

Enhancing the Attendee's Experience through Creative Design of the Event Environment: Applying Goffman's Dramaturgical Perspective

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Environmental psychologists who have studied transactions between individuals and their physical settings have known for almost 40 years that when an individual's environment is changed, his/her behavior and experience are also changed by the environment (Gifford, 2002). This article explores the relationship between the design elements utilized in experience creation and emotional connection for event attendees, as well as for those who provide the experiences including the service, through the application of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (1959) and the components of atmospherics (Kotler, 1973) and servicescapes (Bitner, 1992). Relevant design elements of these existing models are then applied to the event environment, where the dramatic elements of an event unfold in an interactive theatrical setting.

KEYWORDS *dramaturgy, atmospherics, servicescape, event design, environmental psychology*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental psychologists who study transactions between individuals and their physical settings maintain that when an individual's environment is changed, his/her behavior and experience are also changed by the environment (Gifford, 2002). However, it is in the field of Sociology where we discover Erving Goffman, who sets the stage for event management

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production and design. Goffman uses the metaphor of theater to describe how all individuals give performances, control their scripts, and enter settings in which to create experiences.

In a manner similar to actors in a theatrical production, people utilize various dramatic devices, such as language, gestures, expressions, etc., to influence another's perception of an interactive situation (Grove, Fisk, & Bitner, 1992). The ability of the marketplace's physical environment to influence behaviors and to create an image is particularly apparent for hospitality service businesses such as hotels, restaurants, bars, and retail stores within hotel resort properties (Bitner 1986; Booms & Bitner, 1982; Hu & Jasper 2006; Kotler, 1973; Kubacki, Skinner, Parfitt, & Moss, 2007; Shostack, 1977; Upah & Fulton, 1985; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985).

Kotler (1973) coined the term "atmospherics" to describe the intentional control and manipulation of environmental cues. Atmospherics can be defined as "those elements of the service environments that influence affective reactions to place" (Foxall & Greenly, 1999, p. 149). Mayer and Johnson's (2003) study of atmospherics in the casino setting confirm that floor layout and theme are two critically important design factors.

In 1992, Bitner coined the term "servicescape," which focuses on the relationship of physical complexity to action performance. She identifies categories of tangible service evidence that consumers experience in marketplaces.

This article explores the relationship between the design elements utilized to create enhanced experiences for event attendees, as well as event providers, through the application of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective and the components of atmospherics (Kotler, 1973) and servicescape (Bitner, 1992).

The purpose of this article is to gain an understanding of the salient components of experience design in relation to the event environment and those who utilize the space—actors (designers, providers of experiences/services, and staff) as well as the audience (attendees)—in order to apply the existing models: Kotler's atmospherics (1973) and Bitner's servicescape (1992), which both have roots in Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (1959) in a fresh way that is applicable to the event environment. To accomplish this, we review literature from psychology, environmental psychology, sociology, marketing, and architecture, as well as design theory and methodology. Next, we examine trade journals; more specifically, culling articles written by/or highlighting event designers, architects, and producers to gain a better understanding of industry principles, practices, and approaches to experiential event design. Then, we apply the concepts from Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, Kotler's atmospherics, and Bitner's servicescape to event design, the experience it creates, and the emotional connection felt while interacting in this environment. In addition, suggestions for future research are made.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Themeing

As themeing becomes such an important component to the design success of the event product, dramatic elements become more directly applied to the experience environment. In this theatrical production, Goffman's Dramaturgical Perspective is most evident as the *service personnel* become the *actors* whose presence and actions define the service, while the *customers* become the *audience* to whom the service is directed. In an event context, the *service personnel* can literally be actors and other entertainers as well as valet parking attendants, ticket takers, food and beverage servers, hosts/hostesses, and a host of others. While the *audience members* will be the *attendees* of the event. The *service* is the *performance* (Grove et al., 1992). Also, the *uniforms* become the *costumes* for this drama, while the physical *equipment* used to provide the service becomes the *props*. The *property* becomes the physical *setting* in which the experience occurs. It should be noted that the physical *setting* of an event is very temporary and usually lasts for one day or evening.

