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Critically evaluating the marketisation of fun through a socio-cultural lens of consumer experience

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Abstract

Ubiquitous but elusive, fun flows through the fabric of contemporary consumer experiences, enticing marketers to weave the societal pursuit of fun throughout customer journeys. However, despite fun's omnipresence, scholarly understandings of the construct are limited. Marketing and consumer research struggles to provide a definitional consensus, let alone comprehension of fun's conceptual elements and marketers' abilities to leverage them.

Driven by the lack of theoretical understanding of the construct of fun and the keen interest of practitioners, this study has two objectives. First, to examine consumers' lived meanings of fun and the ways in which these are constructed, interpreted, and shared. Second, to understand how the concept of fun is used by marketers in pursuit of marketing objectives and whether the perspectives of two sides are aligned.

Underpinned by an interpretive methodology with the hermeneutic phenomenological lens, the empirical element of this study entails in-depth interviews with consumers and marketing professionals representing the brands that adopt the concept of fun in their promotional activities.

The findings from consumer interviews reveal two layers of insight. In experienced fun, consumers' meaning making revolves around positive affective states, liberated self, social connectedness and normality transgression. From a wider perspective of fun as a part of consumers' lives, self is constrained, social influence is evident and fun meanings are shaped by often restrictive social norms. The findings from marketers' sample signal that while such aspects of consumer fun as positive affective states, social connectedness and going beyond normality are acknowledged, the dynamics of self-liberation and self-constraint, as well as the tensions related to consumers' self-perception surrounding fun that is perceived to fall out of the socially constructed fun norms are overlooked.

Based on the findings, the phenomenon of consumer fun is understood through the application of Giddens' structuration theory, as the intersection of agency and structure affecting and informing each other. Consumers continually recreate structure through their participation in fun practices, while pre-existing conventions of such practices constrain their choices and behaviours but at the same time provide a referential

framework within which personal fun experiences are understood and interpreted. Marketisation of fun can either boost consumers' agency or reinforce the structure, contributing to the construction and circulation of implicitly understood norms regarding what kind of fun practices are 'appropriate' for different consumer social groups.

This thesis makes the following contributions. First, it provides an original qualitative insight into the phenomenon of consumer fun, revealing the links between fun, self, society, and norm. Second, it extends the critical debate in marketing and consumer research with the insights that bridge the literature emphasising liberation and the literature focussing on constraint in the exploration of fun, reconciling two perspectives through the novel application of structuration theory. Finally, it enables marketers to make more informed choices in their attempts to facilitate, rather than deliver or engineer, fun for their customers through a more critically appreciative understanding of the construct.

Key words: Fun, Consumer Experience, Self, Society, Norm, Agency, Structure, Structuration Theory

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Omnipresence of fun

At the beginning of the twenty-first century fun can truly be considered an epithet for the Zeitgeist in the Western world (McManus & Furnham, 2010). Giridharadas' (2010) analysis of the Corpus of Historical American English, an extensive database including newspapers, magazines, novels, plays and film scripts, demonstrates that between the 1810s and 2000s the integral frequency of using the word 'fun' has grown eightfold. Discussing fun as one of the core values of the modern American society, Bryant & Forsyth (2005, p. 209) even suggest that the country's economy has become fun driven since more and more families are ready to pay premium for necessities 'upgraded to the level of fun' (e.g. the modest cost of the basic house skyrockets when it is supplemented by the items that can presumably encourage fun such as swimming pool, home cinema, pool table, game room, etc.). They (ibid.) call the current trend of striving for fun an obsession vaguely reminiscent of religion: 'Fun seeking is very much integrated into our entire culture and in our daily cycle of life—home, work, rest, maintenance, and even sleep. Our hedonistic quest has become a deified entity of its own—the Fun God, as it were' (p. 198).

Despite being an omnipresent phenomenon that individuals often recognise intuitively, fun is enigmatic (Sharp & Thomas, 2019). Most of us can clearly distinguish moments of fun from times that are not fun, yet understanding what fun actually *is* presents certain difficulties, not only for ourselves to reflect upon, but also for marketing managers or copywriters trying to capture notions of fun within their carefully targeted communications. Fun is fundamentally elusive and illogical (Beckman, 2014). It is multidimensional and can be had in various forms (Tews et al., 2012). While fun is often seen just as a by-product of other positive states characterised by enhanced emotional levels, for example, happiness (Fincham, 2016), it is still considered to have its own distinctive features such as spontaneity (Fineman, 2006), intrinsic motivation (Churchill et al., 2007), frivolity, and light-heartedness (Podilchak, 1991a). It has been reported to positively impact people on both personal and interpersonal levels. Thus, fun fills ordinary life with positivity and nurtures mental well-being; if all fun was taken away from human life, some would suggest it would lead to severe, negative

psychological and social consequences (North, 2015). Fun also characterises individuals (Baldry & Hallier, 2010) and helps to form interpersonal bonds (Allen & Meyer, 1990). It brings people together and boosts group commitment by creating emotional engagement in the moment and providing subsequent narrative possibilities when this moment is relived in the memory (Fine & Corte, 2017). Meaningful and positive social relationships, in turn, make a significant contribution to human happiness (Myers, 2000; Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Fun is claimed to be one of the most important life pursuits (Smillie et al., 2006) and research demonstrates its importance in multiple spheres of human endeavour. Thus, fun at the workplace may help recruit better and higher motivated candidates (Karl & Peluchette, 2006), enhance employee satisfaction and engagement (Karl et al., 2005), promote better relationships within the company, and increase efficiency and performance (Tews et al., 2013). In tourism, having fun at a destination helps to build visitors' attachment and affection to the setting (Jiang et al., 2016). In sport, fun is named one of the most important factors affecting children's' involvement in physical activity (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1988; Scanlan & Simons, 1992). Shopping considered fun results in more pleasant and satisfactory experiences in comparison to situations when it is viewed as a serious task (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Use of technology turns out to be more enjoyable when fun is present (Dix, 2003). Perceiving learning process as fun contributes to making it more effective (Malone & Lepper, 1987; Lepper & Cordova, 1992); experienced fun helps to boost learners' motivation and concentration (Lucardie, 2014).

1.2 Making marketing 'fun'

Ubiquitous and desirable for consumers, fun finds its place as an element of marketing strategies. Leading international brands, such as Disney, Lego, Cadbury, M&Ms, Fiat, Vodafone, Asos, and Victoria's Secret use the concept of fun in their marketing communications, promising their customers fun brand encounters. Appeals to fun are widely used in print, TV, indoor, outdoor, and online advertising as well as on product packaging, adopted for the promotion of an increasingly wide range of products and services: from entertainment, sports and fitness, to hotels, cars, gadgets, mobile apps, food, clothing, toys, games, pet care, online courses and many other categories. As this research progressed, multiple cases of marketing communications adopting the

construct of fun were becoming prominent. Appendix 1 provides a set of such examples.

In 2009, Volkswagen came up with ‘The Fun Theory’ suggesting that bringing some fun to the stage is the easiest way to change behaviours for the better (Maultsby, 2020). The brand converted a staircase within Stockholm Odenplan subway station into working piano keys as a part of the campaign developed in cooperation with DDB Stockholm. The plan was to help make people's personal habits healthier, amplify the environmental focus of the company and promote its more eco-friendly products (Diaz, 2009). The campaign proved to be highly successful: the number of people taking the stairs increased by 66% after the musical installation was added and the brand video showing that subway terminal went viral online, reaching over 2.5 million views (Ramos, 2009).

Business media and marketing blogs actively encourage marketing professionals to adopt fun as a part of their marketing approach in both B2C (Windels, 2012; Davis, 2016; Ellis, 2019; Woods, 2019) and B2B sectors (Bengualid, 2019). Industry specialists highlight a number of benefits that ‘making marketing fun’ brings. Thus, it humanises the brand, makes the business appear warmer and more approachable for the potential customers who may then develop brand loyalty (Hausman, 2020). For hospitality and leisure brands, guests who had a fun time are more likely to recommend the brand to their friends and family, leave positive reviews, share brand-related content on social media and return for more experiences (OC&C Fundex, 2019).

While the urge to ‘make marketing fun’ is abundant (Cochran, 2016), advice on how that goal can be reached is relatively vague. For example, the infusion of fun into internet marketing tactics may include running contests on social media, creating funny videos, adopting a funny slogan or character (Windels, 2012); posting ‘behind-the-scene’ photos and videos, using more emoji, polling the audience (Smith, 2019); creating captivating content, engaging with pop culture, using gamified mechanics (Bengualid, 2019). Although such practical steps may indeed be helpful for achieving certain marketing objectives, whether they measurably turn a website or a social media page into a fun-fuelled encounter remains unclear.

Likewise, making brick-and-mortar stores fun is an ambitious aspiration that somewhat lacks clear directions. Fun can be an important part of shopping as long as it is integrated into the overall experience in a smart way to ensure creation of additional value without sacrificing service (Kruger, 2001). Again, business media propose a wide range of instruments brands can utilise to create fun touchpoints with consumers. The strategies vary from evoking shopper's curiosity and enabling exploration through a maze of attractive displays (Danziger, 2006), to making dreams reality with VR and other technology, creating playful and skill-building experience, e.g. indoor rock-climbing walls or cooking classes in the store (Green, 2018), to providing sensory rich environment and integrating opportunities for multimodal experiences in one place (Kim & Park, 2012). An important incentive for marketers, consumer fun might bring extra profits: when shopping for fun recreational shoppers spend 60% more per month than ordinary shoppers - $408 vs $241 (Souvenirs, Gifts & Novelties, 2006). Although it requires a lot of planning and attention to detail, staff trainings and effort to keep the experiences fresh and consistent across the brand locations as well as ensuring that the majority of the customers will find a particular thing fun, successful implementation of fun practices can be rewarding for businesses (Morgan & Rao, 2003).

However, despite attractive opportunities and promising results, retailers struggle to establish fun as a reliable factor of shopping trips even with investments in digital tools, voice-assisted shopping, and robots. Gensler Research Institute (2017) reported that consumers were 1.4 times more likely to have fun at work than during shopping. Commenting on that, Forbes retail analyst (Pearson, 2018) states that the use of entertaining technology is not capable of creating fun unless some more basic requirements are met. For example, novelty, beauty, and authenticity are among the factors that contribute to a great retail experience, particularly if they provide surprise and aesthetic pleasure that might appear as a starting point on the way to reaching a fun state (ibid.). Nevertheless, while demonstrating a keen interest in fun, marketing professionals lack a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon they are trying to capture (especially from the consumers' perspective), and the practical advice is often built on anecdotal evidence or personal opinions (e.g. Davis, 2016; Bengualid, 2019). Moreover, 'making marketing (or consumer experience) fun' is challenging not only because externally imposing fun is opposite to its internally driven nature, but also

because marketing and consumer research, while admitting the importance of fun, provides a very limited scope of knowledge of the phenomenon.

1.3 Fun as an under researched phenomenon

It may seem that the place for fun was secured in consumer research over forty years ago when Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) pioneered the experiential view of consumption, claiming that such elements of consumption as feelings, fantasies and fun traditionally neglected by cognitive research are in fact its integral parts. Yet, with relatively few exceptions (e.g. Tasci & Ko, 2016; Oh & Pham, 2022), attempts to shine a theoretically attuned spotlight on fun have eluded the subject domain. Consequently, consumer research struggles to provide a definitional consensus, let alone comprehension of fun's conceptual elements and marketers' abilities to leverage them (Oh, 2020).

However, the gap in knowledge surrounding the phenomenon of fun is not the unique issue of consumer and marketing research. The same problem is identified by the authors in related disciplines, such as psychology (McManus & Furnham, 2010; Reis et al., 2017) sociology (Fincham, 2016), anthropology (Wilk, 2022), sports research (Wellard, 2014), and cultural studies (McKee, 2016). Although this thesis reflects a Western worldview and the collected data represent fun meanings and interpretations of consumers and marketing professionals in the UK, it is worth noting that this is a globally recognised problem. For example, social researchers, particularly in Southeast Asia, also highlight the absence of any concerted theoretical focus on fun. 'Play, fun and pleasure are typically treated in one of two ways in such studies: either they are ignored or they are seen as symbols of something more important, […] considered a mechanism for political engagement, a symbol of domination, a fleeting resistance to social inequalities or a bearer of cultural difference' (Anjaria & Anjaria, 2020, p. 234).

When deconstruction of fun is present in the domain of social science, those attempts, scattered across aforementioned disciplines, do not demonstrate unambiguity and consensus in its conceptualization; besides, fun often appears in research as a peripheral rather than a central concept (Podilchak, 1986; Bakir & Baxter, 2011). Definitions of fun are often not examined in scholarly literature and there appears to be an assumption that, by default, fun is felt and understood similarly by everyone

(Owler et al., 2010). While researchers underline the amusing, pleasurable and playful nature of fun and use sensory descriptors (Lamm & Meeks, 2009), it is rarely explained in detail (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2014; Sörensson, 2012). Even when the word 'fun' appears in the title of the research paper, it might lack the discussion of the concept itself with the focus on related phenomena such as excitement, enjoyment, or thrill instead, without clear explanation of these constructs' relationships with fun (for example, Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Williams, 2006; Yar & Tzanelli, 2019).

One of the reasons why it is problematic to capture the essence of fun might be the fact that people experiencing it rarely concentrate on it since this would become antithetical for fun. Turning to this issue Fincham (2016) suggests that answering the questions 'what is fun' and 'how does fun feel like' drives attention to the self while having fun usually directs it away from the self. Thus, trying to make sense of the fun state might loosen the essence of the experience (with certain exceptions, e.g., screaming to one's friends, 'I am having so much fun!' in the middle of a crowded dance floor can actually enhance fun; ibid., p. 85). Therefore, the very nature of fun presents a challenge for researchers aiming to explore and explain this implicit construct in more detail.

Additionally, fun research in social science may have been tacitly discouraged by what play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith called a 'triviality barrier' (1970). This barrier represents a form of bias that treats such trivial phenomena as fun or play secondary to work and other rational serious activities, making the former the subject of less critical importance. The omission of fun in research due to its presumable lack of seriousness is also reflected in the position of Goffman (1961, p.7): 'Because serious activity need not justify itself in terms of the fun it provides, we have neglected to develop an analytical view of fun and an appreciation of light fun throws on interaction in general'. Nevertheless, neglect towards affective, irrational, and aesthetic concepts is becoming an issue of the past and the phenomenon of fun is beginning to attract more attention from social scientists (e.g. McKee, 2008; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Fine & Corte, 2017; Blythe & Hassenzahl 2018; Oh & Pham, 2022; Wilk, 2022).

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

Taking into account the ubiquitous yet relatively underexplored nature of fun as well as the growing engagement of marketing professionals with the construct of fun, this

study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon informed by consumers' and marketers' perspectives.

Therefore, the key objectives of this research are the following:

1) To review and interrogate theorisations of the construct of fun.
2) To critically evaluate the narrative underpinning academic investigations of the phenomenon treating it as a means of achieving external goals.
3) Given the prevalence of fun in consumption experiences as well as in marketing practice, to produce an empirical account of how contemporary consumers and marketing professionals understand and interpret fun.
4) To propose a new theorisation of consumer fun illustrating how fun manifestations and their interpretations are shaped by broader socio-cultural forces.
5) To recommend an alternative approach to 'making marketing fun', enabling marketers to make more informed choices through a critically appreciative understanding of fun as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

1.5 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter 1 (the current chapter) introduces the study by demonstrating a strong interest of marketing professionals in the construct of fun as well as the ubiquitous nature of fun and its importance for consumers, on the one hand, and identifying a significant gap in academic knowledge in relation to the phenomenon in question, on the other hand. This chapter also explains the aims and objectives of this study and provides an overview of the thesis.

Chapter 2 reviews academic enquiries concerned with the construct of fun. It begins with the critical discussion of research treating fun as a holistic construct, tracks the historical changes in societal attitudes towards fun and delves into the critique of fun at work, in leisure, in public policy, in marketing and media, emphasising the ideas of fun production, control and purposeful use. It is followed by a discussion of the literature that deconstructs fun, identifying intrinsic motivation, freedom, and idleness as its essential components. Based on the previous research findings, this study defines fun through the lens of play as a situational definition and adopts Consumer Culture Theory as a theoretical framework, embracing the experiential consumption

paradigm. The chapter is concluded with the separation of two levels of abstraction: fun as experienced ('I went to the cinema today and had fun') and fun as disposition ('going to the cinema is fun for me'), and a discussion of the following research questions informed by the literature:

RQ1: How is fun experienced by consumers?

RQ2: How are dispositions of fun constructed, shared, and reflected upon by consumers?

RQ3: How do marketing professionals adopt and implement the construct of fun in brand promotional activities?

RQ4: To what extent are marketers' understandings of the construct consistent with the consumers' articulations of fun?

This chapter addresses research objectives 1 and 2.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology adopted for the study. It overviews the philosophical positions of the previous research of fun where positivism mostly prevails, analyses the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of positivist vs interpretivist philosophies in relation to fun and concludes that interpretivist perspective provides a better fit for the exploration of the phenomenon. If further discusses the adoption of hermeneutic phenomenology as the underpinning paradigm, qualitative research design based on the interviews with consumers and marketing professionals, the processes of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the consumer interviews revolving around three dominant themes emerging from the data: self, society and norm that have a polar opposite nature on the levels of experience and disposition.

Chapter 5 provides the findings from the interviews with marketing practitioners and demonstrates how marketers adopt the construct of fun in the corporate communications, positioning the brand as a fun one and how they can help their customers experience fun within brand encounters. Chapters 4 and 5 address objective 3.

Chapter 6 delivers the interpretation of findings through the application of Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, presenting the novel conceptualisation of fun and addressing objective 4.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis. It presents the overview of the key findings in relation to the research questions, explicates the theoretical contributions of the study and provides recommendations for marketing practitioners working with the construct of fun (addressing objective 5). Next, the limitations of this research are considered and several avenues for future research are proposed.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Industry professionals urge their colleagues to pursue fun in their marketing practice and ensure that customers have fun within brand encounters. However, such claims are rarely supported by solid evidence demonstrating that fun is indeed a valid goal to strive for and that achieving it will benefit the customers and the business. A separate overlooked issue raised throughout this thesis is whether 'making marketing fun' is at all possible. While answering the latter question requires a deeper dive in the essence of the phenomenon of fun (discussed in the sections 2.3.1-2.3.5 of the literature review and further explored in the findings chapter), the former does attract some attention from marketing academics.

Specifically, research on hedonic and experiential shopping provides some evidence (although indirect) that fun experienced by consumers may be beneficial for marketers. Contrasted with utilitarian orientation, the hedonic approach implies festive and ludic side of shopping (Sherry, 1990). It is perceived rather as fun and playfulness than task completion (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Value of hedonic consumption reflects its entertainment potential and emotional worth (Bellenger et al., 1976). Among the indicators of hedonically valuable shopping experience there are perceived freedom, fantasy fulfilment, increased arousal, heightened involvement (Bloch & Richins, 1983). Utilitarianism, on the other hand, represents task-related, rational, efficient type of consumption experience (Batra & Ahtola, 1991). It is important to note, though, that these two orientations are complementary and intertwined (Babin et al., 1994).

Consumers who engage in shopping experiences with hedonic and recreational purposes (which by extension imply having fun) have been reported to exhibit certain behavioural patterns. Fun in such experiences can be viewed as both motivation and outcome. For example, Wolfinbarger & Gilly (2001) claim that fun and commitment to experience that in itself is as important or even more important than acquisition goal are desired outcomes of experiential shopping that can be achieved through surprise, uniqueness and excitement; positive sociality; online deal searching; and involvement with a product class. Other researchers see fun as a motivational driver. Thus, upper-middle consumers driven by fun have been reported to buy a higher amount of items

and more expensive items than those driven by utilitarian motives (Scarpi, 2006). When shopping for fun, consumers were found to be more loyal to a store/website comparing with shopping for necessity; recreational shoppers were also claimed to be more likely to spread word-of-mouth about their positive experiences (Scarpi et al., 2014). In the offline setting, hedonic shopping motivations positively influenced re-patronage intention (Park & Sullivan, 2009) and resistance to store switching (Sloot & Verhoef, 2008). However, the evidence of the positive relationship between hedonism and loyalty is not consistent. For example, Guiry et al. (2006) proposed the existence of recreational shopper identity ('a dimension of an individual's self-concept whereby the consumer defines himself or herself in terms of shopping for recreational or leisure purposes', p.75) and found that individuals scoring high on the scale of such identity exhibited lack of loyalty both to retail form and to particular stores and behaved as variety seekers.

Hedonic shopping orientations have also been claimed to be related to self-indulgent behaviours. Thus, consumers shopping for fun were more likely to engage in trials, make unplanned purchases and buy more items than originally planned (Scarpi, 2012). A distantly related study by Nenkov & Scott (2014) focused on the analysis of whimsical cuteness (associated with capricious humour and playful disposition) has revealed across four experiments in different contexts that whimsically cute products primed mental representations of fun which in turn directed consumers' focus on the rewards they could obtain from engaging in indulgent behaviours. This established link might provide one explanation why consumers who seek fun in shopping will end up with impulsive purchasing and spending more money than utilitarian shoppers.

While such studies help to develop quite an optimistic view of consumer fun from the marketing perspective and further encourage marketers' fun pursuit, there is an ongoing problematic issue that this research fails to clearly define the construct of fun. Besides, while hedonic aspect of consumption involves fun as one of the main elements, sometimes this type of consumer experiences is called 'fun side' as opposed to utilitarian 'dark side' (Hirschman, 1984). Fun then is used as a superordinate term to denote a variety of positive qualities or phenomena. Fun side refers to several emotional and intangible ramifications of consumption hedonic value, that may include enjoyment, excitement, captivation, escapism, and spontaneity (Babin et al., 1994). However, as long as fun is presented as an overarching label for

a combination of other related concepts (or as a part of the indissoluble group of such concepts) that have cognitive, affective, and conative differences (Dix, 2014), it is impossible to assign behavioural outcomes in the findings to any of these factors. In order to explore the full potential of fun for consumers as well as marketers, this construct has to be isolated.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the current understanding of this nebulous phenomenon and establish the research questions underpinned by the appraisal of the existing literature. Although research does not yet provide a comprehensive understanding of fun, there are several areas of academic enquiry that discuss various fun manifestations and attempt to uncover what actually makes fun fun. First, the review discusses how society in the Western world has been treating the construct of fun throughout history and tracks how initially negative connotations came to be replaced by positive attitudes and the original striving to avoid fun at all costs turned into its endless pursuit (sections 2.2.1-2.2.2). These sections are followed by the dive into the critique of fun in management, leisure, public policy, and marketing studies illuminating the problematic issues beneath the strategy of adapting fun as a means of achieving specific purposes and attempts to produce and manage fun of employees, leisure seekers, citizens, and customers (sections 2.2.3 - 2.2.7). The literature aiming to deconstruct fun is then critically reviewed (sections 2.3.1 – 2.3.4), and the sharp contrast is revealed between the identified fun components (such as perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, and transgression) and the position of various organisations and institutions trying to externally generate and control it. The following sections (2.3.5 – 2.3.7) explain the exploration of fun through play and conformity to play mentality adopted in this study; address the studies of experiential consumption within consumer research highlighting how fun is often acknowledged as a loyal companion of extraordinary experiences, yet remains mostly a peripheral concept in the analysis; and elucidate the choice of Consumer Culture Theory as a theoretical framework. Finally, informed by the literature review, the research questions that aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of fun from consumers' perspective and explore how closely this view corresponds with marketers' stance on fun are discussed (section 2.4).

2.2 Socio-cultural factors shaping understanding of fun

The construct of fun does not represent a static entity, it has been evolving and changing, as the society progressed, while being heavily influenced by the agendas of religious authorities, employers, leisure organisers, public policy makers, and marketers. The shifts become visible through the analysis of the literature critiquing fun, its treatment and manifestations in various spheres of human endeavour, but on a surface level they are reflected in the dictionary definitions and the usage of the word 'fun' through the centuries.

2.2.1 Definitions and connotations of fun

The existing academic tradition of using the term 'fun' is relatively short and the scholars who focused their research specifically on this phenomenon note the struggle of coming up with a formal definition (Podilchak 1991b; McManus & Furnham 2010; Fincham 2016; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Blythe & Hassenzahl 2018). Play theorist Johan Huizinga ([1938] 1949) wrote that fun as a concept 'resists all analysis, all logical interpretation' (p.3) and added that no other modern language known to him (specifically mentioning Dutch, German, and French) has the exact equivalent of the English 'fun'.

Although in the attempt to academically comprehend the essence of the concept turning to dictionaries that typically contain common everyday meanings (as opposed to the ways terms understood in professional vocabularies) may not be the best strategy (McKee, 2016), Oxford English Dictionary provides important etymological clues that help to start uncovering the meanings of fun.

Dictionary definitions of fun demonstrate the usage of the word as noun, adjective and verb (Oxford English Dictionary online, n.d.). As a noun it refers to (1) 'act of fraud or deception; a trick played on a person; a joke'; (2) 'light-hearted pleasure, enjoyment, or amusement; boisterous joviality or merrymaking; entertainment'; (3) 'source of light-hearted pleasure or enjoyment; amusing, entertaining'. Fun as an adjective means 'providing entertainment, amusement, or enjoyment'. The verb is used in order to express the meanings such as 'to cheat or cajole (a person) (out of something); to trick, deceive' or 'to indulge in fun; to jest, to joke'. While these definitions provide descriptive markers of the phenomenon, they do not demarcate it from related but

different constructs. The descriptions, however, indicate a clear contrast between two major connotations. The first one is somewhat negative: someone is being fooled, fun of some is had at the expense of others, therefore, the situation implies inequality and potentially malicious intent. The second connotation is mostly positive, described in terms related to positive emotionally enhanced experiences.

While in the contemporary society both, positive (e.g. analysed by Fincham, 2016) and negative (e.g. explored in the paper 'Dark Fun: The Cruelties of Hedonic Communities'; Fine & Corte, 2021) expressions of fun can be found, it is important to highlight that the initial meaning of the word contained only negative connotation.

The word 'fun' is believed to derive from the Middle English 'fonnen' – 'befool'. In the earliest records fun only refers to such actions as to cheat, trick or hoax: 'She had fun'd him of his Coin' (1685). In the eighteenth century it was stigmatised as a 'low cant word' and this disreputable aspect was carried into nineteenth century: 'His wit and humour delightful, when it does not degenerate into 'fun'' (1845). Fun as something amusing and exciting only appears in the language relatively late: (1889) 'There is no fun in doing nothing when you have nothing to do' (Oxford English Dictionary online, n.d.). Some researchers relate the semantic development of the word to the industrial revolution when the division between work and free time became more rigid (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018). Fooling around turned into a form of resistance on the factory floor that provided salvation from the hard physical labour, and at the same time the opportunity to enjoy other activities when not at work induced fun in leisure. Societal attitudes towards fun have undergone a series of dramatic changes.

2.2.2 Fun morality

The Protestant Reformation in Europe insisted on a purity of conduct (Bryant & Forsyth, 2005). In sixteenth-seventeenth centuries puritanical morality (Puritanism being an especially harsh and vigorous branch of Protestantism) that is known for its ascetic overtone and power to foster guilt exerted a strong influence on relationship between work and fun in the Western world. Work was something to be endured, not enjoyed. It was a serious activity that did not tolerate any pleasure or delight of senses (Wilson, 1981). Similarly, in everyday life outside of work people would try to avoid having too much fun as it was considered frivolous, base, crude and sinful

(Wolfenstein, 1951). During this period European society was surrounded by an aura of grim dedication to hard labour and a determination to enforce old codes against play and idleness (Kraus 1990; Furnham, 1990). Instead of letting oneself discover sensuous pleasures and light-hearted fun, the moral norms dictated disciplined pleasures reached through self-training and sometimes even self-denial (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). In the puritanical achievement-oriented worldview fun was not just time-wasting, it was considered a short path to misfortune - bad things would happen to those who put fun before work and discipline (Tumbat & Belk, 2011).

Puritanism made its way from Europe to the American continent and has been flourishing in the Western world for several centuries (Beckman, 2014). Wolfenstein (1951) tracks the change in attitudes towards impulse and restraint, and perceptions of fun in the United States and notices that society has gone a long way from associating fun with wickedness to something being actively sought after. While in the nineteenth century societal stance on fun was getting slightly more tolerant, the real seismic shift only happened after the World War II, when the meaning and worth of human life have been re-evaluated and re-considered. Stoicism and asceticism came to be replaced by fun and enjoyment. If formerly individuals would fear the condemnation by moral authorities for gratification of forbidden impulses and this would arouse guilt, in the new vision not having enough fun was a reason to worry. It was not only an occasion for regret but involved a loss of self-esteem (ibid). Not having fun directly affected the sense of self by bringing it down, making the person feel unwanted and inadequate, since the reputation of the fun person became desirable. This position is further supported by Bourdieu (1984, p. 367) who called the contemporary middle class carriers of ‘fun ethic’ which implied having fun and pleasure as a duty. Failure to do so was a threat to the self.

The increased pressure to turn life into a fun one found its reflection in American advertising of the 50s when a considerable amount of mundane utilitarian products suddenly was positioned through the appeal to fun. Thus, Kiell (1961) describes a day of an average family: a housewife mother, a business executive father, and their children, demonstrating how almost everything they use or see around them is supposed to be considered fun:

‘When the executive reaches his office, his secretary waltzes in on Fortunet's ‘fun-loving shoes’ which encase her Dupont nylons which are ‘such fun, such fashion-nylons with a hint of a tint’. Her watermelon red French purse in mock ostrich is ‘a new fun color . . . not bashful a bit . . . but a great little treasure’. Her hat by Lanvin-Castillo (‘A hat in front, an Egyptian hairdo from the back, in pink silk floss’), is living proof that ‘hats are fun!’ The blouse she wears is Arnold Constable's ‘Own Happy Shirt in Dacron-Pima Cotton’, only two dollars more with monogram. The Nestle color products she uses colors her hair ‘So Easily-in Minutes; It's Fun! It's Fashionable’. As the executive's fun-costumed secretary passes his desk, her perfume, ‘Le Mugnet du Bonheur Caron-Tout la gaiete et le charme de Paris’, is wafted gently to his nostrils. She pauses, bends down, and whispers sibilantly in his ear, ‘Snicker-doodle’, which the Sunshine Biscuit Company has told her on its wrapper, ‘It's fun to say!’ No sooner has she seated herself at her desk when she has picked up the telephone because the Bell Telephone System has onomatopoetically suggested to her, ‘It's fun to phone’. This is the motto his teenage children have discovered and whenever he is at home and they are having one of their telephone marathons, they flash this advertisement in front of him. Who is he to debate with that fun-lover of a genius, Alexander Graham Bell?’ (pp. 2-3)

Kiell (1961) is clearly sceptical of the idea that everything surrounding consumers should be fun and takes it as a desperate attempt to avoid anxieties driven by global and domestic conflicts and alienation of daily life.

The similar path – from something to be avoided to something to chase almost obligatorily or something to be imposed to (with dubious consequences) – can be tracked in the debate about fun at the workplace.

2.2.3 Critique of fun at work

The transition of fun from sin to necessity started breaking work-leisure dichotomy, with fun penetrating both spheres and making the borders between them more blurry (Wolfenstein, 1951). Almost until the beginning of industrialisation work remains mostly free from any fun activities. Working class started filling fun with new meanings (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018). In the beginning of the twentieth century employers considered fun at work a distracting factor that negatively affected performance. One of the most illustrative examples of this viewpoint is the quote of Henry Ford ([1922]

2009, pp. 134-135): ‘It is not necessary to have meetings to establish good feeling between individuals or departments. It is not necessary for people to love each other in order to work together... When we are at work we ought to be at work. When we are at play we ought to be at play. There is no use trying to mix the two. When the work is done, then the play can come, but not before’. However, employees who had to spend long hours in severe working conditions started including fun in their routines to blow off the steam, relieve boredom and fight the monotony: friendly banter, horseplay, sharing conversations and food made work survivable and provided a vent for emotions (Roy, 1959). Fun at the factory floor and later in the offices remained mostly the prerogative of the workers themselves until the founding fathers of ‘fun at work’ promotion Deal & Kennedy (1982) argued in their seminal work, Corporate Cultures, that many blue chip companies in the United States owed part of their success to the introduction of fun and play to work processes. With the contribution of other influential advocates of fun at work (Pascale & Athos, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982) fun, play and humour have been established as managerial tools that support employees’ motivation and performance (Warren & Fineman, 2007).

There is a steadily growing volume of research focused on fun in the workplace, and encouraging and engineering fun in the organisations is a widespread practice (Plester et al., 2015). Many authors concentrate their attention on positive outcomes of such initiatives: increased energy and employee motivation (Stern & Borcia, 1999), positive relationships in the group (Meyer, 1999), better customer service (Berg, 2001), lower levels of stress (Abramis, 1989a, 1989b; Miller, 1996; McGhee, 2000), reduced absenteeism and desire to leave the organization (Marriotti, 1999; Zbar, 1999; Tews et al., 2013). Besides, fun experienced at workplace has been reported to be connected with improvements in creativity and task performance (Fluegge-Woolf, 2008, 2014); job satisfaction (Peluchette & Karl, 2005, Karl & Peluchette, 2006; Ugheoke et al., 2022), and organizational commitment (McDowell, 2004).

However, mixing fun and work is not without shortcomings. Research on fun at work raises an important question of fun management and ‘packaging’ and indicates that fun occurring organically and driven intrinsically is often enjoyed more than fun that has been prepared by someone else (Whitelely & Hessan, 1996; Lundin et al., 2002). Fun created by supervisors in the form social events (birthday celebrations, teambuilding gatherings), professional recognition ceremonies (performance awards),

community events (fundraising), etc. is not always perceived as fun for workers who may feel patronised, become cynical and uncomfortable with suggested activities (Fleming, 2005). When the time pressure is strong, workplace fun can be experienced as distracting and coercive (Baptiste, 2009). On the other hand, uncontrolled intense employee fun can interfere with work routines and slow the progress down (Plester & Sayers, 2007).

Initially, the work sphere naturally let fun in as a means of recharging, but when the role of fun was noticed by researchers and managers it was turned into a tool of staff control and rewarding. Therefore, on the one hand, fun was a sign of liberation from hard labour, on the other hand, emerging freedom from moral authorities (mostly the church) came to be replaced by work authorities trying to impose new rules around having fun and seeing it as a means to the specific end. This debate is mostly about 'neatly packaged, carefully strategised fun with definite goals in mind – as another means of capturing the best of human capital' (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009, p. 563). Although workplace fun may benefit employees, the ultimate goal of its promotion is the boost of productivity (Sørensen & Spoelstra, 2011).

Transition of fun ownership from individual to organisations and institutions is not unique for work, development and commodification of leisure also demonstrates corresponding patterns.

2.2.4 Critique of fun in leisure

Historically, leisure was a prerogative of certain social classes (Veblen, 1899). Together with signalling functions it was supposed to develop their contemplative and aesthetic potential (Bourdieu, 1984). At the same time masses were thought of as unworthy of leisure. Again, when society entered industrial era, the emerging material abundance and the increasing amount of free time created the opportunities for a wider population to experience leisure (Dumazedier, 1974). Leisure becomes an independent developing institution and researchers aim to comprehend its attributes and values (Parker, 1983). One of the first important issues related to leisure is whether it equals free time and by extension where is the place of fun in leisure. While leisure, free time and fun may have been synonymous in early research (Partridge & Mooney, 1941), several decades later free time becomes differentiated from leisure on the basis of values worth striving for during free time (Neulinger, 1974). The

relationship between fun and free time was less clear. DeGrazia (1962) noted that, on the one hand, these notions were very close in meanings (‘when you're having fun, you're free and only if you're free can you have fun’, p.423), on the other hand, however, fun was considered amoral while the major part of the free time was morally and socially contained. DeGrazia also positioned fun as an inferior form of leisure: leisure appeared as a vehicle of social change, fun did not (1962). Leisure was supposed to encourage personal development (Dumazedier, 1967) and ego-expansion (Giddens, 1964) whereas fun’s main functions were relaxation and entertainment (Dumazedier, 1967). A strong class distinction element played a role in separating intellectual, aesthetic and refined forms of leisure of the elite and boisterous, sensual and embodied fun of masses (Bourdieu, 1984).

The trend that was born from the mass nature of fun and somewhat brought fun and leisure closer together was the commodification of leisure (Podilchak, 1986). From the mid-nineteenth century, the growth of industrialisation and entrepreneurial capitalism started to create a fertile ground for businesses to commodify and try to sell fun (Butsch, 1990). In the Western world (with United States as the most prominent example) parks and playgrounds (Bryant & Forsyth, 2005), theatres (McConachie, 1990), organised sports (Hardy, 1990), theme parks and later cinemas (Beckman, 2014) turned into the ways of channelling and constraining fun while at the same time profiting from it. Whether every encounter (or even the majority of encounters) with leisure activities and entertainment available on the market resulted in fun is a different question, however, what is important for the understanding of fun within the critique of commodified leisure is that its every sphere required participants to follow a set of rules (for example, buy a ticket, wait in the queue, conform to the rules of the game, purchase necessary equipment, react to certain events in particular ways (e.g. applaud to performers) and avoid other behaviours (e.g. not to throw objects at the performers). Fun and fun participation was continuing to be externally shaped by institutions.

Adopting an unconventional interpretation of American history, Beckman (2014) explores the fun of ‘joyous revolt’ by tracking how oppressed, outlaw and defiant social groups reacted to their condition through creation and celebration of coarse jubilation acts representing their fight for freedom, from Merry Mount colonists, to the frontier conquerors, to African slaves, to Jazz age flappers, to 1970s punks. Their fun was

active, boisterous, risky, inconvenient for the authorities, and rule-breaking, required participation and whole-hearted devotion, and this is the only fun that author considers authentic. Commodified leisure opportunities are seen as the loss of authenticity in fun. 'Such fun was vicarious, as were its risks: spectators identified with dexterous athletes, death-defying acrobats, and rough-riding (retired) cowboys. Such fun was also voyeuristic, whether folks ogled the ribald antics of minstrels or the splendor of Native American powwows. It required no talent, no personal investment. Such no-stakes fun (call it entertainment) was readily transferable from the circus to vaudeville to nickelodeon and carnival, where automated games of skill and chance offered a limited sense of participation—shooting (corn kernels), galloping (on a carousel). This closed commercial circuit made for a self-sustaining market. Its consumers were unspecialized, indiscriminate, omnivorous, expecting little more than varieties of distraction from one inexpensive venue to the next' (p. 146).

In the similar vein, Wettergren (2009) explores the fun in the protest of European and American culture jammers and reveals the divide between 'real' fun and 'fake' fun. Fun created and distributed by corporations and brands as a commodity is rejected by jammers and considered 'fake'. Fun of consumption is mass produced, seen as boring and undermining action, while fun of culture jamming is perceived as energizing and spurring action, being a source of autonomy and creativity. The latter serves as the means of resistance, liberation from corporate influence and regaining control over means of generating fun (ibid.).

The critique of passivity and constrained nature of commodified fun reaches its zenith in the writings of Frankfurt school theorists on cultural industries. Fromm (1955) believed that leisure-time consumption was determined by industry: '…the customer is made to buy fun as he is made to buy dresses and shoes. The value of fun is determined by its success on the market, not by anything which could be measured in human terms' (p. 136). Adorno's position on fun was especially negative: 'much more than a mere object of repudiation, 'fun' is the specter haunting Adorno's politicized aesthetics: the precise thing that must be cast out' (Weitzman, 2008, p. 186). Adorno & Horkheimer ([1944] 1972) called fun a 'medicinal bath' that 'pleasure industry never fails to prescribe' (p. 140). The authors insisted that good life should revolve around resistance to the capitalist system. Entertainment and fun as its key element are undesirable since 'amusement under late capitalism … is sought after as an escape

from the mechanized work process and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again' (p. 131). Having fun and being amused by the cultural consumption distracts individuals from fighting against the 'wrong' ideology. Fun then is perceived as lacking a political purpose (McKee, 2016). Cultural industry where readily available fun can be found makes things easy to consume and understand, therefore, by not calling for mental effort and providing only pleasurable escape, it promotes resignation from political struggle. All an individual can get is a short release enabling them to temporarily forget about the forces of domination and unfreedom (Adorno & Horkheimer ([1944] 1972).

Such interpretation of leisure and cultural industries is often criticised for pessimism and elitism (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018). Comparing the Frankfurt school writers' stance on fun with positions of other theorists within cultural studies McKee (2008) highlights that the field has important traditions of scholars who denounce fun, but also the academics who insist on its importance, with both sides providing strong criticism of one another. Thus, authors like Ien Ang, Janice Radway and John Fiske (O'Connor & Klaus, 2000) whose thinking can be traced to the ideas of De Certeau, Bakhtin and Barthes (Lewis, 2002; Rojek, 2007) suggest that pleasure (and fun by extension) can be a form of resistance to the dominant ideology and consider pleasure politically progressive. Such view then receives a significant amount of criticism for celebrating pleasure and fun too much, surrendering the political credentials of cultural studies (Lewis, 2002). McKee (2008) goes beyond taking a side in that dispute and underlines its fundamental flaw: those condemning fun and those celebrating its potential both see fun as a means to achieving a specific end. 'Debates about fun are not about the value of fun for fun's sake. Rather, they are about the possible political outcomes of fun. Is fun a distraction from political action? Or is fun, in itself, a form of resistance to political domination? But what about this proposition: it doesn't matter. The fun itself is the important thing. It doesn't matter if, by having fun, you are resisting capitalism. Having fun is the valuable end in itself. Politics is important only to the extent to which it enables more people to have more fun, more often' (p. 6). McKee (2016) insists on seeing fun as pleasure without purpose.

The issue of presumably autotelic nature of fun, on the one hand, and the tendency to treat it as exotelic is not confined only within cultural studies. Initially, when the word 'fun' just entered the language, it was straightaway dismissed by religious authorities

precisely because fun was considered idle and useless. Currently, as the section 2.4.5 will demonstrate, when fun is scrutinised on the level of experience (specific episodes of fun), it can also be considered an end in itself. At the same time, throughout history, institutions and organisations attempted to use fun as a driver of something else considered beneficial for them.

2.2.5 Critique of fun in public policy

A prominent example of the public policy adopting fun for its own purposes is the case of the city-state Singapore where fun has been gaining popularity as a priority in the politics of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) since the country separated from Malaysia and gained independence in 1965 (Elinoff & Gillen, 2019). For the first few decades the dominant social ethics continued to be based on traditional 'Asian values' that embraced prudence and hard work, thrift and piety as antidotes to Westernisation (Hill, 2000). Specifically, industrious labour, competitiveness and discipline were seen as underpinning earlier economic success of Singapore (Perry, 2017). However, since the 1990s, under the influence of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism along with the concerns about city-state's persistent international reputation for being staid and corporate, the governmental discourse of productivity and development took a sharp turn being replaced by the new agenda of fun (Zhang & Yeoh, 2017). Fun was to be promoted as a national strategy claimed Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in his 1999 National Day rally speech: 'Singapore should be a fun place to live. People laugh at us for promoting fun so seriously. But … if Singapore is a dull, boring place, not only will talent not come here, but even Singaporeans will begin to feel restless' (ibid., p. 712). Fun as a target of the state policy was supposed to further raise the quality of life for the citizens and attract international visitors and high-skilled professional migrants.

The implementation of the strategy was grand with multiple arts and cultural projects, as well as significant reorganisation of space that allowed for fine dining, luxury shopping, world-class entertainment, and a variety of leisure activities (Kong, 2012). However, an in-depth exploration of how these initiatives actually correspond with fun-having of Singaporeans reveals that state initiatives for generating fun as a bounded activity are not unproblematic. Thus, Elinoff & Gillen (2019) track the development of fun as a public policy and note that ultimately 'the state production of fun aims to funnel

ludic activity in particular ways, within prescribed spaces, at particular times' (p. 643). Additionally, it reinforces the boundaries between social classes. For example, urban areas where previously people would freely gather and spend time how they actually wanted (e.g. playing self-organised games) were transformed and filled with posh restaurants and high-end shopping malls only accessible to the limited number of citizens who could afford it. The broad range of public resources for leisure was strongly commercialised. The authors (ibid.) argue that externally generating fun goes directly against fun's creative and autopoetic qualities and that fun-seekers still strive to have fun on their own conditions (despite the abundant choice of places to go and things to do, a significant amount of Singaporeans prefers having picnics outside, socialising, playing the guitar, playing Frisbee, etc.). Instead of being individualised, economically-minded citizen-producers as the fun state discourse wants them to be, they defy production (Elinoff & Gillen, 2019).

A particular aspect of the Singapore fun policy is the establishment and management of the mega-casino resorts, interrogated by Zhang & Yeoh (2017). On the one hand, casinos play a role in the global branding of the city-state, attract wealthy international visitors, serve as symbols of accumulation and excitement, reflect the neoliberal values of economic maximisation and retreat of governmental regulation (Wee, 2012). Fun and entertainment provides a façade that masks the ethical ambiguity of gambling (Kingma, 2008). On the other hand, casinos in Singapore are managed on the premise of control and 'protection of citizens'. Public advertising of gambling resorts is strictly prohibited; fun inside is to be had under heavy surveillance in the areas, the access to which is only allowed after identity and security checks. Moreover, while international guests can enter the casinos for free with their passport, Singaporean citizens and permanent residents fall under the levy scheme that requires a payment of S$100 (US$75) for a 24-hour entrance or S$2,000 (US$1,500) for an annual pass. The scheme sends a clear message that individuals from lower socio-economic classes cannot and should not have that kind of fun. The state adopts a paternal role and ensures their protection from potential negative financial consequences of gambling (Zhang & Yeoh, 2017). On the way to becoming the 'state of fun' Singapore does not only try to provide a wide range of entertaining opportunities, such effort is accompanied by drawing clear boundaries between wealthy global leisure citizens and excluded others assumed to be lacking responsibility and self-control. What is sought

after is ‘good clean fun’ without excess, according to Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies in Singapore:

‘The IR (integrated resorts) say Singapore is keeping up with the times. It affords its residents and people who want to visit good clean fun. It’s swish, it’s swanky and yet we are able to keep out the worst of it, the bad stuff. It’s really trying to show that there’s a model of how you can have your cake and eat it almost’ (cited in Cohen, 2015, p. 23).

Therefore, while fun is pursued as a driver of the city-state branding strategy (with questionable degree of success; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019), it is also rigorously regulated (Zhang & Yeoh, 2017). Encouraging fun and at the same time willing to keep it ‘clean’ along with using fun as a means of diverting consumer attention away from controversial issues is evident not only in public policy but in marketing practice as well.

2.2.6 Critique of fun in marketing and media

O’Sullivan’s (2016) ethnography explores consumer experiences of the marketer-facilitated World Series of Beer Pong, originally a party drinking game, that is also played at professional level. While the key focus of the author is on the mimetic (moderate and controlled) forms of excitement desired by marketers escalating into non-mimetic (dangerous and uncontrolled) excitement driven by consumers’ existential needs for intense emotions, fun is also an essential component of Beer Pong players’ experiences, clearly identified in multiple participant quotes. O’Sullivan observes how the consumption of the World Series of Beer Pong that initially invites visitors to take a dive into wild excitement (and fun) is augmented by excessive intake of alcohol, display of nudity and debauchery, becoming a version of Bakhtin’s ([1963] 1984) carnival. The problem with transgressive fun then is that ‘Marketers want consumers to desire frenzy, but not for them to live it too intensely (Reith, 2005), and certainly not too often, if frenzy threatens marketing objectives’ (O’Sullivan, 2016, p. 1051). When consumer fun that is actively encouraged and promoted goes beyond the assigned borders of tolerance, marketers push back and try to regulate and limit it. Fun organisers allow it but want it contained on their conditions.

