Servant and Transformational Followership as a Consumptive Experience

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This conceptual article combines consumer behavior and leader-follower literature to present the notion of leader-follower interaction as a consumptive experience for the follower. The concept contends that leaders should consider the consumer decision process of affection, cognition, and conation and further, that leaders should intentionally frame, script, stage, and perform for and with the follower in a manner that creates a pleasant consumptive experience for the follower. The article posits that the idea of leader-follower interaction as a consumptive experience may lead to a better understanding of followers affective, normative, and continuance commitment to the leader and/or the organization.

This conceptual study examines the follower’s receipt of the leader’s behavior as a consumptive experience for the follower and brings together elements of marketing’s consumer behavior theory with the servant leadership theory/models of Patterson (2003) and Winston (2003) as well as the transformational theory/model of Bass and Avolio (1994). No research at present has examined the role of the leader providing service to the follower as seen through the consumptive view of the follower. The purpose of this study is to lay the groundwork for future theory building research in the area of follower-leader interaction.

Patterson (2003), in her model of the servant leader-follower interaction, as well as Winston (2003) in his model of the servant follower-leader interaction, shows the effect of service (leaders’ and followers’ respectively) on the others’ agapao love (moral love or friendship/respect valuation for the other). Bass and Avolio (1994) present the four I’s of transformational leadership (intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence) as behavior from the leader to the follower in which Bass and Avolio present the behaviors from the perspective of the leader but not from the perspective of the follower. The premise of this conceptual study is that the followers may gain as much or more from the process of receiving the leaders’ behavior as they gain from the end results. The value of this conceptual approach is to show that there may be more value in studying the process of how leaders ‘lead’ through service rather than in just looking at the motivational outcomes of the follower.

To present this concept, this paper first looks at the notion of a consumptive experience and how the consumer may gain value from the experience rather than just the end result or utility of the service. The paper then presents sections examining the affective process of the follower receiving service from the leader.

Consumptive Experience

A consumptive experience is any process in which a customer receives a service from a provider in which the customer plays a willing role in the receipt of the service. For example when a customer receives a
hair cut, manicure, etc, the customer plays an active role in the receipt of the services. Whereas, when a customer receives a newspaper delivered to his or her home the customer benefits from the service but is not an active player in the delivery of the service. In a consumptive experience the consumer may place more benefit on the experience of receiving the service than on the end result of the service. For example, the haircut and manicure customer may express satisfaction with a pleasurable experience even if the end result (haircut or manicure) is of lower quality than another provider might provide. And the converse is true as well in that a customer may be dissatisfied with a good haircut or manicure if the process of receiving the service was not pleasurable. This relates to the leader-follower interaction in that the follower may ascribe more satisfaction or pleasure with a leader who may be less competent if the process of interacting with the leader yielded satisfaction to the follower. The converse is also true in that a follower may ascribe dissatisfaction with a competent leader if the interaction with the leader was not pleasurable.

To assist in understanding consumer satisfaction, this conceptual study relies on Geise and Cotes’ (2000) conceptual study of consumer behavior and accepts Geise and Cotes’ evaluation of the literature to show that consumer satisfaction has three elements: (a) affective, cognitive, or conative responses, (b) evaluated against past experiences as well as the service-related attributes (service delivery person, etc), and (c) expressed before, during as well as after service encounters. Geise and Cotes’ interpretation of the literature on consumer satisfaction applies to the follower’s consumptive experience in that the follower engages in both affective and cognitive interaction with the leader during and after the leader-service exchange and the follower compares the leader-service experience against past experiences. Past experiences include interaction with the immediate present leader, other present leaders, past leaders in the organization, as well as past leaders from other organizations.

If leaders see their leader-service to followers from the view of the followers consumptive experience it may require the leader to consider how his or her behavior is viewed by and received by the follower, both affectively and cognitively. This may require the leader to consider the dramaturgical nature of leader behavior. Gardner and Avolio (1998) examined the leader-actor role and the follower-audience role of the leader’s impression management efforts but their study did not focus on the consumption experience of the follower but rather on the leader’s efforts to portray an image and create an impression in the mind of the follower. However, Gardner and Avolio’s work applies to this present study of the follower’s consumptive experience in that Gardner and Avolio show that the leader moves through four phases of behavior: (a) framing, (b) scripting, (c) staging, and (d) performing with a desired result of having the follower show positive affect to the leader. What Gardner and Avolio leave out is what this present study addresses – the consumptive experience by the follower that mediates the follower’s affect to the leader. Gardner and Avolio build on Conger’s (1989) work on charismatic leaders in which Conger states that charismatic leaders are meaning-makers and to which Gardner and Avolio call for a deeper understanding of how leaders use dramaturgical behaviors to create meaning. This present conceptual study adds to this by implying that in addition to meaning-making, the leader must seek to create consumptive-satisfaction through the leader’s dramaturgical efforts. The leader must desire this to happen, which leads to the proposition:

**Proposition 1:** the leader must have an internal value desiring to create satisfaction for the follower through the leader-follower interaction

Proposition 1 ties well to Patterson’s (2003) model of servant leadership in that the leader is focused on the follower and seeks to produce higher levels of satisfaction in the follower. Winston’s (2003) model of the follower-leader interaction uses this notion of higher levels of satisfaction to impact the follower’s commitment to the leader.

