similarities; for example, joy is similar to love, and guilt is similar to shame.

At the same time, questions remain. Some emotions, such as fear and guilt, are in close proximity, but obviously differ in the responses they induce; whereas fear triggers actions, guilt is linked more closely with passiveness. Similar differences exist for joy and love. Such patterns suggest that, although the two dimensions of valence and energy are helpful for understanding consumers' feeling reactions to entertainment, more factors need to be considered for grasping in totality the complex nature of consumer emotions.

Looking Forward: Adding a Time Dimension to Our Understanding of Emotions

Research on consumer emotions usually looks at the emotions that emerge at the very moment a person experiences a product. However, the experience

character of entertainment products means that consumers have to make purchase decisions *prior* to actually experiencing these emotions. Does this mean that emotions are irrelevant for our actual choice of entertainment? No—research shows that consumers also produce emotions (and thoughts about emotions) *ahead* of consumption.

Such pre-consumption emotions are not limited to the day of the purchase, but instead can develop days, months, or even years before a product is released. Because of the hedonic and cultural nature of entertainment, there is potential for great anticipation. On the level of the individual consumer, emotions scholars have introduced two kinds of pre-consumption emotions to address this separation of consumers' emotional processing of a product from its actual consumption: *anticipatory* emotions and the related, but distinct concept of *anticipated* emotions (Cohen et al. 2006).¹¹⁸

The concept of anticipatory emotions describes a situation in which a consumer actually experiences emotions when thinking about the future consumption of a product. For example, a consumer can become excited *today* when he hears about a product he plans to consume at a later point in time. Such anticipatory excitement is clearly evident when Twitter user “Amie” writes about the movie 50 SHADES DARKER, almost half a year before its actual release, gushing that the film’s “trailer has got me so excited 😍😍😍😍 I can’t wait omg.” We note that such anticipatory emotions are closely tied to the creation of (cognitive) imagery (the other key concept of hedonic consumption in addition to emotions). Because the consumer does not experience the entertainment product at that point in time, the emotional reaction depends on how the consumer *envisions* this experiencing. Research has shown that consumers who are good at envisioning rely more on their anticipatory emotions when making decisions (Pham 1998).

Anticipated emotions, on the other hand, are actually not really emotions. Instead, the concept describes the emotions that consumers *expect* to experience when they consume a product in the future. In other words, it is a cognitive forecast of the emotional consequences of engaging in entertainment. Twitter helps us again with a concrete example: when user “Never Say Never” looks forward to the release of a new album by Justin Bieber, he tells his followers that “Friday 13 november going to be a lucky day because justin bieber’s new album purpose will make me happy :)” In the next section,

¹¹⁸On a collective level, it is this pre-release and pre-consumption anticipation that creates the “buzz” that often accrues before the release of an entertainment product and that can influence the product’s eventual success in the market on its own.

we take a look at whether it matters to make such a subtle distinction—and to which concept managers should pay (more) attention.

Which Emotions Affect Entertainment Decisions—and How?

“If you can make people laugh, cry and feel things with a film you make, you will be successful.”

—*Director and Pixar executive* John Lasseter (2015)

Now that we have overviewed the broad repertoire of human emotions, let us take a peek at what *Entertainment Science* research has to say about the role of emotions when experiencing entertainment, as well as for our preceding decisions to do so. We will put special emphasis on the role of negative emotions because the things that make us cry or scare us are often the ones that we enjoy the most.

General Findings on Emotions in Entertainment

But let us begin with more general insights. Aurier and Guintcheva (2014) study how emotions are linked to consumption experiences and consumers' judgments of those experiences. They conduct exit-poll interviews with 400 Parisian moviegoers and link these consumers' emotional states with their satisfaction with the movie they had just seen; the sample includes responses to a heterogeneous set of 28 films. Using a structural equation model in which they control for several aspects of the film (such as the quality of the acting and the script) and an overall “goodness-of-the-film” measure, the researchers find satisfaction-enhancing links for both positive (i.e., joy) as well as negative emotions (i.e., sadness). Interestingly, they also find that higher calmness, a positive, but low-energy emotion, goes along with *lower* satisfaction. In their results, joy has the strongest influence of all factors (even higher than overall “goodness”), followed by sadness.¹¹⁹

We also studied the role of emotions in an entertainment context, but focused on the emotions that consumers experience *prior* to consuming an entertainment product (Henning et al. 2012). Specifically, we looked

¹¹⁹Aurier and Guintcheva find no significant link between fear and satisfaction. We would assume that this results from the heterogeneous sample of films they use; whereas fear should be a positive state in the context of horror movies, it will probably not affect (or may even obscure) the evaluation of other films. The authors do not report any interactions of emotions with genres or subsample analyses, so their existence remains speculation.

at different kinds of anticipatory emotions and anticipated emotions. In a lab experiment, we offered 308 German college students the opportunity to purchase, among others, a DVD of the movie *STAY*. We then calculated correlations between the different emotion constructs and (a) the consumers' attitude toward the entertainment product, (b) their purchase intentions, and (c) their actual purchase of the DVD in the experiment. Via a series of regression models, we isolated the role of anticipatory and anticipated emotions from cognitive influences (and also control for consumers' cognitive expectations regarding the product's quality).

So, what did we learn? In comparison to a model that includes only cognitive evaluations (e.g., ratings of key product elements such as movie genre, story, stars, and DVD features), a model that includes consumer emotions explains about one-third more of consumers' attitudes toward the product. Positive/high activation anticipatory emotions (e.g., excitement) explain the most, but positive/low activation (e.g., contentment) also increased the consumers' attitude toward the product. Negative anticipatory emotions, however, significantly worsened it. Whereas anticipated emotions (alias emotional expectations) also correlate with consumers' attitude, their effects are crowded out in the regression analysis by the anticipatory emotions.

Consumers' responses to emotions are quite similar when it comes to respondents' purchase intentions and their actual purchase behaviors. In Fig. 6.5 we show that positive/high activation emotions generally dominate those with low activation, but for negative emotions the pattern reverses: *negative low-activation* emotions tend to explain entertainment decisions more than negative emotions with high activation. Boredom and dullness appear to be worse than fear and sadness when it comes to the emotions that entertainment consumption triggers in advance, something we also address in the following section. Interestingly, for the more cognitive concept of what the consumer *expects* to feel when consuming the product (i.e., anticipated emotions), it is negative feelings with *high activation* that have the stronger impact. We also find that emotions not only influence the consumers' purchase intentions and choices directly, but also indirectly—via their impact on attitudes which, in turn, also affects intentions and choices.

Fowdur et al. (2009) used aggregated data when studying the role of emotions; they linked consumer emotions to the actual box-office success of movies. They infer consumers' emotional reactions to each of the 932 films in their data set¹²⁰ from the film's content. Using Latent Semantic Analysis,

¹²⁰The films in their data set were those which received a wide release in North American theaters between 1999 and 2005.

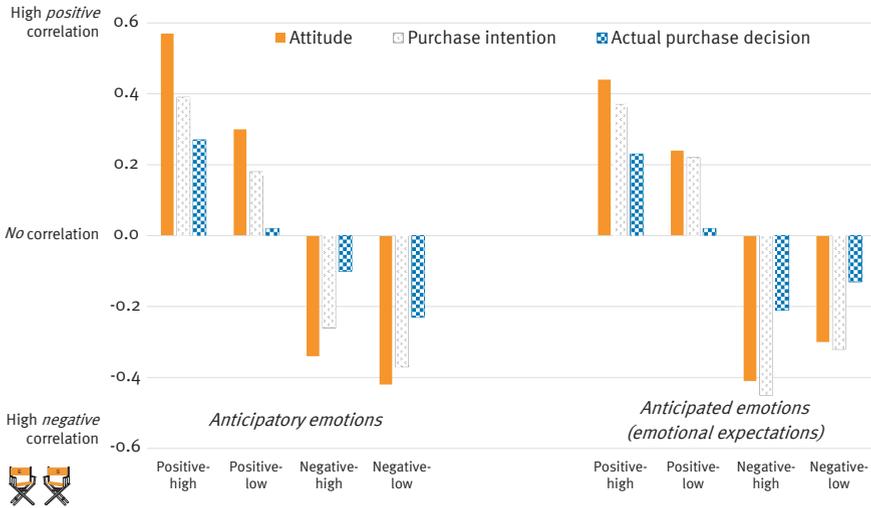


Fig. 6.5 Correlations between different kinds of anticipatory/anticipated emotions and three facets of consumer decision making

Notes: Authors' own illustration based on results reported in Henning et al. (2012). Bars for attitude and purchase intentions are pairwise correlation coefficients; the bars for purchase decision are point-biserial correlations, as the dependent variable here was binary, with 0 = no purchase and 1 = purchase.

a method that determines distances between terms based on a large dictionary archive of text, they create an “emotional profile” for each film based on the “semantic distance” between the film’s “plot keywords” (to capture key events and characters of the film) and six key emotions (i.e., the positive emotions of joy, love, and surprise, and the negative emotions of anger, fear, and sadness). The scholars use a Bayesian method to estimate the distances between keywords and emotions and then link the resulting emotional film profiles to the success of each film (i.e., their theatrical “market share” in a specific week). Instead of using the six individual emotions, they employ two composite emotional “factors” that reflect the relations among individual emotions: the movies’ emotional complexity (*how many* different emotions are triggered by a movie’s elements) and extent of negative emotions.

The researchers’ results show that both emotional factors matter. Emotional complexity plays a stronger role for a movie’s box office share (with more complexity being linked with higher success). But negative emotions also exert a *positive* effect on film success, independent of the effect by emotional complexity—something we look at in the next section. By decomposing their results, we also learn about the success effects of the different individual emotions: love has the strongest link, but the negative

emotions of fear and sadness follow closely. Surprise is also positive, but has the smallest effect on success. As a general takeaway, Fowdur et al.'s findings suggest that stimulating complex emotional reactions by combining positive and negative emotions is a quite powerful approach, at least for movies. Of course, it remains unclear whether a specific movie's content elements actually trigger the emotions to which they are linked on average. That depends at least partly on how (well) the content elements are executed.