Another marketing practice that does not necessarily control fun but adopts it as a means to a specific end is the use of the concept in marketing communications as a distraction from ethically ambiguous or potentially harmful qualities of advertised products and services based on a principle: what is fun for you cannot be bad for you. Thus, food marketing started linking packaged food with fun in the late 1920s – early 1930s in the US and Canada and flourished in the Western world throughout the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first centuries, positioning various goods for children and adults as 'fun to eat', using the word 'fun' in product names, adding playful images, puzzles, brand and cartoon characters, and unusual fonts to the packaging, offering products in whimsical shapes and non-typical colours, and gamifying food consumption (Cook, 2004; Barrey et al., 2010; Watson, 2013; Culliney, 2014, Hennessy, 2014; Elliott, 2015). In 2017, PepsiCo divided its portfolio into 'Good for you' (options helping consumers meet recommended daily intakes of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, nuts and seeds with low to no amounts of particular nutrients, such as added sugars, salt or saturated fat); 'Better for you' (options helping consumers limit particular nutrients, such as added sugars, salt or saturated fat, when incorporated into a well-balanced diet) and 'Fun for you' (treats for consumers to enjoy responsibly) categories (PepsiCo annual report, 2017, p.1). 'Fun for you' products such as Doritos, Cheetos, Lays, Mountain Dew, and Pepsi were positioned through appeal to enjoyment with the degree of responsibility while avoiding any mentions of their nutritional quality, fat or sugar contents. Up to 89 per cent of supermarket 'fun' products – and even 65 per cent of 'fun' foods presented as healthier choices – have been reported to qualify as high in fat, salt, and sugar (Chapman et al., 2006; Elliott, 2008a, b, 2012). In the comprehensive analysis of promoting food as fun Elliott (2015) argues that fun directs consumer attention away from the origin and nutritional quality of products, focussing it instead on the positively valenced experiential dimension of food, often external to the food itself. Fun as a primary motivator for eating reconfigures relationships with food and distances highly processed foods low in nutrients from the negative health consequences of their consumption.

In the same vein, analysing the corporate communications and products of tween clothes retailer Justice and applying feminist critique, Coulter (2021) argues that the concept of fun systematically used in promotional materials and in the slogans on the T-Shirts serves as an instrument of depoliticising girlhood, picturing the tween girls in

the constant state of fun. According to Coulter, this practice fits into the system of cultural demands that require girls and women to be happy, look happy and commit to living their lives in a way that does not challenge the status quo in the world where these very girls and women face a significant amount of injustice. Besides, appeal to fun and its positive connotations distracts consumers from broader unethical and unsustainable issues surrounding production, consumption, and disposal of clothes.

Marketing communications representing happy, excited people having fun are used for the same purpose in advertising of products and services implying more obvious (comparing to food and clothing) negative consequences of consumption, such as alcohol and gambling. In the 2000s in the UK, while media were abundant with stories about the dangerous effects of young people's binge drinking, a number of alcohol brands were strongly linking alcohol consumption to fun, sex, and social success (Szmigin et al., 2008). The authors specifically highlight the example of the sparkling wine brand Lambrini that actively exploited the theme of young women getting together, going out and enjoying themselves, accompanied by a slogan 'Lambrini girls just wanna have fun'. The accent on the fun and socialising with like-minded friends obscured the considerations of harmful effects of excessive drinking.

Conveying the spirit of youth, celebration, fun and social bonding through visuals and taglines is a common technique in advertising of casinos found in the United States (Monaghan et al., 2008), Sweden (Binde & Sytze, 2010) and Canada (McMullan & Miller, 2010). Analysing a wide range of print, radio, TV, and point of sale ads McMullan & Miller (2010) note that the most common appeal was to partying, fine dining, watching entertainment shows and enjoying the 'feel good' atmosphere rather than the games themselves. Casinos were promoted as the 'new fun-tier' of the entertainment industry where economic losses are unremarkable and peripheral and gambling is just a fun recreational choice without aggravating circumstances.

Bringing fun to the foreground and hiding problematic issues behind its façade takes place not only in marketing communications but in media as well. Thus, O'Neill et al. (2023) analyse the news coverage of the 2019 heatwaves in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK and conclude that a major part of visuals was positively valenced and framed heatwaves as 'fun in the sun', portraying people having fun in or by the water. Most images illustrating the danger of extreme heat did not depict people.

The authors argue that visual framing of such weather events as fun is problematic since it marginalises the experiences of individuals vulnerable to heatwaves and simultaneously downplays the severity of climate change consequences.

The contradiction of two messages: ‘come get it, it is fun’ and ‘do not consume it (do it), it is dangerous’ / ‘consume it only in moderate amounts’ that exist on two different levels of abstraction (expressed in the specific words in the ads or media articles (it is fun) and shared as a general knowledge, spread by policy makers and through social marketing campaigns (it is dangerous)) can be considered a form of the Batesonian (1956) double-bind. Miles (2004) argues that certain advertising trends, especially relying on complex destabilizing metaphors, have produced double-bind situations for the target audiences reacting to that with schizophrenic communication patterns (as per Bateson’s description of the schizogenic process) that can include ironic consumption and other paradoxical tensions in consumer behaviour.

The double-bind hypothesis was first introduced in 1956 by Gregory Bateson and his colleagues researching schizophrenic communication. Specifically, the authors paid attention to the fact that schizophrenics struggle to discriminate between the different logical types of communicational levels, in other words, distinguishing the utterances that are supposed to be understood literally, on a denotative level, and the manifestations of communication about communication such as play, fantasy of metaphor, that operate on metacommunicative level and are not meant for literal understanding (Bateson et al., 1956). Looking for the origins of this struggle, the researchers located it in the learnt trait to ‘to perceive the universe in double-bind patterns’ (Bateson, 2000, p. 205) that arises from the family unit, most typically mother-child relationship.

Bateson (2000) specifies four necessary conditions that can produce the double-bind situation:

1. A primary negative injunction like ‘if you don’t do this I will punish you’ or ‘do that or you will be punished’. The punishment may include not only corporal forms but is often expressed as psychological abandonment or hate and anger towards the child.

2. A secondary injunction that contradicts the first one on a higher level of abstraction (it is a metamessage to the injunction). It can be non-verbal or verbal such as ‘do not see it as a punishment’.
3. A tertiary negative injunction that does not allow the victim to escape the ‘field’.
4. And finally, the victim does not have an opportunity to point out the inconsistency in messaging and ask for clarification to understand which message they should respond to due to the psychological pressure in the family unit.

If people often find themselves in the repetition of the double-bind scenario, they learn to expect inconsistency and contradiction between the levels of message and metamessage and develop the inconsistency and paradox between communication levels in their own communication, exhibiting schizophrenic communication patterns (Bateson, 2000).

Miles (2004) then, arguing that advertising and mass media has successfully taken the roles of parents for contemporary consumers, applies that perspective to the analysis of advertising messages built on metaphors, revealing double binds in them. ‘Framing our generic Marlboro cowboy ad within a Batesonian schema would give us the following:

1. Primary Injunction: use the product and feel free, independent, and individual, just like the cowboy pictured here and just like the rugged wilderness he is situated within;
2. Secondary Injunction: do what we suggest, don’t be an individual, don’t be independent, rely on us to tell you how to get to where we want you to go;
3. Tertiary negative injunction that ‘prohibits the customer from escaping the field’: the ubiquity of commercial (ad-funded) mass media means that the ‘field’ is inescapable;
4. The customer is prevented from commenting on the contradiction in order to discover which injunction should be obeyed. An obvious form of comment the consumer might have is the binary message stream of ‘purchase/not-purchase’, but this communication channel is implicitly available only at the end of the successful processing of the contradictory injunctions. Comment in order

> to elicit clarification concerning the contradictions is impossible. The advertisement cannot be interrogated' (p. 276).

The classic Marlboro Country ad results in several double-binds: be independent but achieve it by buying something like everyone else; be independent by using a product that gives you dependence in the form of addiction; be strong, healthy and connected to nature (like a Marlboro man in a good shape living an outdoor life) by consuming goods clearly marked as harmful to health (Miles, 2004). The author also makes an important note that the discussed primary and secondary injunctions are not negative, although the original Batesonian scheme implies that the primary one is definitely negative and the secondary is typically indirectly negative in character. Yet, the essential level of contradiction across levels of abstraction is not lost in case of positive injunctions, and even much stricter interpretations of the double-bind theory situate it within a paradoxical or just ambiguous affirmation and denial within the family (e.g. Koopmans, 1995). What is most important, from Miles's (2004) point of view, is that consumers finding themselves in the advertising double-bind may respond with inconsistency and paradox between communication levels in their own speech and behaviour, for example, consuming products 'ironically', in a flaunted manner while openly judging them with rejection as unworthy of consumption, which is hardly what the creators of the ad had in mind.

Coming back to the use of the concept of fun in advertising of potentially harmful or morally ambiguous products and services, it is possible to consider them as cases of double-bind as well, where the primary injunction in the specific ad 'buy it because it is fun' (and by default, in such marketing communications fun is something good) is contradicted by the secondary injunction widely circulating in mass media and social advertising 'be careful, it is dangerous'. Consumers cannot escape the field of mass communication and cannot interrogate the ad to clarify which message should guide their attitudes and behaviours. The potential consumer reactions may again be paradoxical in nature and inconsistent with the original marketing objectives. Therefore, apart from the likely problematic issue of using fun as a means to an end, how exactly it is being used also raises concerns that require a more in-depth interrogation of consumers' understandings of fun.

2.2.7 Production and control of consumer fun

The marketplace ideology provides a degree of constraint for contemporary consumers compatible with the oppression previously experienced by our ancestors from masters, ruler, and the Church (Thompson, 2007). This tendency becomes especially visible when it comes to societal attitudes to and understandings of fun. Since the phenomenon received a name in the seventeenth century, it has been heavily moralised, its meanings were then shaped and manipulated by religious authorities, and later employers, leisure organisers, governments, marketers and media. Different social institutions treated fun with different degrees of caution that ranged from fully rejecting and forbidding it to actively encouraging and promoting fun. What was similar is the desire to control it and adopt it as a driver for specific purposes. At the same time, the construct itself was often submerged in broader categories, caught in larger debates, and not provided with clear definitions (Wilk, 2022). The presented critique views fun externally and as a whole, without the attempts to deconstruct it. The following sections address that research problem and uncover what kind of fun's essential components have been identified in the literature and how susceptible they may be to institutional production and control.

2.3 Deconstructing fun

Conceptualising fun is challenging in part because many sensory descriptors bring it very close to other constructs such as enjoyment, excitement, pleasure, happiness, and entertainment (Tasci & Ko, 2016). However, researchers have made attempts to reveal and analyse its constitutive elements as well as to pinpoint its unique features that may help differentiating fun from the aforementioned concepts.

2.3.1 Fun conceptualisations

Fun is emotionally fulfilling and freely chosen (Lyng, 2004). It is idiosyncratic, on the one hand, since every person has a unique set of activities and circumstances where fun occurs (Wilk, 2022), on the other hand, fun is often had together in social situations (Reis et al, 2017). During fun experiences individuals report feeling happiness and present awareness, lack of self-consciousness, connectedness to others, being carefree, disinhibited, and forgetting (Fincham, 2016). Analysing children's understanding of fun Poris (2006) reveals ten types: friend-oriented, empowering,

creative, silly, sports-oriented, competitive, family oriented, surprising/adventurous, relaxing, and rebellious fun. The key characteristics of some types are elicited emotions and states, for some others – social surroundings, for yet others – activity.

From the psychological point of view fun is a complex phenomenon with affective and motivational properties. 'People seek out fun activities but respond to situations with a sense of fun, so that fun can be an activity, a state, or a trait. Fun can be used both as a motivational concept: 'to want to have fun' or a trait concept, 'they are a fun-loving sort of person', but it is most often described as the property of a behavioural repertoire or social situation' (McManus & Furnham, 2010, p.160). At the same time, every situation is a unique combination of external (such as behavioural domain or applicable social norms) and internal (e.g. person's current goals, previous knowledge, and experiences) elements (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018). Fun as a property of a particular situation is quite unstable, since seemingly identical circumstances may or may not be perceived as fun depending on a number of factors (Fine & Corte, 2017).

Table 1 below illustrates a range of suggested conceptualisations of fun by researchers in different disciplines.

Table 1. Fun conceptualisations in the literature

Discipline	Definition	Authors
Marketing and Consumer research	'Affective pleasure construct identified by a strong sense of engaged liberation, which often arises from bounded, novel experiences that involve moments of spontaneity and connectedness with others'.	Oh & Pham, 2018, p. 726
	'Component of the hedonic value of an object resulting in desired sensory results for the consumer'.	Tasci & Ko, 2016, p. 163
	'Holistic experience that is fundamentally related to elements such as play (Goffman 1961), efficacy (Celsi et. al 1993), emotions (Desmet, 2003), and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)'.	Mukherjee & Venkatesh, 2008, p. 44

Sociology	‘Collaborative and unscripted sequence of action that produces — and is perceived as producing — joint hedonic satisfaction’.	Fine & Corte, 2017, p. 35
Cultural studies	‘Pleasure without purpose’.	McKee, 2016, p. 34
Critical geography	‘Socially structured but personalized sentiment that also drives interpersonal relationships and weaves people together in interesting and constructive ways’.	Elinoff & Gillen, 2019, p. 644
Leisure studies	‘Social emotional interactive process which deconstructs the social and historical inequalities of lived experience to create a with-equal-other social-human bond’.	Podilchak, 1991, p. 124
	‘Experience of immediate pleasure which was created by doing something’.	Kelly, 1987, pp. 208-209
	‘Intense pleasure derived from a restructuring form of activity’.	Gunter, 1987, p. 120
	‘Gratification deep, intense and isolated’	Wolfenstein, 1951, p. 23

Two key aspects that stand out from the provided definitions are the hedonistic pleasurable component of fun and its social nature. The following sections demonstrate that although these elements are often highlighted in the academic discussion of fun, there is currently no consensus on the specific relationship between fun and other positively valenced constructs, as well as on the issue of to what extent fun should be considered a social phenomenon.

2.3.2 Distinguishing fun, pleasure, and enjoyment

Clearly distinguishing multiple subtle qualities of positive experiences does not appear to be a simple task (Dix, 2014; Tasci & Ko, 2016). For example, enjoyment and pleasure are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g., Brown & Juhlin, 2018) or together to refer to a positive consumer experience (e.g., Hwang et al., 2005). Alternatively,

enjoyment can be considered involving higher intensity of attention, sense of achievement and psychological growth, while pleasure is dismissed as merely a reflex response to the environmental stimuli (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

Enjoyment and fun are also sometimes conflated (e.g. Bengoechea et al., 2004; MacPhail et al., 2008) or fun may be used as a subset of enjoyment when authors consider all fun enjoyable but not everything enjoyable is fun (Strean & Holt, 2000). This is in line with Scanlan & Simons (1992), who define sport enjoyment as, 'a positive affective response to the sport that reflects generalised feelings such as pleasure, liking and fun. This construct is more differentiated than global positive affect, but more general than a specific emotion such as excitement' (p. 202).

Otherwise, fun and enjoyment are presented at the same level but with different orientation: Podilchak (1991a) claims that fun is emotionally expansive and is externally directed while enjoyment is a process of self-refinement and directed internally. He underlines the selflessness of fun with the argument that in fun people interactively engage with others, open up and get outside of themselves. This view on fun is partially supported by Blythe & Hassenzahl (2018), however they use the same criteria (orientation away from or towards the self) while contrasting fun with pleasure which they consider a specific type of enjoyment. The authors also state that fun is distracting from the self, however, for a different reason. In their explanation, during fun experiences people temporarily forget about their worries and concerns and stop the internal dialogues about the things that typically bother them. Pleasure, on the other hand, is about absorption. The activities or objects providing that absorption make a connection to the person's self, they become important and relevant. While experiencing pleasure people try to make sense of oneself by exploring and nourishing one's identity (ibid.). Pleasure comes from being, while fun derives from doing (Giridharadas, 2010). A different focus of fun and pleasure is also reflected in the position of Fine & Corte (2017) considering the former to be social, developing from the interaction of several people within shared emotional register, and the latter personal, an experience of individual actors.

Additionally, pleasure is usually thought of as elimination or absence of pain and provision of positive feelings (Jordan, 2000). Fun, in turn, is not as much about having no pain or providing joy as about the absence of seriousness (Broner & Tarone, 2001).

Blythe & Hassenzahl (2018) state that fun cannot exist within the serious situation. Podilchak (1991a) also considers enjoyment more serious than fun. It is important to note that most of the authors agree that fun – pleasure (enjoyment) is not a polar dichotomy and experiences are fluid. Morevoer, Podilchak's vision of enjoyment and Blythe and Hassenzahl's understanding of pleasure highlight another attribute that brings them together – emphasis on rewards. From the sociological point of view, both enjoyment and pleasure are considered to be focused on getting a specific reward that signifies successful experience and in order to realise whether the reward has been received individual has to engage in self-evaluative reflection. At the same time, fun does not imply specific rewards. In biology, though, researchers tend to see fun as involving something rewarding: fun 'elicits a tendency to repeatedly approach a reward-inducing stimulus (wanting) — and it provides a sense of pleasure — a hedonic response eliciting a positive affective feeling (liking)' (Emery & Clayton, 2015, p. 17). However, analysing such phenomena as fun and pleasure by reducing them strictly to the chemical reaction in the brain gives only partial account of these complex constructs (Brown & Juhlin, 2018). The authors (ibid.) suggest to understand pleasure as a set of skills, activities, expectations, and actions forming enjoyable experiences, and these elements are embedded in and produced by the rich cultural and social world individuals find themselves in. Perceptions of fun are strongly affected by social and cultural circumstances; fun then can be understood in the similar fashion.

A lack of consensus on the relationship between fun, enjoyment, and pleasure (with additional challenges presented by such phenomena as thrill, elation, delight, humour, etc.) makes it complicated to define fun through any of these constructs. Moreover, the differences between them are quite difficult to establish empirically and many claims are rather based on researchers' personal views and cultural beliefs (Podilchak, 1986). There is also some confusion around sensory experiences that have a 'chicken-and-egg' relationship with fun. When a situation is felt by a person as fun, certain positive consequences or outcomes may be experienced during or after the fun episode, such as excitement, serenity or contentment. On the other hand, these feelings can lead to the following assessment of the situation as fun and the causal relationship between these constructs is hard to specify. If they coexist with fun simultaneously, they can be considered fun dimensions rather than its causes or effects (Tasci & Ko, 2016).

While the ‘orientation towards others’ and ‘social nature’ is sometimes used for highlighting the differences between fun and pleasure (enjoyment), there is also lack of consensus on what exactly the social nature of fun entails.

2.3.3 Social nature of fun

There are several ways to understand the phrase ‘fun is social’. The most straightforward one is to assume that an individual needs others to have fun. When affective experiences are shared, they are perceived as more intense (Goulding et al., 2009). Additionally, they serve a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Fun has also been reported to be experienced as more intense when others are involved, especially friends as opposed to strangers (Reis et al., 2017). However, these findings do not necessarily mean that fun cannot be had in a solitary manner. A strong advocate of fun as a phenomenon occurring exclusively within social interaction is leisure researcher Podilchak (1986; 1991a). Moreover, he argues that fun requires absolute equality of members of human bond and vanishing of the external statuses of participants, i.e. fun is established once an equilibrium emerges among participants. In the process of structuring fun, the input of every individual is equally significant and eventually they all co-exist in the form of ‘we’. The author claims that having fun means to feel and embody other’s enjoyment. Fun is not just quantitatively adding others to the situation of enjoyment, but qualitative transformation of those involved (Podilchak (1991a). This view has certain similarities with the concept of communitas (Turner, 1969) which represents a sense of community transcending typical social norms and convention. A key aspect of communitas is the recognition that everyday roles and inequalities are not relevant. This unique type of camaraderie usually occurs when people with different backgrounds share a common bond of experience (Belk et al., 1989). Exploring theoretical significance of pilgrimages, Turner (1973) claimed that these shared ritualistic experiences liberated participants from the obligatory everyday constraints of their normal statuses and roles. Inside this essentially utopian space, ‘homogeneity and unity prevail over the disunity of ethnicities, cultures, classes, and professions beyond it’ (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 39). Podilchak’s version of fun can then be considered ‘mini-communitas’, situations where highly emotionally charged positive relationships between participants bond them in a spiritual egalitarian unity that transcends the mundane of everyday life. However, the existence of ultimate

harmony and equality within communitas is not unequivocal and communitas has been seen as just one idealising discourse about pilgrimage (Sallnow, 1981; Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Similarly, while 'equal fun' might be some kind of benchmark of 'perfect fun', hierarchies can still be present in situations of fun such as gatherings of managers and subordinates (e.g. Fleming, 2005) or equality may be missing for other reasons, for example, when one person makes fun of another (e.g. Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2021). In the fun analysis undertaken in the context of groups and collaborative commitments, Fine & Corte (2017) find that fun can be subversive or hierarchical, it may support established roles or justify a reconsideration of authority. Besides, the presence of others as an essential requirement for fun occurrence is also debatable. Thus, McManus & Furnham (2010) address the unpublished study of Slaughter (1984) where the author directly asked participants whether certain activities and situations can be fun and the findings stated that experiences perceived as fun were equally likely to be cooperative or solitary in nature. Therefore, having fun by oneself should still be acknowledged by researchers.

A less rigid view on the social nature of fun is reflected in Fincham's (2016) work. He considers Podilchak's position somewhat radical; yet still conceptualises fun as a social phenomenon on two levels. Fincham argues that fun is experienced socially even if a person is having it alone, pointing to the absent presence – said individual is involved in something they used to do with others or enjoy communicating to others. Additionally, Fincham (ibid.) turns to the issue of term conflation between fun, pleasure, contentment, and happiness that occurs when people describe their experiences, i.e. when asked to recall having fun alone, they report something that researcher classifies as pleasure, for example. This stance is close to Podilchak's (1986) view that people calling a solitary activity fun refer rather to a state of relaxation and contentment. However, if this is the case, then participant's understanding of fun is ignored and researcher's vision is imposed instead. What is more important, however, Fincham (2016) looks at fun beyond its occurrences within specific experiences and notices that individuals often make sense of their fun in retelling, making their experiences explicable to others, forming the sense of social identity through fun – others develop understandings of who the person is judging by the fun they have. Fun is then social not necessarily because others are needed for it to arise

but because others are needed for a person to recognise and interpret their experiences as fun.

Yet another way to look at social nature of fun is to focus on how it influences social dynamics when had in groups. Drawing on six ethnographic cases: mushroom collectors, government meteorologists, urban skateboarders, professional athletes involved in BMX-freestyle cycling, zoo volunteers, and violence-prone young white males, Fine & Corte (2017) demonstrate how the moments of fun either solidify groups or draw boundaries between individuals. In order to experience fun all members of the collective need to share the awareness of the moment and a common emotional register that boosts commitment. This shared understanding of the situation occurs when participants have similar answers to Goffman's (1974) frame analytic question: 'What is happening here?'. Those engaged in the fun moment produce a joint alternative frame of reality. While hedonic and joyful nature of fun can be felt individually and internally, it is the collective recognition that enhances its sociological power. Fun becomes possible only if social actors coproduce experience by acting in tandem which results in strengthened allegiance to the group. Moments of shared fun serve as commitment devices that help to build affiliation, strengthen positive relationships, and moderate interpersonal tensions. In line with Fincham (2016), Fine & Corte (2017) also underline the significance of retrospective narrative that fun is open to and note that rhetoric of fun provides an appealing past, an assumed future, and a sense of groupness. Exploring the experiences of grandtravel, trips undertaken by grandparents and grandchildren Gram et al. (2019) similarly note that both experienced fun and subsequently shared stories about such experiences are meaningful for both generations and help them feel joyful, appreciated, and valued. However, while fun in big and small groups often acts as a means for solidification, functioning, and continuation, it is also capable of creating divisions and establishing power relations when fun-making is not or is not supposed to be reciprocated. Groups where only a part of members is having fun, especially at the expense of others, are quite unstable and prone to dissolution (Beckman, 2014). On this level fun is social because when it is had together it plays an important role in shaping interpersonal interaction and relationships in groups.

Therefore, using the 'social' criteria as a key basis for conceptualising fun without providing specific details may be too generic. The next section brings together other

fun components previously identified in the literature that may help to provide a more subtle understanding of the phenomenon's nature.

2.3.4 Constituent elements of fun

Several components related to motivation, emotion, perception, temporality, and action have been claimed to constitute the essence of fun. Table 2 presents these accordingly.

Table 2. Constituent elements of fun drawn from the literature

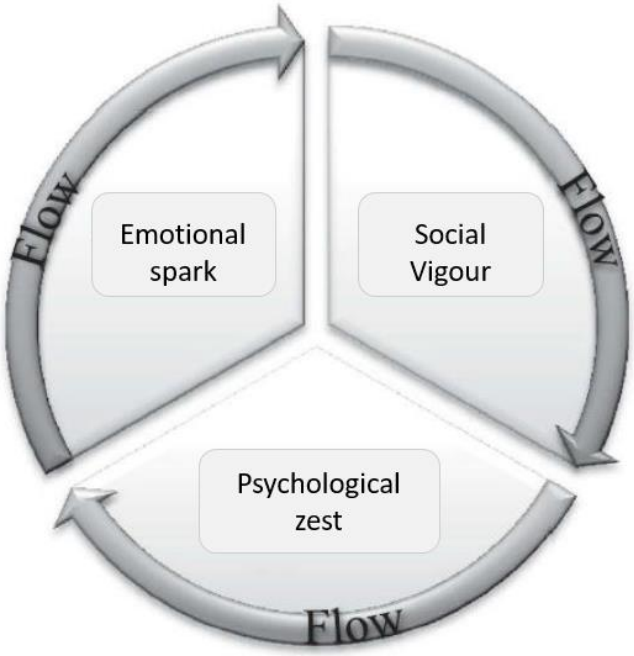
Category	Constituent element	Description	Authors
Motivation	Intrinsic motivation and perceived freedom	Fun can only be motivated from within; it is impossible to force a person to have fun. Fun is never a necessity; it is chosen for the sake of enjoying it. In fun people are free to choose a course of action.	Fincham, 2016; Baldry & Hallier, 2010; Churchill et al., 2007; Bergler, 1956.
Emotion	Surge of positive emotions	Fun is typically associated with joy, excitement, elation, thrill, amusement. These emotions are mostly positive and intense.	Tasci & Ko, 2016; Fincham, 2016.
Perception	Spontaneity, unpredictability, and surprise	Fun situation is unscripted and unpredictable; spontaneity and surprise as integral parts of unguided action enable fun emergence and continuation.	Oh & Pham, 2022; Fine & Corte, 2017; North, 2015; Fineman, 2006.
	Transgression	When a situation is experienced as fun it is contrasted with the typical and mundane course of reality. Fun tends to disrupt routines and establish its own routines. Transgression in this sense is not always related to the complete destruction of the existing order, it may just be a slight infraction of some agreed upon rule.	Wilk, 2022; Price, 2021; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019; Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018; Fincham, 2016; Beckman, 2014; Roy, 1959.

Temporality	Temporal alleviation of (liberation from) commitments and responsibilities	While having fun individuals feel free from pressures of obligations, duties, and worries. Fun is a form of escape from concerns and anxieties. Attention is directed away from responsibility towards a more carefree attitude and serious orientation to task is often suspended.	Oh & Pham, 2022; Price, 2021; Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018; Fincham, 2016; Baldry & Hallier, 2010.
	Distorted sense of time	Losing the track of time or feeling like time does not matter is closely related to having fun. When people perceive the activities they are engaged in as fun, they feel that time passes more quickly.	Sacket et al., 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990.
Action	Active participation	Fun indicates a process in which desires and pursuit of individual hedonic interest translate into particular actions. Participation differentiates fun from entertainment with the latter revolving around more or less passive perception of others' actions.	Beckman, 2014; Lauss & Szigetvari, 2010.

Tasci & Ko (2016) have developed the fun measurement scale in the tourism context combining several constituent elements of fun listed in the Table 2, which is presented in the form of a four-dimensional model of fun (Figure 1 below). The presence of three elements: Social Vigour (energy and excitement within social interactions context), Psychological Zest (hedonic states of different correlates of fun, namely happiness, enjoyment, excitement, and pleasure) and Emotional Spark (high levels of emotional states) results in the emergence of the fourth - Flow. 'Emotional Spark, including the emotional involvement, emotional charge, and emotional peak, may depend on the existence of Social Vigor and Psychological Zest; if these two exist, then a peak in emotional involvement can be experienced. If the first three factors are in place, then the experience of flow with loss of sense of time and place can follow' (Tasci & Ko, 2016, p. 179).

The psychological phenomenon called flow was introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). Flow is the state of a very high engagement in the activity, when individual's attention is fully absorbed by it resulting in strong positive states with certain gains and losses. Gains include ecstasy, joy, self-confidence, serenity, while losses involve self-awareness, worries, sense of space and time (ibid.). The key to the occurrence of flow is challenge that matches skills. If the skill is not strong enough to battle the challenge, anxiety reduces enjoyment. If the level of skill exceeds challenge, then boredom and/or apathy downplays enjoyment (Garn & Cothran, 2006). While flow is most often found in play, it can also occur at work and within other engaging contexts (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). While some researchers closely relate it to fun (Mukherjee & Venkatesh, 2008), others argue that flow is fun (Privette, 1983).

Figure 1. Four-dimensional structure of fun



Source: Adapted from Tasci & Ko (2016, p. 163)

However, not all types of fun experiences can ultimately turn into flow. This state is quite intense and achieved rarely in full (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Oh & Pham (2022), in turn, argue that flow is born from successful application of particular skills in pursuit of specific goals whereas hedonic engagement in the experiences of fun does not rely on goals and skills. The authors (ibid.) suggest their own model provided in the Figure 2. The proposed liberating-engagement theory of fun looks at the phenomenon from

the psychological perspective. Based on several mixed-method studies Oh & Pham (2022) establish that the experience of fun stands on two psychological pillars: hedonic engagement (active immersion in a pleasurable experience) and sense of liberation (temporary release from various psychological restrictions). They further identify four situational facilitators: novelty and social connectedness promote fun through their effects on hedonic engagement, spontaneity, and spatial/temporal boundedness – on the sense of liberation.

Figure 2. Situational facilitators and psychological pillars of fun

Source: Oh & Pham, 2022, p. 59

While this model provides solid representation of fun components that corresponds with the existing literature and is confirmed by several studies within the project, it tends to reduce the phenomenon to almost 'objective' parameters of situations or activities where it is more or less possible to predict whether fun will be had if one could measure how liberating and engaging the activity is for a particular person. Such perspective overlooks the role of consumer mindset and unique perceptions of every single situation that other researchers claim to be as essential for fun emergence as the situational properties since fun does not exist fully outside of the subject (de la Ville et al., 2010).

Besides, while Oh & Pham (2022) discuss broader socio-historical factors (such as fun being a collective response to overly structured life modes that followed the Industrial Revolution) that shape the phenomenon of fun, they deliberately focus their analysis on the level of individual experiences and psychological constructs. It can be argued, however, that individual fun-having is still affected by wider societal forces. Throughout history fun has been heavily moralised and institutionalised (Wilk, 2022), therefore, the exploration of the phenomenon needs to account for both internal and external elements constituting fun. Drivers of fun experiences include situated cultural elaborations within various social groups (de la Ville et al., 2010). Moreover, bringing together the critique of fun discussed in the sections 2.2.3 – 2.2.7 and the fun components discussed in the current section demonstrates that external urge to produce, manage and control fun does not sit comfortably with its intrinsic motivation, liberation, spontaneity, and transgression. This work aims to reveal the details of the tensions arising between the two and how consumers navigate and potentially resolve these tensions. In order to achieve that fun is defined and understood through play.

2.3.5 Looking at fun through the lens of play

Concepts of fun and play are closely related (Broner & Tarone, 2001). While the two are not identical in meaning (Elinoff & Gillen, 2019; Wilk, 2022), play theorists argue that fun is the essence of play (Huizinga, [1938] 1949); Sutton-Smith, 1997). Although being explored in more depth than fun, play also remains a fuzzy phenomenon that has not been universally defined (Burke,1971; Harris & Park, 1983; Garvey, 1990; Motte, 1995). Yet, a number of features binding fun and play together have been identified in the literature. Thus, O'Sullivan & Shankar (2019) following Huizinga's ([1938] 1949) sociocultural conception of play outline its specific characteristics:

- Play is voluntary

Engagement in play is never demanded or forced (Caillois, [1958] 1961), is freely chosen by player (Garvey, 1990) and motivated intrinsically (Dansky, 1999). By creating a feeling of freedom, it provides a sense of escape from obligations and responsibilities of daily life (Turner, 1982). Intrinsic motivation and perceived freedom have been claimed as essential fun components (Baldry & Hallier, 2010; Churchill et al., 2007).

- Play is ‘extraordinary’

In play a new sphere of action is created where ordinary is no longer present (Fink, 1968). New identities are constructed for players and adopted behavioural models might differ from those in ordinary life (Huizinga, [1938] 1949). Situations experienced as fun also transgress the ordinary order of affairs (Price, 2021; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019).

- Play is uncertain

One of the key drivers of enjoyable play is tension of unpredictability and potential surprises; pre-distinguished outcomes are against the nature of playing (Huizinga, [1938] 1949; Caillois, [1958] 1961). Emergence and continuous existence of fun can similarly depend on the perceived degree of uncertainty (Oh & Pham, 2022).

- Play occurs in a defined time and place

Play is happening in a specific temporal and spatial conditions that might significantly differ from the profanity of mundane life. Play requires a delineated space dedicated to the unique feelings it inspires (Turner, 1982). Fun also often needs specific space and time (Oh & Pham, 2022). Some places, such as night clubs, may be more conducive to fun than others, e.g. grocery store, due to the atmosphere, and social rules and expectations (Fine & Corte, 2017). Additionally, certain times can promote fun emergence better than others, e.g. stressful exam weeks limit the opportunities for fun emergence (Oh & Pham, 2018).

- Play is ordered

Huizinga ([1938] 1949) and Turner (1982) emphasise the inevitability of both explicit and tacit playground rules. Rules help to establish a temporary order and only things important to the game matter within that order, regardless of how frivolous the game is considered by non-players and outsiders (Sutton-Smith, 1997). This feature, however, is not very applicable to fun. It does not create or support any order, on the contrary, its transgressive nature may threaten the existing one (Fincham, 2016; Wilk, 2022).

- Play fosters community

Even when the act of play is over, a community built during the play tends to become permanent. After withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms

together, individuals can still experience connection to one another (Huizinga, [1938] 1949). Similarly, fun had in groups contributes to positive relationships between the members and group commitment (Fine & Corte, 2017).

- Play is disinterested

When engaging in play people do not strive to achieve extrinsic goals or produce tangible outcomes (Garvey, 1990). When play is over, the order of the external world should return to the same as it was before (Caillois, [1958] 1961).

The last point brings back the question whether fun is autotelic. Play is often argued to be superfluous. 'The need for it is only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need. Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task' (Huizinga, [1938] 1949, p.8). It is self-sufficient and brings no material gain (Stephenson, 1967); lacks an immediate purpose (Wilson, 1981). While some academics (e.g. Piaget, [1951] 1962; Vygotsky, [1978] 1980; Barthes, [1957] 2000; Bateson, 2006) support functional treatment of play meaning that it has a number cognitive and personal benefits, such as boosting creative problem-solving, expending surplus energy, developing divergent thinking, practicing alternative solutions, these are typically not the reasons why humans engage in play in the first place (Kalliala, 2005).

Play is also exhibited across a variety of higher animals and is generally acknowledged to be essential for development of cubs by helping them to learn and master a set of behaviours through a trial-and-error process. Additionally, play establishes important social connections and acts as a base for the potential future reciprocal altruism (Bekoff, 2015). Although biology is currently dominated by the view that play has an evolutionary purpose (Graeber, 2014), researchers report multiple evidence of animal play behaviour (baboons teasing cattle, pulling their tails when the cow was safely behind a fence, or young elephants chasing harmless species like wildebeest) that does not seem have any end goal at all (Byrne, 2015).

Considering multiple similarities and touchpoints between play and fun, fun can be also viewed as purposeless and existing for its own sake. Therefore, a wide range of social institutions and organisations are and for a long time have been paradoxically trying to generate, manage, control, and adopt for achieving specific goals something that is internally motivated, liberating, transgressive and autotelic.

Another characteristic of play that can be extended to fun to enable fully embracing its elusive and subjective nature affected by both internal and external factors, is that play is enacted in relation to the situational definition (Goffman, 1974; Grayson, 1999). Whether the activity is playful or not depends not on the activity per se, but on the participants' attitudes towards it: in order to be play it has to be perceived as such. 'There is no particular activity, be it baseball, fishing, playing with dolls, that is always necessarily play; neither can an activity be mentioned that may not under some conditions be play. When one runs a foot race, drives a car, rows a boat, or reads a book, it may be play or not, depending on the way he thinks and feels about it' (Mitchell & Mason, 1924, p. 88). Playfulness and fun are neither found in the objects, activities or some fixed properties of certain situations, nor do they reside fully in the mind of the person, they are rather relational properties that emerge through individual's perceptions of the circumstances (de la Ville et al., 2010). It is the frame (Goffman, 1974) shaping and defining the relationship between the subject and their reality that playfulness and fun derive from. This frame cannot be considered fully objective, neither fully subjective, but embraces both dimensions referring to a situated, informed, and socially constructed cultural experience (Stebbins, 2004).

Fun in this work is considered not a type of activity containing certain features or experience eliciting certain states, but a type of situational definition. In other words, fun is what is perceived and interpreted by a person as fun under the influence of internal (thoughts, feelings, current mood, previous knowledge and experiences, etc.) and external (physical and social surroundings, applicable social norms, cultural context, etc.) factors. Such approach allows for thorough exploration of the phenomenon and the meanings consumers attach to it.

This stance brings the focus to the experiential view of consumption introduced by Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) that emphasises the ties of hedonic (vs utilitarian) consumption to imaginative constructions of reality (Singer, 1966). Holbrook and Hirschman call for examining consumption acts based on the consumers' internal construction of reality that is not necessarily congruent with external verifiable world. This work answers that call by exploring fun as mental imagery constructed by consumers around certain life experiences and situations, places, times, objects, and other people.

Besides, according to Holbrook & Hirschman (1982), in contrast with the information-processing approach, the experiential view implies that criteria for successful consumption are esthetic in nature and rest on an appreciation of products for their own sake, without regard to their functional utility. Researchers making such appraisals, therefore, conform to a play mentality (Huizinga, [1938] 1949) wherein perceived benefits are mostly psychosocial and 'episodes designated as playful are assumed to be free from any immediate purpose' (Lancy, 1980, p. 474). Adoption of play mentality indeed shapes the understanding of the phenomenon of fun in this thesis.

Apart from launching the critique against cognitivism and arguing that this paradigm was too restrictive and did not allow for investigations of the full range of consumer behaviours and experiences, in their seminal paper 'The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun' (1982), Holbrook & Hirschman were the first within marketing and consumer research domain to acknowledge fun as an important element of consumption. Academics further exploring experiential consumption also identified fun in various studied experiences, although this elusive phenomenon continued to be somewhat enigmatic and perceived as less critical in comparison with other elements of a specific experience.

2.3.6 Fun in experiential consumption

The experiential view of consumption claims that consumers seek meanings and emotions in goods and services far beyond their initial utility. While the proposed paradigm made such an intangible and irrational concept as fun a legitimate object of study, it is important to clarify how exactly Holbrook and Hirschman understood fun in their paper. Commenting on the key elements of the experiential view Holbrook (2018) highlighted its contrast with the information-processing approach, as well as the expansion and inclusivity that the former enabled: 'We proposed that Cognitions (C) should be expanded to encompass not only conscious beliefs but also unconscious thoughts, mental images and dreams or daydreams – which, collectively, we labeled 'Fantasies'. We claimed that Affect (A) embraces not only brand preferences but also a wide range of emotions such as love, hate, joy, sorrow, anger, fear, disgust, curiosity and so forth – which, we called 'Feelings'. And we urged that Behavior (B) refers not just to purchase choices or buying decisions but also to a wide range of playful or

creative consumption activities associated with product usage – which we named ‘Fun’. Hence, the subtitle of our article: ‘Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun’ (p. 423). Fun, therefore, was adopted as an umbrella term with a behavioural focus, that widened the spectrum of consumer actions lending themselves for consumer researchers’ analysis and interpretation.

More specific meanings of fun began to appear in the stream of research inspired by the experiential consumption view. Experience has developed into one of the key ways of understanding consumption (Lanier & Rader, 2015) while research interest leaned towards exploration of extraordinary experiences, such as river rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993), skydiving (Celsi et al., 1993); Mountain Man Rendezvous (Belk & Costa, 1998), Burning Man festival (Kozinets, 2002), climbing Mount Everest (Tumbat & Belk, 2011), surfing (Canniford & Shankar, 2013). Although Carù & Cova (2003) cautioned against seeing consumption experience as purely extraordinary, thus ignoring the considerable volume of experiences that consumers perceive as mundane and unmemorable, it is the interrogations of the extraordinary experiences that start shedding some light on how consumers feel and understand fun.

Therefore, within the exploration of high-risk leisure consumption in the context of skydiving, Celsi et al. (1993) note that fun is one on the main reasons for engaging with this dangerous kind of sport. ‘When asked why they skydive, [individuals] invariably say ‘because it's fun’’ (p. 11). However, after that remark fun somewhat slips out of focus. While the provided participant quotes mention experienced fun throughout different stages of skydiving process, the researchers treat it as a peripheral concept, without scrutinising it. Tracking the evolution of hedonic motives that drive participation in the high-risk leisure activity, they identify the trajectory from thrill seeking through pleasure and fun to experiences of flow, yet the final proposed model combining the normative, hedonic and efficacy motives does not include fun at all (while acknowledging thrill, pleasure and flow). The authors conclude that ‘all of these interrelated properties in their full complexity constitute the highly abstract yet seductively simple meaning of ‘fun’ as stated by high-risk consumers as reason for their participation’ (p. 15).

This raises questions about how exactly individuals understand fun, how it is related to thrill, pleasure, and flow, and how these constructs can be differentiated. Dismissing

fun as something ‘seductively simple’ may signal another manifestation of ‘triviality barrier’ (Sutton-Smith, 1970) when presumably more ‘significant’ or ‘weighty’ factors are examined more closely. Talking about fun as a major factor in the positive experience derived from sports participation for both children and adults, Wellard (2014) specifically underlines that it is important to be able to recognise fun as a complex term in the first place and calls for confronting the subjective aspects of fun rather than uncritically accepting it as something trivial.

Providing an in-depth exploration of the white water rafting experience, Arnould & Price (1993) also note that ‘having fun’ is the most common expectation of participants before the start of the trip. Again, participant quotes reflect that fun is indeed had throughout the endeavour and constitutes an important element of the overall experience. Yet, fun remains in the background. The themes of personal growth and self-renewal, harmony with nature and connection with others grab the spotlight. Fun potentially contributes to these major elements of analysis, however, it requires further clarification.

Similarly, the feminist re-examination of an ethnography of Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners (Martin et al., 2006) demonstrates that fun is one of the major forces that motivates women to ride. This paper raises an important issue that fun can be gendered and motorcycling masculine culture typically implies ‘male fun’, although it is revealed that women want ‘their share’. Fun in this work is related to the sensory and kinaesthetic pleasures of motorcycling and the satisfaction of taking control of a vehicle, however, where is the turning point where pleasurable and satisfactory experience becomes clearly identifiable fun and how that female fun of the rider can be conceptualised stays behind the scenes. The issues of the women’s identity projects navigating between masculinity and femininity are in the foreground.

Research of extraordinary consumption illustrates a variety of ways consumers seek and obtain fun. Thus, participants explicitly claim to experience fun during clubbing (Goulding et al., 2009), risky motorcycling (Murphy & Patterson, 2011) and surfing (Canniford & Shankar, 2013), yet fun as a construct mostly stays overlooked. Extraordinary consumption exploration often highlights tensions between commercial and authentic, mundane and extraordinary, culture and nature, constraints and liberation (Tumbat & Belk, 2011). When fun is present in these experiences, the

question to what extent it contributes to or affects the rise and resolution of these tensions is mostly overlooked. Studies of experiential consumption signal the potential links between fun and thrill, adrenaline, pleasure and flow, escape and transformation, search for authentic identity, yet a more focused research examination is needed to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of fun.

This study brings a more explicit theoretical focus on fun while embracing the experiential consumption paradigm. It explores how contemporary consumers make sense of their personal experiences and interpret them in the light of shared meanings shaped by socio-cultural and historical factors, while pointing out how societal attitudes to fun changed throughout the centuries and how major historical trends and social institutions loaded it with multiple, often controversial meanings and connotations. The aforementioned studies (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al, 1993; Kozinets, 2002; Martin et al., 2006; Goulding et al., 2009; Murphy & Patterson, 2011; Canniford & Shankar, 2013) inspiring such approach are strongly associated with the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) tradition (Skandalis et al., 2019). This research also adopts CCT (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) as a theoretical framework.

2.3.7 Consumer Culture Theory as a theoretical framework

CCT refers to a family of theoretical perspectives addressing the dynamic and diverse relationships between actions of consumers, the marketplace, and the cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). Consumer culture in this research tradition 'denotes a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). The CCT studies revolve around empirical analysis of intricate interconnections between specific manifestations of consumer culture and broader historical forces (including ideologies, myths, and cultural narratives) as well as marketplaces systems and socioeconomic circumstances that constitute, sustain, and transform consumer actions and their interpretations (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Price, 2018; Bajde et al., 2019). The 'cultural meanings' deriving from plural, fluid and intermingling consumption practices and ways of life are open to multiple conceptualisations (Hannerz, 1992; Venkatesh & Peñaloza 2014). Given a wide range of experiences and situations that can be situationally and subjectively defined as fun

by consumers, and a variety of external factors potentially affecting this framing (especially marketing and mass media), the in-depth exploration of fun facets undertaken in this study fall under the remit of a Consumer Culture Theory study.

Within CCT four broadly defined streams of research have been outlined. They include theoretical underpinnings related to (1) consumer identity projects, (2) marketplace cultures, (3) the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p.871). The authors stress, however, that these categories are not rigid and CCT studies often illuminate different aspects of each one. As the literature review has demonstrated, fun can be a building block in the development of social identity (Fincham, 2016), is susceptible to the influence of institutional and social structures (Wolfenstein, 1951), can be classed (Elinoff & Gillen, 2019; Wilk, 2022) and gendered (Coulter, 2021), and rests on the systems of meanings and normative messages transmitted through marketing and mass media (Szmigin et al., 2008). Brands positioning themselves as fun ones, promising their customers fun experiences as well as the popular culture offering a variety of fun representations that send messages about how fun can be had, play a role in how consumers make sense of their personal fun having. This study explores the ways consumers understand and interpret their fun in the world that actively encourages it and conveys certain belief systems about it, on the one hand, and how marketing professionals use fun in their practice in pursuit of marketing objectives, on the other hand, highlighting points of alignment and misalignment between the two perspectives, which fits in the CCT philosophy, making Consumer Culture Theory a suitable theoretical framework for this research. Considering that one of the key CCT tenets is that human agency operates within a social context (Ratner, 2000), it provides a useful lens for looking at how the freedom and internally driven nature of individual fun interacts with external attempts to generate and manage it for specific purposes.

2.4 Research questions

Marketing and consumer research literature as well as business media provide a very fragmented understanding of fun. While marketing professionals demonstrate keen interest in promoting and enabling fun for their customers, they generally treat fun as a means to an end justified from the perspective of marketing objectives, whether it is

building positive relationships with the brand, boosting brand loyalty, encouraging increased spending or advocating the brand through word-of-mouth. At the same time the issues such as what exactly fun means to contemporary consumers, how they experience it, how they want to have it and how it actually makes them feel and act remain unaddressed. It becomes a case of hyperopia when the vision is only focused on the end goals that fun presumably helps to achieve, yet fun itself is dismissed as something that is understood more or less intuitively. This study aims to equip marketing professionals with a more holistic knowledge of the phenomenon bringing them on the same page with consumers. With fun being an important part of human experience that consumers often have in the environments created by marketers, such understanding is crucial for adopting the construct in the marketing practice in a more comprehensive manner.

