



## Experiential product framing and its influence on the creation of consumer reviews

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### ABSTRACT

We examine how experiential framing, an increasingly popular marketing tactic, influences consumer review behavior. Experiential framing is a communication strategy whereby marketers describe a material product as if it is an experience, something that the consumer lives through, rather than focusing on the product's functionalities and attributes. Based on prior work comparing the consumer relationship with products versus that with experiences as well as prior work on product review behavior and experiential marketing, we hypothesize that experiential framing increases consumers' likelihood of reviewing a product. Indeed, an examination of real world data as well as two lab studies find that framing a product as an experience is associated with increased word of mouth. Our results also support our proposed process; when products are framed as experiences consumers perceive them as more personal and self-definitional; this then increases consumer likelihood of engaging in the self-demonstrating activity of product review.

Marketers are increasingly adopting a strategy whereby they frame material products as experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). An experience is an event or series of events that a consumer lives through, while a product is a tangible object kept in one's possession (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Experiential framing is thus when marketing communications emphasize the encounter with the product – how it feels physically and emotionally, placing less emphasis on the product itself – its specific functionalities and attributes (Elliot, 2013; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Newman, 2012; Schmitt, 1999). See Appendix A for examples of ads using experiential framing versus more traditional material framing. Framing purchases as experiences is therefore a key element of an experiential marketing strategy (Schmitt, 2010).

Marketers are, undoubtedly, using experiential framing in an effort to achieve brand differentiation, and ultimately drive consumer preference. Indeed, both academics and practitioners describe the numerous benefits of experiential positioning, including improved attitudes and evaluations, brand loyalty, and brand satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Nysveen, Pedersen, & Skard, 2013; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Zarantonello, Jedidi, & Schmitt, 2013). In our work, we draw from social and consumer psychology research on experiential purchases to study a so far unidentified, but marketing relevant, consequence of this marketing strategy – increased word of mouth (WOM). We show that framing a material product like

an experiential one increases consumers' likelihood of reviewing the product. We also find that this behavior is, at least in part, driven by the seemingly more personal nature of the good that results from framing it as experiential.

This research, therefore, offers the following four contributions. First and foremost, we contribute to the growing literature on experiential marketing by identifying an important consequence of such a marketing strategy (increased review behavior) and the causal process that leads to it (increased perceived personal closeness to the product). The importance of consumer WOM to both consumers and companies cannot be over-estimated (Chen & Berger, 2016; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Nielsen, 2015; Packard, Gershoff, & Wooten, 2016; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009) and its importance is only increasing (You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi, 2015). As such, the significance of our finding will hopefully also increase overtime.

Relatedly, this research is the first to consider the interaction of two pertinent topics in marketing: experiential marketing and WOM. We identify experiential framing as a novel antecedent for the creation of consumer reviews. Moreover, in identifying experiential framing as a WOM antecedent, and perceived proximity between the product and the self as the mediating mechanism, we offer the larger implication that making a product seem more personal in other manners, besides experiential framing, may also lead to increased reviewing behavior. This is our second contribution.

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Third, this research offers an incremental contribution on the methodological front. Our studies examine consumer responses to print advertising, both preexisting, company-produced ads as well as more-controlled examples produced by us. Not only does this provide external and internal validity to our results but it is also a fairly novel manner in which to investigate experiential marketing. While several authors have discussed the potential benefits of experiential marketing for brands, very few have experimentally manipulated the presence versus absence of experiential marketing and examined the consequences. (Two notable exceptions are [Brakus et al., 2009](#) and [Zarantonello et al., 2013](#)). Also, while previous experiential marketing research has investigated television advertising ([Zarantonello et al., 2013](#)), we believe this is the first research to focus specifically on static image- and text-based communications, which are relevant to both online and offline marketing. Thus, our methodology offers something different for the academic knowledge on experiential marketing.

Fourth, the present research offers a theoretical bridge between two highly relevant yet generally isolated areas of investigation. Specifically, there is an ongoing debate (presented in the [Conclusion and general discussion](#)) between the more managerial work on experiential marketing ([Brakus et al., 2009](#); [Pine & Gilmore, 1999](#); [Schmitt, 1999](#)) and the more psychology-based work on experiential versus material purchases ([Dunn & Weidman, 2014](#); [Gilovich, Kumar, & Jampol, 2015](#); [Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2015](#)). We offer insights for both these areas of enquiry by examining managerially relevant techniques (communications design) and consequences (review behavior) while drawing our theoretical framework from consumer and social psychology. Our research therefore is relevant to both groups and, importantly, offers empirically-based guidelines useful to both researchers and managers who are seeking to frame products like experiences. Specifically, we identify experiential framing as product positioning that highlights the feelings and emotions that occur during use of the product, the level of product involvement, and the sociality around product use.

We next offer the theoretical justification for this identification of experiential framing before considering the literature on experiential purchases as well as the antecedents of WOM in order to motivate our hypotheses. We then present three studies offering evidence for these hypotheses.

## 1. Framing products as experiences

We identify experiential framing as a key element within the larger concept of experiential marketing. Experiential marketing is a marketing strategy that attempts to persuade consumers and establish a connection with them through a variety of methods including describing consumption as a holistic experience (as opposed to a more narrow portrayal of the product only), focusing on the experience that the consumer will have with the product (as opposed to on the product's functional benefits), or evoking specific types of experiences – sensory, affective, intellectual, bodily, and social ([Brakus et al., 2009](#); [Schmitt, 1999](#); [Schmitt et al., 2015](#)). Like any other marketing strategy, experiential marketing encompasses numerous aspects of the product such as packaging, pricing, availability, and positioning. Experiential framing is the part of experiential marketing involving communication strategy – how the product is described. Thus, experiential framing does not involve changing any aspect of the product itself, only the manner in which it is portrayed.

To understand experiential framing and why marketers are engaging in this practice, it helps to understand how an experiential good differs from a material one. By definition, experiences consist of events that a consumer lives through, as opposed to tangible objects that a consumer may keep ([Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003](#)). The experiential/material distinction can be understood as a continuum ([Carter &](#)

[Gilovich, 2012](#)). Some purchases fall at either extreme of the continuum such as movies, restaurants, and gyms at the experiential end versus jewelry, backpacks, and dishwashers at the material end. However, others fall closer to the middle and are harder to categorize. A video-game console, a wine collection, or a bicycle are tangible products that are purchased, largely, because of the experiences they offer. We propose that experiential positioning can be understood as the attempt of marketers to position their product, wherever it may lay on the continuum, closer to the experiential end.

Research comparing experiences to material possessions provides insight on the potential benefits offered by experiential positioning, as well as on the tools and techniques that could be employed by marketers seeking to use experiential framing. By definition, experiences are events that occur over a temporal sequence ([Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003](#)). Thus, experiential product framing focuses more on the action or the occasion around the product and its use, and less on the product itself. Experiences are also more involving, able to impact the consumer through multiple senses, and are therefore generally more arousing than products ([Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982](#); [LaSalle & Britton, 2003](#)). This may be a reason why experiences produce stronger emotional ties ([Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007](#)), and are better at advancing happiness ([Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003](#)). Marketers employing experiential framing when promoting material products are, thus, presumably trying to elicit the feelings, sensations, and emotions around the product and its use in order to capitalize on these benefits of experiences ([Brakus et al., 2009](#); [Schmitt, 1999](#); [Zarantonello et al., 2013](#)).

