

Developing a Shared Experience Connection Theory

Brian J. Hill, Ph.D.

Fulbright Professor, Innovation and Management in Tourism, FH Salzburg
Experience Design and Management Professor, Brigham Young University

Positive psychologists have found that happiness and well-being are dependent on strong interpersonal connections (Frederickson, 2013; Vaillant, 2002). Experience designers seek to provide experiences that build those connections and offer greater happiness to individuals. Our behavioral science work seeks to understand how shared experiences create a better life and how determinant elements in shared experience leads to greater connection. An experience typology was first published categorizing extraordinary experiences as ordinary, memorable, meaningful, or transformative. Qualitative data was used next to develop and publish an experience impact scale, followed by a project considering emotions felt during various extraordinary experiences. These results led to a study on the impact of connection during shared experiences on positive and negative emotions. Another project examined the relationship between novelty and positive emotion in shared experiences. An ongoing study is measuring the impact of self-disclosure in shared experience on attention, engagement, and connection and suggests that greater self-disclosure in a shared experience affects feelings of connection among participants. This study uses psychometric devices, measures, and algorithms to gauge engagement variability. Evidence from this line of research has led to the development of a Shared Experience Connection Theory. This theory hypothesizes that shared experiences incorporating novelty, challenge, and self-disclosure lead to greater feelings of connection and then to greater happiness. Further research will test the effects of the combination of these and other experience design elements on connection and happiness. This presentation will summarize and link conceptualization, measurement, and study results leading to the development of the Shared Experience Connection Theory.