Talking about the concept of enjoyment Brown & Juhlin (2018) make a distinction between enjoyment as a disposition and enjoyment as experienced, highlighting the difference between talking about how a person generally enjoys football vs how that person enjoyed a particular game yesterday. In the first case the long standing attitudes come to the foreground, in the second – episodic feelings and thoughts. Such separation can be a very helpful approach in addressing fun. Most studies concerned with fun directly look at fun experienced within specific situation located in time and place. At the same time, as Wilk (2022) puts it, 'fun can stick to people, places, things and events as a kind of aura; one can become a fun person, visit a fun house, watch a funny film or play with fun toys and games' (p. 259). And when it 'sticks', it rather reflects general attitudes and reflections about a person, place, event or object. Fun as experienced and fun as disposition are presented in the literature mostly separately. Sections 2.2.2-2.2.6 demonstrate the research that talks about fun in general, on the level of disposition, while sections 2.3.1-2.3.4 discuss the studies looking at fun on the level of experience. When brought together, the paradox between production, control and purposeful use of fun from the marketers' side and perceived freedom, spontaneity, transgression and idleness from the consumers' side becomes evident. This research addresses the identified issue, bringing together consumer fun as experienced and as disposition, and marketers' perspective on consumer fun.

The literature, therefore, informs the following research questions:

RQ1: How is fun experienced by consumers?

The first research question looks at how consumers experience fun, how they make sense of these experiences, what kind of thoughts, feelings and external factors constitute the experience and help consumers understand that they had fun within a certain situation.

RQ2: How are dispositions of fun constructed, shared and reflected upon by consumers?

The second research question interrogates fun on a more general level, looking at how a systematic understanding that some entities in consumers' lives are fun (activities, times, places, objects) is formed, what kind of factors help to shape this understanding, how it is interpreted and related to fun as experienced.

RQ3: How do marketing professionals adopt and implement the construct of fun in brand promotional activities?

The third research question turns to the marketers' perspective and explores how marketers understand consumer fun and how the concept of fun is used in marketing practice.

RQ4: To what extent are marketers' understandings of the construct consistent with the consumers' articulations of fun?

The final research question identifies how closely marketers' understandings of consumer fun are aligned with the consumers'.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has demonstrated that while the concept of fun is in relatively high demand among marketing professionals, there is a significant gap in understanding of consumer fun's nature. The indirect evidence from marketing research gives reasons to believe that consumers motivated by fun and having fun as an outcome of brand encounters are highly desirable for marketers, yet, more fundamental questions, such as what fun means to contemporary consumers, and how they understand and interpret their fun experiences are yet to be answered.

Fun can be discussed on two levels: as experienced, with the focus on sensations, feelings and thoughts elicited by specific situation framed by consumers as fun, and as disposition, accentuating more general attitudes to things systematically considered fun as well as to fun itself (as a part of consumers' lives). Since the word 'fun' appeared in English language in the seventeenth century, meanings revolving around fun on both levels have been heavily influenced by multiple historical trends and social institutions. Dynamic shifts in understandings of fun and one's rights to have fun have been happening under the effects and social consequences of Protestant Reformation, Industrial Revolution, changing nature of human labour, commodification of leisure, growing secularisation of society, World War II, marketing push to have fun and be fun. Within three centuries fun morality has made a full pendulum swing and fun turned from sin into necessity. At the same time, while seemingly getting more freedom to have and enjoy fun, society has faced new rules and restrictions surrounding it. Fun at workplace, formerly a way to blow off steam and fight the monotony of labour, started to be seen as a driver of productivity, with managers trying to organise and 'package' it into countless team-building events and office parties, often received with the degree of scepticism by employees. Commodified leisure was based on the idea of selling mass-produced fun that, although providing a variety of choices, called for following specific rules and potentially resulted in the loss of authentic fun. Public policies actively promoting and encouraging fun of citizens built it on the premise of control and further commodified leisure, nesting the production of fun in consumption activities while extending the divide between social classes. Marketers adopting the concept of fun in the brand promotional communications often used it as a façade covering controversial and morally ambiguous issues related to advertised products and services. In multiple industries and multiple forms fun has been treated as a means to achieving specific goals.

On the other hand, literature interrogating fun as experienced highlights intrinsic motivation, spontaneity, perceived freedom among its key elements and indicates its autotelic nature that does not sit comfortably with the attempts to externally produce, manage, control and direct fun towards something else. Besides, studies that focus only on the inside of fun tend to overlook the significant role of social, cultural and historical factors that load fun with additional meanings.

This study treats fun as a type of situational definition or reality framing, following Goffman (1974), and looks at the interaction of internal and external factors contributing to the development of that definition, both when an activity, object, situation, etc. is framed as fun within a single episode, as experienced, and when they are framed as fun on a more general level, as disposition. In doing so it follows the experiential consumption research within CCT tradition that provides some insight into fun as an element of extraordinary consumer experiences, linking it to pleasure, thrill, elation, flow and more distinct concepts such as escape, transformation of or search for authentic identity, however, still leaves a significant amount of questions about fun unanswered. A focussed exploration of the phenomenon is undertaken within this thesis in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of consumer fun.

The research questions embrace the perspectives of two sides: consumers' and marketers' and aim to provide a theoretical contribution to the research of experiential consumption, addressing the gap in the knowledge about the phenomenon (much like Belk et al. (2003) did with desire), and a contribution to marketing practice by enabling marketers to make more informed choices when adopting the concept of fun for marketing activities through a more critically appreciative understanding of fun.

The following chapter discusses philosophical and methodological implications of addressing the research questions through developing research design, collecting and analysing data.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research process is inextricably linked to the views a researcher holds about the nature of reality, nature of knowledge, the place and role of human beings and conscious mind in the world. Those, in turn, direct the chosen research approaches, methodologies as well understanding and representations of findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Different philosophical stances will provide different answers to the questions such as whether the process of knowing defines the known and can the ultimate truth about the world be found (Saunders et al., 2012).

In the research of fun, two major research philosophies, namely positivism and interpretivism, have been driving the academic enquiries. Figure 3 below illustrates that slightly over a half of the identified works (covering such fields as marketing and consumer research, leisure, sport, tourism, learning, and management) is underpinned by a positivist approach.

Figure 3. Philosophical approaches to research focused on the phenomenon of fun

Source: Literature review, 2023

These two philosophical positions radically differ in ontology (philosophical consideration about the nature of reality as such), epistemology (philosophical consideration of the construction, scope, and basis of knowledge) and axiology (philosophical consideration of value in research) (Bryman, 2015) and have been adopted for the research of fun in different ways.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the approach underpinning this study. The chapter discusses the benefits and drawbacks of positivist and interpretivist paradigms for researching the phenomenon of consumer fun, and then delves deeper into interpretivism focussing specifically on the perspective driving this research - hermeneutic phenomenology - and turning to the notions of hermeneutic circle, lingusiticality of understanding, and fusion of horizons. Further, illuminating the fit between research aims and objectives, the philosophical position (ontology, axiology, and epistemology) adopted for the research, and the practical steps enabling a researcher to collect and analyse data (methodology), emphasised by Guba & Lincoln (1994; 2008), this chapter proceeds to discussing the research design, the process of data collection, and work undertaken to analyse and interpret the findings.

3.2 Positivism

Not only in the research concerned directly with fun, but in marketing and consumer research in general, the positivist stance appears to be more prevalent (Hunt, 2020). In the early stage of discipline development, marketing as an inquiry system was focused on delivering generic commodities to the marketplace (Wright & Dimsdale, 1974) and strongly associated with pragmatic economic issues including cost minimisation, profitability, marginal returns and transport efficiency (Hirschman, 1986). Being guided by classical economic theory, marketing adopted positivist methodology (Wang, 2019). It is important to underline that positivist thinking includes several schools of thought, such as classical positivism, logical empiricism, falsificationism, that have certain differences in addressing various issues (e.g. the nature of ultimate truth, objectivity, and verification of scientific claims), however, their basic philosophical views are quite consistent (Radnitzky, 1970). They are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Key tenets of positivism

		Positivist assumptions	Commentary
Ontology	Nature of social reality	Objective, tangible, single, fragmentable, divisible	A single objective reality exists independently of the conscious mind (Peter, 1992). This reality is a structure composed of the relationships between its parts that can be accurately measured (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). It is considered possible to reduce the system to its elements and study them separately (Arndt, 1985).
	Nature of social beings	Deterministic, reactive	The determining factors and the degree of their influence may vary from external world for behaviourists relying on operant conditioning (Morgan & Smircich, 1980) to internal subjective states for cognitivists (Anderson, 1986)
Axiology	Overriding goal	Explanation and prediction	Explanation is achieved when the systematic association of variables underlying a phenomenon is demonstrated; explanation in turn allows the researcher to achieve some level of prediction (Kerlinger, 1973).
Epistemology	Generated knowledge	Nomothetic, time-free, context-independent	Positivists seek for objective knowledge, general abstract laws that are ideally context- and time-free and can be applied to a large number of settings, phenomena, and people (Keat & Urry, 1975).

	View of causality	Real causes exist	A high priority is placed on revealing causal links (Zeng et al., 2020).
	Research relationship	Separation, detached stance, privileged point of observation	Positivists deem it possible for researchers to control or minimise their influence on the subject and be outsider investigators. The inquirer is assumed to have significantly more knowledge about the phenomenon than the subject and occupies a privileged vantage point of observation (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982).

Source: Adapted from Hudson & Ozanne (1988, p. 509)

Typical methods used by positivist researchers include controlled experiments, surveys and sophisticated statistical analysis that aim to confirm or reject the existing theory by hypothetical-deductive logic (Prager et al., 2011). It is important to test hypotheses empirically to understand whether they accurately represent reality (Hunt, 1990). Scientific results are then evaluated using such criteria as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Smith & Heshusius, 1986).

While firmly holding the major ground in marketing research since 1950s, positivism has been extensively criticised (Wang, 2019). For example, positivists have to deal with problem of induction: universal statement cannot be verified by a finite number of observations, therefore, universal laws are unachievable (Peter & Olson 1983). Moreover, fully objective observations cannot be obtained since observations are always theory-laden, value-laden, and interpreted (Anderson, 1983). Then, treating subjective statements like objects and trying to understand objective features of society by studying people outside of their typical social contexts poses a problem that many subtle features are lost in the process (Rubinstein, 1981). Finally, positivism relies on the concept of truth and discovering truth about the world when there is no defensible method for establishing the existence of truth in the first place (Peter, 1983).

Some of these issues are illustrated by the research of fun adopting a positivist stance. In marketing research specifically, such studies demonstrate relationships between

constructs that corporate executives are often concerned with: relationship between fun and monetary spending (Scarpi, 2006), loyalty, Word-of-Mouth (Scarpi et al., 2014), adoption of technology (Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002; Bruner & Kumar, 2005; Yang & Jolly, 2008), reaction to touristic destination (Choi & Choi, 2019). On the other hand, it follows from the literature review that the appropriateness of the items used for measuring fun in the majority of aforementioned studies, such as pleasure, excitement, enjoyment and interest, is debatable. Relationships between these concepts are ambiguous and fluid (Podilchak, 1991; Dix, 2003; Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018). In the absence of the clearly specified conceptual meaning of fun, currently prevailing in the academic discussions, it is challenging to define which concepts can be considered fun components/antecedents/moderators. Talking about the attempts to find the right way of measuring fun Wilk (2022) concludes that existing measures (e.g. Tisza & Markopoulos, 2021) so far fail to demonstrate validity across cultures, or stability over time and outside of control settings.

The objectivist pursuit of knowledge about fun can be further challenged adopting the 'indeterminacy principle' suggested by Heisenberg (1958). He argued that studying a phenomenon inevitably influences what is being seen, therefore, scientists record not universal objective laws but rather relative subjective statements (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). While Heisenberg's critique was developed in the context of physics, more specifically, determining the position and momentum of subatomic particles, in the research of fun, this principle may be even more evident due to fun's fleeting nature. Fincham (2016) argues that even when individuals themselves (without any research incentives) start thinking about fun in the moment of experiencing it, they stop having fun. Observation and examination, then, tend to not just alter but disrupt the phenomenon in question.

Furthermore, the emergence of fun is context and mindset dependent (de la Ville et al., 2010), fun feeling is highly subjective and human beings in fun are typically pro-active and voluntaristic (McManus & Furnham, 2010); it does not sit comfortably with reductionist, objectivist and determinist views within positivism. Not only measuring fun in surveys is problematic, recreating fun in a controlled experiment is very challenging since fun is motivated intrinsically and cannot be imposed (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018). It may be more insightful to research fun as a holistic experience (without trying to break it down in parts or recreate it in controlled settings), with

consumers as the best experts in their own thoughts, perceptions, feelings and interpretation of meanings in the centre.

3.3 Interpretivism

The logical-empirical research approaches began losing their charm for social scientists in the early 1980s when more and more researchers started to pose questions about the focus of inquiry and call for methodologies that were not driven by measurement, prediction and control and focused rather on discovery, description and meaning (Laverty, 2003). The previous 25 years have been described as the time of growing ‘crisis of value’, and appealing to traditional forms of logic and authority could not resolve it (Smith, 1991). Marketing and consumer researchers started to embrace new ways of thinking that represented a radical departure from the traditional positivist paradigm (Belk, 1995).

The new interpretivist perspective acknowledged complex, social, often unpredictable and irrational nature of consumer behaviour, focusing not only on purchasing process and cognitive factors, but emphasising significance of the experiential and affective aspects which underpin consumption (Goulding, 1999). Interpretive paradigm, that might also be labelled subjective (Rubinstein, 1981), naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), qualitative (Van Maanen et al., 1982), and humanistic (ACR Special Session, 1985) gained significant attention after Consumer Behaviour Odyssey project (Belk et al., 1989) where the authors analysed ‘sacralisation' of consumption experiences drawing on a wide body of literature, ranging from theology to advertising. With the adoption of new ontological, epistemological and methodological orientations, interpretive marketing and consumer research started looking at such disciplines as anthropology (Sherry, 1995), history (Cochoy, 1993), literary and cultural studies (Brown, 1999; Stern, 1990) for new theoretical foundations, moving away from cognitive and behavioural psychology and economics where positivism traditionally prevailed (Tadajewski, 2004).

Interpretivism, like positivism, is referred to as a general research approach that captures a number of philosophical positions, however, their basic ontological, axiological and epistemological assumptions are more or less homogeneous (Crotty, 1998). They are presented in the Table 4.

Table 4. Key tenets of interpretivism

		Interpretivist assumptions	Commentary
Ontology	Nature of social reality	Socially constructed, multiple, holistic, contextual	Reality is perceived and mental, human beings create theories and categories in order to make sense of the world around them (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). It is also socially constructed, therefore, multiple realities exist because of different individual and group perspectives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). A complex of these co-existing and fluid realities is analysed holistically, they are seen as more than just a sum of their parts. Systems that compose a reality are dependent on each other for their meaning, in case systems are fragmented and separated, their meanings will change (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).
	Nature of social beings	Voluntary, proactive	Humans do not just react to the external factors, they actively interact with the world and each other to create meanings and shape their own environment (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).
Axiology	Overriding goal	Understanding (of meanings, behaviours, organisation of social structures). Verstehen, (understanding) as opposed to the explicative approach	Understanding is more of a process than an end-product, it is always incomplete (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Researchers may hold a present understanding of the phenomenon, but every new interpretation influences and alters this understanding that in turn affects future interpretations (Denzin, 1970).

		Erklären (explaining) (Weber, 1949)	Verstehen refers to grasping the shared meanings within a culture of language, contexts, roles, rituals, gestures, arts, which can be achieved through active interaction of the researcher with the phenomenon in question, participating in culture, getting an insider's view (Wax, 1967).
Epistemology	Generated knowledge	Idiographic, time-bound, context-dependent	Interpretivists undertake a particularistic and historical approach, analysing phenomena in their natural context, in specific place and specific time. Instead of law-like regularities they aim to determine meanings, motives, feelings and a plethora of subjective experiences shaped by human activities and interactions (Peter & Olson, 1983).
	View of causality	Multiple, simultaneous, shaping	The world is considered too complex and rapidly changing for establishing clear cause-and-effect relationships. Rather, entities are seen as mutually and simultaneously shaping each other (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
	Research relationship	Interactive, cooperative, no privileged point of observation	Interpretivist researchers step down from their vantage observation point and engage in creative cooperation with research participants seen and treated as equals. Those being studied do not only supply information but help guiding emergent research design (Giddens, 1976). Besides, interpretivists accept that the personal detached objectivity cannot be achieved (Hirshman, 1986).

Source: Adapted from Hudson & Ozanne (1988, p. 509)

The common criteria of knowledge evaluation used in positivism are not particularly applicable to interpretive research. There are several alternative positions concerning the assessment of findings. For example, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability corresponding to the positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. An alternative view suggests proposing the precise description of historical and social context of the phenomenon under study and creating 'a social agreement' about the meaning of the generated knowledge as sufficient criteria (Zeng et al., 2020).

Multiple possibilities for interpretation, empathetic identification as a basis for understanding and high degree of researcher's personal involvement in the process provide a fertile ground for criticism. For example, one of the common remarks considers empathetic identification nonsensical, since the researcher cannot read the mind of the subject and is only capable of experiencing and interpreting their own thoughts. Moreover, the results of such identification cannot be validated (Rubinstein, 1981). Another area of criticism is concerned with biases of both researcher and informant, since the former may not be able to prevent personal, social and cultural background from affecting interpretations and, therefore, arriving at misleading results and the latter might be dishonest in an attempt to make a better impression or conceal the details of certain experiences perceived as sensitive or embarrassing (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

Nevertheless, interpretive researchers are committed to generating knowledge that meets the high academic standards (as much as positivists do) and captures consumer realities and experiences in their complexity and interrelatedness (Thompson et al., 1989). They adopt a range of techniques such as using multiple sources of data and triangulation, verification checks between the members of research teams and with research participants, analyses consisting of multiple stages in order to ensure coherence of understanding (Szmigin & Foxall, 2000).

Subjective, internally motivated and context-dependent nature of fun experienced by pro-active individuals, as follows from the literature review, finds a better fit with the interpretivist research goals and philosophical assumptions comparing with the positivist stance. Interpretivism can be considered an umbrella paradigm that clearly

positions itself against positivism in terms of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology, however, several philosophical traditions, such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, exist within interpretivist thinking (Crotty, 1998). This study adopts hermeneutic phenomenology as underpinning research philosophy since its key tenets allow for the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in question.

3.4 Hermeneutic phenomenology

This research is concerned with grasping subjective lived fun experiences and their meanings for consumers, and aims to understand how these meanings are being constructed, shared and reflected upon in contemporary consumer society; as well as how marketers using the concept of fun in their practice understand and interpret consumer fun. Such research goals correspond with the phenomenological tradition of consumer research exploring people's subjective experiences (Thompson et al., 1989). Additionally, the experiential view of consumption claiming (for the first time in consumer research) that fun, sensory pleasures, aesthetic enjoyment and emotional responses actually constitute important elements of overall consumer experience is phenomenological in spirit (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

3.4.1 Husserl’s phenomenology

The phenomenological movement emerged around the turn of the twentieth century driven by the thinking of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Spiegelberg, 1982). He viewed natural sciences dominating academic thinking as losing connection with the fabric and reality of human experience, while scientific theory and practice ‘grows out of and remains supported by the forgotten ground of our directly felt and lived experience’ (Abram, 1997, p. 43).

Husserl ([1913] 1931) introduced the term ‘lifeworld’, understood as being that is experienced pre-reflectively. Phenomenology, then, is a study of the lifeworld or the lived human experience (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenological inquiry puts an emphasis on the world as lived by the participants rather than a reality that is separate and independent from the people (Valle et al., 1989). According to Husserl ([1950] 1970), lifeworld is not something readily available to us because its perceptions are always affected or distorted by ideas from our past experiences, categorization,

conceptualization, or by something we take for granted or see as common sense. Following this logic, studying world phenomena implies returning to and re-examining these taken for granted experiences potentially grasping meanings that are new and/or forgotten.

Husserl ([1913] 1931) suggested that such examination is undertaken through consciousness (understood as a co-constituted dialogue between a person and the world, rejecting Cartesian dualism of reality) and direct grasping of the ultimate essences of specific experiences, a process actively guided by human intention. Intentionality is a process of directing the mind towards objects of the study (Koch, 1995) and the goal of this process is to access and understand the essential characteristics of the phenomenon that make it unique and recognizable (Edie, 1987).

Identification of essences calls for phenomenological reduction where one has 'to set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking . . . to learn to see what stands before our eyes' (Husserl, [1913] 1931, p. 43). This practice is widely known among researchers as bracketing. In Husserlian phenomenology, bracketing is thought to remove distortion of our perception by enabling a refraining from judgment (Tan et al., 2009). In order to see a phenomenon clearly phenomenological researchers are expected to identify and set aside particular beliefs they have about it before the start of their inquiry. Conscious awareness of one's biases is supposed to serve as a protection from pre-conceived notions and assumptions about what is to be found affecting the research results (Colazzi, 1978). While recognising the unusualness of the bracketing approach, Husserl considered it a viable pursuit (Edie, 1987).

3.4.2 Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology

Another eminent exponent of phenomenological movement is German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Despite originally committing himself to Husserlian worldview, Heidegger then came to develop phenomenological thinking in a different vein, blending it with hermeneutic philosophy, giving a rise to what is known as hermeneutic phenomenology (Jones, 1975).

Hermeneutics represents the oldest stream of thinking within interpretivism. The word 'hermeneutics' derives from the Greek ερμηνεύειν (hermeneuein), which means 'to interpret' or 'to understand' (Palmer, 1969). There is also a clear connection to Hermes, messenger of the Greek gods and bearer of knowledge, who announced decisions made on Olympus to mortals and made them understandable (Bleicher, 1980). Hermeneutics stands for a reflective practice of unfolding and deciphering indirect meanings and unmasking concealed meanings beneath what may seem apparent. The basic hermeneutic premise states that myth, art, ideology, and religion are rich with messages waiting to be uncovered and philosophically interpreted (Crotty, 1998). Originally the term came to modern use in the seventeenth century in the context of biblical studies. Hermeneutics provided guidelines for scholars as they engaged in the task of interpreting Scripture. The complex of theories, principles, rules and methods was supposed to unveil what a text had to say and how it should be acted upon (Connolly & Keutner, 1988). However, it received new understanding from the twentieth century philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer (Kearney, 1991).

Human experience as it is lived, or the lifeworld, is at the heart of both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Details and aspects of experience that may seem trivial or taken for granted are illuminated with the goal of developing meaning and achieving a sense of understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). The point where thinking of Husserl and Heidegger starts to diverge is how one proceeds with the exploration of lived experience (Laverty, 2003). With the focus on understanding beings or phenomena, Husserl saw humans primarily as knowers engaged in perceiving and thinking about the world, thus, emphasising the issues of epistemology (Annells, 1996). Heidegger ([1927] 1962), in turn, took an ontological stance concerned with the nature of being, taking it as far as seeing ontology and phenomenology as inseparable. Humans, then, are creatures whose existence is built around grasping their fate in an alien world (Jones, 1975). Exploring the phenomenology of human being, Heidegger ([1927] 1962) introduced the term Dasein, translated as 'the mode of being human'. Dasein includes not only being as such but also the ability to explore the nature and possibilities of being (Tan et al., 2009).

The basic form of human existence, according to Heidegger ([1927] 1962), is understanding which is not the way of knowing but the way of being. Our consciousness is produced by historically lived experience and is not separate from

the world (Polkinghorne, 1983). Historicality, a personal background or situatedness in the world, is a crucial part of understanding and includes a set of ideas, views and beliefs handed down to the person by the culture from birth, presenting ways of understanding the world (Koch, 1995). People and the world, from this point of view, are indissolubly related in historical, cultural, and social contexts (Packer, 1985).

However, before one comes to understanding, the meanings and organisation of culture they hold are presented in the form of pre-understanding, a structure for being in the world (Heidegger, [1927] 1962). Heidegger saw pre-understanding as something a person cannot step outside of or set aside, therefore, considered elimination or bracketing as suggested by Husserl impossible (Laverty, 2003). The object of inquiry can only be encountered with a reference to one's background understanding, and meaning is developed as humans are constructed by the world while constructing the world at the same time from their own experiences and background (Koch, 1995).

Another important part of coming to understanding is interpretation. According to Heidegger ([1927] 1962), the only way to have a life in the world is through the acts of interpretation. Every encounter is an interpretation characterised by a collision of historical meanings of experience and individual historicality that affect and co-constitute each other (Polkinghorne, 1983). Following the logic of hermeneutics, life can be seen as a text that humans attempt to understand and interpret. Our interpretation of this text is influenced by our pre-understanding which is changed and enlightened by the process of interaction and the next interpretive encounter starts with that new updated pre-understanding (Koch, 1995).

Heidegger's hermeneutics refers 'to his phenomenological explication of human existing itself' (Palmer, 1969, p. 42). It starts with a phenomenological return to our Being aiming to grasp it as it presents itself to humans pre-reflectively, and then, using it as pre-understanding, point of departure, to develop and unfold it further, turn implicit into explicit, and comprehend the meaning of being itself (Richardson, 2003).

The differences between phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (HP) reveal themselves in the practicalities of research. Thus, phenomenological studies often have a descriptive nature with the focus on the structure of experience and the goal of uncovering the organising principles giving form and meaning to the lifeworld

(Kvale, 1996). HP research places a stronger emphasis on interpretation rather than description and focuses on the developmental and cumulative effects of historical meanings of experience on the meanings present on individual and social level (Barclay, 1992). In the very beginning of the research journey researchers in both traditions will spend some time practising self-reflection. While phenomenologists will attempt to identify their existing ideas about the nature of the phenomenon in question in order to bracket them, put them aside and strive to see the experience as it is (Osborne, 1994), hermeneutic phenomenological researchers will embrace the pre-conceived notions and assumptions and treat them as pre-understanding that is going to be changed and enriched throughout the research process (Arnold & Fisher, 1994). Hermeneutic way of thinking requires overt naming of personal assumptions and experiences related to the researched phenomenon as well as philosophies or historical movements that guide and influence interpretation (Hertz, 1997). Interpretation in the HP tradition takes place in the process of dialogue and co-construction where the researcher and participants work together to bring the researched experience to life through the fusion of their horizons, dialectic between participants' statements and their contexts, researchers' pre-understanding and the interpretive framework (Koch, 1995). The production of meaning is happening within reading and writing, moving within hermeneutic circle, which together with the fusion of horizons and a detailed attention to language constitute the key building blocks of hermeneutic interpretation (Smith, 1991).

3.4.3 Hermeneutic circle

The multidimensional concept of hermeneutic circle, popularised by Heidegger, lies in the heart of hermeneutic approach and refers to the culturally based nature of human understanding (Hekman, 1986). In social science the term can be used in three meanings: (1) a methodological process for interpreting a text, (2) a philosophical view of the research process, and (3) a general model of the process by which understandings are formed (Thompson et al., 1994).

In consumer research, hermeneutic circle is a frequently used technique for analysing qualitative data in the form of consumption stories verbatims (Pomiès & Tissier-Desbordes, 2016). In this iterative process a 'part' of text is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the 'whole'. The initial

understanding is often modified as reading progresses providing a more developed sense of the text's meaning as a whole (Arnold & Fisher, 1994).

The second meaning suggests that scientific knowledge is developed on the basis of beliefs and assumptions informed by a culturally situated perspective (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1988). In order to develop scientific understanding, interpretation is necessary (Heidegger, [1927] 1962). Pre-understanding that researchers have prior to engagement with the text is considered to play a positive rather than a negative role, acting as a necessary frame of reference rather than distorting bias (Lowe et al., 2005).

The first two meanings address specific implications following from the third, core meaning of the term (Thompson et al., 1994). It is concerned with the complex relationship of broad shared meanings adopted from the cultural tradition and the more personalised meanings constructed by an individual (Faulconer & Williams, 1985). Sociohistorical meanings, beliefs, ideals, culturally shared knowledge that a person accesses over the course of their lifetime through education, media, participation in religious and ethnic traditions, engagement with political and economic organisations, function as a background in which personal understanding of consumer choices and experiences is formed (Gergen 1990; Shweder, 1991).

3.4.4 Linguisticality of understanding

The important role in both sharing personal meanings and conveying broader background meanings written in cultural terms is played by language (Hekman, 1986). While lingusiticality of understanding is one of the key hermeneutic tenets, it gets significantly less attention in phenomenological research (Thompson et al. 1989). Heidegger ([1927] 1962) expressed the idea of inseparability of language and understanding as structural aspects of Being, which was further developed in the writings of yet another German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer whose thinking imbibed ideas of both Husserl and Heidegger and then went on to bring more practical application to Heidegger’s work (Polkinghorne, 1983)

According to Gadamer ([1960] 1998, p. 390), ‘language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs’. Language enables filtering and encoding of human experience and its communication in dialogue; language conveys and propels cultural

traditions and bridges past and present (Arnold & Fisher, 1994). Language is understood not as a collection of words and grammatical structures, instead it represents a system of interrelated meanings that gives speakers access to a culturally shared frame of reference (Johnson, 1987). Being able to speak a language means understanding metaphors, common sense sayings and stories that constitute cultural heritage (Wachterhauser, 1986). There is an ongoing dialogue between personal life meanings and shared societal beliefs, therefore, every personal understanding represents a variation or transformation of previously existing cultural viewpoint, even if it is perceived as novel or innovative (Gadamer, 1976). Importantly though, cultural heritage as a living legacy of shared meanings is not internally consistent or monolithic (Thompson, 1997). Rather, it exists in the form of a heterogeneous network where a wide array of interpretive opportunities and context-specific combinations is possible, therefore, personal meanings derive from a broad range of available frames of reference leading to the construction of countless social realities (Somers & Gibson, 1994).

Another important aspect of the nature of language is that language cannot be explored as an object from a perspective outside of language itself and at the same time there is no world outside of language that can be examined with language as a tool (Bernstein, 1983). Language shapes and constraints human experiences of the world, as Gadamer (1989, p. 470) states: 'Being that can be understood is language'. From the idea that language is actually the only world humans know it follows that understanding is always partial and it is the language that determines that partiality or the horizon of prejudice.

3.4.5 Fusion of horizons

Fusion of horizons is the concept also introduced by Gadamer (Polkinghorne, 1983). A horizon is essentially 'range of vision that includes everything seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer, [1960] 1998, p. 301). If one has no horizon, they are incapable of seeing far enough and as a result assigning unreasonably high value to what is nearest at hand, while having a horizon enables human beings to see beyond what is close (Laverty, 2003). Fusion of horizons is happening between researcher and participant, or between reader and text in the process of interpretation (Gadamer, [1960] 1998).

During the phenomenological interviews (a typical approach to data collection in HP studies) research participants reflect on their specific consumer experiences and try to express the personal meanings and significance of these experiences (Thompson et al., 1990). These reflections are then turned into verbatim interview transcripts, the text that a researcher comes to interpret. This is where the horizon of the interviewees comes to be blended with the horizon of the interviewer since the intellectual background and knowledge as well as personal experiences of the researcher always inform any interpretations of the participants' accounts (Thompson et al., 1994).

It follows that fusion of horizons as a basis for interpretation implies that a researcher actually has a horizon. Gadamer supported pre-understanding or prejudice as the step to knowledge determining what humans find intelligible in the world around them (Koch, 1996). Historicality of being is a building block of all understanding and a knower is incapable of leaving their perspective by adopting an attitude (Gadamer, [1960] 1998). Standing with Heidegger on the issue of bracketing, Gadamer considered it not only an impossible endeavour, but even the attempts to engage in it manifestly absurd (Annells, 1996).

3.4.6 Truth in hermeneutic phenomenology

When the concept of the horizon is applied to the thinking mind, issues of the horizon narrowness, possible expansion of the horizon and opening up of new horizons come to light (Gadamer, [1960] 1998). It means that in any hermeneutic phenomenological research there is always more potential horizons to further reveal and more perspectives to uncover (Crowther & Thompson, 2020). Heidegger ([1927] 1962) and Gadamer ([1960] 1998) agreed on the pluralist vision of truth stating that understanding and interpretation are closely intertwined and interpretation is a constantly evolving process with no final destination, therefore a definitive interpretation representing 'the ultimate truth' is not attainable. Hermeneutic phenomenological research inquiry is driven by a philosophical attitude to openness, unboundedness and wonder, seeking no objective, 'scientific' truth (Saevi, 2013). Truth is instead seen as something hidden and covert and while interpretive analysis is aiming to bring more understanding about the phenomenon in question, there is no claim that any interpretation is fully conclusive (Smythe et al., 2008). Although embracing hermeneutic phenomenological research principles may sometimes feel

uncomfortable since ‘measurable truths’ are somewhat prised and valued higher in the research community, claiming that produced interpretation is final and fixed is an anathema to the purpose of this way of thinking (Thomson & Crowther, 2019). From the hermeneutic phenomenological point of view, scientific methods with traditional positivistic goals produce caricatures, illusions and distortions by ‘de-living’ and ‘dehydrating’ lived experiences of human beings (Harman, 2007).

3.4.7 Adopting hermeneutic phenomenology as underpinning research philosophy

The choice of interpretive philosophical approach, and hermeneutic phenomenology in particular, is driven by the nature of the researched phenomenon. First of all, the hermeneutic emphasis on interpreting consumer meanings in relation not only to their personal history by to a broader narratives passed down on individuals through multiple interactions with culture and historically established meanings (Thompson, 1997) enables the researcher to highlight how shared ideas of fun, as well as societal traditions and values are being translated into personal fun experiences. People have gone a long way from associating fun with wickedness and sin to accepting it as something pleasant and life-enhancing (Wolfenstein, 1951). Changing attitudes towards fun throughout history demonstrate the humanisation and liberalisation of society, with individuals getting rights to the self, rights to discover one’s true preferences and opportunities to enjoy life (Klapp, 1969). Additionally, activities considered fun by the majority mirror its common values. Thus, while in the Ancient Rome going to gladiator fights was considered a close equivalent to fun (Dunkle, 2013), and in the Middle Ages coming to observe an execution counted as good family entertainment (Worsley, 2014), at the present time, when the worth of human life is much higher, people can hardly associate fun with real death and suffering and if they do they are likely considered marginal or dangerous by the majority. Therefore, fun of consumers (not only what they do for fun, but how fun experiences are shaped by internal and external factors, how they are interpreted and communicated) may reflect broader cultural viewpoints. Besides, the momentary feelings about experienced fun may be highly subjective and individual, but on the activity level fun is strongly defined by culture and heavily classed (Fincham, 2016). Cultural, social and economic capital used to prescribe what individuals and groups could or could not do for fun (Bourdieu,

1984), and hermeneutic phenomenology offers the instruments to uncover the influence of these broad cultural factors on personalised fun meanings.

Then, hermeneutic focus on language also helps with developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Talking about fun retrospectively is an important fun component (Fine & Corte, 2017). It does not just enable individuals to share memories and experiences, but helps to reinforce social connections (Halbwachs, [1950] 1992). While the fun feelings may be individualised, the way we put it in words and make it understandable for others is key to presenting the self to peers and maintaining a position in the relevant social group. Moreover, the fun status itself may be attached to an experience only in retelling (Fincham, 2016). Therefore, being attentive not only to what research participants say about their fun experiences but to how they say it may further reveal covert meanings and facets of the phenomenon.

Fincham (2016) also notices that while individuals can identify moments when they had fun, it may be challenging to explain what fun actually is, or why one specific occasion was fun but another one seemingly similar was not, since people just do not normally contemplate about these issues, often considered superficial and/or unworthy of serious reflection. Therefore, in this study, consumer fun meanings are co-constructed in the conversation. Researchers' horizon – questions and props coming from the background knowledge and reading – is crossing participants' horizons and the meanings of lived experience are born in that fusion.

Researchers' pre-understanding in this study is embraced as a crucial element, the stage from which the hermeneutic circle starts to turn on the way to understanding as engagement with the participants, verbatims, and additional literature is happening, rather than being bracketed as a distortion, in line with Heidegger's and Gadamer's arguments. The research design was developed ensuring the consistency with the principles of hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy.

3.5 Research design

Hermeneutic phenomenology is not associated with strictly following specific methods, rather methodology calls for being sensitive to the nature of the researched phenomenon, reflexive and open-minded, while adhering to the hermeneutical principles and concepts such as pre-understanding, hermeneutic circle and fusion of

horizons (Madison, 1988; Arnold & Fisher, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Data collection in HP research is often obtained through phenomenological interviews, where the course of the dialogue is largely set by the respondent (Goulding, 1999).

This research is based on the data collected through such in-depth interviews with consumers and marketing professionals that provide two perspectives of understanding of the phenomenon in question and allow for uncovering multiple and interconnected fun meanings.

3.5.1 Research context

Identifying the specific context where rich and valid data can be generated for elucidating the meanings of fun as fully as possible is a somewhat problematic endeavour. In the studies that analyse fun in a narrow context (e.g. workplace (Chan, 2010), classroom (Lesser et al., 2013; Chu et al., 2017), sports classes (O'Reilly et al., 2001), visiting touristic sites (Bakir & Baxter, 2011), food for children (Barrey et al., 2010), entertaining events (Liu et al., 2017)), the discussion of the phenomenon is often skewed towards the activity characteristics, therefore, the context appears on the foreground and the fun itself is lost. This research rejects the view considering fun a type of activity or experience, analysing it as a situational definition instead, applying the play mentality (Goffman, 1974). Fun is found not within the activity but in the perception of that activity (de la Ville et al., 2010).

Picking a specific context and trying to pin fun down within it means asserting the researcher's assumptions that the chosen situation or experience is fun for consumers which goes against the philosophy and principles of HP research. Just as with play, any experience may be fun or not fun, depending on how one thinks and feels about it (Mitchell & Mason, 1924). Seemingly identical contexts can be fun or not fun for different consumers or for the same individuals on different occasions. Consequently, for the exploratory nature of this research aiming to understand lived experiences of consumer fun and its meanings, focusing on one or several specific contexts tends to be limiting, shifting the focus on the more or less 'objective' measures and parameters of the situation.

In line with Kozinets' claim that ''consumers' are human beings, and 'consumption' is the many human acts that people perform as they interact with the material world

around them' (2002, p. 22) as well as Holbrook's view that any human experience is a consumption experience (Woodward & Holbrook, 2013), this study looks at a wide range of fun experiences across a variety of contexts that participating consumers are willing to share. In the hermeneutic phenomenological research the selection of participants is driven by the focus on individuals who have lived the experience that researchers are exploring, who are interested in sharing their experiences and who are diverse enough from each other to provide a rich data set with unique stories highlighting various angles of the experience in question (van Manen, 1997; Cleary et al., 2014). These were the key principles guiding the data collection for this study.

Importantly, only consumers from the UK and resident in the UK were invited to participate in the study. The literature review demonstrates that socio-historical and cultural context plays an important role in shaping the meanings of and attitudes towards fun. Cross-cultural analysis, although likely to bring more depth to the fun understanding, remains beyond the scope of this work. Besides, with rare exceptions (e.g. Fincham, 2016), the research exploring fun is mostly rooted in the American context (Wolfenstein, 1951; Butsch, 1990; Bryant & Forsyth, 2005; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Reis et al., 2017; Fine & Corte, 2017; Oh & Pham, 2022). This study focuses on the British perspective.

The consumer data address RQs 1 and 2, focused on experienced fun as well as construction and interpretation of fun dispositions. RQs 3 and 4 explore the marketers' understandings of consumer fun and their consistency with consumers' articulations of the phenomenon. In order to collect insightful data representing professionals' perspective, marketers that adopt the construct of fun in their marketing activities (as a part of the slogans, calls to action, advertising copy, or generating fun within brand encounters for their customers) within different industries in the UK were targeted as informants.

3.5.2 Sampling and recruitment

The sample sizes for both groups (consumers and marketing professionals) were not pre-determined in the beginning of the research since hermeneutic phenomenological tradition does not have a strict requirement for a certain number of participants (as well as statistical representability of the sample) – it can vary significantly across the studies and is driven by the goal of generating information-rich cases (Laverty, 2003).

Some authors argue that HP research should include 6 to 10 informants, considerably less comparing to, for example, ethnographic studies and grounded theory where involving 30 to 50 participants is recommended (Morse, 1994; Porter, 1999). However, phenomenological approach implies within-method diversity: sometimes exploring a single participant's experience of being-in-the-world in extreme detail provides valid insights (Smith et al., 2009), in other cases 10 to 50 accounts of target phenomenon are required in order to capture the essential meaning structures shaping the human experience (Van Kaam, 1959). In consumer research, hermeneutic phenomenological studies typically have the sample size between 7 (e.g. Thompson 1996) to just over 20 informants (e.g. Luedicke et al., 2010; Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

In the research concerned specifically with the phenomenon of fun across various disciplines, the number of participants in qualitative studies also varies, as Table 5 below demonstrates.

Table 5. Sample sizes of qualitative studies exploring the phenomenon of fun

Source: Literature review, 2023

A common practice for researchers is to continue engaging in interviews until the data saturation is reached and interviewers believe that new findings or a deeper understanding of the phenomenon will not be obtained through further discussions with informants (Seidman, 1991). This approach was adopted for the data collection. It was also anticipated that the consumer sample would be bigger than the marketers' one since the key focus of this study is fun experienced by consumers.

Consumers and marketing professionals were recruited on two online platforms: Twitter[1] and LinkedIn respectively. The research design was developed in summer 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic was still affecting the ways of organising communication. Getting in touch online ensured safety and peace of mind for the participants and the researcher.

Twitter, as a social media network, provides access to a significant amount of potential research participants. Although Facebook remains more popular in the UK with a much bigger audience (49.69 million users on Facebook in the UK (Statista, 2022a) vs 18.8 million users on Twitter in the UK in August 2021 (Statista, 2022b)), specific features of the platforms make recruitment on Twitter more feasible. Facebook is often used as a platform where users share personal information and life details intended for a close circle of friends or family, or at least people users personally know. As a result, a significant amount of Facebook inhabitants set strict privacy restrictions for their accounts (Forgie et al., 2013). If a researcher is not a 'friend' of a potential participant, their personal messages will arrive in the individuals' 'Message request' folder which does not send notifications to the user (Facebook, 2023). Twitter, on the other hand, is typically perceived as a platform for widespread conversation and ideas sharing, therefore the percentage of users purposefully making their profiles private (partly due to not being aware of how to do that) is very low (Haysom, 2021). Moreover, the 'retweet' function may enable the snowball sampling if users share tweets about the study with their own followers (Lafferty & Manca, 2015). Therefore, for a researcher Twitter provides less restricted access to a wide audience (Wasilewski, 2019). This audience also tends to be quite diverse, with the age groups 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 and 65+ being represented almost equally (Statista, 2022c) and in January 2020 men and women accounted for 58,5% and 41,5% of users, respectively (Strugar, 2023). As discussed before, as an HP study, this research was not aiming for a statistically representative sample, however, the goal was to capture the experiences of different consumers to develop as comprehensive understanding of the

[1] In July 2023, Twitter was rebranded as 'X' (Ivanova, 2023), however, engagement with the platform was taking place while the previous name was relevant, therefore, in this thesis it is referred to as Twitter.

phenomenon as possible, therefore, Twitter was considered the most practical point of access to the potential participants.

Marketing practitioners were recruited via LinkedIn, the largest professional network on the internet, used for job search, developing and strengthening professional relationships, and learning various career-boosting skills (LinkedIn, 2023). In August 2021, there were 37.1 million UK users on the platform (Statista, 2023a) and 72% of people present on LinkedIn use it daily (Statista, 2023b). The user profile information clearly identifying the company and the job position was helping to target marketers representing specific brands.

The recruitment process was undertaken with the following strategy. As the Appendix 1 demonstrates, a wide range of brands adopt the construct of fun for various forms of promotion. First, such brands (operating on the UK market) were identified. Then marketing professionals working for the brand in the UK were approached via LinkedIn from the researcher's account with the invitation to the interview. The personalised messages explained the research goals, the reasoning behind addressing the specific marketer, and outlined the potential benefits of participation (receiving a management report with findings providing an in-depth data-driven understanding of consumer fun).

The potential consumer participants were then identified on Twitter among the followers of the respective brand page. It is important to specify, though, that no assumption related to necessarily engaging with identified brands or having fun while engaging with them was asserted on the chosen participants. The online communities only served as a point of access to consumers and the interviews were focussing on any experiences the informants were willing to discuss, embracing a variety of contexts.

A few more formal criteria (summarised in Table 6) were applied in order to make the recruitment more efficient:

Table 6. Criteria for consumer recruitment on Twitter

Criteria	Commentary
Location: UK	Many Twitter users share the city of residence or use flag symbols (Union Jack or flags of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

	in their profile description to identify their nationality. The combination of these markers was used to make a judgement.
Age: 18+	Due to the ethical concerns related to engaging children in research, only adults were recruited.
Twitter profile settings: public	Users had to have an open profile (accessible for someone they do not follow) with the opportunity to send them direct messages.
Presence on the platform: active usage	Users had to be active on their personal pages, tweeting or retweeting more or less regularly, follow other people and brand pages and have followers (markers of the presence on the platform and potential monitoring of incoming messages).

Prospective interviewees were contacted via direct messages that briefly explained the purpose and the nature of the study and invited them to have ‘an informal chat about their fun experiences as well as thoughts and feelings about what it is like to have fun’. The interviews were positioned as an opportunity to ‘reflect on their positive experiences, discover something new about themselves and have a good laugh or two’. A special researcher page was used for recruitment. It was further explaining the study with regular tweeting of thought-provoking questions about fun and calls for participants to capture the audience’s interest and motivate users to participate in the study.

While the initial strategy was relying on the recruitment of marketing professionals first and then recruiting consumers from the respective brands’ Twitter pages, engaging managers turned out to be more challenging than expected. Therefore, the recruitment of consumers continued to proceed from the identified Twitter brand pages without necessarily having a professional representing the company. Considering that the discussion with consumers was not tied to specific brand experiences, the change in the strategy did not disrupt the sampling principles adopted earlier. Marketing

professionals working with the construct of fun in different ways were additionally recruited through the personal connections of the researcher's supervisory team.

3.5.3 Interviews with consumers

Consumer interviews were designed in a phenomenological manner to attain a first-person description of fun experiences, associated feelings, thoughts, and reflections and address the research questions 1 and 2. The interview guide (provided in the Appendix 2) was semi-structured in nature and touched upon the main issues revealed through the literature review while leaving a degree of freedom for the participants to talk about their fun experiences in a manner they considered the most appropriate (Warren, 2002).

The opening question did not mention fun per se, asking instead whether a participant did something that made them feel good recently. The purpose of such outset was to set up a friendly atmosphere of trust, enabling the interviewees to feel more comfortable while opening up about their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1983). It also purposefully avoided using the word 'fun' letting participants to navigate their stories and arrive to the discussion of fun naturally. If they started talking about the specific fun experiences, the follow up questions encouraged them to uncover more specific details (how it felt, what was special about the experience, whether it was social and how was the interaction happening, whether any expectations preceded the occasion and what is it like to reminisce about it). In case the opening question did not take the interviewee to describing a specific case of fun they were then asked to share an episode of their lives (recent or far away in time) that was 'really fun for them' and then the same follow up questions would help to fill the story with details.

The beginning of the interview, thus, employed elements of narrative enquiry. The literature has demonstrated that since fun is a very subtle and abstract contract, it is not surprising that individuals struggle to answer the direct question: 'What is fun?' or 'How can you describe fun?' (Fincham, 2016). The narrative enquiry helped to ground the understanding of the phenomenon in a specific experience and encourage informants to build their accounts of lived fun. Asking participants to share a story about a particular fun experience in as many details as possible enabled them to provide a recollection of the situation in a coherent way with a beginning, middle, and

ending (Clandinin, 2013). Keeping a certain fun episode in mind was helping to relive it and ease the process of conscious realisation of their fun.

The rest of the questions (related to such aspects of the phenomenon as its sociality, recollection, expression, habituation/progression, barriers to fun) were not fixed in order and were asked to fit naturally as the dialogue was unfolding, as a means of further uncovering the facets of fun within consumer experiences. Specific questions were mostly open in nature and often secondary to the probes such as: 'Can you tell me more about…?', 'How did you feel in that situation?', 'What was it like to experience this?', 'How would you describe it to someone who has never done that?' that followed the course of the conversation. It was done in order to bring the interview process as close to the lived experience as possible (Laverty, 2003).