The Fascination (and Relevance) of Negative Emotions

“Positively the Most Horrifying Film Ever Made”

—Advertisement for the film MARK OF THE DEVIL

Some of the most successful pieces of entertainment are inseparably tied to deeply negative emotions. Consumers have spent more than \$1 billion in theaters alone to be terrified by the violence of the first seven SAW films, and about 1.6 million Xbox One users have paid for the privilege of being slaughtered by zombies while playing the dystopic DEAD RISING 3. Two million readers in the U.S. alone followed Father and Son as they walked a devastated earth in Cormac McCarthy's novel THE ROAD, and is there anyone among our readers who has not enjoyed listening to Eric Clapton suffering about the loss of his boy in TEARS IN HEAVEN?

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to understand why we are so fascinated with entertainment that triggers negative emotions, such as fear or sadness. But despite these efforts, no single, universally accepted explanation has yet emerged (Vorderer 2003). Nevertheless, scholars have proposed a set of explanations, and often supplemented them with at least some empirical support. Some explanations are more general, while others link to specific negative emotions.

A general observation is that entertainment emotions are not the same as “real-life emotions” because of the reappraisal process that takes place during, or after, consumption. In empirical studies, scholars have observed ambivalent emotional reactions to entertainment, with negative emotions such as sadness co-existing with positive ones such as joy; such mixed emotional states are consistent with cognitive reappraisal (Kawakami et al. 2013). Excitation-transfer theory offers a physio-psychological explanation of this reappraisal process (e.g., Zillmann 1971)—it argues that the immediate arousal that is triggered by experiencing a sad or frightening entertainment product lingers on within us until it is cognitively reframed in light of new experiences.

For a movie, these new experiences might be a positive plot twist, a happy ending, or a return to less-miserable real life when the credits are rolling. When Tamborini and Stiff (1987) applied structural equation modeling to survey responses from 155 horror movie goers, they find that consumers' reframing of the experienced cruelty that was enabled by a satisfying resolution was a main driver of liking the movie. It is this reframing that provides the room for euphoria or other positive feelings. A major learning from this finding is that plotting emotional reactions to an entertainment stimulus in the traditional two-dimensional space developed for "real-life" emotions (such as the one in Fig. 6.4 on p. 251) will probably be misleading—if such reframing processes are ignored.

One reason for the occurrence of cognitive reappraisal is that consumers tend to consider entertainment that triggers negative emotions to be "artful" (Kawakami et al. 2013), a characteristic that is highly valued on a societal level. If music, movies, or other entertainment formats are capable of stirring negative emotions in us, we tend to judge these emotional reactions to be the result of artful mastery and virtue. Negative emotions are part of our "darker" side, which humans typically believe to be much more complex and challenging to understand and appeal to than the "bright" side of our identity. The German language gives a nice example by calling classical music "Ernste [serious] Musik," distinguishing it from the more positive, less "valuable" "Unterhaltungs- [entertaining] Musik."

This tie between negative emotions and art is reflected in Fig. 6.6: whereas people are generally more interested in (bright) comedy than (dark) drama movies, this changes in an art context—when people are looking for *artistic* film achievements (as evidenced by adding an award such as the Golden Globe to the search phrase), the interest is reversed, with a higher search volume for dramas than for comedies.

A separate mechanism that has been named as a reason for our enjoyment of negative entertainment experiences focuses on the *simulated character* of entertainment experiences. Simulations provides us with the opportunity to experience what Hirschman (1980) labeled "vicarious consumption": by observing a character engaging in some activity as part of a movie, book, video game, or song, we get to vicariously "live out" that activity (see also Kawakami et al. 2013). The main difference between experiencing a sad or frightening situation in real life and watching a sad or frightening movie is that we are "safe" in the theater—the dangers we confront are only simulated dangers, and neither tragic nor fearful stimuli pose a genuine threat to us. We can simply leave the theater, close the book, put down the game controller, or change the radio station if the negative emotions triggered by entertainment are too much.

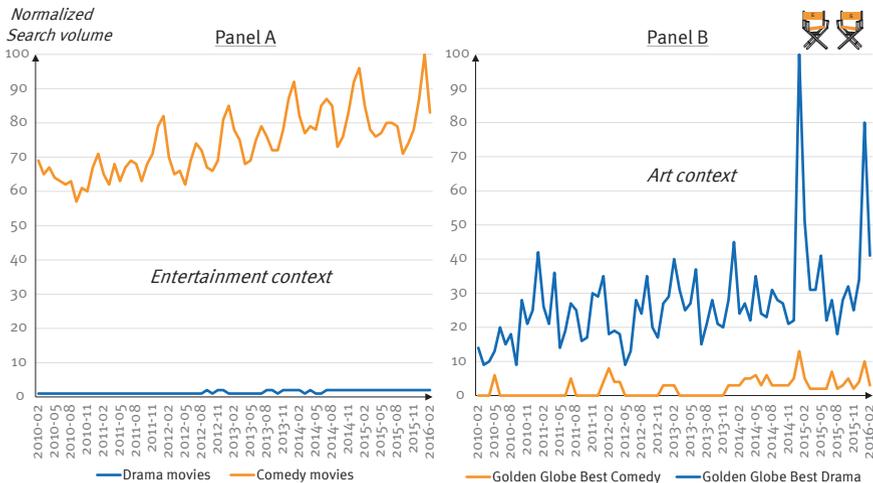


Fig. 6.6 Google search volume for comedies and drama movies in different contexts
 Notes: Authors' own illustration based on data from Google Trends. Panel A shows the normalized total search volume over time for comedy and drama movies, and Panel B shows the normalized search volume for comedy and drama movies in a Golden Globe award context. The scale is normalized to values between 0 and 100 as does not account for changes in the total search volume over time.

But why are we tempted to explore such negative experiences in the first place? We assume this desire is linked to the motive of social learning, which makes us explore the deepest, darkest areas of ourselves and the atrocities life can do to humans—essentially the places to which Joseph Conrad sent his narrator Charles Marlow in the novel *HEART OF DARKNESS*, and the invisible driving force for Martin Sheen's character in Francis Ford Coppola's *APOCALYPSE NOW*, the book's adaptation. A related reason to such vicarious consumption is "catharsis"—the release of emotions to relieve an underlying state of tension or frustration through entertainment consumption. People play violent games to channel their inner aggressions, or watch a tearjerker to cry their frustration "out of their system" (Vorderer et al. 2004). The catharsis argument can help us understand why Tamborini and Stiff (1987) find the level of destruction shown in a horror movie to have the strongest link to a consumer's liking of the film.

Finally, a complementary explanation for choosing entertainment that triggers negative emotions, and particularly sadness, is emotional support. The concept does not treat entertainment as a way to exploit negative feelings in order to feel "better," but to intentionally *intensify* a negative emotional state. Peter Vorderer (2003) reports that 40% of the consumers he interviewed had selected music for this reason; lists on the Internet, such as

“16 Sad Songs to Listen to When You Need a Good Cry” (Reid 2016), add further ad hoc evidence. Vorderer argues that, in some situations, entertainment might provide a feeling of “togetherness” with the artist, in line with the German proverb “Geteiltes Leid ist halbes Leid,” i.e., shared suffering is only half a suffering.¹²¹

Overall, these insights explain that making people “feel bad” can be a powerful strategy because of the simulated nature of entertainment and the cognitive reappraisal mechanisms that follow consumption. We need to keep in mind, however, that any successful use of negative emotions in entertainment relies on the transfer of negative emotions by consumers and their later reframing—and consumers’ willingness and ability to do that. Expectations are crucial, as the reasons for our enjoyment of negative emotion vary in their salience over time,¹²² but consumers must also be *able* to do such processing. For dramatic entertainment, a consumer’s “empathy potential” is essential for him or her to suffer with the entertainment performers. de Wied et al. (1994) provide evidence that those viewers of the movie *STEEL MAGNOLIAS*, a real tearjerker, who have a high level of “empathetic sensitivity” enjoyed the film more than those with lower levels of empathy.

And when it comes to reframing, a separate study of about 100 players of a horror video game points to the role of consumers’ individual ability to carry out such reframing as a determinant of enjoyment, in addition to the entertainment product itself (Lin et al. 2017). Whereas highly fearful people, in general, did not enjoy the horror game as much as those who are less fearful, they *did* like it nevertheless—if (and only if) they believed they had an ability to cope with media suspense (i.e., high “horror self-efficacy”).

The Imagery Facet of Entertainment Consumption

As we have argued above, great enjoyment from entertainment does not stem only from emotions; it also involves strong cognitive processes. In this section, we introduce the concept of imagery that is at the core of such cognitive processing—the creation of “inner images” which, as we will show, can actually be composed of more than just visual images.

¹²¹See also our discussion of parasocial relationships in our chapter on entertainment brands.

¹²²The study by Aurier and Guincheva (2014) offers an initial exploration of the role of expectations for emotions.

We will then discuss narrative transportation, immersion, and flow—the cognitive states that such inner images enable us to enter. These states are the immediate link between our inner images and the motivational ambitions that spur us to consume entertainment. It is through them we can escape our own realities and explore alternative ones that are inhabited by Jedi knights, hobbits, or mythical men who might have no name, but can make our days.

On Event Models, Images, and Imagery

Some Imagery Basics

When we read a book or watch a movie, our brain uses an approach to cope with the input that is very similar to the approach it uses to deal with the “real world,” such as when we go shopping or walk down the street (Zacks 2015). Our mind automatically constructs so-called “event models”—abstract and simplified representations of the things that have happened and we have experienced. These models are not simple one-to-one recordings of the material we saw, heard, or read. Instead, they incorporate insights and logic based on our own knowledge and prior experiences, combining the inputs we now observe with our own logic to create a model that “makes sense” to us. We use such event models when processing entertainment during consumption—and they determine how we remember it afterward. We equip the characters of a novel with a backstory and add motivations to better understand their actions, although these aspects are not necessarily in the book nor have even been envisioned by its author. Event models are idiosyncratic.

But event models go one step further: they include “information about how things look and feel and sound, where objects and people are located, and how you might act” (Zacks 2015). Event models developed from entertainment experiences (but also from the “real world”) thus can be envisioned as “inner images.” Whereas the term “inner” refers to something that occurs within the mind, let us warn you that the term “image,” despite being widely used in this context, is somewhat misleading. The reason is that event model images contain more than just visual impressions, but can instead be multi-sensory, involving smell, taste, and tactile sensations (MacInnis and Price 1987).