In the hospitality industry, themed resort properties and restaurants are becoming the norm, especially in destination cities like Las Vegas, where entertainment themes are used successfully to draw customers into casino resort properties. Caesars Palace (August 5, 1966) and Circus Circus Hotel & Casino (October 18, 1978) were two of the first Las Vegas Strip properties to understand the importance of using a theme to identify their markets. And, today upscale mega resort properties have opted to design their properties by incorporating themes into the façade as well as the public spaces. It is almost unheard of for a new property to be built in Las Vegas without a theme. The appearance of the Strip has been transformed from an entertainment Mecca of name entertainment into an adult "Disneyland," with themed properties such as New York New York, Bellagio, Paris, Venetian, Planet Hollywood, and Excalibur, to name a few. This is also becoming true in other parts of the world. For example, the Splash Landings Hotel in Staffordshire, England was built with a Caribbean Ocean theme and is part of a water park property. In Dubai's Moscow Hotel, Russian culture erupts from the lobby, evoking the dome and paintings of the famous Bolshoi Theater. The theme is carried throughout the property displaying an authentic atmosphere where guests can visit the Red Square Night Club, Bolshoi Restaurant, Volga Coffee Shop, or Tolstoy Library and Bar, where they serve Russian cuisine and drinks. If your guest prefers eclectic themeing, why not visit The Curtis Hotel in downtown Denver where every floor has a different theme: themes as diverse as the "Science Fiction Floor" and the "Dance Floor."

Clearly, themed environments are drawing guests worldwide. Events have been employing the themed space strategy with constant success for many years. Dramaturgy lives in all things theatrical and themed. It is the seminal experience driver for an increasing number of businesses and events

designed to create enhanced experiences employing elements of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective.

Experience Creation and Emotional Connection

Kile Ozier, a creative director and producer, whose event production and design pedigree includes taking the Stanford University Campaign for Undergraduate Education on tour through 12 cities, helping to lay the foundation for the raising of \$1.2 billion, and invitee to the 2007 & 2008 Experience Architecture Forum at Harvard University, maintains that you never simply “show” celebration or spectacle. Rather, “it is a force, an undercurrent of nuance; a subtext that informs and enlightens, framed in an experience” (Nelson & Ozier, 2007). With Ozier at the creative helm, substance and emotional connection always remain at the core.

Ozier has articulated *Five Tenets of Experience Creation and Emotional Connection* (Nelson, 2008). These principals, in various combinations, are effectively applied to any context of storytelling and are successful at any magnitude. Ozier's methodologies are: Exploration of Assumption, Comfortable Disorientation, Liberation of Preconception, Successive Revelation, and Subliminal Engagement.

These tenants are not only the core of experience creation (event producers and designers) and emotional connection (attendees)—the heart of events; they embody the underlying theories and principles found in Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, Kotler's atmospherics, and Bitner's servicescape (see Figure 1).

Goffman's Dramaturgy 1956 <u>SETTING</u> Furniture Décor Physical Layout Props	KOTLER'S ATMOSPHERICS 1973 <u>VISUAL</u> Color Brightness Size Shapes <u>AURAL</u> Volume Pitch <u>OLFFACTORY</u> Scent Freshness <u>TACTILE</u> Softness Smoothness Temperature	BITNER'S SERVICESCAPE 1992 <u>AMBIENT CONDITIONS</u> Temperature Lighting Noise Music Scent <u>SPACIAL LAYOUT & FUNCTIONABILITY</u> Arrangement of: Machinery, Equipment, Furnishings, Size and Shape, Spacial Relationships <u>SIGNS, SYMBOLS, ARTIFACTS</u> Signage Walls Artwork Certificates & Diplomas Photographs Personal Items Floor Coverings Table Cloths Lighting Furniture
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FIGURE 1 Goffman, Kotler, & Bitner applied to Event Design.

APPLICATION OF THEORIES

Actors

Goffman looks at “self” as a social process. Self is a reflection of what the actor presents to the audience. The *actor* has to improvise because every performance is new. In customer service, it is important to cast an actor who is intelligent and can adapt the framework of the script to each situation. It is far better to look beyond the façade of the actor when holding an audition for the role. It is in the casting director’s best interest to look for actors who possess raw talent instead of polish. In a service environment, you want someone who is capable of going beyond only acting out their lines, parroting what they have been taught. Rather, you need someone whose motivation is to serve the customer and the organization at the same time.

Service organizations such as restaurants and hospitality resorts offer actors ample opportunities in which to perfect their craft. Due to the intangible nature of many event services, a common objective associated with the promotion of services is to provide tangible images in order to help facilitate consumer recall from memory (Shostack, 1977).