The conversation was not supposed to follow the pre-determined path and a significant degree of variability between participants was allowed. The dialogue was developing in more circular rather than linear nature. The researcher was not positioned as more knowledgeable or powerful than participants who were seen as the experts in their own experiences and encouraged to share their own vision of the phenomenon that is true to them and their reality. Finally, 'why' questions were avoided because of their tendency to push consumers for rationalisation, explanation or defence of their position (Thompson et al., 1989).

3.5.4 Projective techniques in consumer interviews

Due to the simultaneously omnipresent and elusive nature of the phenomenon, individuals tend to clearly distinguish the moments of fun from the situations which are not fun for them, but sometimes struggle to explicitly explain the difference or capture the essence of fun in words (Dix, 2003). Certain unconscious thoughts, feelings, or needs related to having fun may not be easily accessible to participants. In order to overcome the barrier of consciousness and capture intuitive understandings of the phenomenon in question several projective techniques were used (Keegan, 2008). While social researchers use a wide array of projective exercises, the common goal is linked to elicitation, reducing the impact of conventional thinking, loosening inhibitions, and making it easier to verbalise subconscious or unframed thought and attitudes (Mariampolski, 2011).

The following techniques were adapted for this study:

1) Sensory metaphors

The term ‘metaphor’ finds its roots in the Greek ‘metapherein’ (where ‘meta’ means involving change; and ‘pherein’ is to bear or carry): ‘Change occurs when attributes ordinarily designating one entity are transferred to another entity’ (Feinstein, 1982, p. 47). Understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another is what gives life to metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For consumers metaphors provide a helpful instrument for making sense of embodied experiences as well as structuring, interpreting, and expressing non-conscious knowledge (Johnson, 2009).

Trying to think of the colour, sound, smell, taste and texture that fun would have for a person worked as a vehicle for making tacit knowledge emerge as explicit knowledge, using the domain of senses to understand the phenomenon of fun (von Wallpach & Kreuzer, 2013). The key researcher’s interest was not the specific colours or sounds that informants named, rather further questions like: ‘If you imagine something of that colour, what would it be’? or ‘Where could you potentially hear that sound?’ or ‘How do you feel when you touch something with that texture?’ enabled participants to produce a web of associations contributing to the construction of meanings related to fun.

2) Visual elicitation

This technique is based on the premise that visuals are central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies since visual imagery conveys significant meanings and expresses spiritual and psychological aspects of human existence (Rose, 2016). Bringing visual aspects into traditionally verbal research methodology often takes the form of photo-elicitation where participants are asked to bring photographs related to the researched topic to interviews or focus groups and then encouraged to talk about the situations captured in the images (Braun et al., 2017). Inclusion of visual elements can enable greater access to the constructions of self and understanding of personal experiences that may be challenging to reveal through solely verbal means (Croghan et al., 2008; Silverman, 2013). Moreover, visual elicitation techniques have the power to disrupt taken-for-granted narrative, producing rich and enlightening data (Gillies et al., 2005). Besides, in line with the principles of HP research, encouraging informants to choose the

images they would prefer to talk about gives more control to the participants, allowing them to set the agenda and emphasise the aspects of the experience that is important and meaningful for them (Roger & Blomgren, 2019).

Studies in anthropology, education, community health, psychology, sociology and consumer research have implemented visual elicitation techniques (Carlsson, 2001; Harper, 2002; Wang, 2003; Belk et al. 2003; Loeffler, 2004). In the studies of fun, an example utilising the analysis of the participants' photos capturing moments of fun-having is the work of Oh & Pham (2022). However, researchers approached these data from a positivistic perspective inviting independent panel members to code the images, trying to develop an 'objective' portrait of the phenomenon and identify its key features without reflections of people in the pictures. This study stays within interpretive mode of inquiry and follows the path of Belk et al. (2003) exploring consumer desire and developing a phenomenological account. These authors successfully used both visual elicitation (drawings of participants' images of desire) and sensory metaphors, among other projective techniques, and acknowledged that projective and metaphoric data were helpful in capturing visions of desire, associated dreams and fantasies (ibid.).

Following Belk et al. (2003) in the methodological design of the present study, interviewees were asked to pick 2-3 images that represent fun to them in any way, shape or form, before sharing these with the researcher during the interview. The choice was not limited to the personal photos, the images could be taken from the internet, newspapers, magazines, movie or TV show scenes, or any other sources. At a certain point of the interview these images were demonstrated one by one on the Zoom call screen via the 'screen share' mode, serving as prompts, and the participants were asked to talk about the stories behind the chosen images, what these visuals represent to them, how they make them feel, etc. The discussion was built around associated thoughts and feelings that represented a departure from purely verbo-centric methods of enquiry and enabled latent meanings and emotions linked to fun to be probed in more depth.

3.5.5 Interviews with marketing professionals

The interviews with marketing professionals addressed research questions 3 and 4 and were closely linked to specific brand campaigns or marketing activities utilising

the construct of fun. The interview guide (provided in the Appendix 3) outlines a generic framework of the discussions taking place since every conversation was tailored iteratively in terms of the discussed details. Corporate websites, social media, press releases, and other forms of communications were thoroughly monitored prior to every interview to ensure a focussed dialogue between researcher and participant. The information collected about the brand and associated campaigns during background checks helped to inform the interview questions for each informant. For example, when the construct of fun was heavily used on the brand's social media, the interview questions were developed to explore the fit of the fun appeal in the general SMM strategy, the process of design and execution of SMM campaigns utilising the construct, the reaction of the audience to such communications (i.e. user engagement). Overall, the interviews were developed with an emphasis on understanding of: (a) how managers work with this nebulous concept to achieve their goals, (b) how they conceptualise fun meaning in their brand communications, and (c) who they see as producers and consumers of fun.

3.6 Data collection

A total of 32 interviews with consumers and 7 interviews with marketing managers were conducted between September 2021 and June 2022. All the interviews took place online via Zoom. The chosen format was mostly driven by the need to provide a safe environment for the researcher and the participants in the times of COVID-19 pandemic, however, it also presented several benefits. The ability to connect virtually made it possible to interview participants from various parts of the UK that would otherwise be unlikely considering the required travel. Additionally, being able to switch to Zoom relatively quickly from other activities enabled the interviewees to be more flexible in terms of timing of the interviews.

With the quick expansion of Internet and other technology various forms of online interviewing have grown in popularity (Domínguez et al., 2007). Although online methods of data collection eliminate certain barriers such as distance, a lot of concern is still present among researchers regarding whether the subtle elements of personal presence and communications are lost in the process of online interviews, which makes rapport building more difficult, aspects of body language more elusive and participants' openness less likely (James & Busher, 2014).

Nevertheless, the video element of Zoom helped to establish an open and friendly atmosphere and the participants were feeling comfortable enough to share their lived experiences of fun as well as professional insights, often being very enthusiastic about the topic. The interviews with consumers typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes; interviews with marketers took approximately 55-60 minutes. Informants were free to talk and elaborate on their ideas without interrupting. Depending on the flow of the conversation, their words were summarised, rephrased or probed to further expand on the meanings that were being co-constructed within the dialogue. The interview guides served as a framework for the discussion but a significant amount of variation was happening between participants in terms of the order and depth of the discussed sub-topics.

Attention was paid not only to what was said explicitly but also to what was said 'between the lines' since not everything that is communicated can be fully captured in participants' verbatims (Kvale, 1996). In certain cases silence was saying things in itself (van Manen, 1997), signifying occasional confusion, unexpected revelations or time taken to reflect on the lived experience that did not receive much reflection before. Gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, occasions of laughter were also noticed and further used in the development of interpretation and understanding of informants' accounts. The video recording feature of Zoom helped to capture and replay all these details as needed for the analysis. The recordings were anonymised and transcribed; transcriptions included pauses, noticeable expressions of body language, and remarks on the tone of voice (for example, excited, surprised, cynical or judgemental).

Tables 7 and 8 below present the full data set and summarise the participants' profiles. All the names are pseudonyms.

It is important to note that while the participants are diverse in terms of age and spheres of occupation, they mostly represent those with managerial, administrative and professional occupations (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Therefore, the meanings constructed around fun specific to the consumers from other socio-economic classes may require further, more focused, investigation.

Table 7. Participants' profiles: consumers

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation
Erin	F	24	Flood Forecaster
Martin	M	24	Software Developer
Arthur	M	26	Automation Software Developer
Hugo	M	27	Technical Architect
Finn	M	27	Software Developer
Rosa	F	28	Data Management Officer
Lana	F	29	QA Tester
John	M	30	Senior Software Engineer
Charlie	M	32	Solution Developer
William	M	34	University Lecturer
Ashton	M	35	University Lecturer
Gillian	F	37	Policy Manager
Donald	M	39	Managing Director
Gloria	F	41	School TA
Richard	M	41	Engineer
Emily	F	46	University Lecturer
Maeve	F	47	Business Development Consultant
Jessica	F	48	Occupational Psychologist
Harold	M	48	B&B Owner
Colin	M	51	Entrepreneur
Thomas	M	55	Head of Art
Nigel	M	55	IT consultant
Oscar	M	61	Retired Secretary
Oliver	M	62	HR Manager
George	M	67	Retired, Volunteer
Antony	M	68	Retired Company Director
Madeleine	F	69	Retired Marketing Specialist
Jacob	M	69	Retired Mechanical Engineer
Mayson	M	72	Retired Police Officer
Julia	F	74	Retired Nurse
Ava	F	75	Retired PR Consultant

Andy	M	81	Retired Sales Manager

The marketers' sample is represented by a smaller number of interviewees due to the challenging process of online recruitment and a relatively low response rate. Access to marketing professionals was severely limited by the COVID-19 related barriers in place during the primary empirical stages of the study. These included restrictions on travel and face-to-face communication, in addition to national cancellations of live trade shows and industry events which would normally have served as a point of initial approach and connection with prospective participants. Nevertheless, the interviewed informants provided detailed in-depth insights into their practices allowing for the generation of rich data to support the more expansive consumer data set.

The names of brands are not disclosed in order to protect commercial interests of each organisation and ensure a necessary degree of anonymity and ethical integrity (Kirkup & Carrigan, 2000).

Table 8. Participants' profiles: marketing professionals

Name	Sector	Role
Elizabeth	Theme Park	Digital Content Executive
Edward	Motor Racing Championship	Senior Analytics Manager
Isaac	Pub and Restaurant Chain	Guest Insight and Experience Manager
Adam	UK City of Culture Programme	Member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Steering Group
Meghan	Organisation of Female Professionals in Football Industry	Head of Marketing & Commercial
Hunter	Popular Culture Convention	Event Manager
Albert	Volunteer Youth Organisation	Head of Communications

The complete data set constitutes 43 hours and 45 minutes of video records. After transcription 39 interviews were analysed in the textual form, resulting in 733 pages of data.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Since the research involved human participants, the necessary ethics procedures in line with the university policies were followed. The study did not involve any vulnerable categories of consumers and the topic of fun is not typically considered sensitive. Although certain fun incarnations can be quite destructive and there is a narrow segment of literature exploring transgressive, potentially harmful or dangerous fun forms (e.g. Redmon, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2016), this study did not intend to focus on the destructive power of fun, nor did it occur organically within the interviews.

The key ethical concerns were, therefore, related to making the research purposes and processes transparent for the participants, as well as to recording, storing and presenting the data. Prior to the beginning of the data collection, the online ethics forms were completed and approved as required by the Coventry University guidelines.

Before every interview the informants were provided with the participant information sheet containing the full information about the study and the consent form (Appendices 4, 5 and 6). Interviewees were encouraged to ask as many questions as needed to fully understand their roles in the research and had an opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. The collected data were stored on the Coventry University OneDrive hosting service under the password protected account of the researcher. As soon as the interviews were recorded, the files were anonymised and stored under the pseudonyms of informants which are further used for presenting the data in the findings and discussion chapters. Every effort was made to ensure that the participants cannot be identified.

3.8 Data analysis

This research stage involved engaging with hermeneutic reflections and developing the awareness of the researcher’s pre-understanding of the phenomenon followed by

the multi-step process of data analysis and considerations regarding the research rigour.

3.8.1 Hermeneutic reflections and pre-understanding

In hermeneutic tradition, any interpretive process starts with pre-understanding, and the hermeneutic circle is set in motion once new levels of interpretation and understanding begin to alter the existing pre-understanding of the phenomenon in question (Thompson, 1997). Prior to engagement with the data, the hermeneutic reflection was undertaken identifying the nature of the researcher's pre-understanding of fun and accounting for various factors that helped to shape it.

The essence of this pre-understanding comes from the knowledge of theories and research findings concerned with the construct of fun. As the literature review has demonstrated, studies directly focused on fun are rather scarce and scattered across a variety of disciplines in social science. The initial view of the phenomenon was, therefore, informed by research of fun from psychological, sociological and biological perspectives, as well as by the literature (reviewed in chapter 2 and constituting wider reading for this study) on experiential and hedonic consumption and marketing, learning, management, leisure, sports, tourism, positive affect and emotions, pleasure, happiness, play, gamification, flow, intrinsic motivation, self, and deviant behaviours.

Prior to any interaction with the data, fun was considered a highly subjective situational definition where active participation is intrinsically motivated in the search for heightened emotional engagement and lack of seriousness. This horizon was then getting into fusion with the horizons of participants in the process of conducting the interviews and the analysis that followed.

3.8.2 Procedures to interpret data

Hermeneutic phenomenological research does not offer a finite set of procedures that structure the interpretive process, however the constant movement between the parts and the whole of the texts comprising the data set is a useful starting principle setting the hermeneutic circle in motion (Laverty, 2003).

The consumer data generated with the help of projective techniques (sensory metaphors and visual elicitation) were treated as a part of the overall narrative and

analysed in a similar way as the rest of the interview for every participant in the verbatim form. The attention was focused on how webs of associations emerging from the use of metaphors and the stories of lived fun experiences elicited by the images that the participants drew from were consistent or inconsistent with the themes arising from the other parts of the interview, thus confirming or challenging the developing understanding of the phenomenon. Questions such as 'how do the projective and metaphoric data help to make previously emerging implicit meanings more explicit?' or 'how do insights from these data provide new angles of understanding consumers' meanings?' were asked. The consumers' images were playing the role of eliciting stimuli only and were not analysed as data since, in line with the HP research philosophy, the key focus of the study was on the participants' meanings and interpretations constructed around their own experiences and induced by looking at the chosen visuals, not the researchers' understanding of these artefacts (Arnold & Fisher, 1994; Thompson, 1997).

Data from the consumers' and marketers' interviews were analysed in a 3-stage process discussed below, however, it is important to emphasise that the journey was circular rather than linear in nature and involved a lot of movement back and forth between interview transcripts, written interpretations and re-interpretations and a wide scope of literature (Spiggle, 1994). Additionally, while staying in line with the key hermeneutic phenomenological principles of analysis and interpretation, this work adopted the coding strategy (open, axial and selective coding) developed in the grounded theory literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to ensure research rigour. The coding process was undertaken with the use of NVivo software and summarised in Table 9 below, following the explanation of the stages.

Stage 1.

In the first, intratextual stage of the analysis every informants' account was considered the whole and words, sentences and paragraphs were treated as its parts (Thompson et al., 1989). Two key activities were happening simultaneously while the analysis was unfolding. Firstly, transcripts were individually coded to unorganised free codes (open coding; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Any phrases, sentences, groups of sentences or paragraphs that said something about the consumers' fun experiences, related reflections, thoughts, feelings, anxieties or judgements were coded to these codes.

For marketers' transcripts the same principles were applied while the attention was focused on the use of the concept in marketing communications, campaign development and implementation, building relationships with customers, customer fun experiences, etc. The codes were informed solely by the data, meaning no codes were adopted from the literature or created prior to the interaction with the informants' verbatims.

At the same time the initial interpretation of the transcripts was happening in the form of reading, thinking, writing and rewriting. The data were constantly questioned in order to produce an understanding of what is happening in the interview. What are they saying here? What are they really trying to say? What is not being said? What is causing confusion or anxiety to the participant? What is the meaning and importance of that specific experience for the informant? (Conroy, 2003; Suddick et al., 2020).

Following the ideas of Gadamer ([1960] 1998), close attention was paid to the participants' use of language. Whether informants were using various figures of speech, spoke of themselves in first or third person, generalised or emphasised personal opinion, noticed their own slips of the tongue and corrected themselves, used words with strong emotional connotations (e.g. 'I absolutely hate'), those were highlighted and questioned: how are these forms of language helping the interviewees express the intended meanings? Why did they speak the way they spoke?

Another important note for this stage of the analysis is the issue of frequency counting. HP research typically does not assign very high value to the frequency of themes and hierarchical thinking implying that recurring issues are superior in terms of the meaning they hold (Laverty, 2003). Relying on frequency may give the way to the dominant discourses around the subject, or the voices of the They (das Man), according to Heidegger ([1927] 1962). The They represents the faceless voices filling one's lifeworld and facilitates individuals' learning of the traditions and cultural norms shaping the society (Gadamer, 1976). Das Man also constraints behaviours, public as well as private, and if one embraces the beliefs and prejudices of the They, his or her existence becomes inauthentic, which means living only in reference to others, not on personal terms (Heidegger, [1927] 1962). In the unauthentic Dasein (being human) individuals get lost in the anonymous public self and obey the rules of the world dictated by the They without questioning (Polt, 2003). Therefore, hermeneutic

phenomenological research tradition cautions against considering frequently arising words, ideas or issues as the most important or key to uncovering the meanings of the text. All variations of lived experience are a matter of concern, even if they are expressed by a single participant among many. Besides, seemingly non-typical experience of one participant may resonate with what others communicate more discreetly (Laverty, 2003).

Coding and written interpretations of the texts at the first stage was also supported by drawing mind maps and cluster diagrams, representing visual 'portrait' of separate interviews. As more interviews were coded, new ideas were arising and the previously analysed verbatims were re-read and re-interpreted with more codes added.

Stage 2.

The second, intertextual stage of the analysis treated all consumers' texts as a whole and all marketers' as separate whole, where every single interview text was a part of the respective whole (Thompson, 1997).

The analysis continued with coding and writing processes. The individual codes were further explored with the focus on their meaning and connections between them. Closely linked codes were grouped under categories (axial coding; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Every category was given a description that summarised the key ideas and meanings of data coded to it. The codes were grouped and regrouped multiple times through continuous reading and rethinking of the verbatims (Tan et al., 2009). The interpretation at that stage included establishing the relationships between different categories, with attempts to build a coherent understanding of the phenomenon through creation of visual maps, writing, coming back to individual transcripts, leaving one hermeneutic circle and entering another as the meanings of fun were made manifest (Suddick et al., 2020).

Stage 3.

The third stage considered the full data set as a whole and consumers' data and marketers' data as its parts. The overlaps between categories and meanings in consumer's and marketer's verbatims were explored and interpreted (e.g. issues of social interaction and positive affective states were particularly salient for both groups of informants).

The categories identified at the previous stage were further analysed and unified around core categories (selective coding, Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These categories represented key findings addressing the research questions, namely: (RQ1) experience of fun for consumers; (RQ2) construction and development of consumer fun dispositions; (RQ3) strategies of using the construct of fun in marketing activities; and (RQ4) degree of consistency between consumers' and marketers' understandings of fun.

The ultimate goal of the final stage was to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and seek out philosophical notions that can illuminate the underlying meanings that the participants' stories hold (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). The process involved further interpretation of data that was supported by intense engagement with relevant literature (Spiggle, 1994) that included works in consumer behaviour and marketing, psychology, sociology and philosophy. The intention was not to apply a specific theoretical framework on the data and 'force the fit', rather to naturally come to it through the dialectic interaction of data, researchers pre-understanding that was developing and changing as the analysis was progressing, and the knowledge existing in the literature (Crowther & Thomson, 2020).

Table 9. Overview of the coding process.

Coding stage	Coding process	Outcome (consumer interviews)	Outcome (marketers' interviews)
Open coding of the interview data	Open Coding: The data were scrutinised for manifest (aspects easily recognised within the text) as well as latent (underlying meanings surfaced through interpretation) content (Boyatzis, 1998). Items coded under the same codes were compared to	353 codes (Nodes within NVivo)	87 codes

	ensure consistency and uniformity of meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).		
Merging of Codes	Identifying and merging codes with similar meanings.	Codes reduced to 335	Codes reduced to 81
Axial coding of the interview data	Axial Coding: The codes were further explored with the focus on the connections between them in terms of context, behaviour, motivations, consequences and rewards (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Codes considered to be linked were grouped under category headings.	16 categories: - Phenomenon of fun - Processing fun - Playfulness - Seriousness - Cognitive states - Affective states - Body - Sense of self - Social interaction - Norm - Culture - Marketing - Risk - Environmental factors - Activities - Places	8 categories: - Customers - Customers' affective states - Social interaction - Phenomenon of fun - Brand - Marketing communications - Operative marketing - Personal reflections on the job
Merging of categories	The category content was explored and categories refined by merging them or dividing the contents into other relevant categories.	6 categories: - Experienced fun - Fun as disposition - Fun facilitators and barriers - Self-perception - Social interaction - Norm	4 categories: - Fun in marketing communications - Fun facilitation - Social interaction - Customers' affective states
Selective Coding	Selective coding:	3 Core Concepts:	2 core concepts

	Categories were unified around central 'core' categories selected by their ability to illuminate answers to the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).	- Self - Society - Norm Operating differently on the levels of fun experience and disposition.	- Fun as a part of brand positioning - Fun as a part of brand encounter

Source: Adapted from Strauss & Corbin (1990).

Throughout the analysis the continuous moves between the original transcripts, researcher's notes with written interpretations, mind maps, and contextually relevant publications were documented in the ongoing log that helped to track developing understandings, misunderstandings and decisions, representing a common practice in HP research (Conroy, 2003).

3.8.3 Rigour of the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis

Issues of rigour in hermeneutic phenomenological studies frequently become a point of debate. Since no two HP studies follow the exact same path and specific analytical procedures, there is no unified standard in place to check the work against (Crowther & Thomson, 2020). Moreover, research in hermeneutic phenomenological tradition never claims to be final, complete or generalizable (Arnold & Fisher, 1994).

Nevertheless, addressing the issues of trustworthiness in the hermeneutic phenomenological research is a crucial element of work and guidance can be provided by the literature that discusses rigour in interpretive studies (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989; Finlay, 2006). A variety of activities enables researchers to achieve rigour and trustworthiness. Thus, using reflexivity, constructing texts that are credible to experience and can be understood by insiders and outsiders, reaching coherent conclusions that clearly reflect the purposes of the study can ensure adequacy (Hall & Stevens, 1991). Credibility may be seen in the vividness and faithfulness of interpretation to the lived experience in question, manifest through the use of rich and varied quotes of the participants (Beck, 1993). Demonstrating that the inquiry was conducted in a manner ensuring that the phenomenon was accurately

identified and described can further enhance credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It can be achieved, for example, with the use of decision trail documenting rationale, implementation and outcomes of researchers' actions and persistent engagement with the data (Creswell, 1998).

Although sharing interpretations with research participants to facilitate confirmability of findings is quite a common practice in interpretive research (Thomson et al., 1990), hermeneutic phenomenological approach sees such member checking as questionable since human understanding is treated as constantly evolving, always open to further interpretation and ongoing revision (Crowther et al., 2017). Stories told by the participants at the interview have temporal nature and the meanings of lived experiences constantly change under the influence of personal and social agendas (Sandelowski, 1993). Giving the participants the opportunity to change their mind or alter the self-image they have built in the process of the interview is a debatable way to ensure credibility (Morse, 2015). Meanings shared in the conversation may be reinterpreted in the process of reading transcripts or interpretations developed by a researcher, or simply forgotten, therefore, involving informants in member checking is not congruent with the HP principles (Crowther et al., 2017) and was not adopted for this research.

The practices adopted instead included going through multiple stages of interpretation, keeping a log demonstrating how the patterns and insights were emerging from the data, making sure these findings are visible and comprehendible for other readers, and engaging in constant reflection on the fusion of horizons between transcripts, researchers' developing understandings and relevant literature (in line with Giorgi 1989; Thompson et al., 1989; Thompson, 1990; Thompson et al., 1990).

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed two major philosophical paradigms (positivism and interpretivism) and demonstrated how underlying ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of each position are reflected in the existing research of the phenomenon of fun. The interpretive thinking was considered to provide a better fit with the purpose of this study – to uncover and understand the multiple meanings of consumer fun on the levels of lived experiences and dispositions. Highlighting the main tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology the chapter explained how the hermeneutic,

existential, and ontological emphases found in Heidegger's and Gadamer's writings underpin this research. It further discussed the qualitative research design and the process of data collection that resulted in 39 phenomenological online interviews representing two perspectives: consumers' (32) and marketers' (7). The chapter concluded with the explanation of procedures employed to interpret the data built around the principles of hermeneutic circle, lingusiticality of understanding and fusion of horizons (Thompson, 1997), and coding strategy adopted from Strauss & Corbin (1990), as well as the efforts undertaken to ensure rigour of the analysis.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings emerging from the analysis and interpretation of consumers' and marketers' verbatims respectively.

Chapter 4. Findings: fun from the consumers' perspective

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the study of consumer fun and addresses the first two research questions: RQ1, interrogating how fun is experienced by consumers, and RQ2, looking into how dispositions of fun are constructed, shared and reflected upon by consumers. The themes identified within the chapter arose from the data collected from in-depth interviews with consumers and reflect the participants' understanding of fun on two levels:

- Fun as experienced (i.e. 'I played football yesterday and had fun') revolves around feelings, thoughts, and meanings arising within the specific occasions identified by the participants as fun.

- Fun as disposition (i.e. 'Playing football is fun for me') goes beyond the experience and delves into the mechanisms of understanding that certain practices, places, times, people, and objects are systematically considered fun by consumers (i.e. labelled as fun).

Although several links to the literature will be made throughout the text to signpost further discussion topics in the following chapter, the main focus of the current chapter is reporting insights directly from the data as opposed to fitting the data into the pre-existing conceptual framework, in line with the hermeneutic phenomenological research philosophy (Thompson, 1997). The chapter is structured with the goal of demonstrating the interconnectedness of the identified themes answering the research questions. The brief summary is provided in Table 10.

Table 10. Research questions and key themes (consumers)

Research questions	Key themes	Description
RQ1: How is fun experienced by consumers?	Liberating facet of fun (section 4.2)	Reveals the liberating facet of fun, perceived as a combination of positive affective states, social connectedness, liberation of

		the self and normality transgression.
	Achievement-oriented facet of fun (section 4.3)	Reveals achievement-oriented fun facet understood through social cooperation, commitment, challenge and rewards.
	Fun facilitators and barriers (section 4.4)	Discusses factors encouraging and inhibiting experienced fun, such as attitudes to fun, individual, social and situational fun barriers, and perceived consumer agency in fun.
RQ2: How are dispositions of fun constructed, shared and reflected upon by consumers?	Fun label (section 4.5)	Reports construction and dissemination of fun dispositions on personal, interpersonal and socio-cultural levels.
	Interplay of self, society and norm in fun (section 4.6)	Reports various forms of self-image dissonances and self-perception issues driven by the perceived incongruence between personally desired fun and socially constructed norms regulating fun having.

4.2 Fun as experienced: liberating facet of fun

Although the studies deconstructing fun (e.g. Tasci & Ko, 2016; Oh & Pham, 2022) typically present the phenomenon as more or less homogenous, the data clearly illustrate two distinctive fun facets. They have major similar elements such as positive affective states and positive social interaction, however, relaxation and letting go within one is in stark contrast with mental concertation and effort within the other. Liberating fun rests on feeling carefree, abandoning responsibilities and commitments, and

separating oneself from quotidian existence, while achievement-oriented fun emerges from goal-directed state of mind and focus on reward. It is important to emphasise that these are not two separate or mutually exclusive phenomena, rather two sides of the same construct, two ends of the spectrum. The same experience may be perceived as leaning more towards liberating or achievement-oriented fun by different individuals or by the same person on different occasions. Besides, whether specific episode of experienced fun belongs to one or the other depends not so much on the external social and situational context, but rather on how individuals make sense of their own experience.

Sections 4.2.1-4.2.4 discuss the constitutive elements of liberating fun.

4.2.1 Positive affective states

It follows from the consumer data that one of the essential elements of liberating fun is the combination of positive affective states such as happiness, excitement, amusement, feeling alive, buzz, exhilaration, however, the most prominent component explicitly identified by the participants as a key building block of fun meanings is enjoyment. Thus, to have fun means to enjoy oneself or enjoy a particular activity:

Arthur *(26, Automation Software Developer): To enjoy the action that you're currently doing.*

Ava *(75, Retired PR Consultant): Well, doing things that you enjoy.*

Maeve *(47, Business Development Consultant): I had fun... It's usually I enjoyed myself. Let's say, it's enjoyment of something.*

It is often the case that in participants' stories enjoyment and fun are used interchangeably, as Antony's (68, Retired Company Director) quote demonstrates:

Antony: *I think enjoyment and fun go hand in hand, you know… Last week I went to the theatre. And I really enjoyed it and I had a lot of fun. It was great. It had music in it, it had comedy in it, it was really good, you know. And I was with some other people and we had fun. And I met somebody there that I do know, they came up to me and said, Hi, Antony, how are you? And I said, Oh, fantastic! He said, Are you enjoying it? I said, It's brilliant, it's great fun!*

The analysis of the data reveals the ambiguous nature of the relationship between fun and enjoyment. Enjoyment can signal fun in a situation that may feel unpleasant or not distinctively positive. Emily (46, University Lecturer) illustrates that talking about working out outside with a friend in winter:

Emily: *That was really difficult because we started circuit training at New Year. We just got into a lockdown. And we kept it up twice a week come rain or shine, freezing cold… And… We thought it was fun, but we both said... You know, we never wanted to do it, and it was like, Oh, my gosh, should we just go back in the warm and have a cup of tea? But often we said, I'm so glad I did that, I really enjoyed it. Which to me suggests fun.*

While fun often appears to be perceived as enjoyable by the participants, not every enjoyable occasion is considered fun that implies the subset type of relationship that Strean & Holt (2000) propose.

Julia *(74, Retired Nurse): And I cycle, I still ride my bike... You know, off on a nice day, riding the bike and thoroughly enjoy that... You know, you don't... I don't think of it as fun, I suppose it is… It's just part of life to me.*

Thomas (55, Head of Art) starts talking about the core meaning of fun by mentioning enjoyment, yet, straightaway comes up with the example of an experience that is enjoyable but not necessarily fun:

Thomas: *I would say it's enjoying something, probably. But then again, I would also say, sitting in a library, in a quiet library, looking at a book quietly... On my own, looking at a book... That would not necessarily be fun. I think the activity of going to a library, you know... It's a nice Saturday, getting on a bus, because taking a bus can be 'fun' (makes quotation marks in the air). Not necessarily though... Going to the library, getting a coffee, sitting down in the library, that... That, the whole, the overall activity, that might be fun. But the actual sitting in the library, looking at a book, for me, crosses a line into something else that's not fun, that's enjoyable, but it's... It's more restful...*

The separation between restful enjoyment and more active fun finds a different angle in the example of Richard (41, Engineer) who talks about having fun while playing with pets and then discusses the nature of the two constructs:

***Richard**: Fun and that exhilarating bit when, you know... When they're running between your legs and you're trying to catch them, there's the fun. And then after that comes a sort of... The joy and the enjoyment… I think, fun is associated a lot with movement... And joy is the standing still... And just taking it in. So, joy is a point in time where you can just, you know... Joy is... Standing on a mountain... And looking... Just everything you can see and the contentment that it gives you. Um, fun is getting there. That's where the fun is. It's not fun to stand at the top. I think, maybe fun precedes joy. Yeah, maybe fun is what you're having before you experience joy.*

It is challenging to establish empirically whether fun is a subset of enjoyment, or the former precedes the latter, or these are two more or less independent and separate concepts (some experiences were described as not enjoyable in the moment, but considered fun later, on reflection), and the data reveal a range of positions that consumers take on that issue. Distinguishing constructs that involve positive affect has long been a struggle for academics (Dix, 2014). As the literature review has demonstrated, there have been multiple attempts to differentiate fun from enjoyment (Podilchak, 1991; Strean & Holt, 2000), fun from pleasure (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018), enjoyment from pleasure (Brown & Juhlin, 2018), however, the social science does not yet offer a consensus or clear separation of these constructs. The following sections, however, demonstrate other important features of fun making this phenomenon rather unique comparing to enjoyment, such as relationships between fun, self, social interaction, and norms.

When Mayson (72, Retired Police Officer) talks about fun and enjoyment, he emphasises the social nature of the former:

***Mayson:** I think essentially having fun involves a... At least one other party. It's quite difficult to have fun... You can perhaps enjoy yourself on your own, but I don't think it's as fun as it... I think it's the sharing and the... The sort of giving enjoyment to somebody else is a big part of the fun, I think.*

This quote illustrates the most basic premise of fun's social nature, 'you need others to have fun' as appears in the work of Podilchak (1986). However, the presence of social factors appears to affect fun on several levels.

4.2.2 Social connectedness

The question of whether solitary fun exists is debatable in the literature with the stances ranging from radical ‘no’ (e.g. Podilchak, 1991) to more liberal ‘yes, but with absent presence’ (i.e. people claiming to have fun alone are probably engaged in something they used to do with others or enjoy communicating to others (Fincham, 2016)), to ‘yes, experiences perceived as fun are equally likely to be cooperative or solitary in nature’ (Slaughter, 1984).

Fun without the participation of others does not appear impossible for the significant majority of the participants, although a few informants believe being with someone is absolutely necessary for fun emergence, and the question: Do you sometimes have fun on your own? elicits a strong negative response:

Ava *(75, Retired PR Consultant): No. I hate being on my own. Because I... I'm one of seven children. And I was the youngest but one. And we had such fun together as children... So much fun, you know? And I hate being on my own. Absolutely hate it. And in fact, I've never been on my own until my husband died. Seven years ago... Because... You know, after university I shared a flat with people and then got married and I was married for nearly 50 years. And I've only been on my own really for the last seven years. And I've got used to it and I've adapted to it, but I wouldn't say I like it... I love having people around me.*

The inability to have solitary fun can be induced by both being used to having others around most of the time and feeling abandoned at some point in life, as Oliver’s (62, HR Manager) account shows:

Oliver*: No. I do not like my own company at all. And that goes back to being a child... My parents split up when I was six years of age. I lived with my grandmother. Eventually, I was put in the back room while she sat in the front room watching the telly. And I spent every night there while she was watching the telly in the front room. And as a child… It still haunts me now...*

The common feature for participants denying the possibility of having fun on their own is the constant need to be with other people. Even without taking fun into consideration ‘their own company’ is not a preferable mode of existence.

Harold *(48, B&B Owner): I'm someone that really needs... I'm not so good on my own company, so I quite like being with other people. I'm not like someone that would sit gaming, for instance, and getting a lot of fun from that. That's not me.*

For participants without perceived exigency to feel others' presence both solitary and social fun is valid. As George (67, Retired, Volunteer) puts it:

George*: Do I have fun on my own... Do I have fun watching the television just on my own? Yes, depending on what's on television. Do I to have fun listening to the radio? Yes, ditto, as in what's on the radio, but equally... I do some DIY around the house and... I do see it as a sense of fun in sitting down, Right, I'm going to... Shall I say, floor the loft as an example, right? So, I'll sit down, Okay, so, what do I need and... So, I have fun planning the project and then carrying it through on my own.*

At the same time, comparing the two modes, participants often emphasise that fun shared with others in the moment is perceived as more intense then fun experienced alone.

Lana *(29, QA Tester): I do a lot of solo gaming. Um, you know, I'm an only child, so I'm used to, you know, being on my own, like, keep myself occupied... Most of the games I play are single player. Um, so I'd say definitely I can, you know, have fun on my own… I guess.... It can be more fun when it's with somebody else cause of the shared experience. And then I guess you can bounce off each other... I like to have fun on my own and I'm totally happy with that. I do find that things are slightly more fun when you can share it with someone.*

The phrase 'bounce things off each other', also appearing in other participants' narratives, illustrates the significance of fun reciprocation. It is not just the first-hand experience of positive emotions, such as excitement and joy, but also seeing others living through those and sharing the momentary feelings that becomes an important driver of fun intensity, in line with the title and the key tenet of Reis et al.' (2017) paper, 'Fun is more fun when others are involved'.

Besides, in reciprocation it is not just the social connection that positively affects fun, fun itself starts affecting and solidifying a social connection, as follows from Antony's (68, Retired Company Director) story about him and his friends playing a game on board of the cruise ship and a group of ladies joining them:

Antony: *So she said, Can we come and join? And so she brought her three friends to play with us. And these women had a fantastic time. And she says, We've never had so much fun since we were 20 years old. She said, About time we had it… And… Because you're having fun, people say, I want a piece of that. Because generally I can't see any person in the world who would honestly say, I don't wanna have fun, I don't like fun. And because we were having fun, they were having fun and because they were having fun, so were we. But we also got to know these people, we got to know these four ladies.*

In line with Fine & Corte's (2017) theorising, having fun together helps to create and develop social bonds that can further be reinforced by reminiscing about past fun occasions together. Besides, through shared reminiscing such occasions become more memorable. As Maeve (47, Business Development Consultant) puts it:

Maeve: *I suppose, possibly I get more fun out of it when I'm with my family than on my own. Slightly, not lots more, but, you know, a little bit more when I'm with other people, because then you're sharing experience with other people. If you're doing something on your own... You can tell people about it, but it's not, you know, from memory wise, you're not going to remember, Oh, you were doing that. But when you're like, Oh, yes, I remember when we did that. It's different conversation*.

Having fun together helps consumers to bond not only on the intimate levels between family members, friends or small groups of new acquaintances. Gillian (37, Policy manager) talks about her experience of visiting a big music concert and reflects on how momentary fun brings together thousands of people, creating a shared emotional register and feeling of unity:

Gillian*: It's just that, like being around people that agree with you, being around people that are all there for like the same focus. You know, there's no unalignment. There's no.... I don't mean like arguments, but I think, like so much of the world is just, like, really fractured now, just finding like something that's common to people is really quite powerful. And I think, like, music is really good for that. I mean concerts or theatre, or whatever, but I think because everybody is there for right or wrong. And it just gives you that really nice feeling that you're just like all there, all having fun.*

Rosa (28, Data Management Officer) takes it a step further talking about a similar experience of fun at a concert where the people in the crowd blend into a group identity:

***Rosa**: You basically shout, and you dance, and you let all your feelings go out. And you live in the moment. And the crowd's also feeling with you. You suddenly have this your own identity, but you also belong to the rest of whoever is around you. So you have this group identity and the whole crowd identity in this case.*

In the quote above a big group of people is not just doing something as one, they are being one, the modes of doing and being that stand out from quotidian existence and embrace perceived freedom signify the defining component of liberating fun.

4.2.3 Liberation of self

Broadly, freedom in its different incarnations is one of the most emphasised concepts in the academic discussions of fun. It refers to intrinsic motivation and free will implying that it is impossible to force a person to have fun (Churchill et al., 2007); to the free choice of the course of action within fun experience (Baldry & Hallier, 2010); to the perceived freedom from temporarily alleviated responsibilities (Fincham, 2016). Oh & Pham (2022) identify freedom as one of the fun pillars, adding that it is not just general feeling of freedom but feeling free from something supported by the use of such phrases as ‘a break from’, ‘being away from’, ‘forget about’, and ‘escape’. Therefore, the authors use the term ‘liberation’ that also accurately describes the experiences of the participants in this study.

Evidence of two types of liberation is emerging from the consumer data. Firstly, further supporting the aforementioned findings, the informants’ accounts reveal a strong theme of feeling liberated from things one <u>has to do</u>, obligations and commitments. Thus, Donald (39, Managing Director) talks about the fun visit to Legoland with his son:

***Donald:** It was like, a carefree day, so we didn't have to worry about what's going on at home or at work or anything like that. I think, the more I think about it, it’s more to do with the fact that you can just abandon your responsibilities and just be carefree for a little bit. I think, that's when it's fun.*

Gillian (37, Policy Manager) shares a similar feeling experienced during the picnic in the park with friends, highlighting lack of seriousness and separation from responsibilities:

Gillian: *That feeling of, like, escapism, just like, no, nothing was that serious. It was like I wasn't around people that I needed to worry about or be responsible for or it was just like... I was just gonna say it was just good fun, but, yeah, it was just quite like escape from reality.*

Liberating fun is perceived as an escape from obligations that can be different in nature, from professional and financial duties to managing relationships with others. Richard (41, Engineer) lists a few of those talking about what it means to him to have fun:

Richard: *It's almost that sort of mindfulness... It's linked a little bit. Let's not worry about financial things, let's not worry about work, let's not worry about what everyone done wrong...*

Interestingly, the plan to have a fun experience and dive into a liberating moment may take a wrong turn when the occasion expected to be fun turns into a commitment itself and destroys the fun, as Maeve (47, Business Development Consultant) reveals talking about the family plans to visit several entertaining events that were postponed due to the Covid-19:

Maeve: *The fun planning was like, we're going to go and see 'Mamma Mia' in concert. We're going to go and see 'We will rock you' in concert. We're going to go see The Killers. So we had a lot of plans. So, of course, for the last three years we couldn't go, we couldn't go, we couldn't go, it moved, it moved. So, now this year is like... It's taking the fun out of it that we've got so much stuff that we are doing at weekends. It's painful. (laughs) So we're like, we're going to have all this fun, but it's going to kill us because it's very tiring to have all the fun.*

Once the experience expected to be fun stops being what one wants to do and becomes what one has to do, turns into a chore, perceived fun loses intensity or even disappears completely. However, the obligation to do something is not the only condition one becomes free from in fun. The second type of liberation is linked to leaving behind a person one has to be. Fun allows consumers to be in a space where they may abandon the effort involved into the building of desired or required self-image and just be 'who they really are'. For Emily (46, University Lecturer), the liberation of self is at the heart of the meaning of fun:

Emily: *To me, it means just being relaxed and being me… In the sense that... Whoever I'm with at that time, does not have a problem with the real me. It's kind of like, I don't like that you do that. I don't like this. And they just… I suppose, acceptance. So if I feel entirely relaxed and, you know, I don't have to fake anything, I suppose, or try really hard, then I'm pretty much having fun.*

The moment of having fun implies stripping the self down to the 'real me' and avoiding the need to pretend being someone else. Not only others are expected to accept the 'real' self, there is a degree of self-acceptance in fun, as Jessica (48, Occupational Psychologist) mentions telling a story of celebrating a friends' birthday in the karaoke bar:

Jessica: *We sort of took over the place really. And we ended up on stage. And the bar was full. We were probably the oldest people in there, to be fair... But we were all just completely comfortable in our own skin, that we were on the stage and didn't care who was looking.*

Within experienced fun there is no need to be self-cautious and the grip of expectations of others' is relaxed. As Madeleine (69, Retired Marketing Specialist) puts it, combining the freedom to do and freedom to be:

Madeleine*: To be in a position where I can be uninhibited... And I can... Not take baggage with me. I can forget myself in what I'm doing. Immerse myself in what I'm doing without having the responsibility or the... Or the expectation of others. I suppose it's liberating, really.. Whatever sort of life one has, there are rules or conventions that you have to, um, comply with completely. And part of that is as well, the perceptions of other people... Or the expectations of other people. The individual that's having fun has no constraint. Or feels like they have no constraints.*

Taking the liberation of self to the extreme, William (34, University Lecturer) sees fun as a means of escape form the responsibilities, pressures, and stresses of life routines, but also as a means of escape from who he has to be in the quotidian mode of existence:

William: *It is an escape from the sort of everyday sort of life. You can be something different, if you know what I mean, you can have a different identity. So I used to... When I was sort of towards the end of my degree, I worked really hard at university, used to get to the campus every day, even if I didn't have classes. But when it got to*

5:00 or 6:00 and it was time for a game of darts or something, it was... I could switch off. And then I was sort of... Reminds me, like Goffman, when you're putting on these different sort of like personas at the start of a social interaction, when he's talking about that. So I was darts playing William in the evening or I was up for having a few beers and, you know, being competitive. Or on a Saturday, I was crickety William, not... Not the guy who's a student, who's got six modules to juggle and bits of coursework and all of that.

The escape of fun does not just enable him to separate himself from the self-image he builds in the everyday life, it provides an opportunity to become someone else, put on a different identity.

Both types of liberation discussed above can be viewed as liberation of self since the responsibilities and commitments that participants feel free from are a part of role-required behaviours, whether it is the role of a parent, a breadwinner for the family, an employee, a sports coach, a sports team member, a friend, etc. The liberated self in experienced fun is free from its usual roles and associated / expected modes of doing and being. When experienced fun feels as an escape from the everyday life, the separation from habitual commitments together with separation from the everyday self, signal the difference between normality and space outside of normality.

4.2.4 Transgression of normality

Roy (1959) suggests that fun disrupts routines and establishes its own routines. Fincham (2016) identifies deviation from norm and transgression among the key elements of fun. Transgression in the case of fun does not necessarily mean engagement in destructive behaviours or breaking the laws, rather seeing habitual routines as normality and having fun as being outside of this normality. The data demonstrate that participants do indeed perceive momentary fun as a step outside of quotidian existence. Thus, Maeve (47, Business Development Consultant) reminisces about the visit to the aqua park during the family vacation abroad:

Maeve: *It was fun just spending time with my family and doing silly things really, taking time out from, from other habitual things that you do.*

Madeleine (69, Retired Marketing Specialist) also emphasises the separation from normality through engagement with ‘silly things’ that can be playful and standing out

from serious routines:

***Madeleine**: I am quite happy... Would be quite happy to dress up in fancy dress for a fundraising thing or something like that, or indeed do something on stage, you know, in a musical or whatever. So that sort of a silly thing. And also silly things that help other people have a good time as well. Things that… Something that one wouldn't normally do as part of one's general interests or for work as such. It would be something out of the ordinary. Something not routine.*

Like transgression depends on the norm for existence (Redmon, 2003), fun is strongly dependent on contentment or some other form of neutrality. As much as every single participant acknowledges importance and desirability of fun in their lives, it can only take place as long as there is a routine point of reference. As Martin (24, Software Developer) puts it:

***Martin:** I think that if you were constantly having fun, that would be... That would be just the same as not having fun. You almost need to do something that's fun and then do something that's not fun or just standard. Yeah, or do something that's hard work, it's not necessarily fun, but hard work and then rewarded with something fun. If it was just constantly all fun, then I don't think it would be fun because there's nothing to differentiate between the two.*

If fun becomes a part of normality and the contrast is eliminated, fun will lose its appeal.

***Richard** (41, Engineer): If you have fun all the time, then it wouldn't... It wouldn't be fun. Fun is something you have to, you know, compare with what your norm is and stepping... And stepping outside that norm. That's probably the enjoyable bit. Doing something you wouldn't normally do.*

It is important to emphasise that transgressing normality does not necessarily depend on novelty or uniqueness of experience and seems to successfully survive the threat of repetition and habituation. Although one cannot have fun all the time, participants provide multiple examples where they experience fun in the same scenarios that are repeated regularly (boxing, rock climbing, participating in running events, going to game conventions) but still represent a contrast with everyday routines in terms of intensity of emotional states and feeling liberated from obligations. As long as a

practice is perceived as something one chooses to do vs something they have to do, transgression is taking place.

The perceived contrast between the two types of reality is emphasised in play research that often considers fun the essence of play (Huizinga, [1938] 1949; Sutton-Smith, 1997). One of the key characteristics of play is non-literality, referring to simulation and pretence, not interpreting the situation literally. 'Play events are characterized by a play frame that separates the play from everyday experience [...] Within this play frame, internal reality takes precedence over external reality. The usual meanings of objects are ignored, and new meanings are substituted. Actions are performed differently from when they occur in non-play settings' (Johnson et al., 1999, p. 16). While the participants do not typically see fun occurrences as pretence, their perceptions of their own actions and selves are indeed different and take on new meanings within experienced fun. The responsibilities, commitments and worries are often left in the normality frame, while the frame outside of normality enables liberation and encourages disinhibition. The data further emphasise the similarities of fun and play established in the literature review, and confirm that adopting play mentality (following the call of Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and considering fun a type of situational definition rather than a type of experience or activity is a suitable approach to understanding the phenomenon.