When we think of our first romantic love, we might activate pictures of her face, but also the sound of her voice, and maybe even the taste of her

skin and the smell of her favorite perfume. In Michael Frayn's novel *SPIES*, the main character, now long a grown-up man, revisits his boyhood on an imaginary journey through time. He "sees" the "shining" dining room table from decades ago where he and his friend sat, but also recreates in his mind the taste of the chocolate, and once more feels in his fingertips the patterns in the lemon barley tumblers. The visual dimension is often dominant in humans' creation and usage of such models, and also for consumer decisions, which explains why we speak of inner "images," despite their multi-sensory nature.

Inner images are created, as well as activated, through a process called "imagery." Imagery explains *how* information we perceive through our sensory receptors (the nose, the ears, etc.) ends up in our working memory (MacInnis and Price 1987)—how we create inner images, use them to process stimuli, and also how we store these images.¹²³ Inner images are created by, and activated by, external or internal stimuli. External stimuli can be visual impressions (a photo, a text, a film, a game screen) or non-visual ones. For example, touching a book you read decades ago brings back images of your youth or listening to a song on the radio evokes the images of a long-ago concert you attended with friends who have become estranged over the years. Or the scent of popcorn in a store creates the image of having a great time in a movie theater—and triggers buying tickets for the new *STAR WARS* movie via your smartphone.

But sometimes inner images also show up without such an external trigger: they can be caused solely by internal processes, such as when somnolent or daydreaming. Let us add that, although we classify imagery as a *cognitive* process, it mostly happens automatically, with very limited conscious control by the consumer. If you have ever wondered why inner images are often quite difficult for us to verbalize, it's because of their automatic nature.

Types of Entertainment Imagery

Entertainment is a crucial source for the creation and stimulation of imagery. What comes to your mind when you see the numerals *2001*? If you are a dedicated cine-phile, chances are that you think of Stanley Kubrick's classic sci-fi movie of the same name, and you might envision the hypnotic

¹²³The concept of imagery has quite a long history in the sciences, appealing to both cognitive psychologists and philosophers since the 1870s. For a classic historic contribution, see Galton (1880); Thomas (2017) provides a comprehensive review of the historical discussion of both theoretical and empirical imagery research, including recent contributions.

red-eyed supercomputer HAL 9000, the bone-turning-into-spaceship, and the Starchild; some of our dedicated readers will even hear Richard Strauss' composition *ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA* in their inner ears. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) label such images as "historic imagery"—images that we have actually experienced in the past. If the underlying experience was positive, such imagery goes hand in hand with positive emotions: stimulating the images rekindles the emotional memories (e.g., MacInnis and Price 1987). However, if a musical piece activates imagery that is tied to negative experiences (a terrible concert performance), those negative emotions will come back too. Such historic imagery, if triggered by a new entertainment product, influences how consumers will think and feel about it.¹²⁴

But Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) list another type of image that might be of even more importance for entertainment producers. They label it as "fantasy imagery"—it describes the construction of images that have no direct connection to a consumer's prior experiences. For such fantasy imagery, the "colors and shapes that are seen, the sounds that are heard, and the touches that are felt have never actually occurred, but are brought together in this particular configuration for the first time and experienced as mental phenomena" (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, p. 93). These images are particularly powerful for generating entertainment pleasure—they enable the consumer to fulfill the motives that drive entertainment choices and that are directly linked to his or her experiencing of pleasure when experiencing an entertainment product (i.e., the overall goal of hedonic consumption).

Reliving the "historic" screen adventures of Han Solo and Princess Leia in one's mind has great escapism potential, but many people will extend their imagery beyond the specific events in George Lucas' space saga to fantasize about new adventures and new challenges in galaxies far, far away, which offer endless opportunities to escape, explore, and to address other motives, as well. Such fantasy imagery can also be held responsible for the huge success of James Cameron's *AVATAR*: the film's hyper-realistic imaginary worlds made many of us dream of the things that happen in other parts of the Pandora universe, letting us leave the narrative for a time, during or after watching the film.

As we argue above, inner images are never fully accurate recollections of actual experiences or impressions. Thus, we should not treat historic and fantasy imagery as binary categories—instead they define the end points of a continuum that ranges from purely historic recollections to complete fan-

¹²⁴A concept that is closely related to such historic imagery of entertainment products is the brand image.

tasy. Almost always, the inner images of our event models for entertainment lie somewhere in between these extremes (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982).

The Drivers of Imagery

A key question for entertainment producers is figuring out what causes consumers to produce powerful imagery. Most scholarly research on this topic has been conducted in fields other than entertainment, such as branding and general psychology; we find at least some of the insights to be very relevant for and also transferrable into the context of this book. So what do we know about determinants of imagery?

Research has identified three general factors that explain whether consumers create imagery, and how much: the product (or stimulus), the situation, and the individual consumer. Regarding the product, scholars have often used photos as stimuli, varying their attributes when investigating how the nature of the stimuli impacts the creation of imagery. A key finding is that “vivid” stimuli contribute strongly to the creation of imagery. What is vividness? Although measured in many different ways, vividness is usually associated with a visual (versus textual) character and a high level of concreteness (versus abstractness) (Petrova and Cialdini 2005). Other scholarly results for product determinants point to a close link between the “emotional profile” of the stimulus and imagery creation—photos that are judged by subjects as more arousing trigger substantially more imagery, as do stimuli that are viewed as pleasant (versus unpleasant) (Bywaters et al. 2004).

With regard to the situation, experiments in which consumers were given a task to complete (such as memorizing a list of words) at the same time they were exposed to a stimulus (and asked to “produce” imagery) show that the presence of such “cognitive load” disrupts consumers’ production of imagery. The reason is that the task absorbs the cognitive resources that are needed for the production of imagery (Drolet and Luce 2004). For entertainment producers who care about imagery creation, this finding stresses the critical role of the consumption environment, which is part of the distribution mix for entertainment. Do movies that are watched in a theater have a stronger impact on the consumer’s creation of imagery than do movies that are watched on Netflix because the theater context captures the consumer’s full attention? Or does the presence of others and processing the ambient noise of the crowd siphon away more cognitive resources in the theater? This is an unanswered question which might explain both the consumers’

reaction to a specific piece of entertainment, but also those toward another product whose success builds on the existence (or absence) of such imagery.

Finally, consumers have also been found to differ in their individual ability to produce imagery, in general, as a character trait (e.g., Bywaters et al. 2004). Yet research does not tell us very much about the specific characteristics of those consumers who have high/low “imagery ability.” Age matters, but in a non-linear way: adults are general superior in creating imagery when compared to children (Kosslyn et al. 1990), but only until a certain age (Craig and Dirks 1992). Gender effects are occasionally argued to exist, but empirical studies generally find no substantial differences between males and females in imagery generation (Campos 2014).

As a consequence, entertainment producers who aim to heighten enjoyment by making a lasting impression in audiences’ minds should carefully craft the product and support its consumption free of disturbances. In comparison, it seems to matter less who the target group is, at least in terms of demographics.

The Power of Imagery: Narrative Transportation, Immersion, and Flow

The creation and activation of strong imagery enables consumers to enter certain unique psycho-physiological states in which entertainment motivations can be fulfilled by the consumer getting “lost” in the alternate world of the entertainment product. Three such states have received particular attention by entertainment scholars: narrative transportation, immersion, and flow. Follow us on a journey that makes a quick stop at each of them (but please avoid to get lost on the way...).

Narrative Transportation

Narrative transportation describes a situation in which a consumer experiences a story and, based on strong imagery, gets lost in it, losing track of the “real world,” in a physiological sense, for a while (van Laer et al. 2014). The story element and the existence of characters with whom the consumer can identify are crucial for transportation to occur; thus, it is mostly applicable to narrative forms of entertainment, such as novels, movies, TV series, and certain kinds of games.

As summarized by van Laer et al.’s “extended transportation-imagery model,” research has identified a number of factors that determine whether

an entertainment product triggers transportation processes. On a basic level, we know that effective transportation depends on both characteristics of the narrative and how it is told (the “story-teller”), along with the person who consumes it (the “story-receiver”). Regarding the narrative itself, research has stressed the need for identifiable characters in a story—if audiences cannot relate to the thoughts and feelings of a novel’s hero or heroine, they cannot empathize with these characters (Slater and Rouner 2002). Further, just as storylines can differ in their potential to create imagery depending on their vividness and emotional profile, storylines similarly vary in their “transportation potential.” Offering a sequence of events that can stimulate the creation of strong imagery has a better chance of transporting its readers, viewers, or players into the world in which the story takes place.

A third determinant is a story’s “verisimilitude,” or “fictional realism.” This is one that we, the authors, are particularly intrigued by, probably because it reminds us of countless entertainment experiences in which transportation was disrupted by a lack of verisimilitude. What we experienced was unrealistic—but because we are talking about entertainment narratives here, “realism” does not necessarily mean to comply with our “real” world in all ways. Instead, all fictional, fantastic worlds into which we are invited by the creative artists have laws, albeit almost always unwritten ones. When these laws become inconsistent or are broken, the violating action stands out as a disruption of the story and becomes a major distraction—the “oh-come-on-that-is-impossible” moment of entertainment consumption.

Almost all fictional stories change *some* aspects of reality (e.g., what if animals could talk? What if zombies really existed?), while keeping the others intact, which is important to enable the consumer to remain oriented. If a character suddenly develops a superpower for a reason that makes no sense or something else happens outside the laws of the storyline, the fictional world to which we have traveled implodes and we find ourselves back in the real one. If the number of “The-Most-Unrealistic-Movie-Scenes-That-Ruined-the-Entire-Film” lists on the Internet is any indication, we are not the only ones whose transportation has been quashed. Figure 6.7 lists five of our “favorites”: movie scenes in which the lack of verisimilitude damages the movie-watching experience.¹²⁵

But transportation not only depends on the product, but also the individual consumer—the “receiver” of the stories. van Laer et al.’s (2014) results show that transportation varies with whether a consumer pays attention and whether

¹²⁵Just in case you want to take a look yourself: all the scenes we list in the figure can be found at several places on the Internet, such as at <https://goo.gl/vPFPAs> (CATWOMAN), <https://goo.gl/f7HNHn> (THE MATRIX RELOADED), <https://goo.gl/MaBWVa> (AIR FORCE ONE), <https://goo.gl/TX8KcX> (STAR WARS: EPISODE II), and <https://goo.gl/xom5wR> (DIE ANOTHER DAY).