**Affective Response by the Follower**

Gardner and Avolio (1998) propose that leaders must consider the needs of the follower as the leader defines the ideal vision whereas this current study proposes that leaders must understand what the follower wants and needs in terms of affective stimulus in order to have interest in the leader’s vision. This is what the colloquial ‘platinum rule’ says in that rather than ‘doing unto others as you want them to do unto you’ as the ‘golden rule’ state the leader should ‘do unto the follower what the follower wants and in a manner that the
follower will be satisfied with.” This ties well with Gardner and Avolio’s notion of (a) framing, (b) scripting, (c) staging, and (d) performing in that the leader must make intentionally seek to effect the follower. Thus,

Proposition 2: the leader must know the individual desires and wants relative to the leader-follower interaction and the leader must intentionally behave towards the follower in a way that produces satisfaction for the follower.

Proposition 2 is similar to Bass and Avolio’s (1994) ‘individualized consideration’ but focuses on the interaction rather than the end-state motivation method. Proposition 2 also ties well to Patterson’s (2003) model in that the leader’s behavior is based on the leader’s ‘agapao’ love for the follower as demonstrated through the leader’s seven values of ‘agapao’ love as Patterson’s model shows.

Cognitive Response by the Follower

Although Patterson’s (2003) and Winston’s (2003) models of servant leadership do not address cognitive responses by the follower, per se, there is an implication in the ‘vision’ variable of Patterson’s model that cognition plays a role. Bass and Avolio’s (1994) theoretical variable of ‘intellectual stimulation’ would include cognition as well. In Patterson’s variable of vision the leader learns about the follower’s vision and then seeks to modify the organization to allow the follower to accomplish his/her vision. This process presumes that the follower’s values and vision are in line with the organization’s values and vision, thus insuring compatible end-states. For the leader to understand the follower’s vision the leader must engage in meaningful dialogue with the follower in order to gain a full understanding of what the follower desires.

Bass and Avolio’s (1994) notion of intellectual stimulation calls for the leader to stimulate the follower intellectually such that most the follower and leader are lifted to higher states of intellectual discourse. This requires that the leader know what topics are of interest to the follower, although Bass and Avolio’s concept presumes the leader’s interest in the well-being of the organization (Bass, 2000 see page 33) as compared to Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership concept where the focus of the leader is on the follower.

The consumptive experience for the follower can be the same regardless if the leader’s focus is on the organization or the follower and requires only that the follower gain satisfaction from the cognitive process. The follower must be able to note satisfaction during and after the exchange and be able to identify the cognitive reasons why the follower enjoyed the leader’s service. The leader can enhance the likelihood of the follower’s satisfaction through the use of emotional intelligence (Winston & Hartsfield, 2004). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997) leaders who use emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision-making use behaviors such as (a) enthusiasm, (b) optimism, (c) curiosity, (d) openness to new ideas, and (e) being responsive to self and others. Adding to the understanding of the use of emotion, Cooper and Sawaf (1996) posit that these leader-behaviors are antecedents to followers trusting the leader in that follower observe and interpret the behaviors and ascribe or attribute the behaviors as indicative of fairness, consistency, and appropriateness. The follower will sense satisfaction when there is an increase in the follower’s perception of trust, fairness, consistency, and appropriateness from the leader. Thus,

Proposition 3: the leader must be skilled at the use of emotional intelligence in order to create intellectual stimulation that results in satisfaction for the follower.

Conative Response by the Follower

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) define conative response as representing the underlying intentions of the person that precipitate the actual behavior. Reid and Crompton (1993) applied the idea of conative responses to the level of involvement of the consumer in making a purchase decision. This present study of leadership as a consumptive experience incorporates the notion of conation as a key factor in followers’ decisions to follow the leader. Conation, in consumer behavior, is important because it requires the marketer to use communication (advertising) to create the intent to purchase in the consumer so that the consumer is ‘sold’ prior to arriving at the vendor’s venue. This current study implies that the leader must focus on using rhetoric and impression management communication to impact the follower’s.

Lavidege and Steiner (1961) posited that conation logically followed cognition and affection in the consumer and demonstrated this progression in a concept they called the ‘hierarchy of effect’ in which the consumer moved through the phases of: (a) awareness, (b) knowledge, (c) interest, (d) preference, (e)
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selection, and (f) purchase. Although Geise and Cotes (2000) presented affection before cognition, this present study does not propose an order but acknowledges that all three (a) affection, (b) cognition, and (c) conation must occur for the follower to make a decision to accept the leader and to work with the leader.