Liberating fun is then a type of situational definition arising from the combination of positive affective states, social connectedness, liberation of self and transgression of normality. It implies a state of mental relaxation and letting go of worries, concerns and commitments, in line with the dominant view of fun in the literature.

4.3 Fun as experienced: achievement-oriented facet of fun

While every participant's account provides multiple examples of experienced liberating fun, it does not, however, represent the full nature of this multifaceted phenomenon. A different side of fun that embraces responsibilities and commitments (instead of abandoning them), is focused on excelling at them and striving for rewards, also made itself visible across the consumer dataset. The achievement-oriented facet also involves positive affective states, especially enjoyment, however, in that case participants tend to enjoy the end-goal, celebrating the result, getting to the point they were willing to get to, rather than enjoying the process that may have no clear end-

point, more typical for liberating fun. Positive social interaction is present in the achievement-oriented fun and takes the form of cooperation.

4.3.1 Social cooperation

In the examples of achievement-oriented fun informants emphasise the collaboration and partnership that is not dictated by necessity but freely chosen. Thus, Madeleine (69, Retired Marketing Specialist) talks about the fun she has participating in an amateur operatic society:

Madeleine*: It feels great to be on this stage obliged in a production because it's the culmination of a whole lot of work and everybody's working together as a team... And everybody's doing everything... Doing something that they like. So they choose to be there.*

The group effort of people willingly engaging in an activity and having fun while doing it is also reflected in George's (67, Retired, Volunteer) story about fun experienced during volunteering for the Commonwealth Games:

George*: I was involved before Christmas interviewing applicants... And so being involved, and coming back and meeting people, and being helpful. You know, all of us there, both myself as a regular volunteer and those who go through the training, we are all there for... The one goal is to make sure that the Birmingham Commonwealth Games is a success.*

These accounts illustrate the case of fun emerging between people united by a common purpose, working towards a specific goal, concepts that are not associated with the liberating facet typically arising in the situations when people engage in something 'just for fun'.

4.3.2 Achievement, commitment and challenge

The dual nature of fun causes a degree of uncertainty for some participants, who get confused reflecting on whether their understanding of fun fits into a potentially 'more standard' definition.

Andy *(81, Retired Sales Manager): I have a little problem in defining fun, because when I was small, you always felt you'd had fun when you... You'd done something*

and done a lot of laughing and it might have just been at the fair or playing a game or something like that. And I think now the word fun means when you've got satisfaction and reward. Is that okay?

George (67, Retired, Volunteer) is even more specific in separating the fun of satisfaction that comes from goal-directed behaviours from the 'definition' when he talks about fun experienced while refereeing a football match:

George: *It's a sense of satisfaction, putting something back in, which I know is not the definition of fun.*

While for these informants satisfaction and reward, participation in an activity that requires effort and commitment lies outside that 'definition', Oliver (62, HR Manager) accepts achievement as the only possible way to define fun, rejecting laughter and purposeless playfulness as its indicators:

***Oliver**: Fun is about achieving. Not necessarily about laughing your head off… Getting a buzzer at what you do. And it's not having a laugh and joke with everybody. It's achieving what you need to achieve to go forward.*

Maeve (47, Business Development Consultant) takes the middle ground, where the surge of positive emotions and more or less light-hearted attitudes mix with the desire of achievement and success in fun:

***Maeve:** So fun is, I'd say, is all about being happy, joy, positive, endorphins, yaaay (laughs), success. Probably an achievement and sense of purpose and all that…. For me, it's a personal thing for me, that I'm happy and I have more fun if I'm... Something like if I win an award or... I had someone phoned me up last week and go, Are you the lady that paints the animals?! I was like, Yes, I... Yeah, I am (laughs). And he was like, I'd like to buy some of your paintings. And I was like, Yaay! It's kind of a sense of purpose for the person...*

Participants find sense of purpose infused with fun not only in the activities that are rarely associated with strong negative emotions such as hobby painting as in the Maeve's case above. Moving even further away from playful liberating fun and alleviation of commitments, several participants reported fun even in the circumstances related to grief, trauma, and social injustice. Thus, Antony (68, Retired

Company Director) talks about his visit to the school (in the previously held position of the School Governor) where most students were refugees and children from deprived backgrounds:

Antony: *They were having fun, and they were learning... And that was fun to me. And that to me is how helping people who've had trauma can be fun because you have fun with them. They have fun with you. And hopefully that's... It won't wipe out what's happened to them, it won't, it'll be with them for the rest of their lives, we understand that. But maybe it can give them a little bit of a respite.*

The fun arising in engagement with traumatised individuals is not described in terms of carefree joy, abandonment of responsibilities or transgression of normality, it rather implies willingness to help, a goal to make their lives slightly more bearable even if only for a short period of time. It is not possible to establish whether the children in the story indeed had fun themselves since the participant only reports the behaviours he observed from the side, yet, his own perceptions identified as fun highlight the achievement-oriented side of the phenomenon.

In the similar logic, Nigel (55, IT Consultant) shares a story where the situation itself is not labelled as fun, however, there is still fun there to be had in helping others and doing public service:

Nigel: *It kind of isn't fun to learn that, but it's kind of fun to deal with it because you can... I mean, you can go to help a foodbank. And the fact that there is a food bank... I mean, nobody could describe the fact we have food banks as fun. But you can have fun taking part, doing stuff at the food bank. So, you know, packing the food, talking to the people, just generally having a bit of a laugh and a joke. I wouldn't say giving the food out is fun. But it... There's a sense of well-being and you feel like you're… You are giving something back. And you can see fun even in those kind of scenarios because, you know, you think about… Like Easter, giving out Easter eggs to kids who wouldn't otherwise get Easter eggs or, you know, taking Santas to the kids who don't see Santa. It isn't fun, it's appalling that we even have to do it. But seeing people's faces light up and clearly enjoy it, that is fun.*

Although there are elements of momentary laughter and joking, the situation itself is being taken seriously and dealing with it requires commitment and taking on responsibilities. Fun is not the end goal or the purpose of the experience, however, its emergence creates a more positive mindset for those involved. Additionally, the

achievement-oriented fun tends to appear within the experiences that participants consider meaningful and bigger than the self.

Comparing fun and happiness, Oh & Pham (2022) conclude that meaningfulness is more important for happiness condition than for fun condition and it can even interfere with fun which is typically associated with more light-hearted forms of pleasure. The data in this study show that while it is not a necessary condition for all fun experiences to be meaningful, holding something dear and important and acting in accordance with one's values can be an important contributor to fun.

Challenge is another important element of the achievement side of fun since it often requires commitment and concertation. Harold (48, B&B owner) reflects on the charity cycling trip to France as a part of the team from his previous workplace:

***Harold**: I was quite apprehensive because I was going with a lot of experienced cyclists, I've done quite a lot of practice but literally to go three hundred and thirty miles in three days is quite a lot. And I was only going sort of six kilometres every day, back and forward to work. And so I practiced quite a lot, went on different training things. But it was knackering. And at the end, I was just absolutely exhausted… But yeah, God, that was such a fun trip. It was really good fun.*

Even though the experience required a lot of effort, it is still described as fun. The source of achievement was not only the fact that he physically managed to cover a long distance despite the fatigue, but also because the 'higher' purpose was achieved – he raised a significant amount of money that could compete with the results of more senior colleagues, therefore, the mental reward included pride and satisfaction.

***Harold:** It was such an important charity. Great Ormond Street Hospital for the kids. I think we raised something like... May have been 30,000 pounds between about 30-40 of us. And I was one of the top... The person that raised money as well, even though I was more junior in the organisation, so... In a bank, it's quite hierarchical and there's more managing directors in the bank than you can shake a stick at and they all had big posh bikes and everything. And I sort of felt more junior to them and I was certainly more inexperienced in terms of cycling. But I was one of the people that raised the most through lots of people sponsoring me in my division, which was really nice.*

This facet of experienced fun, therefore, is a type of situational definition that includes a combination of challenge, satisfaction, reward, commitment to (often self-ascribed

and freely chosen) responsibilities that elicits positive affective states and is executed through social cooperation.

4.4 Fun as experienced: fun facilitators and barriers

The data reveal that fun situational definitions (for both facets) are developed from a combination of internal (e.g. current mood, physical condition, perceived amount of pressing concerns) and external (e.g. time, place, social surroundings, weather) factors unique for every specific situation. However, there are major issues that can encourage and inhibit fun emergence as well as affect it while it is being experienced.

4.4.1 Attitudes to fun and personal values

Participants demonstrate solidarity in thinking that fun is a very important part of human existence, even to the point where fun gives life its worth. Addressing the question: How important is it for you to have fun in life? interviewees give very similar answers in almost identical words:

Andy *(81, Retired Sales Manager): Um, well, quite important, because it... Would life be worth living if... If whichever definition of fun you have, would life be worth living if you didn't have fun?*

Harold *(48, B&B Owner): Oh, totally. That's why we live, isn't it? I mean, If you're not... If you're not having fun, then it's… It's not worth it, is it?*

Jessica *(48, Occupational Psychologist): Oh, massively. One of my key motivations and drivers... Definitely. And yeah... Life wouldn't be worth living if you can't have fun.*

Delving deeper into the mechanisms of fun benefitting the well-being and perceived quality of life, participants emphasise the role of fun as a protector from stress, worries, pressures and demands of life.

Mayso*n (72, Retired Police Officer): Oh, I think it's vitally important. It's the one thing that sort of keeps you going, isn't it, you know... Times can be hard and times can be stressful in lots of jobs and in lots of environments. And... And if you can't have a bit of fun in between the stress, well, there's only one way to go and it's down, isn't it?*

Fun helps to release the stress from both factors that one can and cannot control, serving as a coping mechanism.

Maeve (47, Business Development Consultant): *Yeah, it's important and I suppose... I've just thought this, but it's a stress relief, because life is... Has obstacles and... Things are not always... There're times going well and then you have things like people die, people... Things happen, people hurt themselves, bad ill health, get divorced, lots of, you know, things, bad things happen. So the fun is to have a like a... A light...*

The social nature of fun helps to cope not just with worries on the individual level but with social isolation as well.

Julia *(74, Retired Nurse): There's too many... Horrible and sad things going on in the world that to be able to relax and have fun on your own or with other people, I think, is very important for mental health, you know. I think, tragically, there's too many people on their own, isolated. And I think that's where a lot of mental health problems come from. If you can have, you know, a group of friends or whatever and have fun, it's important.*

Absence of fun over long periods of time is clearly noticed and perceived as deteriorating the quality of life.

Rosa *(28, Data Management Officer): If I don't have this present in my life, I see everything in a darker shade of colour. Or the purpose loses, sort of fades. And you feel like, What's the purpose in continuing to do this? If either way, I'm sad all the time or depressed all the time or... Not... Or not alive… For me, fun is also to be alive. It would also be to not be alive.*

Fun then becomes an instrument in the coping strategy with negative factors a person faces on the life journey and having fun is perceived as a need, as Arthur's (26, Automation Software Developer) quote below illustrates:

Arthur: *Otherwise you get stressed a lot. This is... I would say that this needs to happen at least once a week or twice a week, or at least... So the better... The more, the better. But at least it needs to happen... In certain periods of time because otherwise you get overly stressed.*

The search for fun then turns into a type of the goal-directed behaviour.

Ava *(75, Retired PR Consultant): Oh, very important. Very important. And even though I'm almost working full time as a volunteer, you know, with all these meetings and events, I really make sure that I... That I have fun in between. And so, you know, I play golf, I play tennis, I do yoga, I go walking.*

The insights from data challenge the idea from the literature directly or indirectly concerned with the phenomenon of fun that fun is idle, an end in itself, and has no external purpose. The achievement-oriented fun is embedded in the experiences that have their own end-goal. But liberating fun serves a purpose as well, from the consumers' perspective, contributing to their well-being.

In a separate question, participants were asked to think about what is the opposite of fun for them and the answers closely correspond with the factors that fun seems to protect from. The opposites of fun divided in groups are presented below in Table 11.

Table 11. Fun opposites

	Personal Level	**Interpersonal Level**
Strong negative states	Depression*, anxiety, misery, sadness, being 'shattered in pieces', anger, stress, feeling threatened, feeling insecure.	Loneliness, social disconnection
Neutral states	Boredom, seriousness, being reserved, chores and responsibilities, routines.	

Source: Data

* Participants mentioning depression specifically correct themselves saying that they imply not the clinically diagnosed depression, but 'feeling depressed' as a state of deep sadness and frustration.

The key components of fun then help to neutralise or avoid the negative consequences of 'not fun': enjoyment and reported positive emotions such as happiness and excitement can potentially protect against negative states like anxiety, sadness or stress; social connectedness helps to battle loneliness and isolation; liberated self and transgression of normality saves an individual from boredom, enables them to feel

more disinhibited and let go of seriousness, feeling or acting reserved, and helps to separate oneself from obligations and routines. Therefore, while the informants do not consciously address every fun occasion as a box to tick on the journey to well-being, they still perceive liberating fun as purposeful on a far-reaching scale.

It may intuitively seem that such positive attitudes towards fun and acknowledgement of its importance encourage fun having and motivate consumers to seek for it more often. Yet, when participants talk about the role of fun in their lives and its ability to shield them against fun's opposites, fun is often considered as secondary to work and 'serious' purposeful activities. The literature review tracked the history of societal attitudes to fun in the Western world that were heavily influenced by puritanical morality and productivity orientation deriving from it, and illustrated the liberalisation of views and transformation of fun from sin to necessity, from something to be avoided to something to strive for and enjoy. Still, the data show that fun is often needed and chased only as long as it is deemed 'useful', therefore, the productivity orientation is not being completely abandoned. As Martin (24, Software Developer) puts it:

Martin: *I think you need a balance of... You should probably do something and then reward yourself with... With doing fun thing rather than just expecting everything to be amazing the whole time and have fun all the time, I think.*

Donald's (39, Managing Director) case illustrates the internal conflicts that puritanically-driven values can elicit in relation to fun. His experienced fun is most intense when he's engaged in self-focused adrenalin-filled sports activities that require time and financial resources which goes against his role-required responsibilities as husband and father. It results in the feeling that having fun (separating himself from the routines and obligations) has to be deserved and justified. While there is an understanding that it should not necessarily be the case, he cannot fully go away from that dissonance:

Donald: *I don't think you need to justify... I don't think you should have to justify fun. I definitely think I feel like I have to justify time to go and have fun these days. But really... I don't think you should have to justify. I think people should. Well... There's different constraints on your life aren't there…*

Fun's ability to provide a breather from responsibilities is precisely what is used as a justification. Although society has gone a long way from banning fun to encouraging it, especially through marketing communications, mass media and popular culture, liberating fun for some still seems to be deeply rooted in the productivity orientation where fun is allowed and favourably accepted as long as it is adopted as a means of recharging one's batteries, lifting off the weight of responsibilities for a while, rewarding oneself for hard work and then coming back to that work. One has to deserve a right to have fun. Personal values deriving from productivity orientation may lead to guilt and mental discomfort if one is doing something 'for fun' just because they want to instead of doing 'something useful' because they have to, and serve as a strong inhibitor for liberating fun.

Achievement-oriented fun is then another step forward in adapting to the contemporary version of puritanical morality where fun and purposeful routines are not separated, rather fun is incorporated in the productive system. Within the liberating facet fun itself is a reward, in the achievement facet the reward is something separate and more tangible: achieving a milestone, winning an award, helping others, therefore it is less subjected to guilt and notions of deservedness.

4.4.2 Disruption of fun

The two sides of fun also appear to be susceptible to disruption to different degrees. In the stories revealing the achievement facet, most of the time fun prevailed despite physical discomfort and pain, plan disruptions or disagreements between the involved people. As long as the final result was achieved, the experience was considered fun. Thus, Emily (46, University Lecturer) describes crossing the finish line of the race with a friend:

Emily: *We were just both hugging each other, crying our eyes out. But we're not sad, we... we are so happy. I'm proud, I think, of what we achieved and... The amount of support we had, it was actually... We have fun when we trained, and that day was fun. It was hard work. But it was fun because we did it together.*

Pride as a result of achievement and support of significant others helped to see the occasion as fun despite feeling physically exhausted.

If the challenge is manageable and meaningful, there is a degree of acceptance when things go wrong and fun is still experienced. Colin (51, Entrepreneur) shares a story of coming to live in New York in his early twenties and finding out upon arrival that the apartment he was planning to rent was already occupied by other people, yet, it did not prevent his fun:

Colin: *I remember just feeling that it was exciting and it was fun. And these things happen in a city like New York, and that's how it is. And everything's just, you know, to the minute and things can get sorted out quickly in a way that in Europe doesn't tend to happen. So, yeah, it was... Nothing seemed to be... Insurmountable, it all seemed to be doable.*

On the other hand, talking about disruption of liberating fun, participants easily find a wide range of factors that can stop it abruptly. Such situations are often perceived as the irreversible end of fun with the use of such words and phrases as ‘buzzkill’, ‘mood hoover’, ‘mood killer’, ‘fun killer’, ‘death of fun’, ‘chucking cold water on fun’, ‘putting a damper on the whole thing’, ‘fun goes out of the window’.

Interestingly, the first things informants address on the abstract level when asked what can stop or spoil their fun are significant and serious issues such as physical injuries, accidents, getting bad news, issues with property or finance, rarely mundane things like weather. Yet, in their stories about lived experiences of fun it was disrupted by much smaller issues, e.g. rain, long queues, losing a game, getting stuck in the tube and being late to a meeting with a friend, having too many wasps around. Small changes in circumstances that bring distraction or irritation are much more likely to happen and stop fun than major accidents or injuries. The factors disrupting fun can be separated in 3 major types presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Factors driving fun disruption

Individual factors	Social Factors	Situational factors
Emotional / psychological: fear, initially being in the bad mood	Negative social interaction: hurtful words, arguments, fights, others being rude or breaking rules	Uncontrollable major forces (Covid-19, weather), uncontrollable minor forces (accidents and injuries, factors in the environment creating

		physical or psychological discomfort)
Corporal: physical discomfort	Needs of others that cannot be ignored	Plan disruption, reality not meeting expectations
Behavioural: Personal misbehaviour	Others not having fun or not sharing the same level of excitement, lack of reciprocation	Having to follow rules and regulations; having to come back to responsibilities and obligations

Source: Data

With the variety of individual, social and situational factors that stop experienced fun, the most outstanding insight about fun disruption is the power of words. Informants put a very strong emphasis on the fact that fun experienced in the group can be ruined by someone saying things that may be considered by others as offensive, rude or inappropriate, as the examples below demonstrate. The situation does not even have to escalate into an argument or any other form of aggressive confrontation, a wrong choice of words may be already enough.

Jessica *(48, Occupational Psychologist): If when you were laughing, if your friend brought up something that you weren't in the mood for at that point in time. And, you know, if you perhaps went too far with the joke or brought up something that was still quite raw, um, that might be... A big one too...*

Thomas (55, Head of Art): *Somebody will say something that's a little hurtful… There might be history to that thing. And from that point on, you know, it.. It flips. Having fun, everyone's happy, joking, whatever. Somebody says something that relates to... Something that is a bit more hurtful and then... And I don't know why... The fun just disappears and it's just gone.*

As much as social connectedness intensifies fun it cannot guarantee the fun stability. While positive social interaction enhances fun, negative social interaction destroys it.

Lana *(29, QA Tester): Say, that we're all having a joke and we're all in the game and then maybe someone takes it a little bit too far, like takes a subject or talks about something that somebody else is uncomfortable with. And, you know, I think that can*

ruin fun, cause it's a mood killer then if someone, I don't know... You know, said something offensive or something...

It follows from the data the fun has a very unstable and fleeting nature that can be easily put to an end. Considering a keen interest in ‘making marketing / customer experience fun’ in business media and marketing blogs, it is important to emphasise the fragility of experienced fun. Whether it is at all possible to generate fun for consumers systematically and successfully, or ‘engineer’ it, as Oh & Pham (2022) suggest, is a debatable question. Moreover, while the exit from the momentary fun may be abrupt and quick, entry (or re-entry after disruption) to fun is not necessarily as easy and relies on perceived consumer agency.

4.4.3 Perceived fun agency

Individuals have highly individualised perceptions of every situation they find themselves in, moreover, when it comes to fun, they tend to have a personality-driven perceived ability (agency) to enter fun framing. People with high personal agency can have fun almost in any situation, because they ‘bring it on wherever they go’. They are mostly in control of their fun and can deliberately ‘summon’ it. Once they want to have it, they have it.

Gloria *(41, Teaching Assistant)***:** *I'll just make fun, you know, for the kids wherever we are. Or for myself… I can bring that on any time.*

Participants with high perceived agency see themselves (as opposed to the situation) as the primary fun source:

Ashton *(35, University Lecturer)*: *Everywhere holds fun memories for me cause I just can kind of bring fun everywhere I go.*

Emily *(46, University Lecturer): Me, I could have fun in an empty room if I'm in one of them moods. I'll make myself laugh.*

On the other end of the spectrum there are people for whom fun exists absolutely independently and one cannot control it. It comes and goes by itself, however hard a person is trying to have it. As Richard (41, Engineer) puts it:

Richard: *You shouldn't... You shouldn't try and have fun... If you're trying to have fun, striving, trying, it's not fun... There's a certain spontaneity to it. Sometimes you can be given a rubbish job to do. But if you just crack on with it, and particularly if you've got people around you, you know, then it becomes fun. It just... It just happens. You don't... You don't set out to have fun… It just happens naturally.*

The dullest and most constraining activities can be framed as fun if a person with a high agency is determined to have fun. The most liberating and entertaining activities cannot guarantee fun emergence for people seeing fun as an independent entity coming at its own will. There is also a range of middle positions where the circumstances that are likely to bring fun and the intention to have it work as a team. The sole desire to have fun may not be enough, but doing an activity one finds fun increases the chances of its emergence:

Finn (27, Software Developer): *I don't think you can like just summon it up, but I think you can definitely try to have fun in... Well, in my case it would be playing a game. If I go to a friend's house, we're sat there, not doing anything and just chatting to each other... Um... I'm probably always going to say, Hey, do you want a game of this or that? Because I find it fun.*

This stance implies the combination of the intention to have fun, pro-actively seeking for it, and engagement with the activities, objects, places, people or other entities that are considered (labelled) fun. In the process of the fun label attachment and removal the same components that constitute the liberating experienced fun are at play, namely self, society and norm, however, on the level of disposition they turn into their own mirror reflections.

4.5 Fun as disposition: fun label

The data show that how experienced fun feels like is determined mostly individually, but how fun is obtained is very much a social phenomenon. Fun label in this study refers to participants' systematic understanding that something is fun for them, these particular entities help them to enter fun framing. Fun label can be attached to:

- Activities (e.g. being out with friends, playing snooker, going to the pub, gardening, travelling);
- Objects (e.g. Christmas decorations, souvenirs, toys, gaming consoles);

- Places (e.g. seaside, fairgrounds, Disneyland);
- People (e.g. a fun family member, a fun friend, a fun colleague);
- Times (e.g. summer time, Christmas period).

It is important to emphasise that on the level of disposition informants usually talk about fun entities that help inducing liberating side of fun, whereas the achievement facet is mostly discussed as a single episode of experienced fun within the activity that as a whole does not bear a fun label.

Fun labels are not set in stone and can be attached, removed and reattached to different entities through a variety of mechanisms on personal, interpersonal and socio-cultural levels. Besides, as opposed to the experience level, fun disposition can exist in relation to something that has not been experienced personally. In other words, one may genuinely believe that watching a live football match is a fun activity or Lapland is a fun place even if they have never been to the stadium or travelled to Finland before.

4.5.1 Fun label attachment

A positive personal experience with activities, people, objects, times or places that successfully enabled the surge of positive affective states, liberation of self, and step out of normality helps to attach the fun label to those and further solidify it. However, it is not the only way to come to an understanding that engaging with this particular activity or going to that specific place is fun. The data reveal that social and cultural world plays an important role in the construction of fun meanings on the level of disposition.

The disposition may develop based on the recurring personal experience of the liberating fun that enabled a person to feel carefree, relaxed, and separated from routines. Such disposition also brings an expectation that every following engagement with the fun labelled activity will result in experienced fun even despite the potential disruptions.

Donald *(39, Managing Director): Things like rock climbing, you're pretty, pretty confident because you've always had fun experiences, but even when things go wrong and it's ruining the fun... On the whole, you've had fun experiences in the past, so you're pretty sure you can have fun the next time.*

Moving a step up from the individual level, the idea that something is fun can be born under the influence of others, and the level of intimacy with others may vary. Thus, Martin (24, Software Developer) started thinking that going out drinking was fun before he had a chance to do that himself:

***Martin**: You observe it to be something that's really enjoyable because everybody talks about it like it's super fun.*

He does not recall specific conversations with specific people, rather 'everybody' talks about nights out being a fun activity, therefore a disposition is constructed prior to personal experience under the social influence. For him, opinions of collective others also serve as a basis when he is not sure where something is fun or not:

***Martin**: If I work hard at something, I feel really good about it and then... I don't know whether you could call that fun, I wouldn't normally call that fun because it's... It's hard work… Like I've done a part time bachelor's over the past five years and whilst working. I wouldn't necessarily say any of it was fun, but it's very rewarding and it feels good to have it done. Maybe you could call it... It was a fun feeling when I had it done, yeah… You might not necessarily... Normally... People wouldn't probably normally call that fun.*

Significant others such as friends and their opinions can affect the formation of disposition. Hugo (27, Technical Architect) talks about how football came to be thought of as fun:

***Hugo**: I suppose one... More opportunities to play and watch football, um... Two, the... Right, as I was growing up, making new friends, more and more my friends were interested in football and I think that had an influence...*

Family can become another important source of fun dispositions. The opportunities to obtain a first-hand experience can work together with the engagement of older family members who set an example. For Julia (74, Retired Nurse), singing has been labelled as fun from the early years under the influence of the family as well as the external opportunities to sing:

***Julia:** I sang in a school choir when I was 12. And I've sung on and off in choirs and different things all my life. Music as a child was... We had a piano and we all used to*

stand around the piano and sing and that as a family. So it's been... My parents loved music. My sister is... Conductor at male voice choir and is very, very musical.

The existing fun labels of other people are not necessarily being passively accepted and internalised. Maeve (47, Business Development Consultant) strongly opposes the idea of others telling her that something is fun before she has a chance to make her own decision:

***Maeve**: If someone said to you, you're going to have fun and then you do something and you're not having fun, then you're like, Oh, so fun is this. I don't like this. It depends... But as a child, if I was told this is going to be fun and it's not fun for you... It's almost like I don't like being told what... I don't want to be told that you are going to have fun because it's a bit like it's an order. And I'm like, Well, how am I going to have fun now, because you've just told me I have to. So if I don't have fun, then I've done it against what you said, and then I'm wrong, I'm in the wrong, I'm lying, I'm going to fight with you... Sorry (laughs).*

Apart from willing to retain her freedom and ability to develop a disposition for herself based on the personal experience, the conflicting dispositions of different people may potentially lead to a confrontation that she would rather avoid.

On the other hand, a disposition held by others may be actively sought after even if the personal engagement does not directly result in experienced fun. Talking about popular culture and highbrow culture, Nigel (55, IT consultant) separates fun that is immediately available and fun one has to work for:

***Nigel:** So you've got fun that's kind of immediate [popular culture] and you've got fun, which is... You work at it. You learn and through learning, you learn how to appreciate it.*

He then shares an example of the conscious effort of turning a specific music genre into a learnt fun for himself:

***Nigel:** My father was a big fan of jazz and I really struggle with jazz. I mean, I try, I really try because I know it's good, but I... But I kind of can't... I mean, there are some that I like, but some of the really good musicians who kind of play a sort of freeform jazz... I can't get past that idea that it just sounds like they... They are just not playing anything, they're just making noises, you know? And I know that's not right because*

I've read enough about it. And I know enough people... I've listened to enough people whose opinions I value to know that that's something which, you know... I really should keep working at it because I think if I keep working at it, I will enjoy it and that happen... You know, that happens with lots of things, I think, as you grow up… I don't know, wine, opera, theatre in general... But that's a learnt fun.

Even though it is perceived as a struggle, the informant still choses to learn to appreciate jazz as a form of fun and the existing labels of his father and 'people whose opinions he values' appear to have affected that choice.

On top of the individual and social factors affecting the development of fun disposition broader cultural and media environment can play a role. Thus, William (34, University Lecturer) talks about how an advertisement may nudge consumers to seeing a certain product or service as fun:

***William**: There's the thing in gambling advertising that was like... What was the campaign... When the fun stops stop, or something like that… Don't know if it was a gambling commercial, some... Someone anyway, who said, When the fun stops stop. And I think you're automatically assigning the word fun to it, like gambling is a fun activity.*

Interestingly, the disclaimer 'When the fun stops stop' used in the TV and shop window adverts of gambling operators was tested by Newall and colleagues (2022) in an experiment that demonstrated the failure of the warning label to prompt more responsible gambling behaviours. Whether the slogan affected the attachment of fun label to the activity was not examined. The campaign is currently running with a new strapline 'Take time to think'.

The key insights regarding the mechanisms of fun label attachment in this section refer to the fact that unlike experienced fun that can only be lived through personally, fun disposition can exist in harmony with positive personal experience where repetition works as positive reinforcement, even despite the episodes of negative personal experience, or without the personal experience at all. Besides, something in consumer lives becomes labelled as fun under the influence of individual, social and cultural factors. The process of fun label removal exists on the same levels: personal, interpersonal, and environmental.

4.5.2 Fun label removal

Activities, people, objects, times, and places that were once considered fun may stop being referred to as such. The personal drivers behind that include increased self-awareness and altered perceptions of what is suitable for one's comfortable existence. For example, Gillian (37, Policy Manager) compares her current fun preferences with her younger self's ideas of fun and concludes that being in the crowd lost the fun appeal to her due to the way she feels about personal space.

***Gillian**: I used to be really big fan and like going to concerts. And now... I mean, I just hate being around people... Like, I don't like crowds. It's not agoraphobic, because I'm not like agoraphobic, but I just don't enjoy it. Like I don't like really packed pubs. I just don't like people at my personal space to be honest… Yeah, things like that would have been like a bit more chaotic that I really found very fun when I was younger. I do not find fun now… And I went to a lot of gigs then, so yeah, they were always just like the best fun. I can't think of anything worse now, like a mosh pit…*

New life priorities also have the power to erase the fun status from certain activities. Thus, for Martin (24, Software Developer) excessive consumption of alcohol used to be considered fun and lost that status when he became a parent. Taking care of the family is his key priority now, having carefree binge-drinking fun is not under consideration anymore:

***Martin:** Very strange how I would view it now, because it sounds like a lot of effort... And the thought of drinking too much now, it's... Yeah, it's not an option really… But back then it was enjoyable. Really enjoyable.*

Next to the 'my preferences changed' and 'my priorities changed' stands 'my abilities changed' factor. Oliver (62, HR Manager) shares a story of how playing rugby used to bear a fun label for him, but he could not continue playing because of the injury:

***Oliver:** And that stopped when I was 22 when someone jumped on my knee. And that... That wasn't fun. The game was fun. But when that happened, that was the end of me playing rugby and I thought, Um, no, ain't gonna do this no more… I made a decision because I was in a lot of pain and a lot of problems, and I still have an issue with my right knee now. And that is some... Oh, actually many years ago... It was the decision, No, I can't do this, enjoy that and potentially put a career at risk. It's not going to work.*

He then replaced rugby with other activities and the fun status was removed.

On the social level, the change of the social circle can lead to the removal of fun label. Finn (27, Software developer) used to think of engaging with football as a fun activity:

Finn: *I used to live up one side of a country and moved to the other. And while I was up first side of the country, everybody used to love football. Like there wasn't anyone who lived there, who didn't love football, didn't support the home team, which was all the same team for all of us... And most of us played in like on the 11s or under 12s whatever... Meanwhile, I moved to the side of a country I'm living up now and all of a sudden the amount of people who liked football was a lot less... The friends that I'd gotten liked it even less, like they didn't care for it whatsoever. And so I grew to not care for it whatsoever... I think I'd definitely stayed into football if people around me when I moved were into football at all. But because they weren't bothered about that, I slowly dropped it off as well.*

As long as he was surrounded by the people who shared the same fun disposition, it was solid. However, since the new social group did not support such disposition, fun label did not prevail.

The change in personal preferences can also be reflected on the social level where a wider social group seems not to find something fun anymore. As Madeleine (69, Retired Marketing Specialist) puts it:

Madeleine*: Oh, going camping for the weekend with friends in a tent and so on. I used to be in the Girl Guides, so that was quite fun, you know, sort of being in a tent, sort of away from home and... And, you know, midnight feasts and all that sort of stuff... So it was, you know, quite fun. I wouldn't want to spend the weekend in the tent now (laughs) and I certainly wouldn't have midnight feasts... And the people I associate with are also... My own generation, they wouldn't find it fun either. We find other things to do that are fun.*

Just as the fun label can be attached to something prior to the personal experience, the existing label attached imaginatively can be removed based on someone else's experience, as the example of Gloria (41, Teaching Assistant) talking about how travelling to Egypt lost the fun appeal to her demonstrates:

Gloria: *I've always been interested in Egypt and the pyramids, I was really young, actually, and I've always wanted to go and see them. And then whenever I spoke to*

people who have been, they always said that, You know, it's not like in the middle of a desert. It's like the market is behind them and you get children begging you and things like that. And I thought, I just wouldn't be able to walk past the children, I'd never get to the actual pyramids. So that's put me off a bit... It wasn't a fun experience I thought it would be...

The attached fun label had formed a set of expectations that were not met in the reality of other people leading to fun status removal.

In most cases, personal and social factors work together and their combination can be further intensified by the situational drivers. Thus, as a teenager Lana (29, QA Tester) used to make music videos with a friend and upload those to YouTube, finding the whole process a fun activity. However, due to the mix of reasons, she stopped doing it and the fun label was lost.

Lana: *Like, you know, when you're growing up like 13, 14, 15, you get to 16, your priorities change. You know, you've got to do your exams, think about growing up and you know... And kind of, you know, I guess the friendship as well... The person that I used to do the videos with, that, you know, drifted a little bit, because we went our separate ways.*

But apart from personal change of priorities and end of the relationship that supported the fun disposition there was a strong situational factor that the participant had no control over:

Lana*: Because YouTube copyrights music now. So like... It wasn't like it back in the day. Back in the day you could upload, you know, any music you wanted on the video and it wouldn't get copyrighted. And that kind of stole the fun because when those copyrights came in, you couldn't put your, you know, super-duper video on. And I guess we just stopped doing it in the end, but it was really good at the time.*

Ava (75, Retired PR consultant) shares a story of how the social change led to situational one that resulted in the removal of the fun label from going to a skiing resort in the French Alps:

Ava: *Well, when we used to go to this hotel in Courchevel... When we first started going there, it was a lovely hotel, you know, very nice food, a lovely indoor swimming pool. And when we first started going there, there was a mix of people, French,*

English, German. And then we noticed the Russians sort of moved in and they don't just move in ones and twos. The last time we went, we were the only English people in the hotel, it was full of Russians. And they are loud, noisy. They drink from morning to night, and some smoke, and are always on their mobile phone... Mobile phones in the restaurant. And also the impact of them coming meant all the shops changed. So you went from having nice French alpine shops to... Art galleries from south of France or Paris, you know, selling very expensive goods, targeting the Russian market.

Resonating with the liberation of self on the experience level, situational changes result in the loss of the fun label once an activity considered fun becomes an obligation. As Ashton's (35, University Lecturer) example with rugby demonstrates:

Ashton: *Because it became a job and it became a bit too... It was... It just became too serious, it stopped being the thing that I loved to do and started to be something I need to... I need to do all of these other things that aren't what I want to do to do this job better. I took it too seriously...*

From being a fun activity outside of routines and without responsibilities playing rugby turned into a routine with serious commitments, the experienced fun disappeared and the disposition was deconstructed. While most cases of fun label removal are irreversible and other things are considered fun instead, replacing the lost ones, the reattachment of fun status is not absolutely impossible.

4.5.3 Fun label reattachment

Ashton's (35, University Lecturer) story above did not end with the complete abandonment of activity stripped of the fun status. The participant is planning to come back to playing rugby making sure it is not an obligation anymore (although considering his previous successes on the pitch, completely getting out of the serious competitive mindset may be an issue):

Ashton: *I just want to play for fun. Like... But I've said that I don't know how many times, I ended up playing like higher levels because I guess I get too competitive. And if somebody asks, I can't say no. But no, this next time I go back, it will 100 per cent just be on the like lowest senior team that that club has. Just to run around on a Saturday or Sunday. That's it, yeah, just fun. One hundred per cent total. No serious whatsoever. Just fun...*

Therefore, if a person has a degree of control over the situational change, there is a possibility to reattach the fun label to the entity that has lost it. The same principle applies to the personal change. Better self-awareness does not only lead to removing fun status from certain activities but to its reattachment as well.

Richard (41, Engineer) also shares an example from his sport experience. He used to play cricket when he was younger and initially found it fun, however, with time he developed a performance anxiety when he felt a significant amount of internal pressure to play better and deliver results that in reality only led to worse performance. The fun status was removed from the game, and he stopped playing. Not only fun was lost, cricket was a big source of meaning for him; very high importance was assigned to the game and his personal performance, and abandoning it generated very strong negative affect. However, he managed to overcome the performance anxiety issues and with gaining more life experience reassessed his personal values. Getting new responsibilities in the family life helped to rearrange priorities and he was able to play again without the set of expectations. Getting rid of that pressure brought relief and helped to cope with failures on the pitch easier. Fun status was reattached to the game.

Richard: *Um, that's [performance anxiety] not fun. That's not fun. And that... That led me to stop playing for a long time. Um... But now I understand it. Now, I understand as you get older and you get... You get more... A better understanding... Cause when I was a young man, it meant everything to me. And as you get older and you get married, and got a house, and children, and your sense of perspective changes. I can now play without that sense of expectation from within.*

Talking about how personal, social and environmental factors drive attachment, removal and reattachment of fun label to various entities in their lives, consumers reflect on the changes the face as they age. While the age per se does not define how or how much fun an individual has, the perceived strength of these drivers, especially social and environmental (cultural) is reported to fluctuate significantly as the informants progress through the stages of life.

4.5.4 Fun at different life stages

Talking about experienced fun participants often describe the feeling as a return to the childlike mentality and behaviours. Thus, Martin (24, Software Developer) recalls a fun episode of visiting the soft play centre with friends.

Martin: *It was a normal soft play, but I think on evenings they open up to adults and it was maybe a bit bigger. So you could... Yeah, it is just kind of, I suppose, returning to being a kid. And we ran around, jumped off things, these big slides and yeah, we played hide-and-seek and that sort of thing... It was very good fun*.

Having fun can involve acting like a child as the quote above shows or thinking like a child, re-discovering the world uncritically, happy to be deceived by technology that looks like magic, as the example of Ashton (35, University Lecturer) illustrates. He made his biggest childhood dream – going to Disneyland – come true and is describing the feeling induced by watching the fireworks show there:

Ashton: *I became a child again, although I'm always a child, especially if you talk to my Mrs. Jones, she'd tell you, I'm always a child. How did I feel? It felt like... Like sheer wonderment. You know, like, I know how they do that, right?! Because I have a projector for Christmas myself that puts Santa on the wall and stuff, so I know how they do all of it. But at the same time, I'm kinda thinking like, How is this possible? It's even though I know this, like, the sceptical, you know, analytical, PhD brain, etc. just disappears...*

The fun that children (especially very young) have is perceived as the most intense, ‘pure’ and ‘undiluted’. It is driven internally by the imagination and desire to play and does not need to rely on external props. Gillian (37, Policy Manager) recalls the episode of playing with her three-year-old niece:

Gillian: *I mean, to me that is just like undiluted fun and it's just like... It's so silly and so like nothing... Like there's no money involved, there's no buying expensive things or expensive toys or sitting and reading books or setting up DVDs, like we were just rolling back and forth [on the floor]. And she was making me really tired and she just giggled and giggled so hard and like, laughed until she cried. And I just think, yeah, like if that isn't fun, what is…*

Fun of a child tends to be mostly self-focused on two levels: on the one hand, children do not yet have multiple responsibilities and commitments that often include caring for other people, on the other hand, they are also not yet concerned with the opinions or expectations of other people. Therefore, the liberation of self from what one has to do and who one has to be that adults experience in fun is the starting point that children naturally have but begin losing as they grow up. Gillian (37, policy manager) continues talking about whether adults can have the 'undiluted' fun:

Gillian: *I don't think so. I mean, I'm sure some can, but I think you learn behaviours when you get older. So you moderate everything. We're all... I was thinking about what other people think or we're literally thinking about paying bills or work or da da da... I don't think I can... I wouldn't say ever, that seems a bit depressing, but I think there's definitely like it's something that kids learn and grow out of, learn in their own way...*

Organising the lives and fun of children is typically done by their parents or other care-giving adults. With time and transition to adolescence and adulthood, the growing number of responsibilities becomes a strong factor preventing fun from emerging.

Thomas *(55, Head of Art): As a child, I remember being taken on day trips, holidays, whether it was with the family or school. And because I wasn't worrying about anything other than just taking my sandwiches and my drink and... Arguing with my best friend who sat next to me... It was just fun. It was complete fun. There was... No problem. Same with holidays, and Christmas, and birthdays. It was all fun. You get presents, it's a special time, everything to look forward to. And as we get older, obviously we know the work that goes into that and the real life is still happening. So when you go on holiday... All of those things are not revealed... You're not exposed to that as a child. So it's 100% fun. Whereas as an adult... Certainly, and I'm sounding probably a bit miserable saying this, the things I used to find fun like going on holiday are mostly work and I just see it as a big, you know, a big event that I have to organise, take care of, work through. It's a lot of effort, what can go wrong...*

Apart from the emphasis on the obligations to do the 'dirty work' of organising fun for the family, the quote above reveals a very important aspect of the self-consciousness. The participant is cautious that he is 'probably sounding a bit miserable' as if 'complaining' about parent responsibilities in the context of children's fun is not a socially accepted behaviour. He projects awareness that either the interviewer or 'collective others' may be judgemental of his words. Other participants share multiple stories of vicarious fun, when fun of parents and grandparents derives from seeing

children and grandchildren having fun or organising fun occasions for them, and in these cases they do not express any self-consciousness issues. Rather they potentially expect that such attitudes and behaviours are by default accepted as a norm and collective opinions of others approve of them.

Thinking of what others might think is another fun-inhibiting factor that children get exposed to through socialisation as they grow up. Richard (41, Engineer) talks about the fun he had with his three children playing outside, building a den and adds:

Richard: *We used to have that kind of fun [spending time outside for free, not buying anything to induce fun] more when the children were younger. And perhaps their childish attitudes to things... And as they've grown up and they've gone to school and then been with other people, their... Their way of thinking changes. And, you know, they feel they've got to have certain things and conform to things.*

Interestingly, the pressure to do certain things and to be certain type of people that stands on the way of fun does not have an ever-growing trajectory. Older participants share that the number of responsibilities as well as dependence on the public opinions and expectations tends to decline after a mid-life peak.

Julia (74, Retire Nurse): *I think I have more fun as I've got older and had less responsibility. And I think as you get older, you don't care or I don't anyway (laughs). You don't care what people think. You're nowhere near as bothered by what people think. My attitude is, I don't know how many years I've got left, so I'm going to enjoy the ones I've got. You know, I think you're much, much less inhibited as you get older than you are when you're younger. And when I was younger, I was working. I was bringing up children and that. So you didn't have... So much time to sort of let go and have fun, if you see what I mean. Yes, we used to have nice holidays and we used to have time when we enjoyed it, but... I think now I'm older... I haven't got those pressures...*

In contrast, younger participants who find themselves on the growing part of the life responsibility bell curve report a significant pressure that only seems to increase and make obtaining fun more and more difficult. An illustrative example is Lana's (29, QA Tester) narrative where multiple times throughout the interview she uses phrases such as 'when I was young'. In the quote below she is reminiscing on the fun trip to Canada that took place several years ago and describing her feelings about it in the present:

Lana: *Nostalgic, and kind of... Yeah, I think nostalgia. Thinking back to when I was 24 again, like not having too much responsibilities and thinking about, you know, all the things that I think about now like paying for the bills, paying for the mortgage, looking after the dog, thinking about my future and, you know, marriage and all sorts, you know... I think, looking back and just being young and... I mean, I'm still young but younger, you know what I mean? Like fresh young. You haven't worked in your life, so... You know, you haven't experienced paying it, you know? (laughs) It's just that time in your life really, where it was just... You could just... Think about the experience and nothing else and... Yeah, nothing to worry about...*

A significant amount of responsibilities affecting fun having and attitudes to fun that participants refer to in their stories revolve around family commitments. It is reflected in both the projected future of informants who do not yet have a family they are fully responsible for and actual present of those who do. Thus, Rosa (28, Data management Officer) shares an observation of how perception and meaning of fun changes when the role-required behaviours of a parent come into play and restrict fun:

Rosa: *What I could see and analyse myself… I think the moment actually, you start having a family and it's your family, you're not the kid in the family... And so it's your family that you're creating, your priorities shift, your interests shift. That doesn't mean you as a parent cannot have fun and cannot be young through your children because you live with them again. But you do that from a different perspective. So your definition of fun means fun but cautious. So you see, the fun is there, but cautious fun. Or guided fun. Or fun put in a box.*

Participants with children share a first-had experience of 'fun put in a box'. As Martin's (24, Software Developer) quote below illustrates when he is comparing having fun with his infant son and by himself:

Martin: *The fun I'm having with him, subconsciously, I'm probably thinking, am I... Am I doing the right thing to make sure that it's developing him in the right way? Whereas when I was doing something for myself, I'm just enjoying it and not thinking about anything except me, I guess. But when you... When you're a parent, I guess you're thinking... Yeah, I'm having fun, but you're always thinking about safety as well.*

Admitting that the increased number of responsibilities related to multiple social roles people start playing as adults decreases the amount, availability or variability of fun is not just contained on the level of self-reflection, it can be projected on others.

Richard *(41, Engineer): I think in a way I feel I have to accept that, you know... I think a lot of people have children and then... I know a good few who kind of... They do kind of palm them off onto their parents, off they go to grandmas or aunties on the weekend so they can continue living their... You know, child free former life, they go on the city brakes and things like that. Look, I'm not... I can't critisise them, that's their lifestyle of choice. It is what it is, but me personally, I don't agree with that. I think when you have children, then I think you have to accept, at least for a few years, that you're going to have less fun for a bit. You do your job as a parent and as they get older, then that can pick up again.... But some people never seem to stop being either single or they don't stop being a young couple. Yeah, it's... It's not for me to make a value judgement on that. It is what it is and some people just have different priorities, different responsibilities…*

The role-required responsibilities to do something and be someone give life to multiple sets of expectations and ideas about socially constructed unwritten norms regulating who should have fun how, when, where, how often and how much. Through the process of socialisation consumers do not just learn to appreciate and label certain things in their lives as fun, they also face or feel like they face judgement from others if their fun does not fit into the 'standards', and at the same time make judgements about fun of others. As a result, reflecting on fun on the level of disposition reveals a complex of self-related insecurities and dissonances.

4.6. Fun as disposition: self, society and norm in fun

Fincham (2016) briefly discusses the connection between fun and identity on the conceptual level. 'The sorts of things a person finds fun says something about them. Fun is gendered, classed, culturally mediated, manifest in national identities, subculturally expressed, subjectively experienced amongst many, many other things' (p. 43). The inferences from the data provide a variety of scenarios where the perception of self-image in relation to fun is constrained and distorted based on the opinions of others and intuitively understood notions of what is 'normal'.