An actor who not only understands the level of service intended by the organization and expected by the audience, but also understands his role as a facilitator for a successful service encounter, will be invaluable to the performance. Once an actor has an understanding of his role, he can enhance his role through the use of other dramaturgical elements, such as costumes and props, to form the persona that he will convey to the audience. This is especially important in the event industry, where every night is like opening night with one opportunity to get it right.

Audience

Goffman’s audience is seen as vital to the performance. In the event service industry, customers are the audience. With each service encounter, the actor performs before a different audience. And these audience members attend the performances with high expectations of the actor. Grove and colleagues (1992) state that the audience is expected to accept tacitly the dramaturgical rule that the “show must go on” by tolerating minor imperfections of the service performance in the interest of the overall production.

Performance

Components of the performance include: front, dramatic realization, idealization, expressive control, misrepresentation, and mystification. However, this article focuses on the front component of the performance, as the front is the point of the customer contact in the event industry. When referring to the “front” in this article, we will be discussing the *setting*, which includes

equipment used in delivering the service, such as physical *props* of the social setting, as well as personal expressive equipment such as rank, *clothing*, gender, or age which functions to define the performance (Goffman, 1956, 1959).

Service providers in the events industry, knowingly or not, use Goffman's front everyday when representing their products and services. They run the gamut in the degree of how successfully they utilize dramaturgical techniques when dealing with customers (audience). The Chairman of Intel, Andrew Grove, gave a speech at the 1996 Comdex Tradeshow in Las Vegas where he declared, "We need to look at our business as more than simply the building and selling of personal computers. Our business is the delivery of information and lifelike interactive experiences" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) build on Goffman's dramaturgical principles in their book, *The Experience Economy*, where they discuss staging business performances, equating work with theater. They also encourage service personnel (*actors*) to "gain a better understanding of the impact their behaviors [*performances*] have on customers and to exert what Goffman calls 'expressive control' over actions in order to create sincere impressions" (p. 108). This is also extremely important in designing the event environment, as you are creating the mood—carefully manipulating the physical surroundings—throughout the evening to ensure the best experience for your guest (*audience*).

Set Design

According to Goffman, the *setting* involves the furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items that supply the scenery and stage props. Those who use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have arrived at the setting and must stop their performance when they leave the setting.

The setting can determine whether or not a customer will want to stay, explore, work, or affiliate with an organization (Mehrabian and Russell 1974). Bennett and Bennett (1970) stated, "All social interaction is affected by the physical container in which it occurs" (p. 22). Typical "containers" where the service experience concepts occur include boutique hotels such as Starwood's W hotels or Ian Schrager's unique properties (Pullman & Gross, 2004). Schrager (2002) applies the theatrical concepts to his hotel property's vision statement:

I want the experience of staying at one of my hotels to be more like seeing a great movie, reading a wonderful book, or watching a memorable play—not just a place to sleep, but a place where you feel an honest, emotional connection—where you feel like you are an integral part of the story unfolding around you—because you are.

The Hotel Za Za in Dallas, an upscale boutique property, incorporated the component of design and art work in their "Magnificent Seven" high-end,

VIP suites. They worked closely with the architectural designers and an art consultant when themeing not only the public spaces in the hotel but also the overall suites to enhance the guest experience. The suites are themed: Leonardo, The Last Czar, Dangerous Beauty, Crouching Tiger, Rock Star, Red Shoes, and Raven.

The setting can also influence the nature of social interactions between the actor and the audience. Sundstrom (1986) found in her study of workplace design that communication patterns, group cohesion, and the formation of friendships were influenced by the physical setting (*actor-actor vs. actor-audience*). Additionally, the audience tends to use extrinsic cues, such as the physical surroundings, to infer quality (Zeithaml, 1988).

Ambient Conditions

Ambient features, such as noise, music, aroma (Jacob, 2006; Matilla & Wirtz, 2001; Ward, Davies, & Kooijman, 2003), and room temperature (Anderson, 1989), are also used to control the environment. For example, Milliman (1982) found that the tempo (pacing) of background music in restaurants and supermarkets affected the pace of shopping, length of stay, and amount of money spent by customers. Sullivan (2002) built on Milliman's work in the restaurant setting and added volume and pitch to pacing, and a distinction was made between active and passive activities, suggesting that different mechanisms explained the atmospheric effects for each. Goffman's theoretical framework, combined with the field of environmental psychology, serve as the foundation for atmospherics and servicescape.