Typical experiential framing therefore employs sensorial stimuli and tries to persuade through vividness and transportation (traveling with the imagination), rather than presenting hard facts and objective product information, and trying to persuade through analytic evaluation or attributes such as performance and price ([Brakus et al., 2009](#); [Gallo, Escalas, & Sood, 2018](#); [Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982](#); [Zarantonello et al., 2013](#)). Experiences are also more likely to be shared with others ([Capriarello & Reis, 2013](#); [Kumar & Gilovich, 2015](#)). Therefore, another manner in which brands frame products as experiences is by emphasizing the social element of product use ([Schmitt, 1999](#)).

In sum, framing a product as an experience entails highlighting a number of dimensions such as the feelings and emotions that come with the use of the product, the level of involvement, and the sociality around the product and its use. These are important considerations for how we operationalize experiential framing in our studies.

## 2. Experiential framing and closeness to the self

We base the proposition that framing products as experiences increases consumers' willingness to generate WOM on yet another key difference between experiences and material products – consumers perceive experiential purchases as more relevant to the self and more self-definitional ([Carter & Gilovich, 2012](#)). When [Carter and Gilovich \(2012\)](#) asked participants to tell their life story and include elements of their purchasing history, participants were more likely to mention experiences than possessions. In another study, the majority of participants believed that knowing a person's experiential purchases rather than material ones would provide better insight into this new person's true self ([Carter & Gilovich, 2012](#)). An individual's memories of past experiences play an important role in the construction of personal identity ([Wilson & Ross, 2003](#)). Identity itself takes the form of a story ([McAdams, 2001](#)), with a structure similar to that of experiences, with a time sequence and relations of causality. Consequently, experiences turn into memories that are autobiographical and strongly connected to the self-concept ([Carter & Gilovich, 2012](#)). It follows that when brands frame their products as experiences this may also increase perceptions that the product is personal and connected to the self. Thus we predict that framing a material product as experiential will increase perceived

product closeness to the self.

### 3. Perceived product closeness and review behavior

That consumers perceive a product to be closer to the self has important consequences. Consumers use products that they feel are personally close to help them cultivate as well as express their self-concept, be a symbol of self-accomplishment, express individuality, and help them through life transitions (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Myers, 1985; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Here we investigate another potential consequence, one with more immediate ramifications for the product, and thus the marketer – whether increased perceived closeness to the self might also increase the likelihood of reviewing the product.

Consumer reviews are one of the most influential factors in the consumer decision-making process (Chen & Berger, 2016; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Nielsen, 2015; Trusov et al., 2009; You et al., 2015). It is only logical then that WOM is also a priority for marketers (Berger, 2013; Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010). However, reviews are a factor over which marketers have little control. Indeed, this is what gives reviews their strong influence: consumers recognize that reviews do not come from a biased source with intentions to influence purchase decisions (Nielsen, 2015). Instead, they presumably come from a seemingly more innocuous motivation to be helpful (Dichter, 1966; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). While marketers have little control over the content of the reviews, this research aims to demonstrate one manner in which they might influence the amount of reviews.

WOM has attracted a large amount of work from many researchers for many decades (for recent reviews see Berger, 2014; King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Babic Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016). For our purposes here, we concentrate on research on the antecedents of WOM: why consumers generate WOM. Early research identified four categories of WOM motivations: perceived product-involvement, self-involvement (gratification of emotional needs from the brand or product), other involvement (motivation to give something to another person), and message involvement (stimulated by corporate communications or how the product is presented in the media) (Dichter, 1966). Further work has used different typologies. For instance, Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013) categorize WOM antecedents regarding whether they are brand related, transmitter related, or context related. Other work classifies antecedents depending on the type of utility or benefit they provide to the WOM generator: focus-related utility (concern for other consumers, helping the company, social benefits, and exerting power), consumption utility (post-purchase advice-seeking), approval utility (self-enhancement and economic rewards), moderator-related utility (convenience and problem-solving support), and homeostase utility (expressing positive emotions and venting negative feelings) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Yet another classification differentiates between triggers (prime factors that cause WOM, such as responding to a recognized need, serendipity, or advertising) and conditions (factors that are not sufficient to generate WOM, but, given a trigger, increase its chances, such as closeness of giver and receiver) (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007).

Perhaps the most comprehensive meta-analysis of WOM antecedents is De Matos and Rossi (2008), who gather evidence from 127 empirical studies. They classify and rank the principal motives behind the generation of WOM and find that the main correlate is commitment (higher identification with the company), followed by perceived value (consumer's assessment of the utility of a product), quality, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (De Matos & Rossi, 2008). Finally, a more recent review suggests that all motives for WOM generation are, in one way or another, connected to the self, and can be categorized as impression-management, emotion regulation, information acquisition, social

bonding, or persuasion (Berger, 2014).

While prior research has identified numerous antecedents of WOM, no previous work has discussed experiential framing as a mechanism for the generation of WOM. This is an important contribution of our work: we identify and test an unexplored antecedent to WOM (experiential framing) and the psychological process that explains its mechanism (perceived proximity between the product and the self). At the same time, several of these classifications implicitly suggest that one strong antecedent of WOM creation is how personally important, relevant, or reflective the product is, in other words its psychological proximity. Indeed, consumers discuss topics, events, or brands they feel close to and identify with (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Yeh & Choi, 2011), and in general content that is more associated with the self (Chen & Berger, 2016). In this manner, we predict that experiential framing may be an antecedent of WOM creation. Formally we hypothesize:

**H1.** Framing a material product as experiential will increase consumer likelihood of reviewing the product.

**H2.** Perceived product closeness to the self will mediate the effect of experiential framing on consumer review behavior.

There is prior work that offers implicit support for H1. At the same time, such research suggests potential alternative mechanisms through which experiential framing may influence review behavior. For example, when consumers generate a review they recognize that, as in all communication, they are revealing aspects of the self (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008), making reviews a tool for self-enhancement in front of strangers (Chen, 2017). Consumers also recognize that discussing experiences does not have the negative connotation that is frequently associated with discussing material possessions (Van Boven, Campbell, & Gilovich, 2010). Thus, while experiential framing may make products more personal and thus more likely to be reviewed, it also may make a review seem less negatively perceived. However, the mechanism for such an explanation would also involve perceived product closeness. Similarly, prior work reveals that consumers share information that evokes high-arousal emotions (Berger & Milkman, 2012), and experiences are generally more arousing than products (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Thus, it may be that increased perceived arousal from experiential framing also increases review behavior. As such, we offer H2 and perceived product closeness as potentially one of several explanations for the effect we identify in H1.