4.6.1 Norms of choosing 'appropriate' fun dispositions

Reflecting on things systematically considered fun, consumers reveal different criteria defining the nature of fun one is supposed to be having, such as social roles, gender, or age. Thus, progressing through life stages one takes on an increasing number of responsibilities that are often focused on the needs of other people. Switching the

attention back to the self and pleasing the self in fun is then bringing mental discomfort and seeing oneself as selfish.

Donald (39, Managing Director) builds his whole narrative on the comparison of fun ‘then’ (when he was younger and did not yet have a family) and ‘now’ (when the major part of his time is taken by the need to care for other people). His fun of ‘then’ is revolving around extreme sports, challenge, risk, relying only on his own skills and getting a thrill from it. The current situation severely limits the opportunities to have such fun.

***Donald**: I mean, suddenly you realise that your weekends have disappeared and you're doing something else, you know, normally ferrying other people around, so... So without wanting to sound selfish, yeah, suddenly your life is not really about you anymore, is it? So it's about the collective family, so...*

When probed on the issue of ‘sounding selfish’, he continues:

***Donald**: Well, I don't know, some people could perceive it to be selfish, but yeah... You don't really get a lot of your own time. You know, me and my wife, we spoke about it in the past. We don't really... You don't get a lot of me time anymore. So, not as much... Gone are the days you could sit there reading a book all day. You know, now we've got to go to work, you know, or tidy up or something and... We really replace the fun things with other fun things...*

The desire to engage with fun without any regards to role-required behaviours and responsibilities is considered selfish which is perceived as an undesirable quality. ‘Some people’, a collective identity translate the idea that the ‘normal’, acceptable fun of the father does not imply leaving the family behind and going rock climbing or mountain biking, to the degree where it becomes strongly internalised.

Thomas (55, Head of Art) shows a stronger level of frustration and a more intense level of internalisation of the similar idea. A father and husband cannot go and have fun on his own, as dictated by ‘his own terms, his own standards’. If he decides to engage in fun that he personally chooses instead taking care of the family and following along with their desires and plans, he sees as an act of selfishness.

Thomas: *This has less to do with fun, more to do with life choices. I think personally, when I... You know, first met my now wife... We got married. We decided to have children. We.... I agreed that it wasn't just about me… No, I'm sure not everyone has this attitude. I think lots of people are married with children and still, you know, think of themselves. But I think in my situation with my, my view of life. I really don't have the right to just go off on my own. You know, think about myself. And only having fun without the… The responsibility that I agreed to take on years ago, you know, when we got together, got married, had children. So it is selfish. Whilst... My wife and, you know, obviously, my daughters are fine with me being on my own and going off because, you know, that... That's just normal and human. And I'm fine with them doing individual activities as well. To... If I find myself thinking, Alright, you know, I can only have fun on my own, I'm fed up with this responsibility. I'm fed up with this having to take care of other people. That's wrong. And that is selfish by my... My own terms, by my own standards, you know...*

Although his family members do not express any dissatisfaction with him doing fun things by himself and for himself, the participant is unable to find mental comfort with the issue and later mentions 'feeling trapped'. On the one hand, throughout the interview he shares bitterness from the self-ascribed need to always put other first, on the other hand, diving into the liberation of self that experienced fun offers is met with internal resistance and desire to avoid being selfish.

Just as self-focused fun activities of a parent may cause psychological discomfort, leaning fully towards the selfless end of the spectrum brings its own identity-related disappointments. Thus, Richard (41, Engineer) consistently emphasises the other-focused nature of his fun and while he does not want to be seen as a 'martyr', he consistently mentions 'sacrificing' his fun for the fun of others, especially for his children. He shares the struggle to have fun as a parent. He would not participate in fun activities or play of his children, preferring to stand beside them controlling their safety, using the metaphor of the 'guard dog' multiple times. At the same time, he finds such behaviour upsetting, and the upsetting fact is not that he is not having fun himself, but that other fathers around are looking like they are having fun with their children, being involved and relaxed, participating in the activities. He is not worried that they are having a better time and he is missing out, he is worried that they are better fathers than him. It is a perceived threat to his self-image.

Richard: *I remember a couple of years ago being on holiday and the kids were all having fun on the beach. And I found myself kind of standing back and watching them*

have fun and almost unable to have fun myself. I feel sometimes like a guard dog almost, and I'm so conscious of making sure they're safe and okay. And I found myself, yeah, I found myself almost acting like a guard dog, it was a very strange experience. And I remember getting quite upset seeing other dads playing with their kids and throwing themselves back in the water and seeing things like that. And I found myself unable to do it. And that was quite upsetting. It was... It was very strange experience. And I think it was the fact that I look back over the years and a lot of the time I thought to myself, hang on, I don't... I don't get involved as often as I should. Or... hang on... Do we... Or is it how other people may be of the perception that you should?

Similar threat to the image of the good dad comes from marketing communications promoting the image of the involved father having fun with his children:

Richard: *You know, you see these Center Parcs adverts and dads riding bikes, you know, and everyone having a fantastic fun time. Is that how... Is that guy, is he a better dad than me because he's, you know, because he's riding his bike for the children? Not that I wouldn't ride bikes for my kids and things but... Yeah, that should... Is he any better than me, because I'm not doing it? Because I'm, you know, standing, you know, being a bit guard-doggy sometimes, I don't know. I've got no answer to that...*

On the one hand, his self-image is not corresponding with this model of behaviour. On the other hand, he is not involved because he is being responsible and focused on the safety of children, that is supposed to be an unambiguously 'good thing'. So why is he doing a good thing but is not feeling like a good father? It seems to result in the cognitive dissonance. The image translated through advertising gives him self-doubt. He is not sure whether it's the advertisement or him that is right, the dissonance is not resolved.

The examples above imply that the society that participants see themselves a part of holds a set of expectations in terms of what the fun of a parent should look like and if one's fun does not correspond with that image, it results in the disruption of congruous self-perception. The influence of social roles and social standings of adults can also be extended onto the fun of their children. Besides, while some ideas about the norm are internalised without identification of the initial source, and some are conveyed through images in marketing communications, fun norms can also be outspoken. Thus, Julia (74, Retired Nurse) shares an episode where the ideas of fun inappropriate for her social status were clearly articulated in the family.

Julia: *I mean, my father was the local doctor, so we had to... We couldn't laugh about, be daft and go on pub crawls and that sort of thing because it wasn't, you know… The doctors' children had to behave themselves. In those days. I don't think it matters now. But, you know, I'm talking of, well, 65 years ago, sort of thing. And I mean, my father said to me when I was 17 or so, he said, I don't mind you going and having a drink in a pub, but don't do it in... The local area. So, you know, this is where you were quite inhibited and you were quite sort of... And I think this was sort of ingrained for a long time. But as I say, as I've gotten older and that, my father retired, he became much more laid back as well. And sort of... And it doesn't matter so much these days, people don't care and don't take any notice (laughs).*

The opinions of other people having specific ideas of what doctor's children should or should not do dictated the appropriate and inappropriate forms of fun. The quote demonstrates that the informant did not necessarily have to avoid drinking in a pub at all costs as incongruent with the family's social standing, but it had to be done discreetly, without public demonstration of norm transgression. The participant also emphasises that norms regulating fun are fluid and changing with time.

However, certain times within one human's life also seem to be assigned with the socially constructed norms of how individuals reaching specific age should act in relation to fun. Thus, Gloria (41, Teaching Assistant) sees the essence of experienced fun in disinhibition and return to the childlike mentality, being unreserved and expressive. She believes that her fun-labelled activities may be perceived as 'childish'.

Gloria*: Me and my husband went for a walk around a local market, and we found an abandoned golf course. And as soon as I've seen it, I just went running, I just went rolling over and down the hills (laughs) and he just stood there, just watching me enjoying it. Just watching his crazy wife… It was just... Just unabided fun, just absolute fun, it's not caring who's watching, you just go out there and just run like a kid, you know, like we used to do. Nobody cared, you know, just because you can do it at that age. But our age is probably a bit more 'you shouldn't' (makes quotation marks in the air). But I did. (laughs)*

Asked whether someone her age 'should not' act like that, she continues:

Gloria: *Well, I think some people might just think I was a crazy lady, you know, running around that golf course. I think there's a certain age limit that people... Perceive, you know, the… that you should be a grown up now, that's fun times ended.*

While the informant herself does not express strong dissatisfaction or mental discomfort and claims to firmly stand her ground and encourage others (family and friends) to have uninhibited fun just like her, she makes it explicit consistently throughout the interview that when ‘unabided’ fun associated with children is had by adults, ‘some people’ may consider such an adult ‘stupid’ and ‘crazy’, implying the lack of intellectual ability and mental sanity that is supposed to be possessed by adult members of society.

Play that often serves as a source of fun for children and encourages disinhibition can be inaccessible to adults precisely because they are afraid or embarrassed that they will look silly, undignified or dumb, writes play theorist Stuart Brown (2010). This stance implies that individuals try to assess themselves through the eyes of collective others, making assumptions about how they will be judged based on what is widely socially acceptable as a norm of fun.

The social expectations related to the appropriateness of certain fun dispositions can lead to the strong self-image dissonances, as the example below illustrates:

Ashton: *(35, University Lecturer): I'm going to harp on this, on this theme here. And you know what? It's going to... It's going to come at you. So I am a big Disney fan, which is weird because I'm a geneticist, kind of academic and also, you know, 120 kilo weightlifting, rugby playing man...*

Throughout the interview he keeps coming back to the mismatch between being ‘a giant rugby player’, an ‘academic’ and a ‘Disney fan’. While he claims to live with these identities quite comfortably, he constantly underlines that this is unusual, calls himself a ‘weirdo’, emphasises the gap between the ‘serious academics’ with ‘serious’ leisure activities and himself binge-watching the latest Disney+ show. Although he is very passionate and open about his love to Disney, a major source of his fun, he prefers to hide the bits of his personality at work.

Ashton: *Like my boss here... If he liked a Disney movie, he would never be able to tell anybody ever because he's a big macho professor of some sh*t, you know what I mean? And there's loads of other, like everywhere around me is full of those people that wouldn't go on and tell him... He would never ask me, How was your weekend, right? But I don't think he would ask anybody, you know, how their weekend was...*

*And if he did ask, I wouldn't tell him that I binge watched Mandalorian. I would tell him that I put up a f*cking garden shed or something.*

Therefore, informants adopt different coping strategies when their fun dispositions fall out of the perceived 'norm' and become 'weird', 'crazy' or 'stupid'. One can stand their ground and ignore the potential criticism or be less explicit about their fun practises in the social groups where they may expect negative judgement.

The 'sanctions' that society puts on fun are not only concerned with what is considered fun and where fun is found, the ways of expressing fun can be regulated as well.

4.6.2 Norms of expressing fun

Participants see typical fun expressions very similarly in terms of laughter, smiling, being vocal about one's momentary emotions, and active movements of the body, however, different environments require moderation of certain expressive elements.

***Colin** (51, Entrepreneur): If it's your favourite concert… Maybe it's ballet or classical, clearly you... Your method of expressing fun at the Bolshoi [theatre] is different than it would be, you know, watching the Rolling Stones, isn't it? So I think it depends a little bit on what setting you're in.*

Even the facial expressions can be a subject of the social norm and expectations that lead to the necessity to explain oneself if these expectations are not met:

***Harold** (48, B&B Owner): You know, you see when people are smiling... I have a downie, you know, so I always look sad. So I have to really push it to be... You know, people say, Oh, you look so sad. What's wrong with you? And I'm like, I'm fine. I'm actually having a lot of fun, so... But I physically... Because my lips don't naturally go up…*

When participant's fun expressions are questioned because they are not in line with expectations of others and lack clear visual indications of fun reciprocation, he sometimes finds it frustrating which interferes with enjoying the fun experience. It can even be a norm to imitate expected emotions and gestures, and pretend to have fun when it is clearly not experienced but its expression serves a socially accepted goal.

4.6.3 Norms of faking fun

As previously discussed in the section 4.2.2, reciprocation is an important driver of experienced fun intensity. Besides, several participants claimed that if others around them do not look like they are having as much fun as they are, their fun is disrupted. Therefore, individuals may choose to pretend and simulate the typical expressions of fun in order to emulate reciprocation and support the relationship. It can be a relationship between family members or work partners, as the quote below shows:

Colin *(51, Entrepreneur): I think there are a couple of circumstances where you do it [fake fun]. One is when you're with your own children in a place that they will find fun, but you don't, so you fake that fun. Or you fake fun in a business setting because you are having to possibly find something amusing that someone else does. So, yeah, for sure, you can. How authentic that appears to others, I have no idea, but I think we can all do that.*

The generalisation in the last sentence signals that if 'we can all do that', then it is somewhat expected in certain circumstances.

Faking fun can be a two-way street. One party may pretend to be having fun for the other but then expect the same from the second party later in return as a part of the unspoken social agreement.

Donald *(39, Managing Director): We just don't want to offend the person we're with if we're not having fun, but they're having fun, then we want to make sure we don't ruin their fun, don't we? So... But that's good enough, that's a part of being a friend, isn't it? Me and some of my friends, we have different ideas of fun, don't we. So, yeah, I definitely do things... Because I know that they'll return the favour, you know, if I want to go and do something that they're not that bothered about, but it is fun for me, they will come and do that, so...*

Pronoun 'we' instead of 'I' in the beginning of the utterance also implies generalisation and expectation that other people behave in a similar manner. Not having fun may be socially undesirable in some situations, not being fun is another state one tries to avoid.

4.6.4 Norms of being a fun person

Although socially constructed norms can impose significant constraints on having fun, having none is not a readily acceptable option anymore (although it would be the primary choice in Medieval Europe under the rule of puritanical morality). Being a 'funless' or boring person is a matter of self-concern for informants.

For example, Martin (24, Software Developer) labelled playing snooker as fun at least partly because of the fears of appearing boring to others due to not having any exciting hobbies. Saying 'I play snooker' to others tells them a story about who the informant is and in Martin's worldview it protects him from appearing boring.

Martin: *You kind of associate people with things they do, I guess, and... You know, I did think recently… And this wasn't really why I did it, but it was one of the reasons maybe... I didn't really have a lot of things that made me... To other people made me... I mean like people would ask me, Oh, what did you do this weekend or what kind of things do you, like, enjoy? And I would struggle to answer and I thought, Am I just really boring? (laughs) But do I have a lot of things that... Yeah, it's weird that, isn't it, because it's how other people... Me thinking, Oh, do other people think I'm really boring? And I don't particularly care either, I suppose. But it's nice to have something say, Oh, yeah, I do this. I play snooker…*

Thoughts of being a boring person that lacks fun (boredom was one of the opposites of fun, discussed in the section 4.4.1) induce negative emotions (Martin further shares that thinking about it makes him sad), and the self is again assessed through the prism of others' perceptions. And others indeed may see a 'funless' individual as a phenomenon outside of the norm, as the quote below demonstrates:

Jessica *(48, Occupational Psychologist)**:** I have a client in my therapy practice that basically said, I'm not a fun person. I don't... I don't know. I'm not fun. And I find it really hard to identify with this particular lady because I thought, How can you not be fun? How can you not want to have fun?*

What makes a fun person then? A portrait constructed by the informants includes the traits presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Fun person characteristics

Positive affective states	Happy, cheerful, vivacious, lively, laughing a lot.
Social connectedness	Outgoing and sociable, it feels good to be around them.
Liberated self	Not taking themselves too seriously, comfortable in their own skin, disinhibited.
High energy levels	Taking initiative, enthusiastic, organising fun occasions, engaging others.
Seriousness	Supportive and serious if needed.

Source: Data

These features are consistent with the elements that informants use to construct the meanings of the experienced fun: positive affective states, social connectedness, liberated self. At the same time, a collective portrait of a fun person represents an individual who is not completely abandoning all their commitments and is just carelessly doing what they want. There is a degree of seriousness retained and if the situation requires a fun person can be responsible, supportive and reliable, corresponding with a broad idea of a 'good citizen'. Having too little fun is outside of the norm, but having too much fun is also seen as abnormal. A fun person that goes too far into the freedom is not accepted favourably, as the quote below illustrates:

Donald *(39, Managing Director): When you are a kid and you watch TV and you watch films, and you are, Oh that person's really fun! And then you become an adult and go, Actually, that person's just a complete knob. Cause they've abandoned all the responsibilities, but he's a dad! He should be like not doing that sort of stuff, you know what I mean? It's... You've got a different perspective on it when you're a bit older, I think. All these people I thought were fun, are actually... But I think that they are fun... Because they haven't got any responsibilities, you know...*

While being susceptible to the opinions of others (specific people or imaginative collectives) and experiencing psychological discomfort affecting the perception of self, informants simultaneously play the opposite role, imposing the ideas of what they believe is right and wrong on the others and making the judgements about the behaviours and fun choices of people around them.

4.6.5 Enforcing and challenging fun norms

Considering the personally adopted set of norms around fun a ‘correct’ one, people may impose it on others who do not comply with it. Thus, Oscar (61, Retired Secretary) disapproves of the fun he believes contemporary young people have and if these fun activities are adopted by his own generation the disapproval is even stronger:

Oscar: *They [young people] just want to, you know, tippy tappy on the phone all the time. And that's... That's where they get their pleasure or some of it. And I know people who are my age that... They play games on it and it's like, How old are you? You should be outside in the fresh air. I mean, having fun and... Under forties tippy tappy on the laptops, playing games. That's their fun. And it's like, not mine.*

Disagreement with the fun practices of others may drive negative feelings towards certain social groups whose fun does not correspond with one’s idea of a social norm.

Oliver *(62, HR Manager): To me, you can have as much fun if you follow all the rules and procedures. Cause if you want to fight against the rules and procedures, well, it's not going to be fun for somebody. Yes, some layouts might call that fun if they're causing trouble. They might think that's fun. But... Intelligent people, would they do that? You would hope not.*

If in the previously discussed cases informants think they may be called ‘crazy’, ‘stupid’ or ‘weird’ by others since their fun dispositions are located outside the norm, the quote above demonstrates the opposite situation where the informant is on the verge of using the label ‘unintelligent’ towards people who consider breaking rules and safety regulations fun. Such labels and judgements may contribute to social separation and differentiation of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The judgements can also challenge what is perceived as a norm, as Gloria’s (41, Teaching Assistant) example demonstrates, when she reflects on parents discouraging ‘childish’ fun of playing with toys as their children grow up:

Gloria: *I suppose actually most [of her friends] have mentioned things like that, that they've put away their [kids’] toys. Yeah, there is a lot of that, actually. I've heard people say they've put it all in a charity shop bag. Yes, sent it off to the charity shop because they're getting older now. I hear that quite a lot, actually… And it’s sad because I feel like you're putting a limit on... on childhood. That's not for us to do, you know what I*

mean, it's... Not as if there should be a limit. And what is that age? What are people designating as though that it's enough now? It's wrong.

The dissonance between the personalised idea of the fun norms and what is perceived as appropriate fun by 'others' (either specific people within one's social circle or faceless collective others) tends to elicit negative emotions, creates tension and often negatively affects self-perception or attitudes towards other people. Fun is a social phenomenon not because others are necessarily needed for experienced fun to emerge but because consumers learn to appreciate certain entities in their lives as fun through the process of socialisation that also shapes the ideas of what in normal and acceptable in terms of fun in a particular social group and what is not. Historically, fun was heavily classed and dictated by societal agreements (Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018), the data show that the contemporary society did not fully leave it behind. Fun dispositions contribute to the identity construction and signal the membership in social groups formed on the basis of age, gender, social class, etc. If one finds personal fun dispositions outside of the norm adopted in their group, it may create a dissonance in self-image and require coping strategies to reach the equilibrium.

Therefore the key concepts used for the construction of meanings related to fun have a polar opposite nature on the levels of experience (liberating facet) and disposition (summarised in Table 14): liberated self becomes constrained self, social connectedness turns into social influence and social separation, transgressing normality of the quotidian existence converts into a conforming to a social norm. This somewhat paradoxical nature represents a delicate balance of free personal will and social constraint, liberation within rules.

Table 14. Self, society and norm in fun

	Fun as experienced	**Fun as disposition**
Self	Liberated self	Constrained self
Social interaction	Social connectedness / cooperation	Social influence / separation
Norm	Transgressing normality	Compliance with the norm

Source: Data

4.7 Chapter summary

Based on the insights from the data, the phenomenon of fun was presented on two levels: as experienced and as disposition. On the experience level two sides of fun were distinguished: liberating and achievement-oriented. The two facets share similar features: positive affective states and positive social interaction. While it was established that presence of others is not a necessary condition for one's fun to emerge, social factor does intensify experienced fun. The differences between liberating and achievement-oriented fun are the following: the former is characterised by the liberation of self from obligations, concerns and worries related to role-required behaviours and self-images, and going beyond one's normality, stepping outside of routines. The latter is linked to challenge, achievement, and reward and does not imply the temporary alleviation of responsibilities and commitments.

Achievement-oriented fun facet tends to exist mostly within specific experiential episodes, the contexts in which it arises are not typically considered fun on a more general level. Liberating fun, in contrast, is being discussed and reflected upon on two levels: as a single episode and as disposition, an entity systematically referred to as fun by individuals and social groups. Something becomes fun on a dispositional level not only through personally experienced fun but also under the influence of social factors. Fun dispositions are actively shared in consumer society and transferred within families, between peers and communities. As a result, consumers begin to perceive certain entities in their lives as fun because other people see them as such. Fun meanings are constructed and reshaped collectively in the never-ending process of social interaction.

Fun dispositions are actively learnt and acquired by consumers as they progress through life stages. The increasing number of responsibilities and social expectations that one almost inevitably takes on while making a transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood limits opportunities and ability to have experienced fun, on the one hand. On the other hand, the increasing number of social connections opens the access to a wider range of fun dispositions one can adopt.

The abundant variety of fun dispositions in consumer society does not necessarily provide one with complete freedom of choice. Consumers perceive certain fun practices as more appropriate for their age, gender, social status, or social role, and

others as less appropriate. The consumer society constructs a number of norms that regulate who can have fun how, how often, how much, when, where and with whom. While consumers often do not explicitly articulate such norms or where they come from, they experience a range of self-perception issues and self-image dissonances if their fun does not fit into the perceived standards. At the same time, they actively impose internalised norms on others and negatively judge those who seem to locate themselves outside of such norms.

Therefore, social connectedness of experienced fun takes a form of social influence and social separation on the level of disposition; going beyond normality turns into the urge to stay within the norm, resulting into the constraint of self that stands in opposition to the self liberation evident in the experienced fun. On the different levels of abstraction the key fun elements, self, society and norm, appear to have almost antagonistic nature.

Not only social interactions but broad cultural trends including those set by the marketing communications may define where one will look for opportunities to have fun. The literature review demonstrated that marketers are often encouraged to 'make marketing fun', and a lot of different brands use the concept of fun in their corporate communications and promise their customers fun brand encounters. However, it is a challenging endeavour.

There is no available recipe that can guarantee fun emergence even to the same person in the recurring same scenario every single time. Besides, identified fun components, such as positive affective states, liberated self, and transgression of normality are to the most part internally driven. While marketers can offer something different from routines to consumers and bring groups of consumers together encouraging social interaction, sense of liberation and enjoyment are still situational, unstable and fleeting. Systematically recreating external conditions that can elicit these states for a significant part of customers may seem a nearly impossible task. Moreover, delivering fun like a package overlooks the role of personal agency in fun emergence: consumers with higher agency will help fun to arise with their intention to have it amplifying marketers' efforts, while consumers with lower agency may not be very receptive even to the most entertaining offers. Additionally, experienced fun can

be easily disrupted on individual, social and situational levels by the factors that fun organisers have no control over.

The following chapter explores various strategies that marketing professionals from different industries use when they adopt and implement the construct of fun in the promotional activities and elucidates the tensions and barriers between consumers' and marketers' understanding of the phenomenon, addressing RQs 3 and 4.

Chapter 5. Findings: fun from the marketers' perspective

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the phenomenon of fun as understood and interpreted by marketing professionals using the construct in their practice. Research questions 3 and 4 are addressed: RQ3, interrogating the ways of adopting and implementing the construct of fun in brand promotional activities, and RQ4, aiming to reveal the extent of consistency between marketers' understandings of the phenomenon and consumers' articulations of fun.

It comes as no surprise that the multifaceted phenomenon of fun can be used by marketing professionals in various forms. Table 15 below summarises the strategies involving consumer fun that marketers participating in the study adopt.

Table 15. Marketing strategies adopting the construct of fun

Name	Role	Sector	Marketing strategies involving fun
Elizabeth	Digital Content Executive	Theme Park	Actively using the word 'fun' in marketing communications (on the website, social media, emails and blog); creating fun experiences for the customers within the service encounter
Edward	Senior Analytics Manager	Motor Racing Championship	Using customer data to deconstruct what makes an entertaining race in order to enhance viewership; creating entertaining experiences for the race guests
Isaac	Guest Insight and Experience Manager	Brewing and Pub Retailing Company	Creating fun experiences for the guests in the company establishments

Adam	Member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Steering group	UK City of Culture Programme	Positioning the City of Culture events as ‘fun to watch’, ‘fun to do’, ‘fun to participate’
Meghan	Head of Marketing & Commercial	Organisation of Female Professionals in Football Industry	Creating a fun atmosphere at the organisations’ networking events
Hunter	Event Manager	Popular Culture Convention	Creating fun experiences for the guests during the convention, using the word ‘fun’ in promotional materials (emails, website)
Albert	Head of Communications	Volunteer Youth Organisation	Using ‘fun’ in the strapline for the new members intake campaign; creating fun experiences for the members on a regular basis

Source: Data

As Table 15 shows, marketers also address consumer fun on two levels: (1) aiming to create a fun experience for customers on the spot (i.e. when the race is happening, when the Convention takes place, when they visit the pub or the theme park) refers to fun as experienced; (2) using the word ‘fun’ in marketing communications, positioning the organisation or the products as fun ones represents the level of disposition.

This chapter, therefore, reveals the identified themes (summarised in Table 16) on the levels of experience and disposition, in parallel with the previous chapter representing the consumers’ perspective of fun.

Table 16. Research questions and key themes (marketers)

Research questions	Key themes	Description
RQ3: How do marketing professionals adopt and implement the construct of fun in brand promotional activities?	Fun as a part of the brand positioning (disposition) – RQ3	Reports several strategies of using the construct of fun in marketing communications positioning the brand as a fun one.
RQ4: To what extent are marketers' understandings of the construct consistent with the consumers' articulations of fun?	Fun as a part of the brand encounter (experience) – RQs 3 and 4	Addresses both RQs and reports the marketing strategies of enabling consumer fun experiences; elucidates positive affective states, social nature of customer experiences, taking consumer beyond their normality, consumers' and marketers' agency in fun as the points of overlap between the two perspectives.

5.2 Fun as a part of brand positioning (disposition)

Within this study multiple brands using the construct of fun in their slogans and various types of advertising copy, in print, TV, outdoor, and online advertising have been identified. The participating marketing professionals also adopt the appeal to fun as a part of their promotional strategies.

Fun positioning, or attaching the fun label to the organisation and developing the corresponding association in the minds of existing and potential customers, can be driven by specific goals within the organisation. For example, fun may become the focus of the campaign when there is a need to lower the degree of seriousness and emphasise the enjoyable aspect in order to involve more members and/or to eliminate certain worries or uncertainties. Thus, Albert is a Head of Communications at a Volunteer Youth Organisation that is sponsored by the related armed and uniformed structure and this connection sometimes raises concerns among potential members and their parents that there is an obligation to transfer to that structure after spending some time with the youth organisation which in reality is not the case. Therefore, using the strapline 'Fun, Friendship, Action & Adventure' and conveying the atmosphere of fun experiences through the images aims to emphasise that the primary reason for

being a member is to have fun and enjoy oneself. In the quote below Albert talks about the process of choosing the imagery for the campaign driving the intake:

Albert: *We were very conscious to ensure that, yes, we wear the uniform. So we are a uniformed youthful organisation. We are funded by the MOD. We do follow the same rank structure as the [armed and uniformed structure], but there is no obligation to join it after being with us. We are one up from scouts. But obviously in a recruitment campaign very conscious that we didn't want to be perceived as the [armed and uniformed structure]. So we wanted to showcase... An image I quite like is some members, and they're kayaking and the water splashing everywhere and they're laughing. And the zip line one where a member is upside down on a zip line, but they're in their own clothes. So it was having that balance of in uniform and in their own clothes. I mean, for example, again, there's a great one of some members, they... They're walking along and navigating. There's about nine of them and there's... There's a girl and her jacket's clearly far too big for her, but she's wearing a pink rucksack and you can see the pink straps and it's just showing that, yes, they're in uniform, but they're not mini soldiers or anything like that. They are just children enjoying a youth activity. And they're there together. And you can see they're having fun and that is what it's all about.*

Therefore, the attention is being switched from participating in various activities that can involve handling firearms (after the sufficient amount of training and under supervision), obstacle courses or extreme sports for the purpose of becoming a 'future soldier' to doing those for fun, for the sake of enjoying it. The literature review explored the cases of using the construct of fun in advertising with the goal of diverting attention away from the potential harm of dangerous or morally ambiguous consumption practices that may be perceived as a Batesonian double-bind. The fun adoption discussed above, however, does not represent another similar scenario since it aims to relieve the tension related to public misunderstanding and invalid assumptions rather than real issue of binding children to the military system.

While the promise of fun, when a specific offer is positioned as a fun one, something that is fun to engage with, may be internal and company-driven, as Albert's case above illustrates, it can also have an external nature, when there is a pre-existing socially constructed and shared idea that a specific entity is fun and the company capitalises on that. Thus, Elizabeth (Digital Content Executive; Theme Park) talks about amusement park as something that is almost fun by default:

Elizabeth: *At the moment, we're kind of focussing on... It's funny you say about fun because our slogan is Creating Fun from the Memories. So emotionally, what... At the moment, it is all about that fun and expressing... Trying to word it properly... Like the happiness and the excitement of... It's a theme park, isn't it, at the end of the day…*

Since the first amusement parks were introduced in the end of the XIX century, they have been marketed as a fun place, entertainment for masses (Beckman, 2014). With time, this disposition initially driven by the companies owning the parks has probably become so widespread and penetrated the Western culture so deep that currently one does not necessarily need to see an ad or even visit the park before starting to consider it a fun place. Still, if the disposition is not being translated into experienced fun within the brand encounter, the customers will be dissatisfied.

Elizabeth: *It's quite ironic, really. We are literally selling fun. So you could, as a marketer, you could be selling anything. You could be selling a pen or a notebook. It could be anything. But with theme parks, it's quite easy, I would say, to sell it, because if you've got a great product, people are going to want to come because it is a fun day out.*

Probed on the issue of whether fun sells itself, she reveals important implications regarding the effort that marketers still need to invest to support the fun disposition.

Elizabeth: *It does [sell itself] to a certain extent. So you kind of have to push why... Like the reasoning why it's fun. You can't just kind of say, come to the Theme Park, it's fun. You have to say it's fun because we've got this, that's this, this and make sure that it seems and appears to be fun. We went through bit of a stage where we didn't have too much investment over about five or six years. We didn't have too many new additions, and we were still saying it was fun. You should come visit us. It's great. It's fun. You'll have a great day out. But actually, the guest experience didn't correlate with that. So that's when it becomes difficult when the product isn't fun anymore… Our product started to kind of slowly deteriorate. So we had some really old rides that weren't opening all the time, and then we started to take rides out because they were in such bad condition and then we didn't have the finances to replace them at the time. So it just looked like rides were coming out and you were going to a theme park, and there wasn't too much to do. You were still paying the high entry fee, but there wasn't that much to do anymore.*

The disposition in that case can only be internalised by the customers after personally experiencing fun with the company and the quality of the product seems to play a key

role in facilitating that fun. Besides, the issue of paid fun is an important one. In the consumer interviews, participants often emphasised that when they pay for the experience (vs having it for free) there is a strong expectation to have fun that creates internal pressure to reach this desired state. If fun is not experienced, it results in strong disappointment. Therefore, since consumers tend to have a set of expectations related to the experience they have spent money on, marketing managers would want to avoid the incongruence between the expectations and reality.

Marketers, like consumers, pay attention to the difference in expectations and perceptions between the visitors who purchased their own tickets and those who received them through various channels for free. As Edward's (Senior Analytics Manager; Motor Racing Championship) quote below illustrates:

Edward: *So the Premium Offering… The one thing is most people having the Premium Offering are not the ticket buyers, they get offered the tickets through the company, or through their friends, or through whatever... Some of them obviously buy tickets for themselves which is great, but that's also impacting on the expectations because if you go to an event where the ticket is obviously very expensive, you don't pay any of it and you obviously get very good food and good entertainment, you're going to love it. So excitement levels are through the roof and it's hard to find anyone who doesn't like it, I guess because of that. That's also a key thing. If you only had people that paid the price for it, maybe the expectations are different.*

In both cases (paid and unpaid experience), however, quality and value of the product facilitating experienced fun of customers is the primary centre of marketers' attention as opposed to simply making advertising claims that the marketed offer is fun.

5.3 Fun as a part of brand encounter (experience)

From the marketing professionals' point of view, fun can be seen as an outcome of the holistic experience with the product or service – the sum of the parts (each of which is not necessarily fun on its own) becomes fun.

Albert *(Head of Communications, Volunteer Youth Organisation)**:** I like to think that they go away and everything they've done, they've enjoyed and they have found fun. And fun in itself... You know… How can you measure fun? What is fun? It's very much down to each individual's perception of it. But it's... It's about the whole experience, it isn't just any one activity, say, I only participate to do rifle shooting because I find that*

fun. It's not like that. It isn't that... There's one particular activity that they're here for. It's... It's the whole experience and also the... The friendships they make and the camaraderie. Being a member, it's a fun experience, and I think that's why it comes at the forefront of everything we do.

An important part of developing and executing an offer that helps to induce consumer fun is the diversification, so that every guest may find something that corresponds with their personal fun preferences:

Hunter *(Event Manager; Popular Culture Convention): A good event is something that has enough to offer that no matter who's coming through that door, they're going to have something to do. They're going to have something to find. They're going to have something to... To sort of discover and latch on to. And I think that like a good event, it's just a good spread of panels, of things on the floor, of exhibitors, of things to buy, of guests to meet, of just a way to spend your day. So you're not going in and turning around and walking out in an hour. I guess ultimately it could be the same across events, but certainly for our events, I think that's sort of a hallmark goal that we strive towards.*

A significant amount of effort is invested in making decisions about how to create the mix that will appeal to the visitors and their existing fun dispositions and simultaneously try to catch the cultural trends that may help establish new dispositions for consumers. Hunter continues on the decisions about choosing the right content and guests for the Convention:

Hunter: *It's the result of a lot of meetings and a lot of opinions... Of just sort of making sure that we're not making these decisions in a vacuum and that even if we feel something... Strongly about something, that we have a justification for it, whether that's looking at popularity trends versus Instagram hashtags versus, you know, my nephew won't shut up about this thing. Like it is sort of, you have to take it through a lot of different areas… What was popular last week is not going to be popular next week. And what was a big deal ten years ago, it could be coming back because it's a reunion year. So that content thing, it is sort of a healthy mix of feedback from fans, but also sort of a real keen ear to the ground with what is currently popular and trying to stay ahead of the major trends. So that way, you know, we're not chasing pop culture and we're a place where we're sort of delivering the next thing.*

Knowing the target audience preferences is the absolute necessity, informants agree. However, providing a variety of options on top of the main experience that serves as

the key offer may significantly contribute to exceeding customers' expectations. Sometimes the additional options the visitors were not initially expecting to engage with boost the overall experience. At other times, the focal event might not even be the key interest for the guests and the sidekick becomes the main hero:

Edward (Senior Analytics Manager; Motor Racing Championship): *For instance, there are some Grand Prix that have events, i.e. concerts on Saturday and Sunday nights. And to give you an example, in 2017, the US Grand Prix, they had Justin Timberlake on the Saturday and Stevie Wonder on the Sunday. And because we did a study, we realised that on Saturday 20% of the attendance of the day arrived after the qualification… Just for Justin. So they had the tickets for all the events and maybe they were busy on Saturday, so they were, Oh, we'll go see Justin and then they'll go the race on Sunday. So that was an interesting thing to see. But on the other hand, the truth is, it's never just the main race when you buy a ticket because you have super series, you have... Depending where it is because it's not exactly the same all the time. We had the W series, which is the women-led, you have Race 2, Race 3, Automotive Brand Supercup and other series. And we realise that people... Because we do pre- and post-survey analysis to check expectations and see how we delivered on them... And no one expects to really watch these races before, they're, Yeah, whatever, it may be, you know, we'll watch it or not really, we're not there for that. And after they are like, Oh actually it was cool because I was in my seat and I actually just saw another one just after that or just before and it was super cool and they got me, they got me hooked.*

Part of fun facilitation in such scenario is making sure that the customers are aware of all the available options and even potentially nudging the guests towards exploring the whole range of experiences. Edward (Senior Analytics Manager; Motor Racing Championship) continues on the off-track entertainment:

Edward: *You also have a fanzone for each event where we try and provide entertainment activities, like change the tyres type of activity. Play the... Play the video games and so forth. And that's working very well. But what we see as well, based on analysis, is people don't tend to walk... And that's more back from 2017, people were not walking much to explore, so we had to tell them, Hey, this is what's available at that time, because people were actually, not sure if they were scared to move, they just go and find the good place and just not move. So they didn't know... We had a lot of people saying, Oh, actually, I didn't know there was a fanzone. And we felt it was obvious, but obviously wasn't enough obvious. So we like invested a lot in signs and orientation. That's one of the things we did to get people to know, understand better. Because something we see is the more things you do, the more value for money you*

feel you tickets are. Which then you... You're happier at the end versus the price you paid for the tickets. That's some of the things we see to keep people entertained.

Whether the intended entertainment results in consumer fun remains unclear. While some informants explicitly use the concept of fun in their campaigns and refer specifically to fun in their narratives about customer experiences, others prefer 'entertainment', 'engagement', 'satisfaction', or 'value creation', more wide-spread and broadly used terms in marketing practice.

Besides, talking about fun experienced by consumers within brand encounters, participants treat it as a homogenous construct without elucidating its facets or types. While for the most part marketers' descriptions of consumer fun are consistent with the identified liberating facet with the focus on positive affective states, social connectedness and transgressing normality (discussed in the following sections), Meghan's (Head of Marketing & Commercial; Organisation of Female Professionals in Football Industry) example leans more towards the achievement-oriented fun adopted for the marketing purposes. Meghan represents the organisation that unites professionals working in and around the football industry and empowers women, men and non-binary people with knowledge, expertise and collective support. One of their goals is to actively challenge discrimination and lobby for change in the sector to eliminate negative attitudes towards women working in football, that can take the form of the high entry barriers, inability to get promoted, lack of trust from male colleagues, sexist and derogative comments questioning women's expertise. The participants' narrative clearly does not position such issues as fun, yet fighting them together as a network of allies involves experienced fun:

Meghan: *So it's the whole point... There's no point in doing this if you don't enjoy it. So they [events] have to be fun. If they're not fun, people won't come back. So for us, there's... It's an element of networking. So, it enables you to grow your network and build your contacts. And by having these contacts, hopefully it will help you progress in your career. It also enables you to learn from others. And it's not going to be just purely serious. There will be serious elements. But obviously you want people to make jokes, make it humorous, because when we laugh, we have fun, we enjoy it. And you want people to enjoy our events so that they talk positively about it and encourage others to come as well. Um, so, yeah, it's... Yes, there's a serious element in that we want our members to learn and get some real benefit out of it, but it has to be enjoyable, otherwise they won't come back.*

Such fun does not imply abandoning responsibilities and commitments, full relaxation, lack of seriousness and escaping routines, rather fun is a part of the communal effort to fight inequality. Similarly to consumers' stories where fun was experienced in the scenarios related to trauma or social injustice, fun is described as a means of making the challenge of addressing deeply problematic issues more bearable. Fun is not perceived as a 'real benefit', it is secondary to the more serious issue, yet, it is seen as an important driver of engagement with the organisation. Positive social interaction and enjoyment are present and desired. These elements bring this achievement-oriented facet of fun close to the liberating fun in the narratives of others participating marketers. Talking about what makes fun fun, they consistently emphasise these components as the essence of consumer experienced fun.

5.3.1 Consumer positive affective states

Positive affective states that marketers discuss in relation to consumer fun include excitement, happiness, thrill, and enjoyment as the most prevalent, closely corresponding with consumers' articulations of experienced fun. From the professionals' perspective, consumers having fun are consumers enjoying themselves and the situation they are in. For example, for the pub guests, enjoying the atmosphere is a part of the offer that elevates the purely functional consumption of food and drink to the emotional and experiential level, as Isaac (Guest Insight and Experience Manager; Brewing and Pub Retailing Company) puts it:

Isaac: *I think this is absolutely a real key issue going forward, not just for this company, not just for kind of pub companies, but for the whole hospitality industry. Because ultimately, you know, we could... We could go to the supermarket this afternoon and we could go and buy any pack of beer for £10, £11, £12. And that would work out as less than a pound per bottle or per cup. So... So clearly finding the off trade in the supermarkets, beer, for example, and food, it's all going to be way cheaper if you buy in the shop and you cook it yourself, you drink it at home. So it's all about that wider experience. It's all about what's the reason for people to actually go to the pub. And yes, the food and drink is a really important part of it and it needs to be as good as it can be. It needs to be great quality. It needs to delight guests. It needs to be really kind of elevated, but equally it's giving them the atmosphere and the ambience to enjoy these memorable kind of meaningful experiences. Family experiences, social gatherings, friends, whatever it might be. It's almost giving them that kind of comfortable, welcoming, whatever the type of environment is that motivation is to enjoy themselves.*

Moving from functional to experiential aspects with consumer enjoyment at heart is the strategy also adopted by the organisers and facilitators of the City of Culture Programme in the context of renovations and innovations in the city centre, as Adam's (Member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Steering Group; UK City of Culture Programme) quote below illustrates:

Adam: *So there's a series of functional bits and pieces that have had a huge effect, absolutely huge effect. However, they've come along at the same time as some quite playful things. So, you know, at a very frugal level, just outside the university buildings, there's just some fluorescent coloured lights which run underneath the ring road. So how frugal is that, but they do change colour. So they've got... Obviously got some investments in them, but I think that makes a difference. Repainting one of the central streets in lots of different colours has made a significant difference. And the whole street art programme... It's had a huge effect. Art in shop windows has had a huge effect. I think it's generally things like that and 3D pavement art and just... Create this this feeling of a place where you can enjoy.*

The source of enjoyment heavily depends on the type of the offer being marketed and can vary from visual aesthetics of the city to the nature of the unfolding events that customers are observing. For example, Edward (Senior Analytics Manager; Motor Racing Championship) and his team conducted internal research to identify what brings the most enjoyment to the fans watching the race:

Edward: *The thing that's key to the enjoyment... Is people love unscripted results. I'll give you a concrete example. There was an overlay graphic on TV which was trying to predict the likelihood of an overtake to happen or not. And every time that percentage was either very high or very low, i.e. we know what's going to happen, people hated it. Like, why do you tell me what's going to happen? That's why I'm watching. Don't tell me. And I think that's also part of the sport and that's what comes back to what makes it entertaining. People don't want to know the results of the race before the race happens. They don't want to know, Oh, that team or that car is so fast anyway, they're going to win.*

Uncertainty of the experience outcome and not knowing what to expect was often identified by consumers participating in this study as fun-inducing, especially in the context of the new experiences. It also falls in line with the literature stating that spontaneity and surprise contribute to fun emergence (Fineman, 2006; North, 2015; Oh & Pham, 2022).

Interestingly, the organisation is implementing tangible changes that can provide more opportunities for unexpected overtakes during the race and therefore, making it more exciting and enjoyable for fans to watch.

Edward *(Senior Analytics Manager; Motor Racing Championship): So for instance, for the latest Grand Prix, which was a few weeks ago, they made some little track changes like... Which may not be seen or heard by the casual fans, but like, we... That corner is taken slightly differently because it's going to help on the last and the next corner where you can have more overtaking opportunities. So these are the things that people are working on, which doesn't translate to any other sport.*

While being able to change the circuit track layout is a unique feature of motor sport, the key insight here is that the organisation takes the 'entertainment' (the subject of the significant amount of internal research) of their viewers seriously. More entertaining races attract more viewers which further translates in higher revenues when it comes to selling the broadcasting opportunities.

Talking about customers' enjoyment, the interviewed marketing professionals systematically emphasise the social nature of that enjoyment, sharing it with others, and fun generating more fun when multiple participants are present.

Adam *(Member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Steering Group; UK City of Culture Programme): This time around they introduced some water features in the city centre and the space just outside Central Hall has had a, again to my eyes, a huge effect in terms of increasing the traffic to those areas. And again, I think you reach a tipping point where that traffic itself makes the place fun because it makes it energetic. And you see and hear the joy of children playing and having fun and... I mean, it's almost like a hysterical laughing when it passes on throughout a group.*

From the marketers' point of view socially shared experienced fun serves several important functions.

5.3.2 Consumer social experiences

Having fun together can solidify the connections between like-minded consumers who may not see themselves as a part of the majority and play a role in boosting their sense of in-group identification. As Hunter (Event Manager; Popular Culture Convention) explains:

Hunter: *I think at its heart… So, the Convention is about community. It's about people that share similar interests that otherwise might sit outside of the realm of mainstream. I think now there is a mainstream attitude towards the Convention when it comes to the big Marvel movies and video games and comic books. But I think ultimately what the Convention is, it's a... It's a place where people that otherwise sit on the outside of the mainstream of culture are able to come together and realise that they're not so far out of the realm of similarities, of their friends and peers, and people around them... I think these communities exist on online forums, on Discord, on sort of all of the different digital ecosystems that exist. But this is sort of the opportunity for everybody to come together and actually see each other in person and hug and, you know, see the people that they might just know from a digital username or an Instagram handle. So this is the physical version of all of that.*

The social connectedness that is transferred from the digital to physical world also serves as the main promotional message. He continues:

Hunter: *I think the key messaging is, again, it comes back to that community bit, it's about being back... Join together, be together, celebrate together and have fun together... And so, you know, a lot of our visuals and our promotion beforehand, we had Pre-Rolls running on YouTube and across social. A lot of that was about the visual element of cosplay, which is always a big attraction, it's always a big draw for fans, but then just sort of people getting together, embracing, taking photos together, exploring the show together. It's really about that togetherness that I think is the key marketing bit for us in general.*

The idea of the service offering that helps the existing community to find a place where shared fun can be had is strongly emphasised in Isaac's (Guest Insight and Experience Manager; Brewing and Pub Retailing Company) narrative:

Isaac: *You know, a lot of our pubs are used for the community activities, you know, dominoes clubs, Women's Institute, um, football clubs playing out a weekend or going to the pub after their football or cricket or whatever the sport is. So there's so many diverse groups of people that actually use the pub and have... And how the pub is being so important... But being the heart and that centre of the community. Now, if you're a community that loses your pub, you almost lost a little bit of your soul, a bit of your kind of, you know, a bit of your kind of personality because you've not got that big focal meeting place where people get together. And the whole point of the pub is to socialise into a kind of happy, memorable, kind of fun occasions. So, you know, just the heart of the community and almost the source of a lot of the fun that's generated within a community.*

In the examples above the communities were shaped externally and then used the organisations' offers as a focal place of fun. An opposite scenario is possible as well, where the fun had together within the service encounter helps to build a new community. Albert (Head of Communications, Volunteer Youth Organisation) talks about friendships and camaraderie developing through shared fun experiences and also emphasises that the nature of the organisation brings together people representing different age groups and their interactions result not only in experienced fun but also in the valuable social skills:

Albert: *We are quite unique in the sense that their age range from 12 to 18 and that they train together. And the older ones... If it's one star navigation training on a Tuesday night and you've got 15 members in the detachment, the older members who may be a master member or three star, will start to do the training and they're teaching... Teaching how one does the fundamentals and the basics of… This is how you read a map. This is how you do that. So again, that's very unique. And I think it's one of our strengths as well, that communication across different age ranges because you're in school, you're only really friends with people in your age group, in your year. And then you get to 18 or you get to university or your first job, and you're suddenly in an environment where you're communicating with people who are a lot older than you. And you haven't had that experience before. So again, it's another strength in that we are very much mixing the members together like that.*

An important common denominator of the service offerings that imply customers having social fun on the spot is providing enough opportunities for different groups of people to get engaged with something together. Elizabeth (Digital Content Executive, Theme Park) underlines the importance of delivering service points where the interests of different customers intersect. The slogan their Theme Park is using on a regular basis in multiple forms of marketing communications is 'Fun for Everyone':

Elizabeth: *About that family interaction and engagement and spending family time is quite a key message, I think, because you go in for a day out to somewhere that caters for everybody. So you want it to... Cater... Literally... So that they all have the same connection with not just the brand but the products offering as well. And they all want to be there rather than their little kids running around but the adults are kind of like being pulled along in the back.*

Appeal to everyone is a two-way street where both marketers' and customers' intent can have an effect. On the one hand, marketers can fine-tune the offering, as the example below illustrates:

Elizabeth *(Digital Content Executive, Theme Park): And we do try and make it for everyone. So there will be little hidden messages in the entertainment shows and things like that that only adults will understand and find funny and things like that...*

Alternatively, even if fun is not being experienced directly, it can be had vicariously.