Atmospherics and Servicescape

Kotler's atmospherics (1973) is applied to "artificial" (brick-and-mortar) environments—void of natural environments. He uses the term atmospherics to describe the conscious designing of space to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance the purchaser probability. While Bitner (1992) defines servicescape as the "built environment (i.e., the man-made physical surrounding as opposed to the natural or social environment)" (p. 58), she states that it affects both customers and employees in the service organization. In other words, both the actor and the audience who are using the space during the service encounter.

We know that all cultures can be signifying cultures, based on interpretation. For example, Bitner (1992) maintains that the quality of materials used in construction, artwork, presence of photographs and certificates on office walls, floor coverings, and personal objects displayed in the environment can all communicate symbolic meaning and create an overall aesthetic impression.

Bitner's (1992) application of servicescape to the hospitality industry to convey level of service and pricing to the guest is easily transferred to the temporary setting of an event. Like other segments of the hospitality industry, a manipulation of the event setting can enhance or constrain audience actions. Physical elements, as well as other ambient factors such as lighting, color, quality of materials, layout, music, entertainment, fragrance, and room temperature, are just a sample of the dramatic elements used to orchestrate the environment.

Much has been done to take advantage of the touch, visual, and auditory aspects of events. Aroma is a manipulator of emotions and memories. It is a tool often employed in event design, starting with the served dinner. It is utilized quite often as part of the overarching theme of an event—popcorn at the movies, cotton candy at the fair, a pine forest—all bring past feelings to the surface with clarity.

Music/Aroma

Matilla and Wirtz (2001) manipulated scent and music in a field setting and found that when ambient scent and music are congruent with each other, consumers rate the environment significantly more positive, exhibit higher levels of approach and impulse buying behaviors, and experience enhanced satisfaction than when these environmental cues were at odds with each other. These same conditions are not only applied, but are also tools that when manipulated in an event environment, create the best experience for the audience. In the following study, *A Sociable Atmosphere: Ambient Scent's Effect on Social Interaction* (Zemke & Shoemaker, 2008), the effects of fragrance were observed:

The study demonstrates behavioral mapping, a procedure for testing people's responses to ambient factors. The study found that introducing an ambient scent into a meeting room significantly increased the number of social interactions between the study's participants. (p. 317)

Hancock, APR, CHE, in her seminar *Designs for the Senses* (2008), states that purveyors of events must, "Learn how to wrap guests in a cocoon of experience as color, fragrances and sound weave together to create the atmospheres clients seek."

Room Temperature

The approach/avoidance factor is most evident in the room temperature component of servicescape, which is also a tactile element of atmospherics.

Temperature has a great effect on both meeting and event space. Weise (2008) reports:

“Over-chilling” is one of the top complaints of meeting planners, says Donald Young of the International Facility Management Association in Houston. In meeting and event spaces around the globe room temperature is routinely held well below the traditional 72 degrees.

Dubose (2006) suggests that a constant room temperature of 71°F be maintained for training participants. Dubose also speaks to the effect of humidity, reminding that high humidity makes people feel warmer and low humidity makes them feel cooler.

Props

In the hospitality service industry, just like in a theatrical production, props are used to engage the customers (audience) in positive ways. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), plain space must become a distinctive place—a place to stage an experience. The space is layered with amenities (props) that give non-verbal cues to the audience about the organization. These props must be utilized in ways that do not give negative cues to the audience. Successful treatment of props should enhance the audiences experience, not detract from it.

Décor

Props can be used as an impression management tool, but props can also serve in a functional manner. The use of cutting edge technology can give off cues to the audience about the efficiency of the actors.

Lights/AV/Sound/Special Effects

The concepts of dramaturgy will be more effective with carefully orchestrated lights, audio-visual, sound, and special effects. Computer-driven intelligent lighting brings tired space to life with constant movement, color, pattern changes, and varying intensity. The air is alive with movement and color. Sound technology is constantly improving to make the quality and volume of amplified sound infinitely customized to enhance the guest experience without exceeding appropriate volume levels. Interactive bidding on gift packages is competing with the traditional “silent” auction as high-tech projectors not only deliver an enhanced vision of programs and auction items, but also inform guests of items up for bid, a running tally of the amount

bid, and the names of the bidders in the lead. Also, speakers/emcees can submit questions and the audience will be instantly polled as to their preferences, utilizing "Immediate Response Systems," enabling nimble speakers to customize their programs as they deliver their messages. All of the above dramatic and interactive segments of the program are increasingly capped with indoor pyrotechnics to add an exclamation point to the event program. Drama enhanced by technological developments pulls the attendee into the fabric of the event as it is taking place.