### 4. Overview of studies

Before directly testing our hypotheses, we offer a pilot study designed to confirm that consumers review experiential products more so than material products, regardless of framing. Then our three main studies – using both archival and experimental data – test our hypotheses revealing how the framing of a material product as experiential can have a similar effect, and what drives this behavior.

### 5. Pilot study: preliminary analysis of review behavior on Amazon

In H1 we propose that consumers will review products that are framed as experiences more so than the same products without an experiential frame. An implicit assumption of this is that experiential goods are more likely to be reviewed than material ones; in other words, that products that are closer to the experiential end of the continuum tend to be reviewed more often than those closer to the material end of that same continuum. This pilot study serves to test this assumption.

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) (Amazon) is an ideal platform on which to consider

consumer reviewing. Amazon sells a variety of products including more experiential ones such as movies, videogames, and music, and more material ones, such as appliances, automotive parts, and office products. We obtained the consumer reviews posted for the top 10 most reviewed items in each of Amazon's 31 product categories<sup>1</sup> as of July 2017,  $M_{number\ of\ reviews} = 13,453.76$ ,  $SD = 3677.48$  (jeviz.com). We performed two simple analyses, one at the category level and one at the product level.

First, at the category level, we wanted to test whether more experiential categories were associated with a larger number of reviews. To that end, we had consumers rate the material versus experiential nature of each category. Specifically, forty-five participants recruited from Amazon's mechanical turk (53% female,  $M_{age} = 33.47$ ,  $SD = 7.54$ ) were provided with the definition of material and experiential purchases (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and were asked to rate each of the 31 Amazon categories on this attribute (1 = *definitely material*, 7 = *definitely experiential*; across category  $M_{rating} = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ). As expected, categories that were rated as more experiential had a higher number of average reviews. In other words, these two variables were positively correlated, ( $r = 0.30$ ,  $p < .05$ , see Appendix B.1). These results are consistent with previous findings implying that more consumers post reviews for experiential products than for utilitarian products (Pan & Zhang, 2011).

Second, across categories we ranked the products based on the number of consumer reviews garnered. Of the 30 most reviewed items ( $M_{reviews} = 41,200.94$ ,  $SD = 12,665.78$ ), 28 belonged to categories that were classified as more experiential than material (e.g. movies, music, books, and video games; full list in Appendix B.2).

Of course, Amazon categories and products within categories vary on numerous dimensions in addition to their material or experiential nature and, moreover, these dimensions may influence WOM behavior. For example, consumers may feel more obligated to review more expensive products or newer versions of products. Regardless of the reasons why, this pilot study offers suggestive evidence that products and categories that are more experiential are associated with increased WOM behavior, and this serves as an indication that the same may be true when keeping the product constant and varying the way it is framed. In the next study we look specifically at the experiential framing of a good and examine whether this is correlated with a greater number of reviews on Amazon.

## 6. Study 1: review behavior on Amazon

We again examined naturally occurring consumer product review behavior on Amazon. For every item on Amazon there is a webpage featuring, among other information, a product description supplied by sellers. We accessed a collection of product descriptions for a large sample of products and had them rated on their framing (from purely material to purely experiential) by two independent coders. We collected the number of consumer reviews on Amazon. In line with H1, we expected that the more experientially framed a product is, the more reviews it would have.

### 6.1. Method

We considered the top ten selling products in each of 28 product categories on Amazon (for the full list of product categories see Table 1). Given that our theory is about material purchases that are framed as intangible, experiential purchases, we excluded categories

<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid possible biases, we did not include Amazon products categories (e.g. Amazon Video) as well as Amazon products in our counts (kindle, gift card, TV series, Fire TV, etc.). If there was an Amazon product within the top ten most reviewed items in a category, we skipped it and included the eleventh most reviewed. In total we encountered 65 Amazon products.

**Table 1**

Study 1. Results of step-wise regression with consumer reviews on Amazon.com as dependent variable.

Variable	Coeff.	p < t	Coeff.	p < t	Coeff.	p < t
Experiential rating	0.090	0.038	0.089	0.021	0.061	0.086
Log price			0.027	0.436	-0.078	0.014
Mean number of stars			-0.122	0.165	-0.053	0.400
Number of characters			0.0004	0.000	0.000	0.012
Product type						
Arts, crafts, sewing					-0.791	0.000
Automotive					-0.408	0.028
Baby					-0.468	0.057
Beauty					-0.454	0.018
Books					-0.392	0.046
Camera & photo					-0.592	0.005
Cell phones & accessories					-0.284	0.175
Electronics					-0.152	0.508
Grocery					-0.238	0.220
Health & personal care					-0.454	0.043
Home & kitchen					-0.027	0.888
Industrial & scientific					-0.590	0.002
Jewelry					-0.489	0.033
Kindle store					-0.605	0.003
Kitchen					0.046	0.801
Magazine					-0.479	0.017
Movies & TV					-0.783	0.000
Musical instruments					-0.553	0.003
Office products					-0.824	0.000
Patio, lawn & garden					-0.280	0.128
Pet supplies					1.329	0.000
Shoes					-0.450	0.029
Software					-0.480	0.023
Sports & outdoors					-0.152	0.416
Toys and games					-0.919	0.000
Video games					-0.513	0.014
Watches					-0.652	0.001
Log Facebook likes					0.224	0.000
Constant	2.124	0.000	2.375	0.000	1.861	0.000

that do not entail physical objects. Accordingly, we excluded mobile applications, gift cards, and the Kindle store.<sup>2</sup> At the time of this study, as a complementary service to consumers and third party vendors, Amazon tracked the top 100 best-selling products within its 31 listed departments, updated every hour to provide current statistics such as the amount of days spent on the top sellers list. This data was collected between the hours of 4 pm and 9:30 pm EST on August 23, 2012.

Two independent coders, blind to our hypotheses, rated the product descriptions provided for each of these 248 products<sup>3</sup> on a 5-point scale (1 = *pure product framing*, 5 = *pure experience framing*; proportional reduction in loss index = 0.63, Rust & Cooil, 1994). The mean rating of the two raters was used. See Appendix C for the coding instructions. For our dependent measures we considered the number of reviews. We also collected data on product category, product type, price, average number of Amazon stars (1–5), number of Facebook “likes” as indicated on the product page, and length of the product description in number of words to serve as control variables.

As indicated in the Pilot Study, along with product category, product type can also influence review behavior. Thus we controlled for both in two separate analyses. While some categories were univocal (i.e.: all top ten items within Amazon category are the same product;

<sup>2</sup> It could be argued that, according to this criterion, other categories such as movies, music, software, or videogames should also be excluded. We believe that, different to what happens with a mobile app or a kindle book, the material aspect of a movie or a music album (the case, the cover, etc.) may have some inherent value for consumers (for instance, a consumer may get some satisfaction from the movies being placed on the shelf). Regardless, and as we report below, the analyses performed here do not change significantly whether we include or exclude these categories.

