

SACRED SERVICES: THE POTENTIAL FOR SERVICE DESIGN OF THEORY RELATING TO THE SACRED

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ABSTRACT

As we move deeper and into a service economy,

BACKGROUND

The body of research that this paper contributes to is

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Services are defined through their intangibility where customer's efforts are deemed inseparable from creating favourable experiences. The temporal nature of services mean that time is an important dimension. These factors can be a challenge for the service designer.

Around the sacred, rituals and myths are created to concretize and comprehend its intangible nature. These socially driven constructions give structure to time and seasons, narratives to fundamental truths and meaning, whilst alleviating anxiety through life changes and allowing for euphoric experiences.

This paper draws from the theory relating to sacred, mainly from the social sciences, but also through a 'bricolage' approach, which aggregates relevant and useful concepts from the humanities. It argues that service design can benefit from the operationalization of theory relating to the sacred as a way to create favourable experiences and value for service customers.

also address customer needs (Koivisto 2009; Clatworthy 2011).

Cannadine (2012) argues that there is still the need for ritual and myth in modern society and while modern society still yearns for the sacred or euphoric experience, it is now often only fulfilled through consumption, creating myths and ritual to realize these yearnings (Belk, Sherry et al. 1987). Traditions, myths and rituals can and have been invented where none have existed previously (Hobsbawm 2012). These rituals and myths are then agreed and regulated through community (Durkheim 2008). Ecstatic, joyful experiences can be realised through contact with the sacred through ritual and myth (Eliade 1961; Belk, Sherry et al. 1987; Durkheim 2008) shared through the effervescence of the community (Durkheim 2008) the context within which Marx argues is our natural state of being (Megel 1970).

This paper argues that insights from theory relating to the sacred can offer the potential for addressing service design challenges to achieve a positive outcome for both service provider and customer alike.

STRUCTURE

The paper will begin with a summary of the theory relating to the nature of services followed by a summary of the theory relating to the nature of sacred through the constructions of community, myth and ritual. It will offer two examples of sacred mechanisms experienced in consumer society. It will then consider the potential