Bass and Avolio’s (1994) variables of inspirational motivation and idealized influence combine the use of affection and cognition to establish the intent to behave, or conation, in the follower. Bass and Avolio’s concept of transformational leadership focuses on the behavior of the follower, thus the four I’s should all focus on conation, whereas Patterson’s (2003) model of servant leadership focuses more on the follower as a person and does not focus on the follower’s behavior as Winston’s model does but this does not mean that the servant leader seeks the follower’s behavior only. For the servant leader, according to Patterson, there is value in the follower’s affection and cognition as end results even without conation.

Gardner and Avolio’ (1998) model of how charismatic leaders influence the follower’s conation presents the notion that the leader intentionally sets about a dramaturgical process of impression management in which the leader uses narrative to present ideas to followers. Gardner and Avolio focus on the process of framing, scripting, staging, and performing. Although Gardner and Avolio’s work focuses on charismatic leaders, this present study posits that this same process is used by all leaders although non-charismatic leaders may not be as self-aware of the process.

Framing

Grewal, Gotlieb, and Marmorstein (1994) examined the role of framing in the consumer decision making process and posited that positively framed messages tend to help consumers decide to purchase a service when there is a higher risk to benefit ratio (trying something new) while negatively framed messages tend to increase the likelihood of a purchase decision when the message implied that the consumer might lose and existing advantage without the purchase. This ties to the leader’s communication in that Gardner and Avolio (1998) posited that “. . . charismatics choose their words to amplify audience values, stress its importance and efficacy, and, if necessary, denigrate those who oppose it” (p 41). Intentional framing of messages by the leader allows the leader to present a message in a manner that fits the needs of the followers.

Scripting

Advertising messages script the conative responses of the consumer as a means of providing a step by step process for consumers to make the purchase decision. Leaders, in a similar way script the message so that the follower knows his, or her, role. Gardner and Avolio (1998) imply that charismatic leaders use scripting to create a “collective consciousness” (p 41). Gardner and Avolio go on to say that while scripting can be done prior to the communication episode it can also be improvised and thus, is part of the framing process. It is this notion of improvised scripting that creates an opportunity for the leader to shape the follower’s self-perception and self-vision with respect to the leader’s vision for the organization. It is here that there should be a difference between charismatic, transformational, and servant leaders in that the charismatic’s vision is more leader-focused, the transformational vision is more organizational-focused, and the servant leader’s vision is more follower-focused. But, in all three styles the use of planned and improvised scripting allows for the tailoring of the message.

Staging

Gardner and Avolio (1998) propose that staging in a dramaturgical process represents the leader’s manipulation of symbols, props, settings, and architectural artifacts. The leader’s intentional shaping of the aesthetics of the communication environment should be done to make the experience pleasurable for the follower. Symbols may include logos, photographs, interior color schemes, and office arrangements. Props may include employee support items such as coffee machines, exercise facilities, and break rooms. Settings and architectural artifacts would refer to the interior lighting, office furniture, and general décor. The application of staging to the notion of leadership as a consumptive experience is in the intentional efforts by the leader to make the interaction with the follower a pleasurable experience.
Performing

Gardner and Avolio (1998) refer to performing as the actual enactment of scripted behaviors. The leader, in an effort to create a positive consumptive experience for the follower would intentionally enact the script in means and ways that increase the affect of the follower and lead the follower to desired conative responses. Although Gardner and Avolio focus on the charismatic’s use of self-promotion, ingratiation, intimidation, and supplication, transformational and servant leaders would focus more on the followers identification and follower self-image.

Even though conation is not as much a part of the consumptive experience as affection is, conation is a key step in the process of gaining involvement from the follower. This means that the follower, as part of the consumption experience, should have a sense of satisfaction with the intent to behave toward the leader, thus:

Proposition 4: the leader must follow the four stages of (a) framing, (b) scripting, (c) staging, and (d) performing in order to impact the follower’s conative responses that would then lead to desired behavior.

Future Research

Since the research literature is silent on the idea of leader-follower interaction as a consumptive experience it is worth studying in order that we might more fully understand the reasons that followers establish affective, normative, and continuance commitment as presented by Allen and Mayer (1990). Since this topic of leader-follower interaction as a consumptive experience is at the early stage of inquiry there is a need for exploratory phenomenological case studies in which in-depth interviews and observations are combined by researchers to increase the level of knowledge about the what and why of the concept. In addition, single and multiple-shot case studies of leaders who seem to do exceptionally well at creating consumptive experiences would allow researchers to more fully understand the ‘how’ of this concept. Eventually, grounded theory studies might allow the work to move from the conceptual to the theoretical and then on to quantitative studies. Future research should examine the differences in the consumptive experiences of charismatic, transactional, transformational, and servant leadership styles.
References