<sup>3</sup> Thirty-two products did not provide a product description.



e.g.: shoes, books, DVD's), other categories included diverse items (e.g.: the top ten items within the Appliances category include an electric kettle, a water pitcher, a sharpener, an electric grinder, and six water filters). In total, 26 products were found to have repeated items, for a total of 151 repeats.

## 6.2. Results

On average, products received 1113.55 Amazon reviews ( $SD = 3656.27$ ). The distribution of the number of reviews (skewness = 7.89) and Facebook likes (skewness = 12.46) was highly skewed. Thus, we log-transformed these variables. We conducted stepwise multiple linear regressions in order to evaluate the impact of product framing on the number of Amazon reviews.

Controlling for product category, price, average number of Amazon stars, length of the product description, and log number of Facebook likes, the degree of experiential framing had a significant positive impact on the number of Amazon reviews the product received ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $t = 1.57$ ,  $p < .1$ ). The overall regression equation was significant ( $F(32, 219) = 17.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and accounted for 73.45% of the variance. Results were similar and also significant when we controlled for the more specific variable of product type instead of product category.<sup>4</sup> Full results are provided in Table 1. See also Fig. 1.

## 6.3. Discussion

As predicted, there is a significant relationship between the framing of the description of a product and the number of reviews the product receives. In line with H1, the more experiential the description, the higher the engagement from the readers, in the form of writing a review. It is important to note that these results cannot be explained by the overall valence of the reviews (as measured in number of stars), or by the length of the seller-provided description. One could argue that it is more likely that consumers review products that are liked more or that are described in greater length. Nevertheless, this did not explain the results. The influence of framing on the number of reviews is positive and significant even when controlling for these factors. Similarly, our results also control for the Amazon category to which the products belong as well as the product. As demonstrated in our Pilot Study, some categories are more experiential than others and are therefore associated with larger numbers of reviews. What we find in this study is that, beyond this effect, experiential framing has a significant impact on review behavior. Moreover, even within a specific product category (e.g. diapers) the effect still holds. Having found supporting evidence for one of our main hypotheses, we now turn to a more controlled setting in which we can examine causality (Study 2) and mediation (Study 3).

## 7. Study 2: examining framing and reviewing with real ads

Study 2 was designed with three objectives in mind. First, we wanted to provide new evidence that experiential framing, more than traditional material framing, is associated with an increased likelihood of review behavior. Second, we wanted to build on the results found in Study 1 by providing the first building block towards demonstrating causation. And third, we wanted to provide some external validity to our findings, by using real ads from real brands in our stimuli.

<sup>4</sup> Controlling for product type, price, average number of Amazon stars, length of the product description, and number of Facebook Likes (log), the degree of experiential framing had a significant positive impact on the number of Amazon reviews the product received ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $t = 1.67$ ,  $p < .1$ ). The overall regression equation was significant ( $F(30, 211) = 9.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and accounted for 57% of the variance.

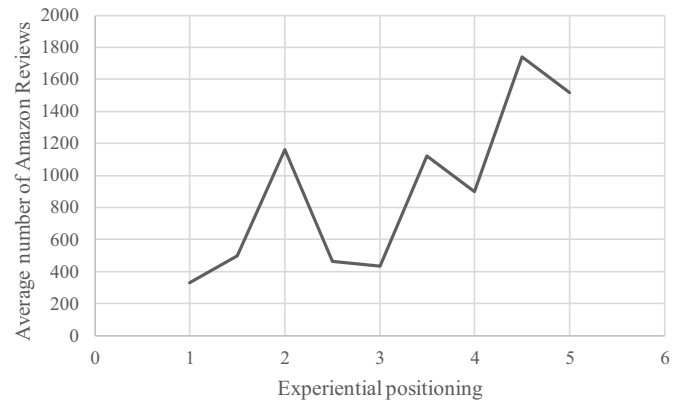


Fig. 1. Study 1. Experiential description and number of consumer reviews.

## 7.1. Method

### 7.1.1. Participants

Seven hundred and thirty (730) participants from Amazon's MTurk completed the study in exchange for compensation. Twenty-nine participants said they had seen the ad they were exposed to before and thus were eliminated. The final sample was, therefore, 701 (51% women,  $M_{age} = 34.74$ ,  $SD = 10.01$ ).

### 7.1.2. Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of 16 conditions in a 2 (product framing: material vs. experiential)  $\times$  2 (usage valence: satisfactory vs. dissatisfactory)  $\times$  4 (product type: Aleve (pain killers), Dyson (hair dryer), GoPro (cameras), vs. Arla (milk)) design. There is evidence suggesting the valence of consumer's experience with a product may influence likelihood of reviewing (Dubois, Bonezzi, & De Angelis, 2016), though the evidence is mixed as to whether review rates are higher for satisfactory or dissatisfactory purchases (Anderson, 1998; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Godes et al., 2005). In order to test whether our hypothesis is supported regardless of valence, we varied the satisfaction level of the hypothetical product purchase.

In all conditions, participants were told that they were going to see an ad for a product, and asked to "imagine this is a real purchase you are considering." Participants then saw one of the print ads. Next, they saw the manipulation of consumption experience valence. Specifically, and in line with previous literature (Inman & Zeelenberg, 2002; Maxham, 2001), they saw the following message: "Imagine that you have purchased this product, and you are quite happy (unhappy) with it."

Participants were asked to "Further imagine that the vendor contacts you and asks you whether you are interested in posting a review online. How likely are you to write this review?" They rated their likelihood of writing a review (from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much). This served as our dependent variable. Finally, participants responded to a number of control variables, regarding their familiarity with the ad ("yes", "no", "not sure"), their familiarity with the brand, and their expertise in the category (both on 7-point scales).

### 7.1.3. Materials

The ads consisted of four pairs of print ads that varied on product class. Within each pair a pretest confirmed that one ad used more material framing (focus on attributes, etc.), while the other used more experiential framing (focus on usage experience, etc.). See all eight ads in Appendix D. Twenty-one MTurk participants (37% female,  $M_{age} = 29.54$ ,  $SD = 4.57$ ) each rated a set of four of the eight ads (one per product class, randomly selected) on a number of measures (modified versions of the measures used in Zarantonello et al., 2013). Specifically, participants rated the extent to which the ad focused on

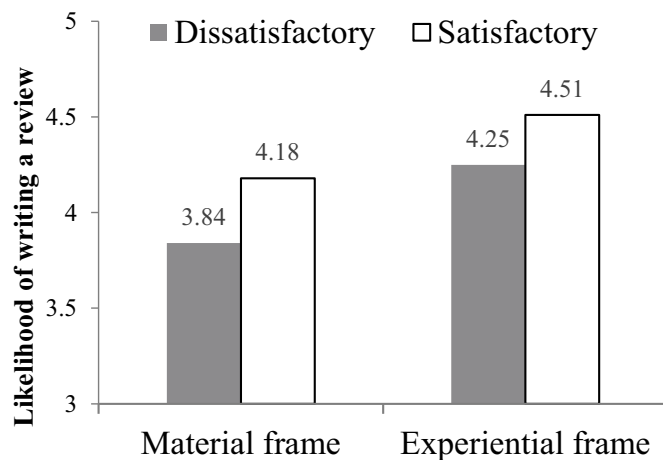


Fig. 2. Study 2. Likelihood of writing a review for material and experiential ads.