Costumes

Image is the "everything" in event production and design. Therefore, an actor's costume is one of the most important tools found in his/her dramaturgy toolbox. Costumes enable the actor to "get into character." The actor, Ed Harris, credits the costume designer on the set of *The Truman Show* for finding the perfect hat (a beret) that helped him connect with the character he portrayed, which earned him his Oscar nomination.

Putting on the costume can mean putting on a role and shedding other roles. Markus and Kunda (1986) and Markus and Wurf (1987) found "Dress acts as a reminder that helps engage particular cognitive schemas of behavior" (p. 862). Thus, role-playing can assist the employee (*actor*) in representing the organization sponsoring the event provide better service for the attendee (*audience*).

Costumes represent the organization via the actor. Judgments about the quality of service will be made by the quality of the encounter with the actors who transport the tangible part of the service to event attendees. The perceived value of the experience increases through the use of dramatic elements of production.

Room Layout/Functionability

It is not enough to make the space entertaining, beautiful, and temperature-controlled, the space must also be functional. When designing event space, safety, security, and personal space must also be considered. One of the most widely studied areas of environmental psychology today is personal space. Sommer (1969) pioneered this area, which refers to the invisible boundaries surrounding a person's body. Shock (2007) states that, "... ambience can make or break a meal function, be it a continental breakfast or a formal dinner."

FUTURE RESEARCH

The field of event management is an emerging profession in need of academic research. A review of the literature indicates a wide range of research

possibilities. Bitner (1992) proposed a tremendous need for theory building, empirical testing, development of better measures and methods, and application/replication findings from other fields. Direct observation of environmental conditions (music, timing, aroma, temperature) of facility layout options (seating, dance floor, stage design, food service styles) and their affect on customer service patterns provide opportunities for research in event management. Experimental methods and surveys would also be appropriate for assessing the impact of design dimensions on attendees and providers. For example, various sizeable corporate meetings and events take place over a period of weeks, often accommodating as many as 18,000 attendees. In order to ensure the same quality experience for their attendees, the exact product is delivered with a repetition of the same schedule, including a replica of precise event design elements, over multiple weeks, which provides an ideal laboratory in which to study the attendees' experience through manipulation of the design elements. One such event design element suggested for research is entertainment, and more specifically, music. Dan Nelson, CSEP, CMP, of Dan Nelson Productions, a Las Vegas entertainment and event production company, states that:

Music is used in an event venue to assist in changing and creating the pace, flow, and mood of attendee interaction with the event environment. For example, When the meal is served, dinner music facilitates conversation while maintaining a basic energy level (2008).

Therefore, by altering the music and the event environment, the stage is set to test the experience of the attendee.

CONCLUSION

Goffman's principles of dramaturgy are effectively applied to event design and customer service in the event industry. In fact, they are needed because the guests are buying into the unique story and theme before they are revealed. No matter how many times a professional designs the event environment, there are subtle assumptions that creep into his/her approaches and methods (Nelson & Ozier, 2007). There is a symbiotic relationship between the audience and the actor. Therefore, those who successfully engage in interactive, theatrical methods will have a competitive edge in the industry.

As the field of event management becomes professionalized, and a body of knowledge continues to develop, the connection between experiential design and enhanced attendee satisfaction becomes more evident. "A group of academics and practitioners has developed the event management body of knowledge, or EMBOOK, model (Silvers, Bowdin, O'Toole, & Nelson, 2006), which portrays five knowledge domains and related functional units for the

student or practitioner to master . . . ” (Getz, 2007, p. 3). Design is one of the EMBOK knowledge domains. This model portrays design to be crucial to the following functional areas: catering, content, entertainment, environment, program, and theme. As occupational roles and titles in event management evolve from party planner to event designer and architect, the application of the existing models developed by Kotler (1973), Bitner (1992), and Goffman (1959) serve as tools in the development of a new event design model. In today's theatrical arena of sophisticated attendees, where customer service merges with design elements, experience creation, and emotional connection, a new model for event design based on the application of combined principles, such as atmospherics, servicescape, and dramaturgy, will hopefully not only add to the body of literature sorely needed to move the industry forward, but also culminate in the creative delivery of a memorable experience for event attendees.

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