Film	Scene	Why lacking verisimilitude?
CATWOMAN	Catwoman playing basketball	Instead of showing her skills, it looked “like you showed two people a 15-second clip of a middle school game, and told them to do something vaguely similar and make it all look like a bad ‘90s music video” [1]
THE MATRIX RELOADED	One Neo fighting numerous Agent Smiths	“[T]he second the fighting begins, both Neo and Agent Smith get replaced with CGI so terrible it makes THE SIMS look like virtual reality.” [2]
AIR FORCE ONE	The crash scene	Ruining an action movie “with a rendering that looks like Microsoft Flight Simulator” [3]
STAR WARS: EPISODE II	Anakin and Padme romance scene	The lack of chemistry. The acting. The dialogue. Basically everything [4]
DIE ANOTHERDAY	James Bond surfing a tsunami	A scene that “looks slightly less realistic than playing GOLDENEYE on N64” [5]

Fig. 6.7 Some prominent movie scenes lacking verisimilitude

Notes: Authors' own illustration. The quotes in the figure are from the following sources: (1) <https://goo.gl/iy1qhR>; (2) <https://goo.gl/Am1792>; (3) <https://goo.gl/NHx868>; (4) <https://goo.gl/HWnbJ8>; (5) <https://goo.gl/amw7Qn>. Brands are trademarked.

he or she is familiar with a story or the genre in which the story is situated. Familiarity facilitates the understanding of a story and thus transportation, although the link is not necessarily linear—*very* high familiarity levels with a storyline can create perceptions of low levels of novel sensations and could, thus, reduce interest and attention which are needed for being transported.

Some scholars have also argued that consumer transportability is a stable personality trait, i.e., some people are transported more easily than others. Dal Cin et al. (2004), for example, tested a “transportability” scale with four movies and novels, finding that the measure was significantly linked with the extent of transportation. But it remains unclear whether such a “transportation trait” is anything more than a combination of consumers’ ability to produce imagery and their empathy skills—at this point, we have to wait for future research to shed more light on this issue.

Transportation has also been shown to vary with consumers’ gender. It is stronger for females because they, on average, have a higher empathy potential. No such differences have been found for different age groups (van Laer et al. 2014), despite the fact that younger consumers are less rooted in the “real world” and thus could be expected to have higher imagery potential. It seems that other factors also matter and counter this advantage.

Finally, the circumstances in which we consume narratives might also impact our transportation experience. We assume that such situational factors include whether we are consuming the stories alone or amongst others

(who might distract us, but also facilitate the transport) and the devices we use. Is a printed book more suited to transport us than a Kindle, a large TV screen more than a tablet or smartphone? Future technologies, and Virtual Reality in particular, make big bets on their transportation-enhancing powers.¹²⁶

What do we know about the consequences of transportation for consumers' reactions and behaviors? The concept has been linked, theoretically and/or empirically, with several of the key entertainment motives we discussed above. These findings underline the important role that transportation plays in the sensation-familiarity framework, as a mechanism that enables imagery to fulfill entertainment wishes. Green et al. (2004) suggest that transportation is not only a means for escapism (leaving the worries of the "real world" behind), but also for discovery/exploration (by creating an openness to new experiences), companionship (feeling as if one knows the entertainment characters), social learning (by offering simulations of alternate personalities and actions), and mood management (transporting experiences likely being "the most effective at managing moods," p. 319 in Green et al.).

Further support for the concept's relevance also comes from van Laer et al.'s (2014) integrated analysis of existing research findings on the links between transportation and consumers' liking of a storyline and their subsequent "behavioral intentions."¹²⁷ Both links are statistically significant and also substantial, with average *r* values of 0.44 and 0.31, respectively. Finally, transportation has also been shown to be highly correlated with the consumers' level of enjoyment, which is the inner driver of all our entertainment activities. In their studies of short stories and novel chapters, Green and her colleagues report correlation coefficients of 0.60 and above between the two concepts, which suggests that the intensity of transportation can, at least in certain entertainment settings, strongly determine the degree to which a story fulfills consumers' desire to be entertained.

Immersion

Immersion is a concept that is closely related to narrative transportation. It describes the consumer's sensory impression of being surrounded by an

¹²⁶See our discussion of technology later in this book for initial empirical findings regarding the use of virtual reality in entertainment.

¹²⁷The data analyzed by van Laer et al. includes heterogeneous settings beyond entertainment in which transportation has been studied by scholars, such as advertisements and website browsing. "Behavioral intentions" thus is a broad concept; example manifestations include a consumer's stated willingness to adopt an advertised product or behavior.

alternate (often virtual) world—this is why some scholars also refer to it as “spatial presence” (Madigan 2010).¹²⁸ When fully immersed, the senses of a consumer are tied to the alternate (entertainment) world; the “real world” is screened out and consumers make decisions that only make sense in the context of the imaginary world. A player fully immersed in the western game RED DEAD REDEMPTION will prefer to travel long distances via horse, instead of using “fast traveling” options provided by the game’s menu screen. The main difference between immersion and transportation is that the latter is closely tied to the *storyline* of an entertainment product, whereas immersion does not require a narrative at all. Its focus is on an entertainment product’s aesthetics and its “physical configuration” (Phillips and McQuarrie 2010, p. 388).

As a result, the concept of immersion is particularly relevant for experiences that are mainly aesthetic, rather than narrative. In the realm of entertainment, this applies to many video games and musical experiences for which narrative transportation is less explanatory. Think of the open worlds of games such as FAR CRY 4, SKYRIM, and MINECRAFT (which is about *creating* an alternate reality), the thrill of participating in a fictitious sports universe (such as in FIFA), or the absorbing experience of listening to a classical piece of music or a soaring movie soundtrack.

So, what are the critical factors that must exist for immersion to happen, and how do they differ from the drivers of transportation? Wirth et al. (2007) have suggested an integrative general model of immersion in which they distinguish two stages of immersion: (1) the cognitive creation of an alternate world and (2) the consumer’s acting inside of this world.¹²⁹ For immersion to happen throughout these stages, they argue that products must offer “rich” cues, and that these cues need to be consistent among each other. (And yes, as with transformation, individual consumer factors also matter for immersion, but we will get back to this in a moment.)

¹²⁸Let us note that some scholars have tried to set immersion apart from presence by considering immersion as the technological, “objective” element that causes the consumer’s psychological perception of presence (e.g., Wirth et al. 2007). Such definition (which restricts the immersion concept to its underlying technical forces), however, conflicts with the common understanding of immersion. Another group, including Bracken (2006), considers immersion as part of a more complex presence concept; these scholars separate immersion from what we consider here as elements of immersion itself (such as the perceived realism of the alternate world), which we do not consider helpful.

¹²⁹We find it an interesting question whether immersion is a binary or continuous concept. Wirth et al. (2007) argue for the former (“you are either in an alternate world or not”), but our own experiences suggest that a continuous interpretation is more appropriate: one’s perception of such a world is more or less exclusive, with presence experiences differing in depth and richness. The same question can be asked for narrative transportation.

The richness of cues partially overlaps with the idea of vivid and emotional stimuli that we discussed in the imagery section. But there is something else to it here: the more information the consumer receives regarding the alternate world, the less reason he has to question the world's existence. "Multi-sensory" cues, already highlighted by hedonic consumption pioneers Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), add more "realism" to the consumer's experiences. Seeing a realistically layered horse in a western setting is one thing, but also hearing it nicker or huff is another (Madigan 2010). Such richness makes the blank spots disappear in the consumer's inner image: the less of the alternate world that is left undefined, the easier it is for him or her to accept its existence. Other factors that immersion scholars argue will facilitate the consumer's perception of a rich alternate world include whether the product has a "challenging" character, which absorbs the consumer's mental resources and prevents him from looking at the alternate world with too much scrutiny (Madigan 2010). Also, a strong narrative, although not essential to immersion, *can* help the consumer "stay connected" to the alternate world (Wirth et al. 2007). Whereas the narrative aspect shows closeness to transportation, the challenging character links immersion to flow experiences (which we discuss next).

The consistency aspect of cues that enable immersion resembles the idea of verisimilitude as a transportation determinant. For immersion, scholars argue that cues need to be congruous, both amongst each other and with the rules of the world that the product is trying to establish. For example, if a player enters a tomb that has no burial chamber, sees American police cars in a European setting, or notes misspelled signs, the illusion that the alternate world is "real" is threatened (game designer Toby Gard, quoted in Stuart 2010). In games, congruity is particularly challenging when it comes to the integration and design of menus, heads up displays, tutorial messages, and advertising (Madigan 2010). Consistency is also influenced by the behavior of game characters (can I interact with them? Do they respond in a believable way?) and the technical fluidity of the presentation (e.g., no loading times between scenes).

Turning to characteristics of individual consumers, most arguments we offered in the context of transportation also apply for immersion (familiarity with the genre, etc.). And stable consumer traits have been linked with immersion too: the "immersive tendency" concept by Witmer and Singer (1998), which reminds us of the consumer transportability trait, has been found to explain 13% of the amount of immersion in a role-playing game study with 70 students (Weibel and Wissmath 2011). Wirth et al. (2007) point at two sub-traits: they argue that consumers also differ in their

“suspension of disbelief” (some of us pay more attention to “real-word” factors and incongruous cues than others and thus have a better chance to be transported) and in how easily we become fascinated with phenomena that are distinct from our everyday life (see also Wild et al. 1995). Finally, the consumption situation (such as the devices used) will also play a certain role, as it does with transportation, but little research exists to document the exact nature of the impact.

Regarding outcomes, immersion is, like transportation, positively correlated with consumers’ enjoyment of entertainment products, although fewer studies have specifically addressed immersion consequences. When Visch et al. (2010) manipulate immersion in a film-viewing experiment, comparing a high immersive condition (i.e., so-called CAVE viewing, where projectors illuminate multiple walls in a cube) with a somewhat less immersive condition (3D viewing), they find enjoyment (measured via a “beautiful” rating) to be more than 40% higher for the former condition.¹³⁰ And in their role-playing game study, Weibel and Wissmath measure immersion and enjoyment directly, finding a strong positive correlation of 0.53. However, a path analysis of their data suggests that, in the game context of Weibel and Wissmath’s study, the link between immersion and enjoyment is not direct. Instead, they find that it is mediated by consumers’ flow state—which we discuss in the next section.