product attributes, applications, or benefits (material), sensory elements, feelings and emotions, or imagination and mental simulation (experiential) (from 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *strongly*). As expected, participants rated the experientially framed ads as more experiential than the materially framed ads ( $M_{\text{experiential frame}} = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 0.94$  vs.  $M_{\text{material frame}} = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ,  $t(82) = -2.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and materially framed ads as more material than the experientially framed ads ( $M_{\text{material frame}} = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 0.62$  vs.  $M_{\text{experiential frame}} = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ,  $t(82) = 4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## 7.2. Results

### 7.2.1. Likelihood of reviewing

A two-way ANOVA with framing and experience valence on review likelihood revealed a main effect of framing whereby experientially framed products ( $M_{\text{experiential frame}} = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ) were more likely to be reviewed than materially framed products ( $M_{\text{material frame}} = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ,  $F(1, 697) = 6.827$ ,  $p = .01$ ). There was also a main effect of consumption valence whereby consumers were more likely to review after a satisfactory experience ( $M_{\text{satisfactory}} = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) than a dissatisfactory one ( $M_{\text{dissatisfactory}} = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ,  $F(1, 697) = 4.458$ ,  $p < .05$ ). See Fig. 2. A three-way ANOVA revealed that product type did not interact significantly with either framing ( $F(3, 685) = 0.551$ ,  $p = .648$ ), or satisfaction ( $F(3, 685) = 0.764$ ,  $p = .514$ ) on likelihood of reviewing, thus we collapsed across product type for these analyses. Results did not change when we controlled for gender, age, brand familiarity, or category expertise, none of which predicted likelihood to write a review.

## 7.3. Discussion

Study 2 provides additional support for H1, and builds on the evidence found in the previous study. In Study 1, we identified a positive correlation between experiential framing and number of reviews, while Study 2 shows causation. Using real ads for real brands, we observe that participants reported being more likely to review a product when it is experientially framed, rather than framed as a material purchase, regardless of their consumption experience with the specific product, their familiarity with the brand, and their expertise in the category.

Study 2 had two ads from each brand to control for many potential alternative explanations, such as brand-self-identification (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Tuškej et al., 2013; Yeh & Choi, 2011), brand personality (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013), or more generally attitudes towards the brand (Berger, 2014). The current study provides evidence that, controlling for brand-

related factors, experiential framing is associated with an increased likelihood of generating reviews. Nevertheless, while using real ads has some advantages, it also has disadvantages. For instance, the level of information across ad versions can vary, as do the explicit or implicit calls to action. Study 3 addresses such concerns.

## 8. Study 3: examining framing, reviewing, and perceived proximity in the lab

Study 3 offers additional support that framing a product as an experience indeed increases consumer willingness to review (H1), and also tests whether this effect is mediated by the perceived proximity between the potential purchase and the self (H2).

Along with offering support for H1 and H2, Study 3 was designed to rule out two important alternative explanations for the process. First, in line with prior work on experiences versus products, consumers may be more likely to review an experience-framed good than a product-framed one because they consider a review of the former more helpful (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1993; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). To address this alternative explanation, we included a measure of perceived helpfulness of the review. Second, there is also evidence that consumers are more willing to share interesting and arousing content (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Even if interest and arousal may be precisely part of the expected benefits of experiential framing, we control for these characteristics in our stimuli, therefore providing a strong test of our hypothesized mechanism: proximity between the purchase and the self.

We expect participants will be more likely to review a good when it is experientially framed than when it is not, regardless of whether they perceive their review as more helpful and regardless of how interesting the product is perceived to be. Finally, by focusing on one material good and manipulating its framing in two ads that we create, we are able to control for product category, product, and information content.

## 8.1. Method

One-hundred and twelve (112) students (Female = 58.43%,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.34X$ ,  $SD = 5.52$ ) at an American university participated in this study for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (framing: experience vs. product)  $\times$  2 (usage valence: satisfactory vs. dissatisfactory) between subjects design.

### 8.1.1. Manipulation of product framing

Participants saw an advertisement for a pair of running shoes using either a traditional product-frame or an experience-frame. Specifically, while the product attribute information was held constant, the experience-framed ad asked participants to "Imagine yourself running through the woods with a pair of Westerley's Titan HyperMotion shoes..." and then described various attributes of the product (modified from Escalas, 2007). The experience-framed ad included a still picture of a woman running through a park and a sound clip of a runner breathing. The product-framed ad listed the same attribute information but did not include imagery language, a picture, or a sound clip (both versions of the ad are shown in Appendix E). Thus the experience-frame manipulation mimicked the type of experience-framing used by brands today, focusing on the occasion more than on the product and increasing the sensorial appeal, involving participants in a "consumption-like experience based on real – or at least realistic – product samples" (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). At the same time, and in order to avoid confounds, we did not vary information content across conditions nor did the ads include any appeals to the social and sharing component of experiences.

We run a posttest online to verify the comparability of the two versions of the stimuli across important dimensions. In developing the stimuli, our intention was to manipulate whether the shoes are perceived as a material possession or as an experience, controlling for

other dimensions that could explain our results. In exchange for a small compensation, 324 participants (57.87% female,  $M_{age} = 33.48$ ,  $SD = 7.33$ ) were randomly assigned to view the material or experiential version of the ad. Participants rated the shoes and the ad on a number of dimensions. Results reveal participants rated the ad to be equally informative across conditions ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 5.33$  vs.  $M_{material\ frame} = 5.25$ ,  $t(322) = 0.575$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Additionally, participants found the shoes to be equally interesting ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 5.10$  vs.  $M_{material\ frame} = 5.01$ ,  $t(322) = 0.551$ ,  $p > .10$ ). In contrast, and as expected, participants in the experiential-frame condition perceived the ad to be easier to understand ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 5.74$  vs.  $M_{material\ frame} = 5.33$ ,  $t(322) = 2.829$ ,  $p = .005$ ), and more pleasant ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 5.55$  vs.  $M_{material\ frame} = 5.04$ ,  $t(322) = 3.579$ ,  $p < .001$ ). That the experiential version of the ad is easier to understand is important, since – as we argue above – one of the possible reasons why someone may be willing to generate WOM is to help others make better decisions. One possible reason for a consumer to post a review for an experiential purchase is precisely that experiential purchases tend to be more uncertain, and it is more difficult to assess their quality (Jain & Posavac, 2001; Nelson, 1970; Wright & Lynch, 1995). In our stimuli, the experiential ad is easier to understand than its material counterpart, therefore decreasing the likelihood that participants generate WOM because of their desire to be helpful. Finally, the experiential ad was more pleasant. As reviewed, there is mixed evidence about the impact of positive versus negative valence of the usage experience on WOM behavior. Thus, this difference cannot convincingly explain the hypothesized effects. As in Study 2, participants were then told to imagine that, after using the shoes for a month and being satisfied (dissatisfied) (condition dependent), the manufacturer had asked them to write a review.

