Chapter 9

Exploring the Enigma of the Happiness Construct in Phygital Fashion Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to address the need for a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges facing fashion retailers in our current digital climate. This will be explored through the lens of the happiness construct, as we examine fashion consumption and the role of experiential and atmospheric techniques in facilitating happy fashion retail consumer experiences. This chapter takes a conceptual, exploratory approach by interrogating literature on the happiness construct; experiential retail, atmospherics and flagships in the pursuit of understanding how these concepts enhance happy shopping experiences in physical and virtual environments. It will identify the multi-sensory techniques that retailers are employing to enhance the user’s experience and ultimately, their state of happiness. The adoption of a consumer psychological approach to explore the notion of happiness within fashion retail experiences is a first within the fashion and consumption domain. Examples are used throughout the chapter, as illustrations of innovative and novel retail approaches that exemplify the application of happy, immersive fashion strategies.

THE HAPPINESS CONSTRUCT

This section explores how happiness is understood through psychological and marketing discourse and elaborates and acknowledges seminal debates around what contributes to an individual’s happiness. What is happiness and how do individuals get it? Early philosophers, such as Aristotle, contributed influential understanding to the enigma surrounding the etymology of happiness, with his distinctive explanation, that it is a combination of instant pleasure (hedonia) and a life well lived (eudaimonia). This implies both

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immediate and enduring elements to the construct of happiness (Greco et al., 2015). The eudaimonian perspective of happiness is rigid and fixed, rather than socially constructed (Greco et al., 2015). Aristotle distinguishes his views from alternatives, such as the Socratic philosopher, Aristippus (435–366 B.C.) whose position of happiness is associated with the pursuit of pleasure, specifically, physical pleasure. Similar to Aristotle’s ‘hedonia’ – the hunt for hedonism from the Aristippean perspective, is a continuous, on-going, enduring search for continuous pleasure that leads to hedonic conquests.

This is in stark contrast to the more bleak view of the philosopher Hegiasias, whose idiosyncratic view of happiness as ‘impossible’ (Lampe, 2015) is considerably more pessimistic. More recent understanding of happiness is derived from Ryan and Deci (2001) who explored the two generally accepted perspectives of happiness and confirmed that hedonism refers to happiness as pain avoidance and pleasure through well-being, compared with the eudaimonic approach that focuses on self-realisation and the ability of an individual to be ‘fully functioning’ (p. 141).

In the psychological literature, happiness has been defined as an individual’s experience of contentment, joy or positive well being associated with a sense that one’s life is meaningful and valuable (e.g. Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006; Lama and Cutler, 1999; Lyubomirsky, 2008), thus advocating that happiness is a feeling or a sensation that has the propensity to be transitory. Conversely, Hellen and Sääksjärvi (2011) argue that happiness is a personality trait, which suggests that it is inherent to an individuals’ emotional state and is congenital. In contrast to this view, we posit that happiness is a sentiment, an experience, a state of being, not a trait that is nurtured, given, or inherent to ones’ DNA. As such, this view neatly fits with the supposition that fashion retail experiences have the capacity to create or destroy happy fashion moments and that this capability supersedes ones’ heritage or personality. We contend that retail atmospherics, details and immersive experiential creations can sway an individual to a happy, hedonic experience (or not).

Other consumer psychologists define happiness as the propensity to experience positive, optimistic emotions on a regular basis, united with a sense that one’s life is meaningful and valuable (Diener and Larsen, 1984a; Diener, Larsen and Emmons., 1984b; Schimmack & Diener, 1997). Thus, the literature suggests that happiness can be defined from both psychological (enduring) and marketing (temporary) perspectives (e.g. Chang, Eckman and Yan, 2011; Labroo & Patrick, 2009; Labroo & Mukhopadhyay, 2009). The notion that happiness can be erudite, heredity, temporary and enduring is a perplexing foundation for comprehension, but provides an opportunity for fashion brands to manipulate emotional or hedonic reactions in their consumers. In support of this hypothesis, Sheldon et al., (in press) assume that happiness is the fundamental objective of all human effort and activity, in all cultures, whether people are aware of it or not. If this view is accurate, then fashion has found its true purpose in the pursuit of happiness and compounds the view of ‘retail therapy’ and fashion as instrumental on the path of hedonism and pleasure.

Happiness scholarship collectively suggested that we have an innate desire to be happy, feel happy and pursue happiness and that this goal permeates our everyday existence from a physical and subconscious level. Consequently, in what circumstances may we view the pursuit of happiness most vividly? If, as the literature suggests, happiness is fundamentally, a social experience that leads users to a state of hedonic pleasure, we may look to retail, specifically, the fashion sector, that is curated to stimulate gratifying and enjoyable experiences. In this vein, Cox et al. (2005) discuss the pleasures of shopping as a private pleasure executed in a public domain (in terms of physical shopping versus virtual). The enhancement of online experiences facilitates these ‘private experiences’ in an ever-personalised way,

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