Elizabeth *(Digital Content Executive, Theme Park): So that joy of seeing yourself experience it first-hand but also seeing your children and the rest of your family or the rest of your group experience it as well. So, it's the second hand emotion as well.*

There is a range of scenarios for fun emergence here. On the one hand, consumers in this study reported multiple cases of having genuine fun from observing fun of their children or grandchildren, on the other hand, some consumers choose to pretend experiencing fun to make their family members happy, and yet others only want the first-hand fun and their own desires and preferences take priority. Whether or not a particular social occasion will result in vicarious fun, faked fun or no fun for one of the involved parties is likely to depend on a wide range of individual, social and situational factors, unique for every single case that marketers cannot fully account for. What is relatively easier to manage, though, is developing an offer that enables consumers to take the leap out of their routines and normality, and the interviewed professionals do focus on that issue in their narratives.

5.3.3 Taking consumers beyond their normality

Providing customers with opportunities to separate themselves from quotidian existence and feel a sharp contrast with habitual neutrality of life can be a unique selling point even for the organisation that does not necessarily sell something. Thus, Albert (Head of Communications, Volunteer Youth Organisation) consistently emphasises throughout the interview that offering the members an experience that is completely different from what they usually do is their key competitive advantage as the quote below demonstrates:

Albert: *Members will go... They will do adventurous training overseas. They will... Get to experience things that they wouldn't necessarily get to experience in everyday life or with a rival youth organisation such as the Scouts… Essentially everything we do is... Is a fun experience for the members, and it's doing stuff that they wouldn't do at school, or with other clubs, or at home.*

Giving a specific example of such experience he talks about members and adult volunteers doing a 4000-feet unassisted parachute jump and adds that 'those sort of experiences are totally out of the norm'.

Interestingly, that emphasis on transgressing normality is closely corresponding with Albert's personal meaning of fun. Reflecting on what helps him realise that a specific occasion was fun he says:

Albert*: I think it's when you've done, you know, if you've been with friends, you've been away, you've done whatever, it is when you return to your 9 to 5 or your day to day, as... As much as some people might not like others to believe it, we all have mundane parts of our life where it is the day to day, whether it's your studies, your work, your responsibilities. Everyone has that. And it's only when you're doing those parts and you think back or there's something you're looking forward to that, you know what the fun parts are...*

Just as the consumers in the study, the marketer sees the contrast between fun and routines as giving fun its meaning which is also translated in the marketed offer.

Similarly and even with the use of very similar words, Hunter (Event Manager; Popular Culture Convention) considers the Convention an event that disrupts the routine and transfers the guests to a different reality:

Hunter: *I think that the Convention, it's very much... It's sort of the extreme of that [doing something out of habitual normality]. It takes the... Take you out of your… Your day to day, 9 to 5 or, you know, school and puts you in sort of the... The extreme version of the opposite end of it, you know, it's the full pendulum swing, I guess.*

Such claim is again consistent with his personal view on what it means to have fun:

Hunter*: To do something outside of your normal existence, I guess is fun. For me, I... Even the mundane, I think, can be fun as well. But I think yeah, if I had to say… It would just be something outside of your daily routine that you can share with other people or yourself.*

Considering that the members of the Volunteer Youth Organisation meet once a week and the Convention takes place two times a year, it can be argued that only the offers that consumers engage with relatively rarely can exploit the step beyond normality. However, talking about guest experiences in pubs**,** Isaac (Guest Insight and Experience Manager; Brewing and Pub Retailing Company) points out that even a pub (that can potentially be visited every day) can be a place of escape from the usual responsibilities of daily life:

Isaac: *People work so hard during the week. The pub is all about almost escaping from that and kind of, you know, putting yourself in that kind of... That space where you're not having to worry about the stresses of the week and you're just enjoying yourself.*

And again, the informants' personal understanding of the phenomenon is built around stepping out of routines:

Isaac*: I think maybe excitement, you know, something that you wouldn't normally do. So almost, you know... I mean, God, I'd love to be having fun every single day. But I think the reality is, I don't go through the working week thinking, Oh, God, I'm having so much fun today. So I think it is almost like an occasion, a treat, something different to the norm, something kind of that it's almost, you know, a special occasion, I guess.*

Losing the contrast between fun and normality leads to the loss of fun even when marketing a fun offer as a job is considered fun in itself. Thus, Elizabeth (*Digital Content Executive, Theme Park*) explicitly calls her day-to-day work fun, yet, with time and repetition it turns into a routine and requires a break:

Elizabeth*: I guess sometimes… Because we are there day in, day out, it's hard for us to... You know, if you experience something a bit too much, like repeatedly, it's not fun anymore. So sometimes you have to, like I say, sit back and watch somebody else experience it to remember how great it is… Because almost it's like repeatedly and you've done it so frequently, you become almost bored of it. But... I think like a couple of days break away from it... So like we always say, as great as our jobs are, we want to be at work and we want to be there... We always have to force ourselves to, I know it sounds insane, we almost have to force myself to take annual leave to recharge, because otherwise it does become oversaturated.*

Enabling consumers (and sometimes themselves) to find the reality that stands out of quotidian existence is a step that marketing professionals can take. However, the question is whether it is enough for consumer fun to emerge. Keeping in mind the varying degrees of consumer agency and different personal entry thresholds into fun, it is important to address the issue of who is ultimately responsible for the fun having: consumers or marketers.

5.3.4 Consumers' and marketers' agency in fun

Professional business media and marketing blogs often suggest 'to make your offer fun', 'to make shopping in your store fun' or 'to make your marketing communications fun' (Morgan & Rao, 2003; Danziger, 2006; Davis, 2016; Green, 2018; Pearson, 2018; Ellis, 2019; Bengualid, 2019). The way these propositions are being articulated implies that marketers are fully capable of delivering fun in a ready available form and consumers only have to come and take it. However, as the insights from consumer data demonstrate, fun is not an internal property of an activity, situation or place. On the experience level, it is constructed from the combination of internal (e.g. one's current mood and intention to have fun, level of stress, degree of concern with the past or the future) and external (e.g. what is happening, who is around, how they behave, etc.) drivers that may be different every single time even in seemingly similar scenarios.

Talking about where fun resides and whether it can be generated, from his point of view, Albert (Head of Communications, Volunteer Youth Organisation) further illustrates the idea of fun being born from the combination of the internal and external factors:

Albert: *It's partly in the mindset, but it is equally partly on the activity and who you're with. Like I'll never have fun doing the hoovering. It's an activity, it has to be done. I don't think I'll ever have fun doing it. It's just something that's got to be done. No matter how much I try and make it fun in my head or say, I'm having a good time, the reality is, I probably won't. So I think it's a mixture of both. It is led by the activity, but it is also hugely impacted by the mindset, because you could be doing... One of the funnest things ev... You know, you could be out skiing. And, you know, it's meant to be amazing and fun. You're meant to have a great time. But if it's -20 and you're freezing cold and you're in a bad mood... Because your mindset... You're probably not going to have as*

much fun as you potentially could. So it's definitely that the factors and the mindset that contribute to an activity being fun.

Isaac (Guest Insight and Experience Manager; Brewing and Pub Retailing Company) develops that idea in the context of the industry he represents and emphasises that consumer fun emerges when both parties, marketers (or pub staff) and customers make an effort for it to happen and co-create fun as they co-create value:

Isaac: *It absolutely should go hand in hand. It is completely a combination of the two. You know, we talk a lot... We talk a lot here about atmosphere. How do we create an atmosphere in a pub. And it's actually a bit like the idea of fun. It's actually quite an intangible abstract concept. And I think the best way to think about it is... Is you need to get your foundation in place first… So if you think about when you enter a pub or a bar, you get a nice greeting, you don't get ignored, you get... You get served quite quickly. There's this kind of, you know, it's clean. These are... These are the basics. So you almost need everything in place first for that to happen. But then, it is a combination of the different... Of different parties. So you almost need that welcoming kind of greeting and great service from the staff. You almost need them to be trying their best to create a rapport. But equally, if you've got like a, you know, a very sort of, a kind of indifferent or bit of an aloof group of guests that are almost kind of... They're not receptive to it or they're kind of, you know, they're sort of creating trouble, or they're... They're not kind of behaving or whatever it might be, then they're going to detract from it as well. So it is very much kind of, you know, in marketing terms it's very much value co-creation. It's very much the customers and the staff working together in harmony to create a good fun atmosphere. And it's that interaction between the two.*

Such intense reciprocation and two sides co-contributing to fun emergence is an illustration of the embedded consumer-producers model proposed by Kozinets et al. (2004) where ‘consumers produce producers' products at the same time and as much as producers consume consumers' consumption’ (p. 671).

While laying the foundations and doing everything to ensure the ‘fun potential’ of the offer is the absolute consensus between the participants, the perceived role of customers may vary. Thus, Hunter (Event Manager; Popular Culture Convention) emphasises the effort that producers make and the guests are seen as somewhat less active in terms of personal contribution, although not completely passive:

Hunter: *I think that we facilitate fun. I think that we... We build it. So the fun that is had… I would like to think that there is fun being had at the panels, at meeting the guests, at going to buy something new at a... At a comic stand or a merch stand,*

whatever we have. I think that we... We build it. And then the fun is ultimately had by the attendees. But we do what we can to sort of ensure that that actually happens.

Probed on whether the guests can come to the convention and have no fun at all, he adds:

Hunter: *I would be very genuinely surprised if somebody went the Convention and said I had no fun.*

While a considerable amount of planning, designing and executing goes into marketing solutions intended to be facilitating consumer fun on the spot, whether or not fun was had is still very much an assumption. Participants do talk about the detailed feedback that is being collected after visiting the pub, the race, the Convention or the Theme Park, yet, the forms do not include questions that directly address consumer fun. Adam (Member of the Monitoring and Evaluation Steering Group; UK City of Culture Programme) elaborates on the challenge of trying to get feedback on experienced fun and measuring it in the quote below:

Adam*: I think the bigger question is, how long does that fun last for. How long does that feel good factor last for. So, um... Yeah, you do that [try to measure consumer fun]. I mean, the most basic way of doing it is to ask you, isn't it? And what you... What you wouldn't know if you simply asked the question bluntly would be whether people have got the same definition of what fun is... And... I mean, I think the irony is, yes, you can do it. And, yes, you could ask more and more questions about whether someone is having fun. But at some point, the very process of asking those questions would dilute the level of fun he's talking about. If not kill it off totally.*

Multiple meanings constructed around the phenomenon of fun (as the insights from consumer data have also demonstrated) and its fleeting nature become barriers in assessing whether customers experienced fun within the brand encounter, how much fun was had or what can be done to improve the situation if the outcome was unsatisfactory for consumers or marketers. Such an intangible construct is also not the most fitting for becoming a specific objective or part of the official brand strategy; yet, it is still being actively used in marketing communications and considered a part of the offer.

5.3.5 Marketers as customers

Experiencing their own offer ‘from the other side’, in the shoes of a customer may potentially signal to marketers whether all the effort invested in product or service development and delivery aimed at facilitating fun actually helps it to emerge. Yet the nature of the liberating facet of the phenomenon plays its part: once fun facilitation becomes a part of the job, a responsibility, it becomes challenging to shut down the call of that responsibility and actually have fun.

The informants share two modes of engaging with their own brands as well as with competitors: a ‘marketer-customer’ mode implying that one is deliberately trying to understand what is working and what is not adopting the view of the consumer or doing a competitor research, and a ‘full customer’ mode when the marketer just wants to eat in the pub or enjoy a day in the theme park, in other words, to do it ‘just for fun’. However, in the latter case the absolute relaxation and achieving full liberation of self from the work identity is not easily accessible.

Isaac *(Guest Insight and Experience Manager; Brewing and Pub Retailing Company): I think, since I've been doing this role... I think it's like one of those, isn't it, where you tend to notice a lot more when you're the other side. So I think since I've been doing this role, I'm probably a bit more of an annoying person to go to pubs with just on a social occasion, because I'll be constantly sort of noticing the things or looking for things that I might not even really notice before…*

The working mentality on a non-working occasion can reveal itself in paying attention to specific details that matter for doing the job, analytically deconstructing the experience, or even taking action that is not required yet habitual.

Hunter *(Event Manager; Popular Culture Convention): So, I used to run a publisher booth at San Diego Convention and actually had a lot of different events around that. And the last time I went to that show [as a guest], I've been doing that show for 15 years now... I sort of just went by that old booth and sort of couldn't help myself from like trying to carry a box or like restocking items on a shelf. I just couldn't help it. Now, when I go to other events, it just sort of always... Always in the back of your mind, not necessarily like, I would do this differently, but like, Oh, that's a really good idea, how can we incorporate that in our show?*

When providing fun is to a certain degree a responsibility, it can hardly be separated from occasional dips into the responsibility even if only ‘fun consumption’ as opposed to ‘fun production’ is intended. When Elizabeth (Digital Content Executive; Theme Park) spends a day in competitors’ theme parks, enjoyment is getting mixed with competitor research mindset.

***Elizabeth**: It kind of overlaps. So I go to enjoy it for myself. But then when I'm there, my work brain does sometimes turn on and go, Oh, they've done that. That's quite interesting. I'll take that back to work. But I am primarily there for myself… Sometimes, like I'll see a tweet, or something from another theme park or another attraction or another brand, really and I'm kind of... My work brain will turn and I'll be like, Oh well, they could have done this, or Oh, that's a really great way to do that actually. So sometimes... It depends... I'll either pick it apart or I'll think, Wow, that's amazing.*

Consumers participating in the study shared multiple examples of their own experiences in similar contexts: eating out in pubs and restaurants, going to entertaining shows, festivals, game conventions, visiting theme parks and clearly identified such episodes as fun. While consumer descriptions of these occasions corresponded with the liberation of self and stepping out of normality, for the marketers committed to enabling consumer fun in the aforementioned scenarios, the ‘guest-like’ encounters were still very much a part of routines and included acting and thinking within the role-required patterns. Although participating marketers do briefly mention escape from responsibilities and concerns as a component of consumer fun, it is not in the focus of their attention; positive affective states, socially shared nature of experiences and transgressing normality are the most prominent features in their narratives. Yet, their own experiences with trying to have fun in the situation that is normally a job and not fully switching into the ‘fun mode’ indirectly point to the antithetical nature of fun and commitments, obligations, and role-required concerns.

5.4 Chapter summary

When fun becomes a commodity to be sold and bought, it puts pressure on both marketers (to provide it) and consumers (to have it) which does not sit comfortably with the nature of fun that is fleeting, unstable, can be easily disrupted and emerges with different intensity and ease for different consumers. Yet, marketing professionals actively adopt the construct of fun in various forms in their practice, trying to facilitate

experienced fun within brand encounters, using the word ‘fun’ in a wide range of marketing communications, positioning their organisations as ‘fun’ ones, making claims that their offer is ‘fun to do’, ‘fun to watch’, ‘fun to visit’, etc.

Fun becomes a part of the slogans and advertising copy, is conveyed through the images of smiling happy-looking people typically engaged in a certain activity, often as a group. Within marketing communications fun exists on the level similar to consumer fun dispositions, in other words, it aims to develop a systematic understanding that the organisation and/or the offer is fun and encourage consumers to attach a fun label to it. The formation of the disposition can be company-driven when the fun image helps accentuate enjoyable aspects of the offer and attenuate potential concerns of the customers. Alternatively, fun dispositions already existing in the socio-cultural consumer world may be used by the brands to emphasise their positioning. However, from the marketers’ point of view, dispositions have to be supported by experienced fun. If the mental associations do not translate in the personal fun experience, it results into customers’ disappointment.

When it comes to facilitating fun on the spot, the key marketers’ focus is on the offer, the quality of the service, the variety of options for different types of consumers to engage with, and ensuring that the customers are aware of the available opportunities. The main components of experienced fun identified by the marketing professionals include positive affective states (with enjoyment as the most prevalent), social connectedness and enabling customers to transgress their normality. These are the points of overlap between the consumers’ and marketers’ perspectives.

The main difference on the level of experience is the lack of marketers’ attention to the liberation of self that consumers report in this study. Although several participating professionals briefly mention escape from responsibilities and worries that fun-having consumers may experience within the brand encounter - while also sharing the struggle to fully immerse in fun in the scenarios that are typically work-related - they tend not to focus on the liberation of self from various role-required behaviours and appearances as a core fun feature. Therefore, the concepts of ‘freedom to do what one wants to’ while alleviating obligations and commitments (doing what one has to), and ‘freedom to be who one really is’, do not appear in the narratives of the interviewed marketers.

On the level of disposition the misalignment becomes stronger since the findings do not reveal evidence to suggest that the participants consider the interplay of self, social influence and norm, that appears to be a central issue in consumers' reflections on various fun practices. Narratives of the professionals revolve around positive aspects of fun and do not appear to cover the tensions and mental discomfort related to consumers' self-perception surrounding fun that is perceived to fall out of the socially constructed fun norms. The construct of fun tends to be used in marketing communications almost unreflectively as an unambiguously positive appeal and it is somewhat expected that fun in slogans and texts, as well as visual representations, will be understood intuitively and interpreted in more or less in the same manner by different customers, although it is acknowledged that customers themselves can have different preferences, desires and expectations. Fun's omnipresent but elusive nature also does not grant it a place among specific and articulated marketing objectives since it is not clear how to measure it or how to reliably 'deliver' it.

Although the literature review revealed that marketing fun to consumers can often be built on the notions of fun production and fun control, the participating professionals occupy a less rigid position, rather considering emergence of fun as a co-constructed endeavour where engagement of both sides (marketers and consumers) is needed for fun to occur. Interviewed marketers, however, do not distinguish the customers by their perceived agency in fun and do not assume that some consumers may reach the state of experienced fun easier than others due to their personality traits. Control of fun also does not seem to be a matter of significant concern for the participating professionals. Even though they acknowledge that sometimes consumers may get impatient or too excited, no specific measures are considered to manage to customers having 'too much fun'.

The next chapter will discuss the implications of these findings and provide the final layer of data interpretation that will illuminate the profound meanings held by the consumers' and marketers' narratives, in line with the hermeneutic phenomenological research philosophy (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016).

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

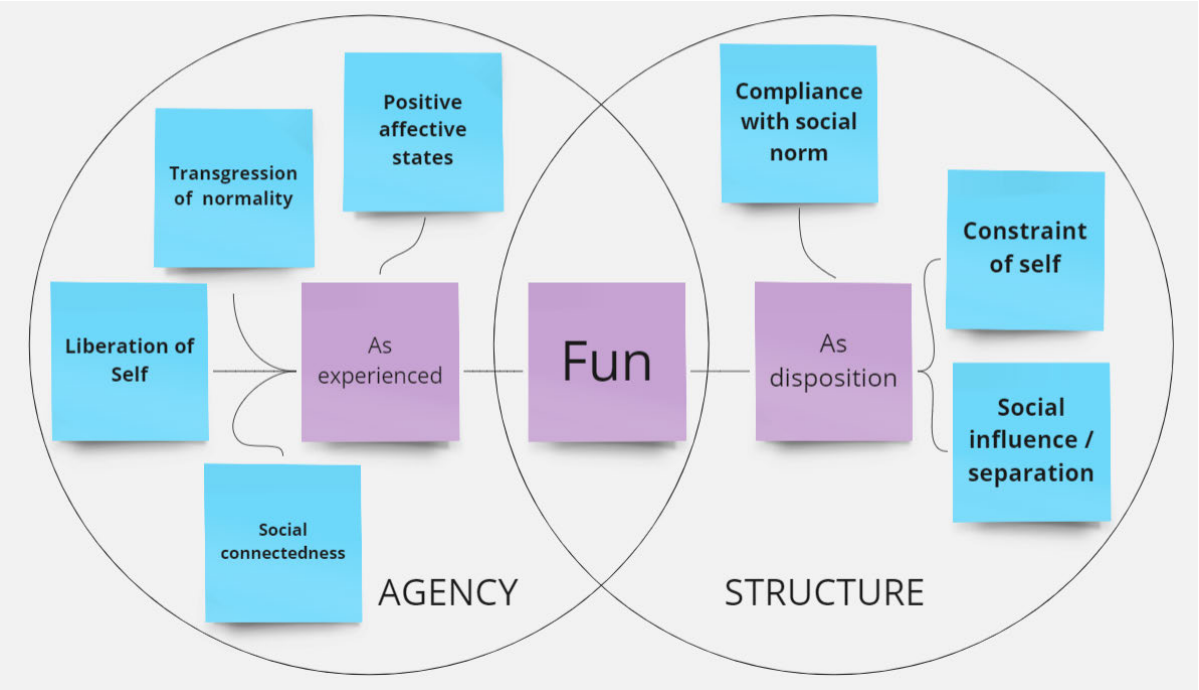
The previous two chapters focused on the empirical account of the phenomenon of fun as understood by consumers and marketing professionals. They highlighted three core concepts emerging from the consumer articulations of fun: self, society and norm operating differently on two levels of abstraction: fun as experienced and fun as disposition. They also demonstrated that, while experienced fun is understood in more or less similar categories by consumers and marketers, the effects of socially constructed norms around fun on the consumers' self-perception taking place on the level of disposition is mostly overlooked by the professionals adopting the construct in their practice. Although several links with the relevant academic literature were made, the emphasis was deliberately put on the inferences emerging from the data without the attempts to fit the data in any pre-existing conceptual framework (Thompson, 1997). The purpose of the current chapter is to further develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in relation to the existing literature and elucidate its key meanings as well as the implications of the study.

It follows from the consumer data that fun has somewhat paradoxical nature. When it is experienced (i.e. when a specific single episode is perceived as fun), consumers are intrinsically motivated, pro-active, engaged in something they want to do (as opposed to something they have to do); they feel free to expose their authentic self, be the people 'they really are', leaving any constraints in the routine framing of their realities. When consumers reflect on their fun on a more general and abstract level (i.e. talking about fun dispositions), they often feel constrained by intuitively understood norms prescribing how, when, and where the members of specific social groups are supposed to have fun. Fun appears to be both a protagonist and antagonist in its own story. Although consumers strongly associate fun with the surge of the positive affective states, the story of fun is not the story of enjoyment, happiness, excitement, or pleasure. The data as well as the literature review demonstrate that the essence of the phenomenon revolves around the opposition of freedom and control, individual and society (social groups and institutions). Widely held social views and dominant myths are reflected in the individual experiences of fun and their

interpretations by consumers, illustrating a key tenet of the Consumer Culture Theory that human agency operates in the social context (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Ratner 2000).

Visually fun can be presented as the intersection of agency (individual voluntarist action) and structure (system of rules and codes dictating how one should behave and reflect on behaviours), as Figure 4 demonstrates.

Figure 4. Consumer fun as the intersection of agency and structure



Source: Data

What is important, fun dispositions are governed by the rules and norms that are not universal, fixed, or written down as a set of codes. Rather, they exist in the form of the socially constructed implicit stock of knowledge disseminated within social groups. Consumers often do not identify a specific person or any other source explicitly stating that a father having fun on his own while leaving the family responsibilities aside is selfish or a lady rolling down the hills for fun is crazy. There is an assumption instead that ‘people may think that’ or ‘someone may say that’. Fun does not appear to have a clearly recognised gatekeeper. While three-four centuries ago the Church played such role with the priests warning their congregation about the dangers of having fun (Furnham, 1990), currently, the position of the ‘fun guard’ is diluted.

Another significant point is that while on the level of disposition consumers' selves are constrained and defiance of the socially constructed norms results in issues with self-perception and potential social separation, fun dispositions provide a frame of reference within which consumers understand and interpret their experienced fun. They talk about fun in a way that makes sense to others. In order for others to understand and relate to one's fun experience, a person has to make it explicable, communicate it in terms familiar to the listeners (Fincham, 2016). Therefore, on the level of disposition fun is not only constraining, but also enabling.

In order to further explore this dynamic between the experience and disposition and demonstrate how agency and structure co-constitute one another within the phenomenon of fun as well as how marketisation of fun contributes to this interaction, this study relies on structuration theory suggested by Giddens (1984). The chapter is structured as follows. First, the overview of structuration theory is provided. Then the key components – agency and structure – are discussed in relation to the phenomenon of fun. Finally, the process of fun structuration is explored and the role of marketing practice in it is elucidated.

6.2 Structuration theory overview

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens developed structuration theory (ST) as a broad ontological theory of social relations (Giddens, 1976; 1979; 1984). The most systematic and elaborate version of ST is provided in his 1984 book, 'The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration', however, Giddens acknowledged the he considers all his work as one continuous project, where the critique of the earlier traditions serves as a base for building new theoretical constructions (Bryant & Jary, 1991). Structuration theory addresses the perpetual issue of determinism versus free will but denies both the totality of influence that structures impose on the subjects and the full freedom of unrestrained action performed by the subjects (Nicholson et al., 2009).

The two key concepts of the structuration theory are agency and structure (Giddens, 1984). Agency refers to the intentional activities undertaken by individuals seeking to satisfy their needs and goals, while structure represents resources, rules and guidelines making such actions possible (Johnson, 2008). Giddens argued that rather than pitting the two against each other, as was often the case in the sociological debate

at the time (Klesel et al., 2015), society should be reconceptualised as the duality of agency and structure, dependent on each other and recursively related, and that all social phenomena reflect both simultaneously (Giddens, 1984). Structuration theorists then explore the interconnections between human action, in the form of structuring activities, and established structures (Gioia & Pitre, 1990).

The duality of structure implies that repeated human actions reproduce the social structure while being enabled and compelled by it (Buhr, 2002). Social actions possess structural properties, patterns of routinized action, and yet they can also be altered by human action (Shove at al., 2012). 'According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices they recursively organize. Structure is not 'external' to individuals: as memory traces and as instantiated in social practices, it is in a certain sense more 'internal' than exterior to their activities... Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling' (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Social practices are at the intersection of agency and structure and can be considered working blocks of society (Butsch, 1990). Social structures like norms and institutions are brought into existence by the continually performed practices and only present in the social reality as long as they are manifested in individuals' actions and interactions (Giddens, 1984). Understanding of the social world, according to Giddens (1984, p.2) 'is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but practices ordered across space and time'. The world consists of multiple series of relational networks connected through practices which in turn are being configured and re-made in the ways individuals perform them (Bellotti & Mora, 2014).

For an individual, agency and structure are interacting through a process of reflexivity when people monitor their intentions, character, and actions within their social circumstances based on what they know and understand about themselves and the social context of their lives. In other words, individuals' interpretations of the social expectations about their role-required actions in specific time and place result in a conscious or subconscious decision to either conform to the accepted and familiar ways of doing things, therefore, reproducing the existing practice, or to challenge the typical manner of conduct, thus producing the practice in an altered form (Giddens, 1984). Other social actors observe and interpret how one goes about practices and also engage in their reproduction or change. Humans are, therefore, considered not

passive and unreflective beings guided by the social structural forces beyond their control, but active agents capable of employing their knowledge, physical and mental abilities in the ongoing production and reproduction of the social world (Johnson, 2008). ‘The production and reproduction of society thus has to be treated as a skilled performance on the part of its members, not as merely a mechanical series of processes’ (Giddens, 1976, p. 168). According to structuration theory, the effects of human actions are not limited to the face-to-face encounters and relationships, rather they can spread beyond the micro-level social worlds and transcend the subjective intentions, especially when aggregated through the actions of multiple agents. Individual actions provide the foundation for the macro level institutional structures of society and the ‘skilled performances’ of practices lead to reproduction of the structures or the structural transformation that can be both intentional and unintentional (Johnson, 2008).

The ongoing production and reproduction of structures or the ‘dynamic process whereby structures come into being' is referred to as structuration (Giddens, 1977, p. 21). The term ‘structuration’ emphasises the continuity of the process as opposed to the stable state (Sewell, 1992). To study structuration means ‘to attempt to determine the conditions which govern the continuity and dissolution of structures or types of structure' (Giddens, 1977, p. 120). In ST such intention implies looking at both individual agency and structural constraining and enabling tendencies which distinguishes structuration theory from structuralism and the philosophy of action (Bryant & Jary, 1991). Structuralism in its functionalist, Marxist or modern structuralist variants is concerned with the reproduction of social relations and practices 'as a mechanical outcome, rather than as an active constituting process, accomplished by, and consisting in, the doings of active subjects' (Giddens, 1977, p. 21). Whereas 'the characteristic error of the philosophy of action [along with most forms of interpretative sociology] is to treat the problem of ‘production’ only, thus not developing any concept of structural analysis at all' (ibid., p.21). By emphasising these limitations structuration theory aims to reveal how human agency constitutes social structures while the latter function as a medium of this constitution (Bryant & Jary, 1991).

It is important to emphasise that in ST the term ‘structure’ is used differently comparing to its conventional use in functionalism. Rather than referring to 'the descriptive analysis of the relations of interaction which ‘compose’ organizations or collectivities',

it implies 'systems of generative rules and resources' that members rely on, but also thereby update and alter, in the ongoing process of societal production and reproduction (Giddens, 1976, p. 127). While structural-functionalism treats the terms ‘structure’ and ‘system’ as more or less equivalent, there is a sharp distinction between then in structuration theory (Algesheimer & Gurău, 2008). In ST, structures are unobservable sets of rules (such as group norms) and resources (e.g. human: individual traits, abilities, physical strength, knowledge, and non-human: objects) that interact to generate a system (Bryant & Jary, 1991). Systems in turn refer to the observable patterns of relations between individuals and embody structures (Mouzelis, 1989). Systems can be understood as ‘empirically observable, intertwining, and relatively bounded social practices that link persons across time and space’ (Sewell, 1992, p. 6).

The key argument of structuration theory is visualised in Figure 5. People engage in routine practices of everyday life relying on the rules and resources (structure) used in the practises to guide the action and provide a frame of reference, whereby reproducing or sometimes transforming the structure. Through this structuration process individuals are involved in actual social relations that constitute the social systems. ‘Thus the structure is both the ‘medium’ and the ‘outcome’ of the routine practices whereby systems of actual social relations are sustained’ (Johnson, 2008, p. 462).

Figure 5. Relationship between agency, practices and structure in structuration theory

Source: Johnson, 2008, p. 461

The introduction of structuration theory in the early 1980s initiated much debate among sociologists; since the beginning of the 1990s the theory started to receive attention in

the business disciplines (Nicholson et al., 2009). For example, ST has been actively referenced and used in the field of organisational studies (Ellis & Mayer, 2001), specifically strategic management (Child, 1972, 1997; Whittington, 1988; Pozzebon, 2004; Jochoms & Rutgers, 2006). In the area of organisational theory, structuration thinking has been adopted for exploring the relationships between workforce as agents and organisations as structures (Mutch et al., 2006). In the research of information technology and information systems, ST is considered one of the most influential theories applied with the goal to understand the interaction between users (the agents) and IT (the structure) that enables and constraints people as they engage in various practices (DeSanctis & Poole 1994; Brooks, 1997; Walsham, 1998; Jones & Karsten 2008; Nunu et al., 2019).

In marketing and consumer research, ST has not been one of the key theoretical frameworks (Humphreys, 2014), although structuration approach has been used to analyse crisis situations in public relations (Durham, 2005; Rawlins & Stoker, 2002), to critique traditional mass communication theory (Olkkonen et al., 2000), and explore relationships between individual brand supporting behaviour and organisational structures (Vallaster & Chernatony, 2005). Talking about sustainable consumption Dolan (2002) notes that 'individual acts of consumption are not in opposition to, and prior to, macro structures and processes; they are macro processes at work' (p. 171). Further developing applications of structuration theory in studying sustainability Ardley & May (2020) argue that ST provides a solid foundation for understanding agents (e.g. marketers, customers, stakeholders) and structures (e.g. companies) within marketing as they continuously interact through various practices, especially because attention to agents' intentionality and structures' enabling features offers the potential for transformation.

Structuration theory presents an opportunity to illuminate the multifaceted nature of fun while considering the antagonistic elements not as tearing the construct apart but rather as holding it together. ST also becomes a helpful instrument of bringing together two blocks of reviewed literature that explore fun holistically emphasising production and control, on the one hand, and aim to deconstruct it elucidating freedom and transgression, on the other. Experienced fun revolving around liberation of self, social connectedness and transgressing normality represents agency and fun as disposition

standing on constrained self, social influence or potential separation, and compliance with socially constructed norms is considered structure.

6.3 Consumer fun as experienced: Agency

In structuration theory agency refers ‘not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place, the capability to make a difference’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). The author emphasises that with relatively few exceptions people are always agents (and agents are always human) meaning that almost under any circumstances they have a possibility to behave otherwise (Giddens, 1989). Individuals are viewed as perpetrators that could have acted differently in a given sequence of conduct and what happened as a result of their actions would not take place has that person not intervened (Nicholson et al., 2009). Agency implies volition of human actors making choices in the process of social interaction (Bryant & Jary, 1991). It is the ability to ‘deploy a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others’ (Giddens 1984, p. 25). Agency embraces the capacity to change a state of the world considering that individual action may have both intended and unintended consequences (Humphreys, 2014). It is important to emphasise that in the current chapter the term agency is used differently comparing with the section 4.4.3 that presented perceived consumer agency in fun. In the latter the agency refers to one’s perceived ability to enter fun framing, or ‘summon’ fun (people with high agency can start experiencing fun relatively easily if they have an intention to do so, while people with low agency consider fun an external entity that comes and goes at its own will and there is no guarantee that one can get into fun framing even if there is a strong internal inclination to do that). In the current chapter agency is understood on a higher level of abstraction and includes the people’s ability or power to make a difference in the world through their actions, as well as knowledge of how the social world operates and how to participate in it in a competent manner (Johnson, 2008).

Actors employ reflexivity to monitor their own conduct as well as behaviours of others and adjust their actions for sustaining the flow and meanings of routine practices. In habitual situations individuals mostly manage to understand and adapt to one another without the need to explicitly communicate and explain their actions. But even without such necessity people would be able to comment on their behaviour and ‘rationalise’

their actions if they were asked to do that. The ongoing process of reflexive monitoring is closely connected to the ability to provide reasons for one's actions (Turner, 1986). 'To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about them)' (Giddens, 1984, p.3). The reasons that individuals can provide for the explanation of their conduct may not correspond with 'real' reasons, but the key to understanding Giddens' meaning of rationalisation is that it can include any type of explanation that helps others to make sense of one's actions (Johnson, 2008).

Further exploring agency in relation to knowledge, reflexive monitoring and accountability, Giddens looks at 'discursive consciousness' and 'practical consciousness' (Giddens, 1984, p. 7). Discursive consciousness incorporates various forms of knowledge required to participate in everyday practices as well as broader ideologies and systems of belief that can help to explain or justify such practices. These shared interpretations and knowledge can be and often are expressed in words and may be acquired through formal or informal socialisation (Turner, 1986). Practical consciousness in turn revolves around implicit common-sense knowledge manifested in skills needed to perform activities without verbal explanations. Such knowledge can be gained by observing others or through first-hand experience. The boundary between the two modes of consciousness is not impenetrable since discursive consciousness can be transformed into practical one that is incorporated into everyday habits and practical consciousness can become the subject of discourse (Bryant & Jary, 1991).

If an individual intentionally or accidentally violates widely understood and accepted social expectations, they might be asked for an explanation or feel the need to offer one. In case of intentional deviation, the perpetrator may attempt to defend and justify it as appropriate or necessary for the specific situation. In the scenario where the violation was unintentional, an apology may be offered, alternatively one can provide the explanation of what they intended to do (Johnson, 2008). Is it important for structuration theory to acknowledge that all human behaviour, even the most habitual and routine practices, have a potential to be transformative. The execution of routines may vary and agents can engage in innovative behaviours, and if others accept and repeat such innovations, they may lead to structural transformation. At the same time

many of the everyday practices serve to reproduce currently existing structures (Giddens, 1984).

One of the main reasons why people tend to lean towards maintaining the practices as they are, therefore, reproducing the structures, is that the habitual routines provide a sense of stability and order. Regular performance of everyday life practices helps to satisfy deep-seated and often unconscious needs for security (Giddens, 1984). Going one step beyond discursive and practical consciousness, Giddens incorporated the unconscious level that includes unconscious motivations (Turner, 1986). Based on the psychoanalytic theory and Freudian ideas, Giddens noted that motivations generating anxiety or threatening to one's identity and sense of autonomy are likely to be repressed by humans, but can still have an influence on their behaviour despite the lack of awareness. According to Giddens, the strong need for 'ontological security' provides an unconscious source of motivation to stick to practices in their familiar forms (Johnson, 2008). However, in his later work, Giddens (1992) focused on the exploration of individual autonomy expressed in seeking alternative patterns of behaviour that change the usual practices, therefore, staying in line with the argument that actors have to ability to both reproduce and transform structures.

The conceptualisation of agency within structuration theory helps to further explore the nature of consumer fun on the experience level. First and foremost, the data revealed that the essential component of the experienced fun is liberation. Consumers having fun are pro-active, voluntarist human beings that temporarily abandon multiple constraints typically related to the social roles they play. The feel free from responsibilities, obligations, commitments and any things they have to do, similar to the findings of Fincham (2016), Price (2021), and Oh & Pham (2022), but they are also free from the identities they have to display and images of the people they have to be in accordance with their positions in society, therefore, their selves are liberated. Within fun framing actors are free to choose the course of action and entering that framing is an expression of free choice, in line with Bergler (1956), Churchill et al., (2007), Baldry & Hallier (2010). Consumers cannot be externally forced to have fun, there is always a strong element of volition in the experience (even people considering fun an external entity that cannot be internally summoned are incapable of having fun on command), that is why fun organisers, whether they are employers, governments

or marketers, always face an uphill battle if they try to ‘deliver’, ‘generate’ or ‘engineer’ fun (Fleming, 2005; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019; Fincham, 2016).

On the level of experience, individuals are likely to be able to choose and decide for themselves who makes their company in the fun framing. They engage in positive social interaction, feel connectedness with one another that may transgress the fun episodes and bring them closer even when they exit the framing and the situation is not defined as fun anymore. The findings highlighting the role of interpersonal communication and connection that boosts the intensity of experienced fun also correspond with the literature (Podilchak, 1991; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Fine & Corte, 2017; Reis et al., 2017; Oh & Pham, 2022). Although the existence of solitary fun is a debatable question among academics researching the phenomenon (e.g. Podilchak, 1986), the data clearly indicated that consumers are capable to experience fun on their own, acknowledging, however, that the presence of others intensifies the experience and makes it more memorable, especially if the participants share a pre-existing story of relationships. The reason for that may be not only matching interests but also openness to coordination and shared zone of interpretive tolerance derived from acquaintanceship (Sternberg, 1998). These factors create a social safety net that encourages trust and spontaneity (Fine & Corte, 2017), also acknowledged by the participants as contributing to fun emergence and continuity.

Consumers in fun may be also seen as perpetrators in the sense that they transgress their normality from the moment they enter the fun framing. It is important to note that fun can be and often is experienced by individuals in the same scenarios that are repeated with certain regularity like a routine. However, the essence of normality transgression lies in defining the reality in a way that puts the experience of fun in strong opposition with emotional neutrality of everyday life where the major part of actions is a matter of necessity, while fun is never a necessity, rather a manifestation of free will.

As consumers grow up and progress through life stages they learn to appreciate difference practices, e.g. going out with friends, playing computer games, watching sports, rock climbing, volunteering, etc. as fun (developing dispositions that will be discussed from the structural point of view in the next section). In doing that they also develop discursive and practical consciousness related to fun. Individuals learn to talk

about their fun experiences and make them understandable for others while describing them is specific words, such as ‘enjoyable’, ‘exciting’, ‘carefree’ or any other words circulating in their social groups. At the same time, they develop intuitive skills of recognising experienced fun, feeling it, and acknowledging the times when fun framing is being entered and exited. Such skills do not receive verbal expression, yet, they are crucial in experiencing fun. Brown & Juhlin (2018) argue that pleasure is a set of skills since objects and activities in the world around us are not pleasurable in themselves, they become pleasurable through human appreciation of their specific qualities. In a similar manner, fun in this work is considered a situational definition, it does not reside in any entities present in the consumer world, therefore, learning to appreciate activities, places, times, objects, etc. as fun requires knowledge and skills developed in the social context. When asked to describe how it felt to have fun or what was the experience like, consumers had no trouble ‘rationalising’ their fun practices and explaining what made them fun (discursive consciousness). However, when they were asked to think what fun is, they were often lost for words even though they could clearly distinguish episodes that were experienced as fun from those that were not (practical consciousness).

As the findings demonstrate, fun dispositions can be developed through personal experience, in the process of socialisation, as well as interaction with different forms of culture. It is often the case that dispositions adopted from other people, from movies, books or mass media fit in what is perceived as a norm for fun having in the social groups one belongs to. Then, within the experience individuals experience a surge of positive affective states and social connectedness, their selves are liberated and their normality is transgressed giving them a breather from boring routines. It is discussed by consumers in purely positive terms. When they reflect on such experiences, they do not face or suspect that they may face any judgement, since they did not cross the boundaries of what is accepted as ‘appropriate’ fun practices, which potentially contributes to their ontological security. Additionally, when experienced fun is considered a shield from anxiety, stress, sadness or work overload, it adds another level of ontological security.

In contrast, when consumers develop fun dispositions (most likely through personal experience in that case) that go against the perceived fun norms they feel they should adhere to, the experience is still described in the same positive terms, but the reflection

on disposition is followed by self-perception issues that elicit negative affective states and potentially breach ontological security. They may experience or expect negative judgements and perceive the expressions of the self as constrained. That scenario implies a choice: one can drop the fun practices that may not be approved by peers, family, colleagues, any other relevant social group or faceless 'some people', or continue engaging in that practice. The engagement may be overt, when individuals prefer to stand their ground and be explicit about what they do for fun, or covert, when they decide not to talk about it in the presence of those who may impose the norm.

The need for ontological security may contribute to the reproduction of the fun structures, meaning that consumers stick to fun practices that are 'appropriate' for their age, gender, religious views, social status and role, etc. On the other hand, those who persist with the fun practices perceived to be outside of the norm may contribute to the transformation of the structure, especially if others follow their lead.

6.4 Consumer fun as disposition: Structure

Agency and liberation of the experienced fun meets the constraint of fun dispositions operating as structures. Structures, according to Giddens, are 'recursively organized sets of rules and resources' used by actors in their interaction (1984, p. 25). Empirically they are reflected in norms, prohibitions, laws, rituals, and expectations in particular social contexts (Humphreys, 2014). Structures transcend time and space, applying both in the past and in the future, as well as in multiple places (Klesel et al., 2015). The notion of structure can be explored in comparison with language. Both involve definite rules and both do not exist in the form of objective reality in the external world independently of their use: structure is manifested in practices, language – in speaking and writing. Although the 'virtual' reality of language is reproduced every time one speaks or writes, the intention of the individual is to communicate a message, not reproduce the language. Similarly, each time the structure is expressed in the practice, a person intends to engage in the practice, not reproduce the structure (Johnson, 2008).

Two constitutive elements of structures are rules and resources. Rules are ''generalizable procedures' and 'methodologies' that reflexive agents possess in their implicit 'stocks of knowledge' and that they employ as 'formulas' for action in 'social systems' (specific empirical contexts of interaction)' (Turner, 1986, p. 972). These

rules are informal and known tacitly, used in daily routines, interaction rituals and conversations, and widely sanctioned (Ranson et al., 1980). Resources within structure refer to the material equipment and organizational capacities of actors that allow them to participate in practices (Jochoms & Rutgers, 2006). Rules and resources are not static, they can be created, altered and used together in various combinations. They are also mediating in the sense that actors rely on them to tie social relations together (Riley, 1983).

Giddens (1984) identified two types of rules within ST: constitutive and regulative. The former establish and define the nature of the social reality that actors produce, and the latter govern the way that reality is supposed to function and provide sanctions for violations (ibid). In a simplified way the application of these rules can be illustrated through the model of the organised game. The constitutive rules define the essence of the game (how many players are required, what are their goals, what kind of equipment they use, etc.) and regulative rules dictate how the game should be played (how players' goals can be achieved, what specific actions are allowed or banned) (Johnson, 2008). While the game rules are usually clearly defined and explicitly stated, in the significant amount of social practices rules are quite ambiguous, which results in inconsistencies in actors' definitions of what is (or supposed to be) going on and which rules they should follow in a particular scenario. Even though people share widespread implicit knowledge about conduct in specific practices, misunderstandings and disagreements about what rules should be applied still often take place in social life (Bryant & Jary, 1991)

Resources in structuration theory are also grouped in two categories: allocative and authoritative (Giddens, 1984). Allocative resources imply material assets used in production and consumption, and their role in structuration rests on actual physical possession as well as the rights to use them is a socially appropriate way. While allocative resources enable control over objects, authoritative resources enable control over people and imply the ability or right to influences actions of others (Klesel et al., 2015). 'Both types of resources in Giddens' notion of structure may be subsumed under his general concept of rules. In essence, then, structure may be seen as consisting of constitutive and regulative rules, plus rules that establish rights to control material objects and/or the behavior of others in their roles as subordinates in some type of power structure' (Johnson, 2008, p. 466). While structures are both

constraining and enabling, people in different segments of society face different proportions of enablement and constraint due to the uneven distribution of resources and power. People as agents have the ability to intervene in the course of events, however, the opportunities to do so vary greatly between the representatives of different socioeconomic classes or people on the different levels in hierarchical structures (Giddens, 1984).

Finally, structures in ST are considered to include three different dimensions: signification (related to meaning), domination (related to power), and legitimation (related to norms) (Bryant & Jary, 1991). On the level of personal interactions between agents, they operate as communication, power, and sanction respectively (Nunu et al., 2019). Signification implies the meaning and interpretive schemes that actors rely on for interpretation of social events, being able to make sense of their own and others' conduct as a result (Ardley & May, 2020). Domination is concerned with the ways power is applied, particularly regarding control of resources that leads to reinforcement or change of structures (Gibbs, 2013). Legitimation revolves around morality and refers to the applications of norms, standards and values that sanction agents' behaviours (Buhr, 2002).

On the level of disposition, fun operates as a structure – enabling and constraining at the same time. On the one hand, a systematic understanding that certain entities in consumers' worlds are fun for them provide a familiar and understandable frame of reference and guidance in terms of where fun experience can be obtained. Although there is no guarantee that experienced fun will definitely emerge every single time in the contexts labelled as fun (e.g. due to the personal, interpersonal and situational disruptive factors), still consumers rely on their existing fun dispositions to develop a set of expectations and knowledge about what one has to do or where one has to go to have fun. If a person finds playing rugby fun, they then know what kind of constitutive elements need to be put together for fun to (likely) emerge: individual needs to get the uniform and equipment, get to the pitch, meet the teammates, start the game, etc. Although fun is a nebulous and elusive phenomenon, dispositions help people to pin it down in familiar contexts, eliminating the need to elaborate every single time on whether fun can be experienced in a particular scenario and serving a similar role to heuristic. If an activity is labelled is fun, there is a solid possibility that engaging with it will result in experienced fun. In that sense fun dispositions are enabling for people.