### 8.1.2. Measures

Participants rated their likelihood of writing a review and how helpful they thought a review of this product would be, both on 7-point scales. As a measure of closeness to the self, participants rated their agreement with the statement “Compared to most running shoes, these running shoes feel close to me and who I am” on a 7-point scale (from Carter & Gilovich, 2012). Finally, participants were asked to indicate, also on a 7-point scale, whether the good was a “material purchase” (1) or an “experiential purchase” (7), and rated their expertise in the category, likelihood of post-purchase regret, and perceived importance of the category, all on 7-point scales. These three constructs could potentially explain a difference in likelihood of providing a review, so we included them in order to use them as control variables in our analyses.

## 8.2. Results

### 8.2.1. Manipulation checks

Participants rated the experience-framed shoes higher than the material-framed shoes on the product/experience dimension ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 3.44$ ,  $M_{material\ frame} = 2.73$ ,  $F(1, 111) = 4.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Usage valence had no effect on this classification ( $M_{satisfactory} = 3.15$  vs.  $M_{dissatisfactory} = 2.95$ ,  $F(1, 111) = 0.39$ ,  $p > .10$ ). While there were no differences in expertise or importance (both  $F$ 's  $< 1$ ), there was a difference in purchase regret ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 3.62$ ,  $M_{material\ frame} = 2.94$ ;  $F(1, 111) = 7.56$ ,  $p < .05$ ). We controlled for this in our analyses.

### 8.2.2. Likelihood of writing a review

A two-way ANOVA with framing and usage valence on review likelihood revealed only a main effect of framing whereby experientially framed products ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) were more likely to be reviewed than materially framed products ( $M_{material\ frame} = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ,  $F(1, 112) = 4.42$ ,  $p < .038$ ). This supports H1. See Fig. 3. Gender had no effect in any of our dependent variables or covariates, we therefore do not discuss it further.

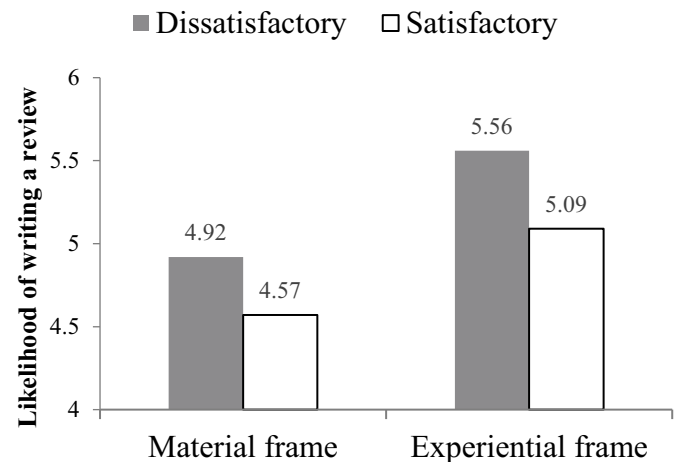


Fig. 3. Study 3. Likelihood of writing a review for material and experiential frames.

### 8.2.3. Helpfulness of the review

A two-way ANOVA with framing and usage valence on review helpfulness revealed only a marginal main effect of material frame whereby participants in the experience-framed condition ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 5.63$ ) considered a review marginally more helpful than those in the product-framed condition ( $M_{material\ frame} = 5.22$ ,  $F(1, 112) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .06$ ).

### 8.2.4. Closeness to self

As expected, a two-way ANOVA with framing and usage valence on perceived closeness to the self revealed only a main effect framing: participants rated the experience-framed shoes ( $M_{experiential\ frame} = 4.37$ ) as more self-defining than the product-framed shoes ( $M_{material\ frame} = 3.71$ ,  $F(1, 112) = 3.98$ ,  $p < .048$ ).

To test whether review likelihood was driven by perceived closeness to the self (H2), we performed a mediation analysis (model 4 of the PROCESS macro; Hayes, 2013), with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval. The analysis revealed that the effect of framing on likelihood of reviewing was mediated by closeness to the self ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95% CI = 0.01 to 0.34,  $p < .05$ ). A multiple regression analysis revealed a significant effect of closeness to the self on likelihood of reviewing ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $t = 2.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ), controlling for framing. The effect of framing on likelihood of reviewing was not significant ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $t = 1.07$ ,  $p > .10$ ), suggesting indirect-only mediation. Helpfulness of the review did not mediate the effect of product framing on likelihood of reviewing ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ , 95% CI =  $-0.06$  to 0.42,  $p > .10$ ).

## 8.3. Discussion

Study 3 provides additional support for H1 in a more controlled manner in that we manipulated the ads ourselves rather than relying on preexisting ads that likely vary on numerous dimensions. Additionally, this study identifies a mechanism behind this effect, perceived closeness to the self, supporting H2. Study 3 also reveals that H1 holds for both satisfactory and dissatisfactory consumption experiences and even when a review is not evidently more helpful. Participants' measures of the helpfulness of the review did not mediate the effect; perceived closeness of the self to the product did.

This provides additional insight into the consequences of framing products as experiences, as well as into what motivates people to share information. Experiential framing is now a prevalent technique, but previous work that has theorized about experiential marketing (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999) does not identify this increased importance to the self as one of the consequences of framing

products as experiences, nor the subsequent effect seen here – increased likelihood to review. This is an important consequence of this technique, as we discuss below.

Also, neither perceived helpfulness of the review nor interestingness of the product could explain the results. This offers further evidence that perceived closeness to the self is, indeed, what drives differences in review behavior. Compared to its effect in Study 2, the valence of the usage experience had no effect on reviewing behavior. As noted earlier, previous research is inconclusive regarding the influence of valence on WOM, with evidence that consumers are more likely to review when the experience is positive and also when negative (Anderson, 1998; Berger & Milkman, 2012; Dubois et al., 2016; Godes et al., 2005). Our findings seem to reflect this. Importantly though, and central to the issue at hand, regardless of the valence of the usage experience, experientially framed products are more likely to trigger increased reviewing behavior on the part of the consumer.

## 9. Conclusion and general discussion

Framing products as experiences is a popular marketing trend as evidenced not only by the actions of brands such as Panasonic and Harley-Davidson but also by many other players across industries (Chazin, 2007; Elliot, 2013; Newman, 2012; Schmitt, 1999). The selected ads we used in Study 2 serve as anecdotal evidence of the prevalence of this technique. Nevertheless, we know little about the effects of this strategy on the often times critical (both positively and negatively) consumer behavior of providing product reviews. We drew from the growing research on differences between material and experiential purchases that suggest that framing a product as an experience may lead it to be perceived as closer to the self. Then, through a combination of archival and experimental data, we show that this perceived proximity has real behavioral effects as it causes consumers to engage more in WOM behavior. As such, this research identifies two important consequences of experiential framing. We discuss the theoretical and managerial importance of each next.