Flow

The concept of flow adds a specific perspective on consumers’ cognitive processes. Whereas both transportation and immersion focus on the imaginative aspects of consumption, flow is more interested in the active contributions of the consumer to an experience. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1975, p. 43), who introduced and has strongly shaped the concept, describes flow as a state in which consumers “act with total involvement.”

A flow state is associated with a holistic energetic feeling; it is characterized by an intense level of immersion, a distorted sense of time and a high level of perceived personal control in the activity. In contrast to transportation and immersion, the flow concept has not been developed with a particular focus on entertainment experiences. Instead, it is a rather general concept that has been applied to all kinds of hedonic activities, as well as

¹³⁰They also find that immersion goes along with higher levels of consumer emotions (positive or negative), adding further evidence for the coexistence of imagery and emotional processing of entertainment consumption.

other behaviors that are driven by intrinsic motivation, such as the composition of music (e.g., MacDonald et al. 2006) and browsing the Internet (e.g., Hoffman and Novak 1996).

The aspect of flow that sets it apart is “control”—flow necessitates balancing the requirements of the consumer’s activity with his or her skills. A flow perspective considers the consumption of an entertainment product as a “task” that a person chooses to accomplish, and flow occurs, and only does so, when the requirements of the task match the skills of that person. The task may be too difficult or too easy for the consumer—in either case, flow will not occur. Skills can be quite heterogeneous, depending on the product and task: cognitive (such as the ability to follow a complex novel plot), aesthetic (such as “seeing” the beauty of an ambitious musical composition), and motor skills (such as swiftly operating the buttons on a PlayStation controller).¹³¹

Whereas early flow research argued that flow results from *any* match of challenges and skills, Csíkszentmihályi and his colleagues later settled on a “minimum-challenge” condition—a consumer can only enter a flow state when the task provides at least a certain level of opportunities (e.g., Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi 2002). As we show in Fig. 6.8, a situation in which the consumer faces high challenges, but has low skills (think of a game in which you cannot master a certain level and are killed by the zombies every time you try), will cause anxiety (and probably frustration) instead of flow. On the other hand, if skills are significantly higher than those required to meet the challenges, we experience pure control, relaxation (when watching a soap opera on TV after an exhausting day in the office), or boredom (when the game is too easy for us), but—notably—no flow.¹³²

The critical role of the challenges and tasks a customer must tackle, on the one hand, and his or her skills to do so, on the other, affect managers’ and artists’ production decisions for all forms of entertainment. An intelligent mystery novel can cause frustration instead of flow if the reader lacks the skills to mentally keep up with the complex plot and solve the mystery, whereas an overly simple narration carries the risk of boring readers. Ruth et al. (2016) experimentally manipulate the complexity of music played by a radio program. They find that high musical complexity prevents con-

¹³¹For readers interested in a discussion of consumer skills required in entertainment, we recommend Sherry (2004).

¹³²We find some of the other states in Csíkszentmihályi’s current flow model somewhat debatable—given an equal level of challenges, why should higher skills turn boredom into relaxation? Overall however, the model provides us with a sound understanding of what is needed for a consumer to experience flow.

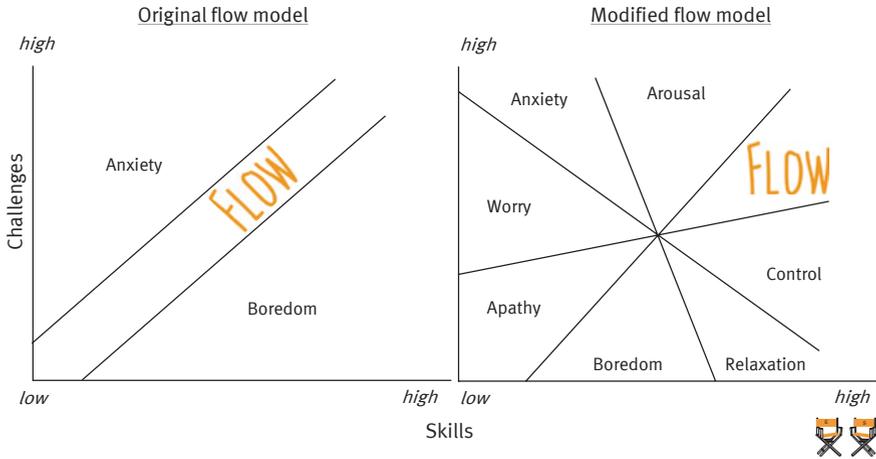


Fig. 6.8 Models of flow

Notes: Author's own illustration based on arguments in Nakamura and Csikszentmihályi (2002). With graphical contributions by Studio Tense.

sumers with low skills from experiencing flow, whereas for consumers with high skills, complexity actually facilitates flow, in line with our theoretical arguments.

Among entertainment forms, flow is particularly relevant for video games for which the consumption act designates a more active role for the consumer. In this context, flow is common—Hoffman and Nadelson (2010) report that 89% of gamers who played games five hours or more per week experience a distorted sense of time when playing, a key facet of the flow experience. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that most scholarly research on flow in entertainment deals with games.

In addition to control, immersion is a key element of flow, and the close link between the two concepts has been empirically shown. Bachen et al. (2016), applying structural equation modeling to data from players of a role-play game, find that immersion explains 28% of flow, and Weibel and Wissmath (2011) report a correlation of 0.34 (i.e., 12% shared variance) in a similar setting.

As is the case with transportation and immersion, scholars have argued that the level of flow someone experiences is influenced by the consumer's personality. Specifically, Csikszentmihályi has proposed that people differ in the degree to which they “enjoy life” or in their preference for hedonic activities or primary process thinking in general. In theory, such “autotelic personality” is associated with high levels of curiosity, persistence, and low

self-centeredness (e.g., Csíkszentmihályi 1997), but empirical evidence is yet lacking. Others have focused more on consumer abilities than hedonic preferences for explaining different flow levels (Baumann 2012). For example, Sherry (2004) makes an attempt to explain the greater fascination of male versus female consumers with certain kinds of video games with gender-specific abilities such as cerebral 3D rotation (which has been shown to be higher for males). We assume that the consumption context will also influence whether flow is experienced in a given situation, but again, few studies have tackled the issue.

Regarding the outcomes of flow, scholars have accumulated evidence that flow is a major driver of enjoyment and product usage/liking for different forms of entertainment. Because flow builds on intrinsic interest in an activity for which the “end goal” is often simply an excuse for taking part in the activity itself, such a link should not surprise us. In a path analysis for video games, Weibel and Wissmath (2011) find that flow explains 22% of consumers’ gaming enjoyment, Choi and Kim (2004) report that consumers’ flow perceptions account for even more than two-thirds of their intention to replay a game (based on structural equation modeling of survey data from about 2,000 Korean online gamers), and Smith et al. (2016) show that flow goes along with playing longer in a sample of 422 Australians (the correlation is 0.34). Results are similar for music; Ruth et al. (2016) calculate, in a study of radio music consumption, that flow explains more than 60% of the variation in a participant’s liking of the program. However, there is one soft spot in all of these studies. Usually very few (often even no) control variables are included in the empirical models. Thus, the reported effects for flow might actually be caused by transportation or immersion, rather than flow itself.

Finally, there may also be a “dark side” to flow experiences. In a survey of 395 members of virtual communities devoted to Internet games, Chou and Ting (2003) find, via structural equation modeling, that flow is strongly linked to various addictive behaviors, including obsession (i.e., being unable to stop playing) and withdrawal symptoms. Getting people excited with entertainment is certainly a great thing, but producers need to be aware of such unintended outcomes associated with the usage of their products. Ignoring them may eventually harm not only the customers, but also the reputation of a product, company, and industry, as a whole.

Before we move on to the final section of our consumer behavior chapter in which we discuss the process of decision making for entertainment products, Fig. 6.9 summarizes what we have discussed here about the three experiential states of narrative transportation, immersion, and flow, naming their similarities as well as their main conceptual differences.

<i>State/ Concept</i>	<i>Narrative Transportation</i>	<i>Immersion</i>	<i>Flow</i>
<i>Definition</i>	The sensory impression of getting lost in a story, losing track of the “real world” in a physiological sense	The sensory impression of being (spatially) present in an alternate world, with the “real world” being screened out	A state in which consumers act with total involvement
<i>Of main relevance for ...</i>	Entertainment for which the narrative is focal (novels, films, TV series)	Entertainment for which aesthetics are focal (video games, music)	Entertainment experiences which assign an active role to consumers (and also other activities in which consumers engage with intrinsic motivation)
<i>Dominant mechanism</i>	Strong imagery and empathy with the story’s characters	Strong imagery to create an alternate world and act in it	Immersion and the balancing of challenges of the entertainment product and consumer skills
<i>Product determinants</i>	Identifiable characters; storylines with imagery potential; verisimilitude	Rich depiction of alternate world (multisensory, comprehensive); challenging; strong narrative	See immersion; features that determine the product’s challenges for the consumer (e.g., cognitive, aesthetic, motor skills)
<i>Other determinants</i>	Familiarity of consumer with story/genre; transportability trait; demographics; contextual factors (e.g., devices, social constellation)	Familiarity; immersive tendency; suspension of disbelief; absorption trait; contextual factors	“Autotelic” personality and abilities; contextual factors
<i>Empirically suggested outcomes</i>	Linked with entertainment motives; enjoyment; product liking; behavioral intentions	Linked with emotions; enjoyment	Enjoyment; product liking; behavioral intentions; usage time; addictive behaviors

Fig. 6.9 A nutshell comparison of narrative transportation, immersion, and flow

Note: Author’s own creation.

A Process Model of Entertainment Consumption

“We really don’t know the decision-making process of moviegoers as well as we should.”

