

The user journey behind socially electric live event experience

July 13 2021, by Matt Weingarden

Researchers from University of Bath, University of Melbourne, and King's College London published a new paper in the *Journal of Marketing* that explains a four-stage process that can help firms create pleasurable social atmospheres for consumers.

The study, forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing*, is titled "Social Atmospheres: How Interaction Ritual Chains Create Effervescent Experiences of Place" and is authored by Tim Hill, Robin Canniford, and Giana Eckhardt.

Across the globe, restrictions on live events have affected the experience economy and entertainment industries. Simultaneously, the empty seats and eerie silence in sports and music venues have reminded us how much fans and supporters contribute to the atmospheres enjoyed in stadiums, nightclubs, theatres, and [music festivals](#).

This new study investigates collective live events where crowds of people create social atmospheres. The authors explain that live music, sports, and theatre provide opportunities for people to share emotions and behaviors with others. These opportunities create value for firms and customers alike.

The authors explain how social atmospheres are created through an in-depth ethnographic study of Anfield, the iconic and legendary home of Liverpool Football Club. Specifically, social atmospheres result when groups of people share a focus and align their behaviors and emotions so

that mass outpourings of excitement can follow. Hill explains that "We show that these conditions occur via a four-stage process, through which firms and [consumers](#) cooperate before, during, and after events to create pleasurable social atmospheres."

The first stage begins days and weeks before [live events](#) even start. It often occurs in the home where consumers anticipate atmospheres by learning about behavioral expectations as well as making material props such as costumes and flags. Firms can facilitate preparations for atmosphere by providing web-based resources that allow people to find out where they can share experiences that anticipate and contribute to the event build-up.

For the second stage, atmospheres require activation among smaller groups. Similar to a sports team or music group warming up before an event, consumers also rehearse songs and gestures as a way to align behaviors and emotions before an event begins. Firms can facilitate these activities by ensuring that places like stadiums and concert halls are surrounded by smaller venues that cater to consumers' desires to meet and build excitement before they progress to the main event.

In the third stage, once smaller groups have built a sense of anticipatory excitement, firms must often work to unify these groups into larger crowds. One way to do this is to stage formal rituals: from the Olympic Opening Ceremony to the All Blacks' 'haka,' formal rituals provide intense moments of interpersonal connection that align emotions and behaviors as an event begins.

In the fourth stage, following an event, shared emotions and memories of [atmosphere](#) are stored in merchandise and memorabilia. By reminding supporters of the emotional highs of atmospheres, these objects help to inspire repeated visits to events.

Successful social atmospheres require cooperation between firms and consumers. Canniford cautions, though, that "As much as firms can facilitate the creation of social atmospheres, they can also damage atmospheres by dazzling consumers with music, lights, and pyrotechnics. These generic stimuli can drown-out the organic expressions of pleasure and excitement produced by people participating in crowd behaviors."

Importantly, consumers want to create atmospheres themselves, with their own meaningful rituals that are often passed down through generations. Although firms may welcome an upsurge in the popularity of the events they stage, they must understand how tensions can arise between longstanding devotees and more casual consumers such as tourists. "Preparing tourists or visitors to understand the expectations for participating in creating atmospheres can help preserve atmospheres and avoid tensions between groups," says Eckhardt.

Finally, large events must manage myriad risks and safety precautions, yet this can often limit atmospheres. Successful event management requires that service and security staff acquire local knowledge of crowd behavior so that that shared emotions and behaviors are not disrupted.

Although the reopening of entertainment venues heralds hope for the entertainment industry and consumers emerging from lockdowns, firms that facilitate social atmospheres effectively are more likely to benefit from enhanced customer experiences, customer loyalty, and the possibility to create iconic sites to which visitors will return time and again.

More information: Tim Hill et al, EXPRESS: Social Atmospheres: How Interaction Ritual Chains Create Effervescent Experiences of Place, *Journal of Marketing* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429211023355](https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429211023355)

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