### 9.1. Theoretical implications

The importance that consumers and brands place on WOM and other forms of recommendations is well known (Nielsen, 2015; You et al., 2015). Prior work on WOM antecedents WOM has typically focused on the context or the goals that the consumer may be looking to fulfill, such as self-enhancement (Chung & Darke, 2006; Sundaram et al., 1998), altruism (Dichter, 1966; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), or bonding (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Rimé, 2009). Rather than focus on the consumer or context, we examine something over which the marketer has more control, the framing of the product. As such, this research offers real managerial implications for marketers seeking to increase or decrease the number of product reviews.

This research also contributes to the understanding of how experiences differ from material possessions (Carter & Gilovich, 2010, 2012; Gallo, Sood, Mann, & Gilovich, 2016; Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), as well as how material objects can be framed as experiences (Brakus et al., 2009; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999). This is relevant because, as our pilot study shows, there is a wide material/experiential spectrum even within categories of physical objects; some products are considered much more experiential than others.

Indeed, there is some debate around the distinction between material and experiential purchases that is made in the psychology literature (Dunn & Weidman, 2014; Gilovich et al., 2015; Schmitt et al., 2015). Gilovich and colleagues understand these two kinds of purchases as distinct, moving along a continuum, even if the distinction is not always clear-cut (goods may exist close to the middle of the continuum) (Gilovich et al., 2015). On the other hand, Schmitt and colleagues reject the continuum and talk about two dimensions of every purchase that

provide value to the consumer: materialism and experientialism (Schmitt et al., 2015). They posit that value not only resides in the *object* of consumption (whether a possession or an experience), but also in the *experience* of consumption. They also note that consumers buy brands, not products, and that brands convey a combination of experiences, such as sensing, feeling, thinking, acting, and relating to others (Brakus et al., 2009).

With this research we hope to offer a modest contribution to this debate. In line with previous conceptual work in the field, we believe that the value of all goods and services comes from the experience of using them (Gummesson, 1995), and that there are experiential aspects of everything purchased by consumers (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Therefore, categorizing purchases as experiential versus material has some limitations. As Gilovich himself states, “it is not whether a purchase is material or experiential per se that determines the satisfaction people derive from it.” (Gilovich et al., 2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, consumers in our studies recognize a purchase (in Study 3, the *same* purchase) as more material or more experiential and, perhaps more importantly, this material versus experiential emphasis has relevant behavioral consequences. Additionally, to differentiate material versus experiential framing in our studies we relied both on real ads from real brands as well as on stimuli that were manipulated based on documented differences between material and experiential purchases. We believe this provides validity to the material versus experiential distinction in two manners. First, our work reinforces that this distinction is relevant for brands and managers as well as for consumers. Second, previous research on this field has allowed us to make valid predictions and to successfully design the stimuli to test them (i.e.: operationalizing the material versus experiential construct). In sum, our work seems to corroborate the notion that “(...) it is the set of psychological processes that tend to be invoked by experiences and material goods that determine how much satisfaction they provide.” (Gilovich et al., 2015, p. 4).

### 9.2. The bright side and the dark side of experiential marketing

Our findings also offer numerous insights for practitioners. First, we have provided a set of practical guidelines for managers willing to implement experiential framing. To summarize, to frame a product experientially we recommend: focusing on the occasion of use; using sensorial stimuli in order to provide a sense of holistic involvement that easily evokes emotions and feelings; and highlighting the sociality of the purchase. These recommendations are based on prior research on the differences between material and experiential purchases (Capriello & Reis, 2013; Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) as well as on previous investigations regarding experiential marketing (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999), here we offer a concise summary.

Second, in establishing a link between the perceived product proximity to the self and the likelihood of generating WOM, we provide a mechanism for managers who want to generate more consumer buzz around their products. This technique may also, in turn, establish or reinforce consumers' connections with the brand on a more personal level. This might be a recommended first step if a marketer seeks to broaden a brand to be a more all-encompassing lifestyle brand, develop brand extensions, or change the brand's overall positioning. Similarly, another implication of this work is that, regardless of the technique used, making a product seem closer to the self may increase reviewing behavior. Apart from experiential framing, more direct manipulations of self-proximity might be using the second person (e.g. “You”) in calls to action.

Our findings also suggest a word of caution for managers thinking about framing their brands as experiences, and for managers of experiential purchases in general. These managers should be aware that, although there are benefits to the experiential framing strategy, there is also some risk. Consumers value WOM precisely because it is not



controlled by the marketer (Bughin et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2015). As such, anything that increases consumer reviewing behavior necessarily takes control away from the marketer. If the resulting reviews are mixed or negative, this additional product information may be a serious threat. This is noteworthy as most experiential marketing literature, both academic and managerial, has primarily focused on the benefits and positive consequences of this strategy, perhaps overlooking potential risks.

### 9.3. Limitations and further research

We offer this research as an initial exploration of experiential framing and its influence on reviewing behavior. There are several unanswered questions worthy of exploring in future research. First, in our creation of the experiential and product framing manipulations in Study 3 we relied on prior research (Escalas, 2007; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999), on the differences between material and experiential purchases (Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Carter & Gilovich, 2010, 2012; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), as well as on techniques employed by marketers today (Elliot, 2013; LaSalle & Britton, 2003; Newman, 2012). No doubt our manipulations influenced some underlying dimensions such as level of involvement or the perception that what the consumer is evaluating is an event. Because these are integral to what defines experiences and experiential framing, we did not address whether or how these aspects of the framing's experiential nature influence the observed effects. Regardless, our analysis supports the claim that it was perceived self-proximity that drove the WOM behaviors witnessed. Future research might tease apart which of these factors is most fundamental to a description in order for a product to be perceived as experiential.

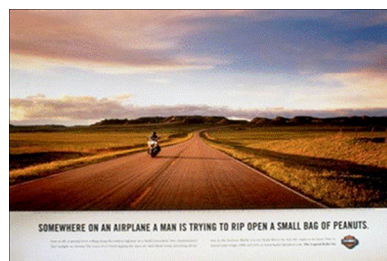
In contrast, while in Study 3 we controlled for information content, ensuring that both framings included the same information on product attributes, experiential framing typically involves very little actual product information. The stimuli in Study 2, taken from real brands, reflect this. However, across both studies we saw that experiential framing leads to greater review behavior. Future research might consider whether and how the amount of product information provided influences WOM generation.

Finally, in this research we focused on products and experiences, ignoring a third category in the marketplace, that of services such as doctors, insurance providers, or car repair shops. One of the marketing

## Appendix A. Recent examples of experiential vs. product framing

### A.1. Experiential framing

#### *Harley-Davidson motorcycle*



challenges for these industries is to transmit the intangible benefits that a service provides (Mittal, 1999). As such, marketers often describe the service by focusing on its tangible attributes. We consider this as product framing, and the opposite of what we have been discussing in this research. Our findings, therefore, imply that such framing may induce consumers to be less likely to review the product. This is open for future research.