—*Studio marketing executive (quoted in Stradella Road 2010)*

Our sensations-familiarity framework of entertainment consumption links the different psychological responses and states that combine within the consumer to create a desire to watch a movie, read a novel, play a game, or listen to a song. It also highlights those responses and states that people experience while consuming entertainment. But the framework does not tell us the *process* that consumers go through when deciding whether a particular entertainment product, out of the myriad of available options, is well-suited to provide the desired level of pleasure or enjoyment.

Although this question is of obvious relevance for managers, relatively little is actually known about this process, as evidenced by this section’s introductory quote. The main reason is that traditional models of “the” consumer decision-making process, which are taught in MBA classrooms and management training sessions around the world, are just too generic, and do not provide sufficient room for the particularities of entertainment, as we discussed them earlier in this book. Models such as the classic “attention-interest-desire-action” chain are constructed at such a high level of abstraction that they enable only limited insights into how consumers confront the entertainment particularities when searching for a product that entertains them.

The model of entertainment decision making we present on the following pages builds on general process models of consumer behavior, but even more so, is it inspired by the work of Hart et al. (2016). To better understand how consumers make decisions about entertainment, these authors applied a qualitative introspective research approach, drawing on the rich personal experiences of just *one* consumer, the smallest of all possible sample sizes. Our own decades-long studying of consumers’ entertainment choices suggest that the insights from Hart et al. (2016) align spot-on with reality. Based on their insights, we distinguish between three major stages through which consumers proceed when making decisions regarding an entertainment product: (1) sensemaking, (2) decision making, and (3) the consumption experience itself.

These three stages happen sequentially, but the process is not “linear”—feedback loops between the stages are possible and are the norm rather than the exception. How long does the process take? The decision can be made in what seems like a snap (nearly automatic processing), but it can also be made carefully and slowly over the course of some minutes, hours, or

even days (deliberate processing); in either case, we argue that the consumer actually goes through a staged process. Let's take a closer look at what happens in each of the stages and how they are interlinked.¹³³

Phase 1: Sensemaking. In the initial stage of the decision-making process, consumers "make sense" of a product to which they have been exposed. Sometimes this exposure happens intentionally when we are purposefully looking for a product to entertain us. But in other cases, we just stumble upon an ad or store display, or a friend or social network contact says "you've got to see/read/hear/play this" Some of the products to which we are exposed are new to the market (often even yet-to-be-released), whereas others have been out awhile, but we were not previously aware of them (or had ignored them at a prior time).

Regardless of the specifics of the situation, consumers automatically "fit" the product into their very own personal "classification scheme" of entertainment products, based on their sensing of and the processing of the information they receive about the product. This information might be fragmentary (e.g., a first teaser trailer or a friend sharing a vague rumor) or very detailed (e.g., information on every element of the product and its quality). In this sensemaking phase, consumers use their knowledge about, and feelings toward, elements and facets of a new entertainment product (such as the genre of a movie and the actors participating in it) to subconsciously develop imagery and anticipated and anticipatory emotions regarding the product.

Think about your reaction when you first heard about the filming of a *BLADE RUNNER* sequel. You were trying to "make sense" of it. If you are an ardent fan of the original classic (just like one of this book's authors), the information might have caused skepticism to bubble up, particularly when you hear that the original film's director will only produce (but not direct) this time. You try to figure out if the new director, Denis Villeneuve, is any good by reading reviews about his earlier works, maybe even watching a few of them on Netflix or DVD. Hearing that the writer of the original is crafting the sequel's screenplay excites you, but knowing that his co-writer authored the misguided *GREEN LANTERN* movie dampens your anticipation. Who will be in it? The fact that Harrison Ford will return and co-star with Ryan Gosling, who was so cool in *DRIVE*, excites you and creates inner images. The vividness of these inner images is heightened by the first stills shared via the Internet. Watching the teaser trailer then triggers high arousal. You can't wait to see the film anymore; you are filled with desire to do so.

¹³³Wohlfeil and Whelan (2008) as well as Batat and Wohlfeil (2009) offer additional rich insight into consumers' entertainment consumption process in form of introspection studies.

In other cases, sensemaking will create much less anticipation and desire. A remake of *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*? Why filming again what was perfect the first time? No one can replace Steve McQueen and Yul Brynner. And when you quasi-accidentally stumble over the film's trailer on YouTube and learn that it does not even feature that glorious music theme, your desire cools off even further.

In any case, the outcome of such sensemaking is a certain level of desire for the product that will clearly differ between products; it is, like all consumer judgements about hedonic products, of a holistic type (versus attribute-based) and highly idiosyncratic for each consumer, based on his or her previous knowledge and experiences, preferences and motivations. It is this desire (or the lack of it) which results from sensemaking that mediates all future activities in the process.

Phase 2: Decision making. Based on the desire for a product that is experienced as the outcome of the sensemaking phase, the consumer's brain will, if a critical level of desire is exceeded, produce an intention to experience the product. Then, and only then, the consumer will explore consumption options. If this threshold is not reached, consumption of the product will not take place (at least not until desire changes). In the latter case, the process is interrupted, with the consumer either exploring other entertainment products (of the same form of entertainment—watching another movie—or a different form—e.g., playing a game) or engaging in something completely different (e.g., going to bed, working).

Desire and a resulting inner intention to consume are necessary for consumption, but they are not sufficient. Whether consumption eventually happens depends upon several contextual forces. Such forces include the consumption environment (e.g., is there a movie theater close enough which shows the film? Or can it be downloaded from iTunes? Does the movie's age rating allow the consumer to attend a screening?), the situational environment (e.g., does the consumer have enough time and money? Is the consumer in the right mood?), and the social environment (are friends available or are they insisting on doing something else?). These environmental conditions can also amplify or reduce the level of desire experienced by the consumer (and, subsequently, his or her consumption intention). For example, knowing that you simply do not have the time to watch a movie can subconsciously *suppress the development* of high levels of desire (to avoid disappointment), or can actually *lower an existing desire* when the consumer realizes this time constraint at a later point in the process.

In this phase, the cultural role of the product also matters. Is the product consistent with the subjective social norms of the consumer's local culture

or society? For example, is experiencing a critically acclaimed drama movie such as *LOVE* considered appropriate if the film violates social norms by containing explicit hardcore sex scenes filmed in 3D? Do the film's good expert reviews and "art value" justify the consumer's desire and consumption intention under these circumstances? Like environmental forces, subjective norms can also influence the level of desire experienced by the consumer.

Phase 3: The consumption experience. It is during consumption when the consumer's future behavior regarding the product is determined. The consumption experience can trigger additional search activities. A consumer may look for new information to figure out how producers filmed the uninterrupted six-minute tracking shot in the TV series *TRUE DETECTIVE*.¹³⁴ But the experience of consuming the product can also stimulate the consumption of other (multi-)sensory stimuli, such as watching a movie again, listening to its soundtrack via Spotify, or purchasing its merchandise (think *STAR WARS* lightsabers). The quality of the experience also determines whether and how consumers communicate about the entertainment product via social media, websites, or personal exchanges with friends.

So, this is the whole picture of how we consume entertainment then? Not yet. Our discussion so far has largely glossed over one important aspect of entertainment products—their *social* dimension. Because entertainment consumption often involves and is influenced by social factors, a deeper look is warranted into the social environment that we have mentioned only cursorily in our discussion of the process model above. Consumers often prefer to enjoy entertainment together, in groups instead of alone. Because entertainment has a vital cultural function, consumers go to the movies together with their friends and spouses, play games with them (and others over the Internet), and listen to music with others at a party or dancing in a club.

Panel A of Fig. 6.10 shows a stylized overview of the process of entertainment consumption, flowing through the three stages of sensemaking, decision making, and the consumption experience, along with naming the different concepts involved in each stage. But it illustrates the full process model for two different consumers: one female who develops a desire for the fantasy classic *THE NEVERENDING STORY*, and a male consumer who, based on processing information about the film, desires to see the last-days-of-Hitler war drama *DOWNFALL*. Panel B of the figure then adjusts the process for the case that both want to go *jointly* to the movies. In our example, they end up seeing the raunchy, profanity-rich German hit comedy *FACK JU GÖHTE*, for which they both feel a desire to watch—together!

¹³⁴In case you want to know: please check out Fukunaga (2014).

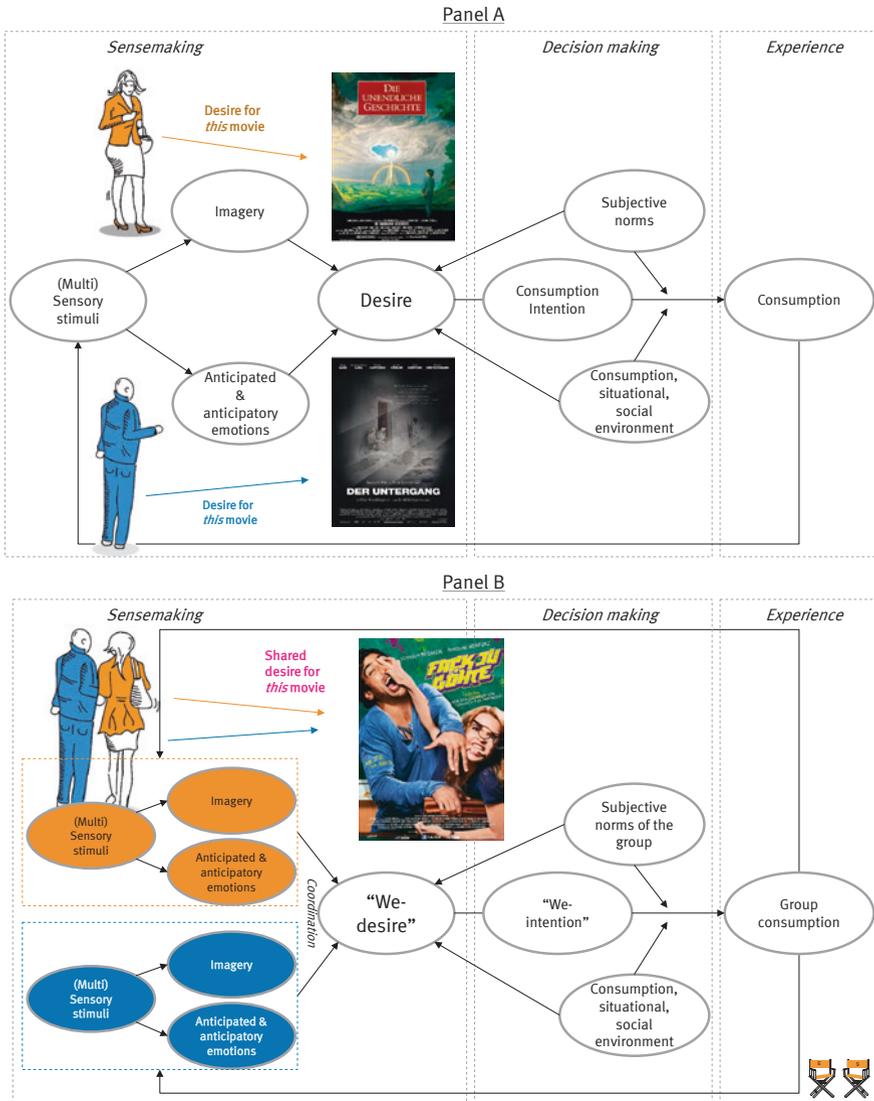


Fig. 6.10 A model of the entertainment decision-making process

Notes: Authors' own illustration. Panel A describes entertainment decision making when consumers act in isolation; Panel B shows the process for groups. Posters for THE NEVERENDING STORY, DOWNFALL, and FACK JU GÖHTE are © Constantin Film Verleih, with permission. With graphical contributions by Studio Tense.