### 9.4. Coda

There are likely several contextual reasons behind the growing use of experiential positioning for material products. First, it may be a response to the increasingly mature and crowded markets in which many products compete. If consumers perceive that essentially the same features are offered across brands, then managers may be more inclined to design communications that appeal to elements beyond tangible attributes. Second, as countries and economies develop and become more affluent, it is more likely that people's functional needs are met, leading to a growing interest in experiential purchases. And third, it may be the result of a culture with increased psychological sophistication and thus recognition of mental health needs and the legitimacy of experiences such as fun, relaxation, or travel. Whether it is the context that is pushing brands towards framing products as experiences, or that brands are recognizing the persuasive power of experiences, or a combination of both, we identify this as a real development in the marketplace and we find important consequences in consumer behavior, both for researchers and for managers.

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### Declaration of interest

None.

Panasonic 3D TV



A.2. Material framing

Nescafe

Golf clubs



Appendix B

B.1. Correlation pilot study

Category	Average experiential rating	Average number of reviews (for top 10 most reviewed products)
Appliances	2.9	11,326
Apps & games	4.9	42,072
Arts, crafts & sewing	4.9	5046
Automotive	3.7	12,228
Baby products	3.0	8463
Beauty & personal care	3.9	12,019
Book	5.6	42,553
CDs & vinyl	4.5	16,779
Cell phones & accessories	3.5	23,331
Clothing, shoes & jewelry	3.2	14,187
Collectibles & fine art	4.2	187
Computers & accessories	3.2	18,106
Electronics	3.4	26,344
Grocery & gourmet food	5.1	13,198
Handmade products	3.6	187
Health & household	3.7	17,456
Home & kitchen	3.6	19,639
Industrial & scientific	2.7	25,098
Luggage & travel gear	3.0	4744
Luxury beauty	4.3	3647
Magazine subscriptions	3.8	995
Movies & TV	5.9	32,012
Musical instruments	4.4	11,273
Office products	2.1	12,248
Patio, lawn & garden	3.4	6742
Pet supplies	2.4	10,605
Software	4.0	3349
Sports & outdoors	5.2	14,658
Tools & home improvement	2.7	12,060
Toys & games	4.6	11,186
Video games	5.3	9287

B.2. Top reviewed items per category

Item	Amazon category	Average experiential rating (category)	Number of reviews
Fifty Shades of Grey	Book	5.6	84,507
Candy Crush Saga	Apps & games	4.9	66,510
Minecraft: Pocket Edition	Apps & games	4.9	58,376
The Girl on the Train	Book	5.6	57,298
The Hunger Games (Book 1)	Book	5.6	56,285
The Secret Society® - Hidden Mystery	Apps & games	4.9	55,624
Panasonic ErgoFit Headphones	Musical instruments	4.4	46,195
Gone Girl	Book	5.6	43,856
Downton Abbey Season 1	Movies & TV	5.9	42,713
Subway Surfers	Apps & games	4.9	42,079
Interstellar	Movies & TV	5.9	41,927
Crossy Road	Apps & games	4.9	39,596
The Fault in Our Stars	Book	5.6	37,859
Fitbit Charge HR Wireless Wristband	Electronics	3.4	37,414
Downton Abbey Season 3	Movies & TV	5.9	37,252
Netflix	Apps & games	4.9	36,940
Cards Against Humanity	Toys & games	4.6	36,628
Divergent (Divergent Series)	Book	5.6	36,341
Mad Dogs	Movies & TV	5.9	35,364
The Nightingale: A Novel	Book	5.6	33,843
Escape The Titanic	Apps & games	4.9	33,434
Justified Season 1	Movies & TV	5.9	32,947
Outlander	Book	5.6	32,868
My Horse	Apps & games	4.9	31,741
Downton Abbey Season 5	Movies & TV	5.9	30,379
The Martian	Book	5.6	29,896
Mr. Robot, Season 1	Movies & TV	5.9	29,762
Despicable Me: Minion Rush	Apps & games	4.9	29,711
iXCC Element II, iPhone charger	Cell phones & accessories	3.5	29,614
Ex Machina	Movies & TV	5.9	29,057

Appendix C. Coding instructions Study 1

Thanks for participating in this study.

In the attached spreadsheet you are going to see a number of Amazon purchase descriptions.

You should classify purchase descriptions as experiential or non-experiential in a scale from 1 (the focus of the purchase description is on the product characteristics/attributes) to 5 (the focus of the purchase description is on the experience).

Some examples of experiential elements:

Focus of the purchase description: focuses on the experience more than on the product. It can do this by doing any or all of the following:

- Focuses on experiential aspects of using the product.
- Focuses on feelings, emotions, fun.
- Creates a narrative around the consumer and the product.
- Does not focus on specific product features.

On the other hand, a more traditional description will focus on functional features and benefits.

Words: Includes the following words:

- Experience, feel, emotion, imagine, lifestyle.
- (refers to emotions, such as) Happy, sad, excited, engaged, satisfied, love, hate, friendly, fun.
- Description tries to convey what it is like to have and to use the product.
- (Refers to these as a consequence of using the product, or while using the product) Active, comfortable: as in “you will feel this way or this other way”, or “it will make you be more active”. But not as in “comfort grip”

Senses: Describes in some detail any of the following:

- See, touch, smell, hear, listen, taste, visualize, observe.
- Touch: how it feels, texture, grip, smoothness.
- Smell, hear, taste.

**Appendix D. Stimuli for Study 2**

Aleve (pain killers): material (left) vs. experiential (right) ads



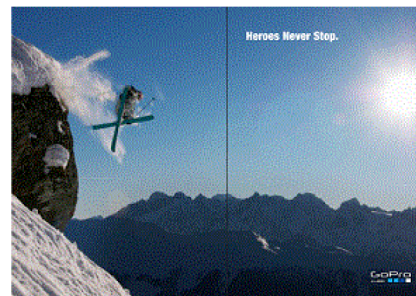
Arla (milk): material (left) vs. experiential (right) ads



Dyson (hair dryer): material (left) vs. experiential (right) ads



GoPro (cameras): material (left) vs. experiential (right) ads



**Appendix E. Stimuli for Study 3**

*E.1. Product-framed condition*

Westerley running shoes

With an energy-returning heel and maximum midsole cushioning, Westerley Titan HyperMOTION shoes deliver comfort and responsiveness. The design of these light, versatile running shoes gives a bold look to the breathable upper.



## Details

- Weight: 10.875 oz. per shoe.
- Non-slip lining for safety and performance, even on wet surfaces.
- HyperMOTION with leaf-shaped springs in the heel for return energy.

## E.2. Experience-framed condition



While you listen to the sound effects, take a few seconds to imagine yourself running through the woods with a pair of Westerley's Titan HyperMOTION shoes. Imagine a constant pace accompanied by good efficient breathing.

Now focus on the Westerley shoes. With every step, you can sense how the leaf-shaped springs in the heels return energy to your feet and legs. Your feet feel light – 10.875 oz. of shoe – and comfortable, resting on the maximum midsole cushioning. You are safe even on wet surfaces, due to the non-slip lining. And you are confident, propelling forward glancing down at the shoe's bold look.

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