In the “entertainment-consumption-as-a-group” model, we draw from Bagozzi’s (2000) theory of “intentional social action.” In it, Bagozzi postulates that groups are characterized by a certain “We-ness”: the group members share their actions, beliefs, attitudes, and their desires, being aware of this “We-ness.” The group’s subsequent social action (such as the two consumers watching a movie together in our little example) is based on a joint “We-desire” for a common goal. Such “We-desire” emerges through coordination and interactions between the group members. In the example in the figure, the two consumers skip their original plans because the other group member had discrepant thoughts and feelings about their respective favorite choices. As a group, they develop a “We-desire” for a third movie, *FACK JU GÖHTE*.

If a critical threshold level of joint desire is passed, a “We-intention” is formed such that the group members become committed to act *as a body* to consume the product together. There is also initial evidence that such social entertainment action can influence the enjoyment derived from the consumption act: Ramanathan and McGill (2007) find, in an experiment with 57 students watching a clip from the TV show *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*, that group consumption results in higher enjoyment.¹³⁵ However, it seems safe to say that group cohesion and other factors will moderate such “group effects”: going out with a potential love interest who does not reciprocate one’s feelings will probably *not* result in a heightened positive evaluation of the dance music.

Finally, Intentional Social Action theory can also help us to explain the activities of groups that have much weaker social ties. Think of brand communities or social networks (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002), but you could even go more broadly to like-minded fans/consumers, in general. All of us know what can happen when fans share the desire for a new entertainment product: it sparks anticipatory “buzz” behaviors, which are easily observable in our social media feeds, real-life conversations, trending topic lists online, etc. Such buzz expresses the large-scale “We-desire” of fans and consumers who are usually not directly connected, but know each other often only via their buzz behaviors. The “We-desire” of this amorphous group then might send a positive signal to those who have not yet joined the “movement” (and who doesn’t want to be a fan of “the next big thing!”), which can initiate a virtuous circle, spreading to even more consumers.¹³⁶

¹³⁵This effect can be subconscious: the consumers attributed this enjoyment to the quality of the show, not to the presence of the other group members.

¹³⁶For a discussion of the buzz concept and its role for product success, please refer our chapter on “earned” entertainment communication; in it, we return to the idea of “We-desire” cascades.

Concluding Comments

Understanding consumers is key for successfully managing entertainment because it is consumers who ultimately adopt (or ignore) new entertainment products. Even in those constellations in which advertisers or subsidy providers are a firm's main direct source of revenue and consumers do not hand over hard-earned dollars to access the products, it is the reactions of consumers that eventually determine an entertainment product's long-term success. In this chapter, we bring together a large number of scholarly studies to present a framework that explains—in a practical way—consumers' cognitive and emotional reactions to entertainment products, and how these reactions result in behaviors that include decisions of whether or not to consume a film, game, book, or song.

In short, firms must ensure that their products provide experiences that create desired levels of sensations for consumers to generate desirable emotions and imagery. But it is not only the sensations that drive enjoyment—consumers also value a new product's familiarity, the return of beloved heroes, places, and tunes which link new experiences with favorite previous ones. Combining sensations and familiarity in the right way attracts consumers and sparks their enjoyment via triggering emotions and cognitive processes that allow consumers to get transported into alternative universes and get “lost” in them. Such transportation then helps to realize key consumer entertainment motives such as escapism and social learning.

Determining the right combination of sensations and familiarity is a huge challenge though, as the links between the framework elements are complex and often subtle—too familiar offerings carry the danger of satiation. Emotions are multi-dimensional and the simulated nature of entertainment implies the distinction between immediate and later reactions. And transportation success is not only affected by the product, but also by consumer and situational factors.

In combination with an understanding of the unique characteristics of entertainment products and markets and the industry's value-creation processes and business models, this understanding of entertainment consumers lays the ground for Part II of this book: the managing and marketing of entertainment.

References

- Addis, M., & Holbrook, M. B. (2010). Consumers' identification and beyond: Attraction, reverence, and escapism in the evaluation of films. *Psychology & Marketing, 27*, 821–845.
- Almond, D. (2006). Introduction. In D. Hahn, L. Flynn, & S. Reuben (Eds.), *The ultimate teen book guide* (Vols. VII–VIII). London: A & C Black Publishers.
- Arnold, M. B. (1960). *Emotion and personality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Askin, N., & Mauskapf, M. (2017). What makes popular culture popular? Product features and optimal differentiation in music. *American Sociological Review*, forthcoming.
- Aurier, P., & Guintcheva, G. (2014). Using affect–expectations theory to explain the direction of the impacts of experiential emotions on satisfaction. *Psychology & Marketing, 31*, 900–913.
- Bachen, C. M., Hernández-Ramos, P., Raphael, C., & Waldron, A. (2016). How do presence, flow, and character identification affect players' empathy and interest in learning from a serious computer game? *Computers in Human Behavior, 64*, 77–87.
- Bagozzi, R. P. (2000). On the concept of intentional social action in consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*, 388–396.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 16*, 2–21.
- Bartsch, A., & Viehoff, R. (2010). The use of media entertainment and emotional gratification. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences, 5*, 2247–2255.
- Batat, W., & Wohlfeil, M. (2009). Getting lost “Into the Wild”: Understanding consumers' movie enjoyment through a narrative transportation approach. In *Proceedings of ACR* (pp. 372–377).
- Baumann, N. (2012). Autotelic personality. In S. Engeser (Ed.), *Advances in Flow Research* (pp. 165–186). New York: Springer.
- Behrens, R., Kupfer, A., & Hennig-Thurau, T. (2017). Empirical findings on the role of sensations and familiarity for motion picture success. Working Paper, University of Münster.
- Bohnenkamp, B., Knapp, A.-K., Hennig-Thurau, T., & Schauerte, R. (2015). When does it make sense to do it again? An empirical investigation of contingency factors of movie remakes. *Journal of Cultural Economics, 39*, 15–31.
- Bracken, C. C. (2006). Perceived source credibility of local television news: The impact of television form and presence. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 50*, 723–741.
- Busch, A., & D'Alessandro, A. (2016). ‘Star Trek Beyond’ launches to \$59 M; ‘Lights Out’ electrifies; ‘Ice Age’ tepid; ‘Ghostbusters’ no Cinderella story—box office final. *Deadline*, July 25, <https://goo.gl/XyFPHm>.

- Bywaters, M., Andrade, J., & Turpin, G. (2004). Determinants of the vividness of visual imagery: The effects of delayed recall, stimulus affect and individual differences. *Memory, 12*, 479–488.
- Campos, A. (2014). Gender differences in imagery. *Personality and Individual Differences, 59*, 107–111.
- Choi, D., & Kim, J. (2004). Why people continue to play online games: In search of critical design factors to increase customer loyalty to online contents. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 7*, 11–24.
- Chou, T., & Ting, C. (2003). The role of flow experience in cyber-game addiction. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 6*, 663–675.
- Cline, E. (2011). *Ready Player One*. London: Arrow Books.
- Cohen, J. B., Pham, M. T., & Andrade, E. B. (2006). The nature and role of affect in consumer behavior. In C. P. Haugtvedt, H. Paul, & K. Frank (Eds.), *Handbook of consumer psychology*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Coursaris, C. K., van Osch, W., & Florent, S. (2016). Exploring the empirical link between game features, player motivation, and game behavior. *MCIS 2016 Proceedings*, Paper 53, 1–9.
- Craik, F. I. M., & Dirkx, E. (1992). Age-related differences in three tests of visual imagery. *Psychology and Aging, 7*, 661–665.
- Csikszentmihályi, M. (1997). *Finding flow*. New York: Basic.
- Csikszentmihályi, M. (1975). Play and intrinsic rewards. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 15*, 135–153.
- Dal Cin, S., Zanna, M. P., & Fong, G. T. (2004). Narrative persuasion and overcoming resistance. In E. S. Knowles & J. A. Linn (Eds.), *Resistance and Persuasion* (pp. 175–191). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- De Wied, M., Zillmann, D., & Ordman, V. (1994). The role of empathic distress in the enjoyment of cinematic tragedy. *Poetics, 23*, 91–106.
- Drolet, A., & Luce, M. (2004). The rationalizing effects of cognitive load on emotion-based trade-off avoidance. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*, 63–77.
- Ekman, P. (1999). Basic emotions. In T. Dalgleish & M. Power (Eds.), *Handbook of cognition and emotion* (pp. 46–60). Chichester: Wiley.
- Ford, R., Kit, B., & Giardina, C. (2017). Hollywood rethinks key movie franchises amid a mixed summer at the box office. *The Hollywood Reporter, 21*, <https://goo.gl/YcjgNd>.
- Fukunaga, C. (2014). How we got the shot. *The Guardian*, March 17, <https://goo.gl/qgrA3S>.
- Fowdur, L., Kadiyali, V., & Narayan, V. (2009). The impact of emotional product attributes on consumer demand: An application to the U.S. motion picture industry. Working Paper, *Johnson School Research Paper Series #22–09*.
- Galton, F. (1880). Statistics of mental imagery. *Mind, 5*, 301–318. [Available at <https://goo.gl/C39Uuc> as part of the “Classics in the History of Psychology” repertoire.].

- Gardner, J. (2013). Busting the Disney myth: Artist tears apart the unbelievably perfect anatomies of your favorite characters step-by-step. *Mail Online*, June 4, <https://goo.gl/384ana>.
- Green, M. C., Brock, T. C., & Kaufman, G. F. (2004). Understanding media enjoyment: The role of transportation into narrative worlds. *Communication Theory*, *14*, 311–327.
- Hart, A., Kerrigan, F., & vom Lehn, D. (2016). Experiencing film: Subjective personal introspection and popular film consumption. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *33*, 375–391.
- Henning, B., & Vorderer, P. (2001). Psychological escapism: Predicting the amount of television viewing by need for cognition. *Journal of Communication*, *51*, 100–120.
- Henning, V., Hennig-Thurau, T., & Feiereisen, S. (2012). Giving the expectancy-value model a heart. *Psychology & Marketing*, *29*, 765–781.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1980). Innovativeness, novelty seeking, and consumer creativity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *7*, 283–295.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1983). Predictors of self-projection, fantasy fulfillment, and escapism. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *120*, 63–76.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1987). Consumer preferences in literature, motion pictures, and television programs. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, *5*, 31–46.
- Hirschman, E. C., & Holbrook, M. B. (1982). Hedonic consumption: Emerging concepts, methods and propositions. *Journal of Marketing*, *46*, 92–101.
- Hoffman, D. L., & Novak, T. P. (1996). Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations. *Journal of Marketing*, *60*, 50–68.
- Hoffman, B., & Nadelson, L. (2010). Motivational engagement and video gaming: A mixed methods study. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, *58*, 245–270.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *37*, 509–523.
- Kawakami, A., Furukawa, K., Katahira, K., & Okanoya, K. (2013). Sad music induces pleasant emotions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *4*, 1–15.
- Kosslyn, S. M., Margolis, J. A., Barrett, A. M., Goldknopf, E. J., & Daly, P. F. (1990). Age differences in imagery abilities. *Child Development*, *61*, 995–1010.
- Lasseter, J. (2015). Technology and the evolution of storytelling. *Medium*, June 24, <https://goo.gl/dRsCxd>.
- LeDoux, J. (1996). *The mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Lee, B., & Lee, R. S. (1995). How and why people watch TV: Implications for the future of interactive television. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *35*, 9–18.
- Leung, R. (2004). Jimmy Buffet rediscovered. *CBS News*, October 4, <https://goo.gl/RsBv6o>.

- Lin, J. T., Wu, D., & Tao, C. (2017). So scary, yet so fun: The role of self-efficacy in enjoyment of a virtual reality horror game. *New Media & Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817744850>, forthcoming.
- MacDonald, R., Byrne, C., & Carlton, L. (2006). Creativity and flow in musical composition: An empirical investigation. *Psychology of Music*, *34*, 292–306.
- MacInnis, D. J., & Price, L. L. (1987). The role of imagery in information processing: Review and extensions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *13*, 473–491.
- Madigan, J. (2010). The psychology of immersion in video games. *The Psychology of Video Games*, July 27, <https://goo.gl/znZgNN>.
- Mansell, M. (1980). Dimensions of play experience. *Communication Education*, *29*, 42–53.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, *50*, 370–396.
- McAlister, L., & Pessemier, E. (1982). Variety seeking behavior: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *9*, 311–322.
- Nakamura, J., & Csíkszentmihályi, M. (2002). The concept of flow. In C.R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 89–105). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nemeth, B., Scheerens, L. J. J., Lijfering, W. M., & Rosendaal, F. R. (2015). Bloodcurdling movies and measures of coagulation: Fear Factor crossover trial. *BMJ*, *351*, 1–7.
- Pähler vor der Holte, N., & Hennig-Thurau, T. (2016). Das Phänomen Neue Drama-Serien. Working Paper, Department of Marketing and Media Research, Münster University.
- Palmgreen, P., & Rayburn, J. D., II. (1982). Gratifications sought and media exposure: An expectancy value model. *Communication Research*, *9*, 561–580.
- Petrova, P. K., & Cialdini, R. B. (2005). Fluency of consumption imagery and the backfire effects of imagery appeals. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*, 442–452.
- Pham, M. T. (1998). Representativeness, relevance, and the use of feelings in decision making. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *25*, 144–159.
- Phillips, B. J., & McQuarrie, E. F. (2010). Narrative and persuasion in fashion advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *37*, 368–392.
- Plutchik, R. (1980). *A psychoevolutionary synthesis*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Posner, M. L., & Snyder, C. R. R. (1975). Facilitation and inhibition in the processing of signals. In P. M. A. Rabbitt & S. Dornič (Eds.), *Attention and performance V* (pp. 669–682). London: Academic Press.
- Posner, J., Russell, J. A., & Peterson, B. S. (2005). The circumplex model of affect: An integrative approach to affective neuroscience, cognitive development, and psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology*, *17*, 715–734.
- Ramanathan, S., & McGill, A. L. (2007). Consuming with others: Social influences on moment-to-moment and retrospective evaluations of an experience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *34*, 506–524.

- Reber, R., Schwarz, N., & Winkielman, P. (2004). Processing fluency and aesthetic pleasure: Is beauty in the perceiver's processing experience? *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 8, 364–382.
- Reid, M. (2016). 16 sad songs to listen to when you need a good cry. *Lifhack*, <https://goo.gl/hreJSx>.
- Reisenzein, R. (1994). Pleasure-arousal theory and the intensity of emotions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 525–539.
- Rubin, A. M. (1981). An examination of television viewing motivations. *Communication Research*, 8, 141–165.
- Russell, J. A. (1980). A circumplex model of affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 1161–1178.
- Ruth, N., Spangardt, B., & Schramm, H. (2016). Alternative music playlists on the radio: Flow experience and appraisal during the reception of music radio programs. *Musicae Scientiae*, 21, 75–97.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54–67.
- Ryan, R. M., Scott Rigby, C., & Przybylski, A. (2006). The motivational pull of video games: A self-determination theory approach. *Motivation and Emotion*, 30, 347–363.
- Schäfer, T., & Sedlmeier, P. (2009). From the functions of music to music preference. *Psychology of Music*, 37, 279–300.
- Schäfer, T., & Sedlmeier, P. (2010). What makes us like music? Determinants of music preference. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 4, 223–234.
- Sherry, J. L. (2004). Flow and media enjoyment. *Communication Theory*, 14, 328–347.
- Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment-education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion. *Communication Theory*, 12, 173–191.
- Smith, L. J., Gradisar, M., King, D. L., & Short, M. (2016). Intrinsic and extrinsic predictors of video gaming behaviour and adolescent bedtimes. *Sleep Medicine*, 30, 64–70.
- Stradella Road (2010). Moviegoers 2010. Company report.
- Stuart, K. (2010). What do we mean when we call a game 'immersive'? *The Guardian*, August 11, <https://goo.gl/V3wLHA>.
- Tamborini, R., & Stiff, J. (1987). Predictors of horror film attendance and appeal: An analysis of the audience for frightening films. *Communication Research*, 14, 415–436.
- Thomas, N. J. T. (2017). Mental imagery. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. <https://goo.gl/PfTfuC>.
- Tomkins, S. (1962). *Affect imagery consciousness: Volume I: The positive affects*. New York: Springer.
- van Laer, T., de Ruyter, K., Visconti, L. M., & Wetzels, M. (2014). The extended transportation-imagery model: A meta-analysis of the antecedents and conse-

- quences of consumers' narrative transportation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40, 797–817.
- Visch, V. T., Tan, E., & Molenaar, D. (2010). The emotional and cognitive effect of immersion in film viewing. *Cognition and Emotion*, 24, 1439–1445.
- von Goethe, J. W. (1808). *Faust: A Tragedy*. Our English-language cite is from the 1870 edition translated by Bayard Taylor, published by The Riverside Press, Boston.
- Vorderer, P. (2003). Entertainment theory. In J. Bryant, D. Roskos-Ewoldsen, & J. Cantor (Eds.), *Communication and emotion: Essays in honor of Dolf Zillmann* (pp. 131–153). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Vorderer, P., Klimmt, C., & Ritterfeld, U. (2004). Enjoyment: At the heart of media entertainment. *Communication Theory*, 4, 388–408.
- Ward, M. K., Goodman, J. K., & Irwin, J. R. (2014). The same old song: The power of familiarity in music choice. *Marketing Letters*, 25, 1–11.
- Weibel, D., & Wissmath, B. (2011). Immersion in computer games: The role of spatial presence and flow. *International Journal of Computer Games Technology*, 2011, 1–14.
- Wild, T. C., Kuiken, D., & Schopflocher, D. (1995). The role of absorption in experiential involvement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 569–579.
- Wirth, W., Hartmann, T., Böcking, S., Vorderer, P., Klimmt, C., Schramm, H., et al. (2007). A process model of the formation of spatial presence experiences. *Media Psychology*, 9, 493–525.
- Witmer, B. G., & Singer, M. J. (1998). Measuring presence in virtual environments: A presence questionnaire. *Presence*, 7, 225–240.
- Wohlfeil, M., & Whelan, S. (2008). Confessions of a movie-fan: Introspection into a consumer's experiential consumption of 'Pride and Prejudice'. In *Proceedings of European ACR Conference* (pp. 137–143).
- Yee, N. (2006). Motivations for play in online games. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 9, 772–775.
- Zacks, J. M. (2015). *Flicker: Your brain on movies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zajonc, R. B. (1980). Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences. *American Psychologist*, 35, 151–175.
- Zillmann, D. (1971). Excitation transfer in communication-mediated aggressive behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 7, 419–434.
- Zillmann, D. (1988). Mood management: Using entertainment to full advantage. In L. Donohew, H. E. Sypher, & E. Tory Higgins (Eds.), *Communication, social cognition, and affect* (pp. 147–171). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Zuckerman, M. (1979). *Sensation seeking: Beyond the optimal level of arousal*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.