On the other hand, development and application of dispositions is in many ways restrained. The choice of dispositions is not completely free. Considering that pretty much anything in consumers' worlds can be perceived as fun, they are still not choosing from the full variety of potential experiences. Some potential fun scenarios will be inaccessible due to the material limitations: people from lower socioeconomic classes may struggle to find shopping in luxury boutiques fun if they cannot afford it. Moreover, as the inferences from the data demonstrated, dispositions are constructed on personal, interpersonal, and socio-cultural levels. Not only the personal experience but the membership in various social groups and engagement with different manifestations of culture affects what a consumer would label as fun. If one can mostly choose who to have fun with on the level of experience, in many cases the social groups are not the matter of choice, people just find themselves a part of a family, one of the classmates or colleagues. One cannot choose or control whose fun dispositions they may adopt in the process of socialisation. Besides, dispositions do not just help to identify the contexts in which consumers are likely to experience a surge of positive affective states, liberation of self, social connectedness and transgression of normality, they also prescribe what is appropriate or inappropriate in relation to fun for a particular person as a member of specific social groups, contributing to the identity development.

Fun dispositions imply a tacitly understood set of rules that can be quite fluid and ambiguous. The constitutive rules – what defines fun – differ from consumer to consumer. The importance of the main elements constituting the experience varies: some emphasise social connectedness above all, some mostly focus on feeling carefree and leaving all responsibilities behind, for some the key to fun is being the person they really are, for yet others the achievement-oriented facet of fun that does not necessarily translate into a disposition is on the foreground. The regulative rules governing who can have fun how, where, when, with who, how often and how much, are also vague and equivocal. There is no unified law stating that an adult is not supposed to consider 'childish' Disney movies fun or that a father must participate in fun activities of his children instead of watching them from the side, however, consumers do express the pressure of various perceived and socially constructed norms that affect their self-perception.

Access to and control of resources also plays an important role in development and application of fun dispositions. As previously mentioned, limited possession of material

(allocative) resources may limit the variety of potential contexts that can be labelled fun. Besides, individuals (and institutions) with authoritative resources may impose specific fun dispositions on others or, alternatively, stop the people on the lower level of hierarchical structures from developing certain dispositions. Thus, in the case of the Singaporean politics built on the premise of the 'fun state', the government and leisure providers built numerous barriers for people from lower socioeconomic classes to adopt such fun practices as gambling at mega-casino resorts, while the representatives of the higher classes were most welcome (Zhang & Yeoh, 2017). While that step was intentionally made, reorganising the city space and turning the river bank into a complex of high-end restaurants and shopping malls inaccessible for certain public unintentionally resulted in the similar block of fun (Elinoff & Gillen, 2019). As the literature review demonstrated, employers (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009; Sørensen & Spoelstra, 2011) and marketers (Szmigin et al., 2008; McMullan & Miller, 2010; Elliott, 2015; Coulter, 2021) as people with often higher authoritative resources compared to employees and consumers, attempt to impose specific fun dispositions on others in pursuit of specific objectives (e.g. boosting the productivity or diverting attention from harmful and/or morally ambiguous nature of products and services).

Three dimensions of structure within ST (signification, domination, and legitimation) (Giddens, 1984) are also reflected in fun on the disposition level. Reflecting on personal fun experiences and communicating about them is based on interpretive schemes that allow consumers to makes sense of their own experience and interpret fun of others (signification). Telling the stories of what they do for fun individuals accentuate and attenuate specific details depending on who they are talking to, and make disclaimers such as 'this sounds silly', 'this is going to sound weird', 'sounds horrible but…', 'this makes me look miserable'. The findings closely correspond with the position of Fincham (2016, p. 193): 'The communication of both humour and fun relies on understanding what the collective memory of appropriate behaviour, response or way of communicating is. This is a learned process, one which involves immersion in a culture in such a way that fun is understood to consist of certain features, something is experienced which may or may not be fun, and is then replayed back as fun'.

Domination in fun is revealed when people enforce certain fun dispositions in the situation of inequality (where the degree of inequality may vary). It can be manifested

in the situations when parents try to persuade their children to stop playing with toys and find something ‘less childish’ for fun, when managers make a judgement about their subordinates based on the fun dispositions of the latter who then may choose to conceal certain parts of their identities, or when religious authorities explain to their followers what kind of fun is allowed or accepted and falls in line with particular systems of belief. Such enforcement often reproduces structure, but it does not necessarily mean that those who are on the receiving side always adopt (rather than reject) the suggested dispositions. Besides, parents or managers, or any other type of authority do not represent any united coalitions imposing the same rules and norms, the latter may vary significantly between particular families, companies and other organised hierarchical social groups and depend on personal values and beliefs of specific people.

In terms of legitimation, consumers reflexively monitor their own conduct and that of others when it comes to fun, making and receiving judgement if certain dispositions seem to fall out of the implicitly understood norms and rules which provide basis for sanctions. The violators may be praised by someone who also engages in innovative behaviour with the potential transformative effects on the structure, but they can also be disapproved of, labelled with negative terms, and potentially ostracised.

Rules and resources, pre-existing conventions (structures) shape and constrain fun practices, while providing the framework within which consumers can interpret fun; consumers as agents, in turn, continually recreate or transform the structures through their participation in fun practises in habitual or novel manner. Agency and structure interact and affect each other within the multifaceted phenomenon of consumer fun through the process of structuration.

6.5 Structuration of consumer fun

In the experienced fun, consumer agency is exercised through the expression of free will, intrinsic motivation, liberated self and normality transgression, while on the level of disposition, people are often bound by implicitly known socially constructed systems of norms and rules guiding behavioural choices that can ultimately affect self-perception (when communicated to and interpreted by others). Engagement in fun practices represents a blend of freedom and control where one or the other can take precedence over time, as structural effects (enablement and restraint) meet

behavioural effects (reproduction and change). Agents may be susceptible to the pressure of norms to varying degrees, and while some actors have fun 'the way they are supposed to' in accordance with their age, gender, social status, or membership in specific social groups, others challenge the norm, find novel fun practices and stick to them which may gradually lead to structural transformation. Beckman (2014) presents the whole American history from the foundation of the country to the present day as the story of oppressed people who used fun as a rebellion against the order of society they found themselves in, whether in the puritanical colonies of the East, or the frontier of the West, from dances and music of African-American slaves, to parties of Jazz age, hippies' summers and protest of the punks. A major part of what was then a fun of counterculture is now considered a version of mainstream cultural manifestations after more and more people have been engaging in the fun practices of the few. Structures governing fun are constantly evolving with some elements being almost intact for centuries and some other elements undergoing significant changes.

As the literature review demonstrated, the attitudes towards having fun have changed significantly between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, what was initially considered a sin turned into a sought-after important element of well-being (Bryant & Forsyth, 2005). What counted as 'appropriate' fun practices has also been a subject of major changes and many things considered fun throughout human history (e.g. gladiatorial combat, public torture, and slaughter of wild animals in classical Greco-Roman times) are now rejected as unacceptable, cruel and criminal, labelled 'Dark Leisure' (Rojek, 2013; Spracklen, 2018). It is important to note that since the word 'fun' appeared in English language only four centuries ago (Oxford English Dictionary online, n.d.), it is not possible to determine whether the spectators of these events were having fun in the same sense contemporary consumers have it, yet, such entertainment of the Ancient world is described in the literature (e.g. Dunkle, 2013) in the similar terms that people use to describe fun in the present day. In later times, people with physical abnormalities, fools and jesters were seen as sources of often degrading and violent fun. 'People laughed at executions, jeered at women stripped and carted for suspected witchcraft or adultery … and taunted mad men howling in their cages' (Brown, 2010, p. 324). Fun in contemporary society appears to be much more humanistic.

Fun is also more encouraged and desired nowadays. The data reveal very strong positive general attitudes of consumers towards fun as a part of their lives. It is considered highly important, valuable, and even giving life its worth. At the same time, fun is still often perceived as secondary to more 'serious' life endeavours such as work and various forms of role-required responsibilities. Fun in that sense is needed as a breather, an opportunity to recharge and distract oneself from obligations and commitments in order to get back straight to them with the renewed stocks of energy. Fun is then enjoyed not for the sake of fun itself but as a means to getting other, more 'useful' or 'serious' things done. The idea of fun as an idle and autotelic pastime (McKee, 2008, 2016) is rejected on the basis of productivity orientation – the tendency of being constantly productive, making progress, and accomplishing more in less time (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). As a result, for some people fun needs to be earned and justified.

The Western culture (especially American) has long been criticised for the strong devotion to the productivity orientation deeply rooted in the puritanical work ethic, which discourages frivolous use of time (Lewis & Weigert 1981; Rifkin, 1987). Cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead (1957) argued that in the American culture, in order to enjoy leisure without guilt one has to earn it by past or future work. West Point Military Academy, one of the oldest of its kind in the US, considers unproductive use of time a form of punishment: delinquent cadets are forced to walk aimlessly for hours which is perceived as more frustrating than alternative methods of penalising (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). The findings from the data (British consumers) can be perfectly illustrated by the words of Wilson (1981) who further critiqued Americans for their attitudes to idle play: 'Our culture, although superficially pleasure-loving and apparently exhibiting an almost frenzied dedication to play, is really quite uncompromising in its orientation toward this central human activity. Play is not honored for its own sake: it is either consigned to the domain of the frivolous and meaningless, or alternatively subsumed under instrumental goal-striving as a species of work or preparation for work. Thus our often-remarked devotion to sport is un-leisured in essence, being the grimly serious pursuit of victory or perfection. The child's play is construed solely as rehearsal for the solemn tasks of adulthood. (It is indeed this, but not only or most significantly). The adult's play, when not viewed as a category of work (e.g., the role of the professional

athlete), is thought of as a kind of necessary evil, a ‘timeout’ to refresh body and mind for the real world of work’ (p. 298).

The argument above demonstrates that certain structures governing fun have been transformed. Although cruel and degrading fun can still be found in the society (Fine & Corte, 2021), it has become sanctioned. Public executions do not count as family entertainment anymore. On the other hand, one of the basic premises of the puritanical morality – rejection of idleness – that initially governed attitudes towards fun has remained. Fun is not banned as something crude, base, and sinful as it used to be (Wolfenstein, 1951), yet, the pendulum has not made the full swing. For some consumers productivity orientation interferes with fun, eliciting guilt if one has not ‘deserved’ the right to leave responsibilities and ‘serious business’ behind and do something ‘just for fun’.

Another prominent example of transformation of structure lies in the perceived contrast between the fun of children and fun of adults emerging from the data. Children’s fun is considered to be the most natural, ‘undiluted’, ‘unabided’ form of fun that is barely accessible for adults overwhelmed with obligations and commitments. The difference between the fun of children and adults can be illustrated through the continuum from rule-following to being unrestrained in Caillois’s (1961) typology of play. The rule-following end of the continuum is called ludus and the opposing end is represented by intrinsically motivated and self-oriented role-breaking behaviour called paida. Ludus is the Latin word for play or game and involves ‘playfully following arbitrary, imperative, and purposely limiting conventions (Caillois, 1961, p. 13). Paida, deriving from the demotic Greek word for child, is characterised by uncontrolled fantasy, active improvisation, carefree gaiety, behaving without regard for role expectations (ibid., p.13). Relationships between freedom of action and adherence to a set of rules are used as criteria in distinguishing between different types of play by several researchers. Thus, Garvey (1990) contrasts spontaneous and voluntary play with rule-bound games. In a similar line of thinking Goffman (1974, p. 57) views objects in play as ‘quite temporary, never fully established’, while in games they are ‘institutionalized—stabilized as it were—just as the arena of action is fixed by the formal rules of activity’.

Fun of children (who are mostly free from responsibilities as well as social expectations) leans towards paida and fun of adults (who are often restrained by commitments and expectations of others) – towards ludus. As follows from the data, adults are not always capable of reaching the same threshold of freedom as children (i.e. they cannot have fun like children do), and at the same time, adults who label 'childish' things as fun may face judgement from others since such fun is 'age-inappropriate' (i.e. they should not have fun like children do). In addition, the participants expressed the view that childhood is naturally the time for fun and play which is almost perceived as raison d'etre till a human being reaches a certain age (with no particular agreement on what age it should be). Therefore, there appear to be tacitly known socially constructed rules (perceived as something organic and commonsensical) stating that (a) children should be having fun, the essence of childhood is fun and (b) adults should not be having fun of children (unless it is vicarious), they should be having 'adult' fun.

In can be argued that both rules are the elements of structures that have been gradually transformed. Thus, childhood as a separate period in human life that ends at the specific point and implies a number particular features is a relatively new social construct. Postman ([1982] 1994) tracks the history of childhood and notes that, for example, in early antiquity there was no separation between adults and children and very young human beings were treated in a ferocious manner (from slavery to infant sacrifice). Later, the tradition of schooling in Athens became a driver of establishing such separation when people who have developed a certain knowledge capital through education were considered adults, and those who have not yet obtained it did not reach adulthood. For Romans, the cornerstone concept defining childhood was shame, in the sense that intimate and 'embarrassing' issues such as sex or death had to be concealed from children who should be taught 'correct' virtues instead. In the middle ages, the border between childhood and adulthood became very blurry again, seven- eight-year-olds often worked as apprentices, from the age of ten people had to fully abide by the laws of the Church and the state (ibid.). Therefore, the structure binding childhood and fun appears to be a result of the gradual transformation of social order. Such major shifts can barely be reduced to the role and actions of specific and clearly identified agents since the construct of childhood and its essential elements has been changing due to such social and economic factors as reformation of

education, invention of typography, secularisation of society, development of industrial capitalism, introduction of mass media, etc. and varied considerably between the countries and cultures (Postman, [1982] 1994). Yet, these changes did not take place independently from conscious mind and human action, and were brought to life by multiple people engaging in novel and innovative behaviours.

Moreover, the idea that human beings who are not children anymore are supposed to be having fun without 'childish' attributes is also being challenged by the structural transformation. The lack of seriousness, frivolity and levity of fun does not strongly correlate with ideas adulthood is often defined through (Fincham, 2016). One way of solving this problem is trying to keep some elements of a 'younger identity' to legitimise more 'childish' forms of fun in life. In recent years the idea of infantilisation of consumer culture has gained popularity across social sciences and many researchers report that linear transition from youth to adulthood loses its position as a norm (Calcutt, 2000; Heath & Potter, 2006; Barber, 2007; Smith, 2014). There are a lot of interruptions and reversals in the journey to adulthood and extended adolescence is becoming a widespread phenomenon (Currie, 2005). It might be happening due to the social-economic and cultural influence of labour flexibilisation, decline of industrial employment, and the individualism of consumer culture (Oesterle et al., 2004; Winlow & Hall, 2009; Lloyd, 2012; Bengtson et al., 2012). As a result consumers exhibit the behavioural patterns of young people that are often manifested in chasing fun and pleasure, avoiding missing out on new experiences and engaging in circuits of hedonic consumption (Raymen & Smith, 2017). The tendency to prolong adolescence is liberating since it implies compliance with less rules and norms which creates more space for having fun. Looking at the 30-40-year-olds engaged with the rave culture Goulding & Shankar (2004) find that for the studied group cognitive age was 'out of synch' with chronological age and expressed in feeling and looking younger than their actual years as well as holding interests normally associated with a much younger age group.

The call for letting out an inner child is utilised in multiple brand campaigns around the world (McDonald's (Australia), Volkswagen (France), Haribo (France), Ford (United States), Audi (United States), Kia (United States), Evian (worldwide)) (Oliver, 2016). Analysing consumer infantilisation in Las Vegas, Belk (2000) notes that that those leaving cognitive, rational, adult control behind make better gamblers and better

consumers in general, with higher expenditures and less compliance to restrictive norms. From a wider perspective, the whole domain of experiential consumption is built around the importance of the primary process thinking ruled by the pleasure principle (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). This type of thinking directs task definitions towards hedonic response and is called ‘primary’ because if refers to way a baby pursues immediate pleasure or gratification (Hilgard, 1962). Therefore, seeking for fun the way children do is being legitimised.

While structures related to fun are reproduced and transformed through the human actors’ execution of practices, marketers, acting as agents themselves, also contribute to the structuration of fun.

6.6 Marketisation of fun as a part of fun structuration

Intensive commodification and marketing of leisure in the Western world taking place from the mid-nineteenth century onwards made a strong contribution to the transition of mostly self-organised fun with emphasised agency to the mass-entertainment provided and controlled by corporations with the structure coming to the foreground (Butsch, 1990). For example, marketing strategies adopted by sporting goods manufacturers in the nineteenth century included the standardisation of sports rules and products that could be sold to the mass-market (Hardy, 1990), therefore fun of sports participation was becoming a subject of more and more constraints and tied to the possession of specific resources (for example, knowing the football rules, owning baseball bats and balls, having access to the tennis court). Another example of the prevailing structure is the policy of stimulating regional economies through recreational industries developed by the US Forest Service after the World War II. The agency was building roads, campgrounds and other facilities and encouraged related local business with the goal of packaging and promoting ‘the forest experience’ for tourists but at the same time expropriating the forest from local residents (Greer, 1990). The fun of interaction with nature was then given structural properties regulating how, when and where such fun could take place. The gradual transformation of other structures shaping social life were followed by the changes in the structures guiding fun of women. The Victorian morality still prevalent in the nineteenth-century United States prescribed home-based recreations (and by extension fun) to both middle-class ladies of leisure and working class-women. However, the commercial success of rapidly

growing entertainment industries partly depended on reintroducing women into public leisure. At the turn of the century, the fight for women's rights and emancipation was further supported by marketing strategies persuading consumers that certain public amusements were 'respectable' enough for women to engage with. Thus, the promotion of dance halls and amusement parks appealed to single working women offering them an opportunity to experiment with new definitions of propriety (Peiss, 1990). Therefore, on the one hand, women were exercising more agency in their fun, having a choice of how and where to have it, yet, on the other hand, they were still constrained by the structural properties guiding them towards 'appropriate' fun forms.

Nevertheless, the structure was not entirely dominating the establishment and development of entertainment industries, and leisure commodities were often a result of symbiotic cooperation between consumers and corporations. Thus, the hobby industry enjoyed the contribution of small entrepreneurial efforts by hobbyists themselves, specialty publications, national organisations, and large suppliers of hobby goods (Butsch, 1984; Moorhouse, 1986). In the 1950s, American radio stations and recording industry experienced a surge of consumer agency when in the attempts to replace the listeners lost to television they started playing a broader range of music such as appealing to the youth rhythm-and-blues and rock-n-roll, and later were repeatedly drawing on subcultural and countercultural musical traditions, following the desires of their audience (Peterson & Berger, 1975). Besides, when new fun-related structures were introduced or enforced through marketing communications, they were not necessarily adopted as such by consumers. After the seismic shift in the attitudes towards fun when the previously dominating values of self-denial gave way to the ideas of self-fulfilment and having as much fun as one possibly can (Wolfenstein, 1951; Butsch, 1990) structural changes in society found their reflection in structural changes in marketing. Advertisers were quick to step in and started positioning a wide range of products, from cream puff mix to baby shampoo, to handbags, to hats, to car tyres as fun that rather elicited perplexity than general agreement that all that is indeed fun (Kiell, 1961). Moreover, while fun as a part of the perceived brand image has been found to have a positive effect on brand preference for hedonic products and services, it may negatively affect brand preference for utilitarian offers (Oh, 2020).

Consumer fun represents the continuing interplay of agency and structure. On the level of experience agency often prevails, therefore, by enabling and encouraging

consumers to have fun within brand encounters marketers can potentially boost that agency. It is, however, not a simple task, considering that fun is fleeting, unstable and prone to dissolution under the influence of a wide range of personal, interpersonal and situational disrupting factors. It follows from the data that marketing professionals working with the construct of fun do not see the fun experience as something that can be generated, produced or delivered in the readily available form despite the discourse of 'making marketing / store / website / consumer experience fun' (Kruger, 2001; Morgan & Rao, 2003; Windels, 2012; Davis, 2016; Cochran, 2016; Green, 2018; Ellis, 2019; Woods, 2019). Marketers acknowledge the importance of fun experienced by their customers in the mostly hedonic and experiential consumption contexts (Theme Park, Pubs, Motor Racing Championship, Popular Culture Convention, UK City of Culture Programme, Volunteer Youth Organisation activities, Organisation of Female Professionals in Football Industry events) but do not typically tie it closely with quantifiable objectives (e.g. increased spending, prolonged brand encounters, stronger customer loyalty) and do not directly identify or measure it in the requested feedback.

The emergence of consumer fun on the spot is seen by the marketing professionals as a result of the co-creation where marketers and customers both need to invest certain effort for fun to take place. Marketers identify positive affective states, social connection, and transgression of normality as key constitutive elements of consumer experienced fun (in a very consistent manner with consumers themselves articulating their fun), however, they pay significantly less attention to the sense of liberation that fun provides to consumers or to the achievement-oriented facet of fun. When it comes to the ways of enabling consumer fun they mostly focus on the quality of the core offer (e.g. food and service in the pub or the availability of the rides in the theme park), the opportunity for customers to enjoy something together as a group, the diversity of the elements within the offer where everyone can find something appealing, and the transgression of customers' normality. Although the feeling of liberation from what one has to do and who one has to be is to the most part internally driven and no external circumstances can guarantee it, the explicit appeal to the temporary alleviation of responsibilities and commitments, and being 'who you really are' in the marketing communications can potentially help to elicit the perceived freedom that experienced fun revolves around. Giving consumers a chance to feel unrestrained and capable of

making choices, deciding for themselves how they want the fun experience within brand encounter to unfold may boost the agency side of fun structuration.

Positioning the brand as a fun one, working on the level of disposition, reflects the structure. Although in order for fun label to stick to the brand or the product a reinforcement from the actually experienced fun may be needed, what exactly is positioned as fun in the marketing communications, how it is visualised, what kind of people are presented playing specific roles and how the message is framed serves as a source of information for consumers about 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' fun practices. Once this information is incorporated into the existing mental schemes that consumers use to understand and interpret the world, their sense of self may be affected positively (in case the information is consistent with the fun norms currently applied by the individual) or negatively (when the consistency is not reached). Marketing communications can reproduce the existing structures when they reinforce the socially constructed fun norms. For example, when fun of boys is conveyed in advertising through the 'masculine' engagement with physical activity and exploration of the world, while fun of girls is represented through 'feminine' giggles, wide smiles, hugging and taking selfies with friends (Coulter, 2021). Alternatively, marketing communications appealing to fun can challenge and potentially transform structures when they introduce and normalise new or more inclusive fun practices. Thus, Lego positions some of its products as a source of fun for people from 4 to 99 years old (Lego, 2022), opposing the perceived norm that playing with bricks is a 'childish' form of fun. Individual marketers utilising the construct of fun in their practice act like agents, on the one hand, making choices and decisions in terms of how they want to communicate the message about fun and how they can help their customers to elicit the experienced fun. On the other hand, however, they act within existing frames of reference and rely on the rules provided by structures guiding not only what the target audience is 'supposed' to do for fun, but also what the brand is about on more general level, what are the brand values, what kind of offering they market and the resources they have. Therefore, the marketisation of fun also represents a manifestation of the interaction between agency and structure.

6.7 Chapter summary

The contrast between freedom and constraint identified in the literature review is further illuminated by the consumer data. While the literature would typically emphasise one or the other: production, control and purposeful use of fun (Plester et al., 2015; Elliott, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2016; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019) or freedom, transgression and idleness (McKee, 2008; Fincham, 2016; Oh & Pham, 2022), this work explores their duality. This chapter provided the discussion of findings in the light of the Giddens' structuration theory illuminating the interaction of agency (revealed on the level of fun as experienced) and structure (operating on the level of fun as disposition) within the phenomenon of fun and elucidated the contribution of marketing in the processes of structural reinforcement and transformation.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Fun is a multifaceted, omnipresent but elusive phenomenon that represents an important part of consumer experience within and beyond the marketplace. It elicits positive affective states, distracts consumers from the drudgery of routines, gives them the sense of freedom, brings people together in the positive social interaction and is believed to be essential for a fulfilling life. At the same time, engaging with certain fun practices may elicit guilt, shame, and dissonance in self-perception, undermine self-confidence, drive interpersonal misunderstanding, and potentially lead to social separation. Having too much fun may be undesirable, but having too little is also not a safe option for the development and display of a socially accepted identity. Consumers have a complicated and dynamic, culturally mediated relationship with fun, where fun experience and its further interpretation may become almost polar opposites. The way consumers reflect on their fun experiences and develop systematic understanding that certain entities in their lives are fun for them is affected by age, gender, social class, belonging to particular social groups and cultures. Fun is argued to exist for its own sake, yet multiple attempts are being made to use it as a driver for achieving external goals. The calls for 'making marketing fun' are strong (e.g. Smith, 2019; Bengualid, 2019; Hausman, 2020), however, academics as well as marketing practitioners still struggle to give fun a definition.

This thesis addresses the gaps and paradoxes surrounding the construct of fun identified in the literature review and provides an in-depth understanding of consumer fun informed by consumers' and marketers' perspectives, presenting it not as just a psychological but rather as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

This chapter brings the thesis to a close. It begins by reporting the key findings in relation to the four research questions, arising from the hermeneutic analysis of 32 interviews with consumers and 7 interviews with marketers, and stating how the aim of the study (to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of fun) was met. It then proceeds to discussing the theoretical contribution of this work to the fields of experiential consumption and fun studies. The overview of the contribution to the existing knowledge is followed by the recommendations to marketing professionals

adopting the construct of fun in the brand promotion. Finally, the chapter addresses the potential limitations of the study and presents the future research agenda informed by the findings.

7.2 Research questions and main findings

The research questions were informed by the literature review, considering the interest of marketing practitioners in the construct of fun as well as its active usage in the marketing practice, on the one hand, and highlighted importance paired with the lack of in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in marketing and consumer literature, on the other hand. The RQs addressed the perspectives of consumers and marketers in relation to the phenomenon of fun first separately and then together, exploring the points of alignment and misalignment between the two sides. The consumers' understanding of fun was also explored on two levels of abstraction: specific experience located in space and time (fun as experienced) and the systematic understanding that certain activities, places, times, objects, etc. in consumers' lives are fun for them (fun as disposition) representing more general reflections on and attitudes to fun. Research questions 1 and 2, exploring the consumers' stance on fun were addressed in chapter 4; research questions 3 and 4, looking at the marketers' position were discussed in chapter 5.

In brief, the proposed RQs of the study can be answered in the following manner.

RQ1: How is fun experienced by consumers?

The data revealed two facets of the experienced fun: liberating and achievement-oriented, that have distinctive features, yet are not mutually exclusive: similar experience may fall towards being perceived as one or the other by different consumers or by the same person on different occasions. The two facets share two key constitutive elements, namely, the surge of strong positive affective states and positive social interaction. Talking about the experienced fun consumers emphasise feeling excitement, thrill, happiness, buzz, amusement, exhilaration, and, above all, enjoyment. Joining the debate about distinguishing fun with other positive states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Podilchak, 1991a; Scanlan & Simons, 1992; Strean & Holt, 2000; Dix, 2014; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018) this study acknowledges that fun and enjoyment are closely connected, yet, the specific nature

of that relationship may differ for different consumers depending on how they make sense of their own experiences. Fun and enjoyment may be interchangeable, fun can be considered a subset of enjoyment, fun may precede enjoyment, or the two constructs can have different orientations, with fun being perceived as more active and social, and enjoyment as more restful and personal. The social interaction within experienced fun is also understood by consumers as its core element. In the liberating facet, the social connectedness, unity, and bonding is emphasised, while in the achievement-oriented facet social cooperation and working together towards a common goal come to the foreground. As previously discussed, consumers do not completely reject the existence of solitary fun, contrary to some views in the literature on fun (e.g. Podilchak, 1986, 1991a).

The major distinction between the two facets of the experienced fun lies in the emphasised relaxation and letting go of any constraints within liberating fun as opposed to mental concertation and effort engaged in the achievement-oriented fun. The former rests on mentally separating oneself from responsibilities and commitments (in line with Fincham, 2016; Oh & Pham, 2022), as well as personas and images typically displayed in non-fun situations, therefore, resulting in the liberation of self. Additionally, liberating facet of fun implies a perceived contrast between the occasions framed as fun and routine normality, emotionally neutral, articulated as serious and/or boring, often consisting of necessities rather than free choices that characterise fun. Achievement-oriented fun, in contrast, does not imply the abandonment of obligations, can be experienced in the situations where one indeed has to be responsible, includes goal-directed state of mind and focus on reward. While liberating fun is mostly translated from the experience mode into dispositions, achievement-oriented fun is often experienced in the scenarios that are not generally labelled as fun.

Consumers are capable of entering the fun framing of reality marking the start of the fun experience with varying degrees of difficulty. Some consumers can ‘summon’ fun relatively easily and their intention to have fun almost always results in experiencing it, while others feel powerless in relation to experienced fun that ‘comes and goes by itself’. Additionally, experienced fun is susceptible to disruption by personal, interpersonal, and situational factors that consumers (and marketers) often do not have control over. Finally, while fun is typically praised and desired by consumers as

an important contributor to well-being, the productivity orientation rooted in puritanical morality may tie experienced fun with guilt and the notion of deservedness when one has to 'earn' the right to have fun. Therefore, from the consumers' perspective, fun is not consistently considered idle and enjoyed for its own sake, in contrast to the position of McKee (2008, 2016). For some it is rather a sort of the coping mechanism, allowing people to face the worries, stress, and anxiety of their lives with more internal resistance and have a breather from overwhelming responsibilities.

RQ2: How are dispositions of fun constructed, shared and reflected upon by consumers?

Consumers label certain entities in their lives as fun, developing dispositions through personal experience, process of socialisation, and engagement with culture they belong to. The fun labels are not static and can be attached, removed, and reattached to activities, places, times, etc. Fincham (2016) briefly indicates that fun contributes to the identity formation and what an individual considers fun tells others a story about who that person is and how to approach them. This study reveals a more detailed mechanics of interaction between the concepts of self, society and norm operating in a very different manner on the levels of experience and disposition. Within experienced fun self is liberated, normality is transgressed, and social connectedness is present. When it comes to fun dispositions, consumers are expected to develop the dispositions 'appropriate' to their age, gender, social class, etc. People see themselves as subjects to the socially constructed and implicitly understood sets of norms governing how representatives of particular groups are supposed to have fun. If one violates such norms, they risk facing negative judgement from others, that affects the perception of self. Thus, self becomes constrained, transgression turns into compliance with social norms, and social connectedness takes the form of social influence and potentially social separation.

The interplay of freedom and restraint in fun can be illuminated through the application of Giddens' (1984) structuration theory with fun as experienced representing agency and fun as disposition – structure. The structure provides a necessary frame of reference for consumers to experience fun, make sense of it, communicate about it, and reflect on it. At the same time, it restricts the choice of fun practices to the 'appropriate' ones. Agency, in turn, is expressed in liberation, proactivity and

voluntarism of experienced fun. Agents who abide by the fun rules reproduce and reinforce structures, but those who chose to engage in novel fun behaviours challenge the structure which may result in structural transformation where more practices are perceived as 'normal' for more consumers. Such inclusivity, in turn, may reduce the grip of restraint on the self and provide less foundation for judgement and social separation.

RQ3: How do marketing professionals adopt and implement the construct of fun in brand promotional activities?

Marketers work with the construct of fun on two levels as well (corresponding with fun as experienced and fun as disposition): they facilitate fun experiences of consumers within brand encounters (e.g. in theme parks, pubs, at the events and conventions, etc.) and use the construct of fun in marketing communications for brand positioning, developing the idea that a particular brand or offer is a fun one. The dispositions can be either solicited in their existing forms from the cultural world of consumers and adapted for the brand (a theme park is generally a fun place, therefore, our theme park is a fun place) or developed internally with specific goals in mind (e.g. when there is a need to tone down the seriousness and emphasise the enjoyable side of the offer). Although for consumers certain dispositions may exist for some time in the hypothetical form (for example, if significant others consider something fun, an individual may adopt this disposition and think of it as fun without personally experiencing it), marketers believe that for the brand to be positioned as fun reinforcement by experienced fun is needed.

The experience of fun on the spot, from the marketers' point of view, is a result of co-creation between organisers and consumers, marketing practitioners can create certain conditions that can help consumers enter fun framing, but they cannot impose fun on their customers, produce or deliver it. In order to enable experienced fun marketing professionals need to ensure the quality of the offer, delivering on the core promises; they also emphasise taking consumers outside of their normality, providing a variety of options for different consumers to engage with and giving the consumers an opportunity to get together and experience positive social interaction and connectedness. Despite considering fun an important attribute of the overall customer

experience, the marketers in the study do not turn it into a specific measurable objective due to its subjective, elusive, and fleeting nature.

RQ4: To what extent are marketers' understandings of the construct consistent with the consumers' articulations of fun?

There are several points where consumers' and marketers' perspectives overlap: both sides acknowledge positive affective states, social connectedness, and normality transgression as the constitutive elements of the experienced fun. Although achievement-oriented facet appeared in one of the marketers' narratives as a part of the organisational members experience built around a common goal, presenting playful challenges to customers for encouraging cooperation and striving towards achievement and reward to stimulate this side of experienced fun is not typically considered.

What is missing in the marketers' understanding of consumer fun is the element of self-liberation on the level of experience and the interaction of self, society and norm on the level of disposition. The tensions, mental discomfort and distorted self-perception that can be elicited by the inconsistency between personal and socially prescribed fun dispositions is overlooked, as well as the role of marketing communications in the formation of fun dispositions and their potential effects on the sense of self. Marketing professionals can promote and normalise certain practices and products as fun, and such dispositions may exist either in harmony with the current consumer ideas about what is 'supposed' to be fun for them, therefore, supporting and boosting their self-image, or contradict such ideas, thus, negatively affecting the sense of self.

Based on the findings of this study, fun can be defined as a subjective situational definition characterised by a surge of positive affective states, social connectedness, liberation of self, and transgression of normality, and constrained on reflection by socially constructed norms.

Overall, this thesis provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of fun based on the extensive review of the relevant literature, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data representing two sides: consumers and marketing professionals. In line with the hermeneutic phenomenological research principles (Heidegger, [1927] 1962; Gadamer, [1960] 1998), this understanding is not ultimate

or the only possible one, yet, it is deeply rooted in the data and results from the multi-staged journey along the hermeneutic circle including intensive engagement with participants' verbatims, thinking, reading, writing, re-writing, and visualisation of emerging ideas. Every effort was made to ensure the quality of the data, according to the trustworthiness criteria suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), namely: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The data were collected in multiple instances in the iterative process of interviewing and analysing the transcripts; previously analysed accounts were revisited as the analysis progressed and new meanings emerged; the in-depth phenomenological interviews were supplemented with the use of projective techniques in order to access more implicit thoughts, feelings and associations related to the construct of fun, altogether ensuring credibility. Establishing transferability, thick description of the research was provided with relevant details in terms of context and background highlighted, allowing to identify similarities in terms of consumer meanings and interpretations of fun across a variety of contexts. In order to ensure dependability, every phase of the research was documented, from formulation of research questions to decisions concerned with research design, to sampling and recruitment processes, to data collection and analysis, including arising problems and undertaken solutions. Finally, addressing the issue of confirmability, a detailed explanation of the underpinning research philosophy (hermeneutic phenomenology) as well as explicit reflection on the researcher's pre-understanding of the phenomenon was provided, additionally, the emphasis was made on giving voice to the participants by providing rich quotes of different interviewees.

7.3 Theoretical contributions

This study answers the call for the more detailed exploration of the phenomenon of fun as an essential part of human lived experience (McManus & Furnham, 2010; Wellard, 2014; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Anjaria & Anjaria, 2020; Wilk, 2022), that is also crucial for the successful adoption of the construct in marketing practice. While fun often appears in the literature as a peripheral subject (Bakir & Baxter, 2011) or the initial intention to explore fun turns into the examination of other related concepts (e.g. Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Williams, 2006), this work puts fun in the spotlight and unpacks multiple meanings assigned to the construct across a number of contexts, focussing not on what various consumers find fun but on how they come to the

understanding that certain entities in their lives are fun for them and how interaction with such entities is unfolding.

This research provides a theoretical contribution to several fields of academic literature. First, it continues the Consumer Culture Theory tradition in exploring experiential consumption that has previously identified fun as an important part of consumer experiences (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982. Celsi et al., 1993; Arnould & Price, 1993; Martin et al., 2006; Goulding et al., 2009, Murphy & Patterson, 2011; Canniford & Shankar, 2013) by suggesting an original and novel theorisation of consumer fun as a socio-cultural phenomenon, revealing the crucial links between fun, self and norm in the social context. The exploration of fun in this thesis goes beyond the experience itself and includes the analysis of the phenomenon on two levels of abstraction (experience and disposition) where the concepts of self, society and norm operate as their own mirror reflections. Following in the steps of Belk et al. (2003) who developed a phenomenological account of desire, exploring it as a powerful cyclical emotion that can be both discomforting and pleasurable, driven by self-seduction, longing, desire for desire, fear of being without desire, hopefulness, and tensions between seduction and morality, this work presents a hermeneutic phenomenological account of fun, a subjective situational definition that embraces liberation, transgression and social connectedness on the inside, but faces multiple restrictions from socially constructed norms on the outside, in the eternal circuit of longing for freedom and finding constraint. It also demonstrates how personal and deeply subjective lived experiences reflect wider dominant beliefs and myths about fun circulating in consumer culture and how consumer-to-consumer interactions as well as consumer interactions with marketing communications affect the interpretation of and reflection on individual experiences and ultimately influence self-perception.

Second, this work helps to further build the interdisciplinary nascent stream of literature concerned directly with the phenomenon of fun (Podilchak, 1986, 1991a, 1991b; McManus & Furnham, 2010; Fincham, 2016; McKee, 2008, 2016; Tasci & Ko, 2016; Reis et al., 2017; Fine & Corte, 2017; Blythe & Hassenzahl, 2018; Oh & Pham, 2022; Wilk, 2022). It further unfolds such ambiguous issues previously identified in these studies as distinguishing fun from other positive states such as enjoyment, pleasure, happiness (consumers interpret the relationships between these concepts individually and in different manner, therefore, it is barely possible to develop a strict

and unified differentiation measure); social nature of fun (consumers can have fun on their own as well as with others; they learn to appreciate certain things as fun through the process of socialisation; social context enables and constraints fun at the same time); idleness of fun (consumers do not perceive fun as direct means of achieving concrete and specific goals, yet, emphasise that ultimately experiences of fun contribute to general wellbeing, alleviating negative effects of stress and worries, in that sense seeking for experienced fun can turn into a goal-directed behaviour). It also brings to light previously overlooked themes such as fun disruption due to personal, interpersonal, and situational factors; perceived consumer agency in fun allowing some people to enter fun framing easier and faster than others; tensions between general positive attitudes to fun and guilt associated with having it in case it is not perceived as 'deserved' or 'earned', driven by productivity orientation that derives from puritanical work ethic.

Third, two traditions of looking at the phenomenon of fun are brought together in this study and their highlighted incongruities are reconciled through the original comprehensive theorisation of fun. One tradition looks at the construct holistically, from the side, often in specific contexts: fun at work (Warren & Fineman, 2007; Plester et al., 2015), fun in leisure (Fromm, 1955; Adorno and Horkheimer, [1944] 1972), fun in sports (O'Reilly et al., 2001; MacPhail et al., 2008), fun in public policy (Zhang & Yeoh, 2017; Elinoff & Gillen, 2019), fun in marketing communications (McMullan & Miller, 2010; Elliott, 2015), emphasising the production, control and purposeful use of fun that is supposed to benefit employers, leisure and sport organisers, governments or brands, maintaining a teleological position on fun. Another one works with deconstructing fun and finds that its essence rests on intrinsic motivation, freedom, transgression, and idleness (e.g. Churchill et al., 2007; Fincham, 2016; Oh & Pham, 2022). This work elucidates these paradoxes and, rather than just sticking to one side of the argument, provides an interpretation of consumer fun in a manner that highlights the duality of the two, being recursively related and dependent on each other, through the novel application of Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. Although ST has received limited attention from scholars in marketing and consumer research (Nicholson et al., 2009; Ardley & May, 2020), it provides a helpful instrument allowing to illuminate the phenomenon of fun in its totality, as the interaction of agency that

reproduces or transforms structure, and structure that enables and constraints the agency.

Finally, this work adds to the marketing literature investigating the effects of hedonic consumption (and hedonic shopping specifically) that considers fun a part of the hedonic mix (together with pleasure, enjoyment, excitement, interest, captivation, escapism, spontaneity, etc.) and links experiencing these states with purchasing higher quantities of items and more expensive items (Scarpi, 2006), resistance to store switching (Sloot & Verhoef, 2008); brick-and-mortar stores re-patronage intentions (Park & Sullivan, 2009); spreading word-of-mouth about positive experiences (Scarpi et al., 2014). Such studies typically fail to clearly define the construct of fun, therefore 'shopping for fun' or 'having fun while shopping' gets assigned with a number of behavioural outcomes without the explanation of what exactly fun entails for customers, how it is experienced and interpreted. This work provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for further research of the phenomenon in contexts where researchers aim to investigate its links with other constructs.

Overall, this thesis extends the critical debate about consumer fun, drawing on the existing knowledge in marketing and consumer research, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, research on play, leisure, management, tourism, and sports, and proposing a theorisation of fun that embraces its complexity, with positive as well as negative connotations and manifestations. It also brings new insights to the marketing professionals adopting the construct of fun for the promotion of their brands.

7.4 Contributions to marketing practice

Over the course of four years that this research has been undertaken multiple examples of using the construct of fun in marketing communications have been identified, both for products and services leaning more towards hedonic consumption (e.g. games, toys, dog shows, holiday packages, restaurants), as well as for offers with a more utilitarian nature (e.g. soap, shampoo, cucumbers, antenatal courses) where the direct association with fun is less obvious. Although the consumer data gathered in this study represent a variety of contexts and scenarios within which fun was experienced, the marketers' data typically embrace the industries associated with hedonic and experiential consumption. Therefore, the provided recommendations address primarily marketing practitioners within the context of an 'experience

economy' (Pine & Gilmore, [1999] 2011), whose customers often engage with brand offers being motivated by fun and expecting fun experiences as an outcome of brand encounters. The experiential sector has a promising future with the entertainment and media market in the UK estimated to reach £85bn by the end of 2023 with growth forecast predicted at a compound annual growth rate of 4% over the next four years to generate revenue of £100bn by 2027, maintaining a leading position in Europe (PwC, 2023).

Marketers can work with the construct on two levels: (1) position a brand as a fun one through marketing communications and (2) enable or boost the emergence of consumer experienced fun through the design of the experiential brand encounter. When the word 'fun' is being used in advertising it does not necessarily transform into a consumer fun label attached to the brand straightaway but can be a first step on the way to developing such a disposition. It can potentially be strengthened through appeals to the liberation of the self, social connectedness, and transgression of normality in the message when consumers are invited to 'have fun together', 'forget about their worries', 'leave it all behind', 'be the person they really are', or 'do something extraordinary'.

Besides, it is important for marketers to be conscious of the reasons why they adopt the construct of fun in their communications in the first place. For some brands and sectors, promotion through fun can be a natural fit (e.g. theme park, popular culture convention), for others it is a way to emphasise the enjoyable characteristics and tone down the seriousness (e.g. volunteer youth organisation), for yet others fun becomes a façade for hiding the potentially harmful or morally ambiguous consequences of consumption (e.g. junk food, gambling). The latter represents an ethically dubious practice that sends a double-bind message to the public and is recommended to be avoided.

Marketers that find the appeal of fun to be a good fit for their brand may not only try to develop the disposition from scratch claiming that the brand is fun, but also rely on the existing dispositions circulating in the cultural worlds of their customers. Drawing on the associations with activities, events, places, objects or characters already acknowledged as fun in movies, books, music or other forms of popular culture brands can nudge their existing and potential customers to labelling them or their offers as

fun. It is also important to keep in mind that marketing has the power to normalise or marginalise certain practices as fun for the public, thereby alleviating or boosting the tensions in consumers' self-perception. When a brand is using marketing communications for developing a fun positioning, it is recommended to make the language and visual aspects of the message more inclusive, demonstrating that it is 'normal' for people of a different age, gender, race, and social status to consider a particular thing fun and experience it together. Finally, the communication can also address the issue of reducing the guilt related to engaging with something fun instead of doing 'serious work', driven by the productivity orientation. The message may accentuate consumers 'deservedness' to have fun without the need to earn this right through hard productive work. Communicating this idea can signal to consumers that fun should be neither a luxury, nor a last resort necessity when it is used only as a means or recovering from stress overload, rather it can be enjoyed for its own sake and fill one's life with positive moments and memories.

When it comes to facilitating experienced fun as a part of the brand encounter, the first important recommendation is choosing the right language for it. While business media and marketing blogs are ripe with calls for 'making marketing fun' (Kruger, 2001; Morgan & Rao, 2003; Danziger, 2006; Windels, 2012; Cochran, 2016; Green, 2018; Ellis, 2019; Bengualid, 2019), the findings of this study indicate that 'making' something fun, as well as 'generating', 'producing', or 'engineering' (Oh & Pham, 2022) fun is quite a futile endeavour since fun is internally-driven, emerges with different degrees of ease for different consumers and can be easily disrupted by the factors that marketers cannot control (from individuals initially being in the bad mood or overloaded with worries and concerns, to negative social interaction, to bad weather). Marketing practitioners may, therefore, attempt to facilitate, enable or elicit experienced fun for consumers, but are incapable of 'making', 'producing', or 'delivering' it. Besides, making hard promises and giving guarantees that one can 'come and absolutely / definitely / 100% have fun' means putting unnecessary pressure on consumers (who may think that if they end up not experiencing fun something is wrong with them), and is likely to result in disappointment.

Although such an elusive and unstable construct can hardly become a quantifiable marketing objective, it may be worth including it in the requested feedback, asking the customers whether they had fun, how did it feel and what, from their point of view,

made the experience fun or, in contrast, ruined their fun. Answers to such questions can provide valuable insights about the experience and uncover new angles of looking at the marketed offer and designing the scenarios of brand encounters.

In case customers are inclined to have fun and willing to participate in its co-creation, the following options can be adopted. Introducing friendly competitions and doable challenges with prizes and rewards for customers (in the store, e.g. mini basketball in the sporting goods outlet, gamified VR / AR technology in the electronics store; or during the service delivery, e.g. customers and groups of customers competing in bowling, snooker, karaoke, etc.) can boost the achievement-oriented facet of fun. The rewards can be given directly to the winner, or part of the reward may be turned into an issue bigger than the self and given to charity (providing that there is a good fit between charity and the brand). Thereby personally experienced fun will also help others, which in turn can promote physiological changes in the brain linked with happiness (Post, 2014). Additionally, in order to boost social connectedness, marketers can design brand encounters (in terms of activities, space and time) for groups of different size and offer a range of flexible pricing options for groups. Addressing transgression of normality, entertainment businesses can organise special offers on weekdays, encouraging consumers to break the monotony of routines, or thematically / visually / audibly organise brand encounters in an unusual or extraordinary manner, e.g. make a golf course look like a spaceship, or run a spinning class in the darkness with the disco lights. Liberating the self may be the most challenging element of experienced fun to elicit from the marketers' side since consumers can still feel the internal pressure of obligations and commitments, as well as the need to behave in a certain way even in the most hedonically engaging contexts. However, knowing the target audience well, being aware of what captivates them, and attempting to encourage deep immersion of customers in the experience can be a step on the way to liberation. Creating the atmosphere with no judgment, where customers can 'dance like no one is watching', feel free from the image they normally need to maintain and know that 'what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas', also contributes to the liberation of the self. Giving customers a variety of flexible options to choose from may contribute to consumer empowerment, giving them more agency, allowing to be in charge of their own fun and feel less restricted.

The suggested recommendations embrace several elements of the marketing mix (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020), namely, promotion, product, and pricing. Additionally, paying attention to two more Ps – people and processes – can further help to boost experienced fun of consumers. Friendly and helpful personnel can facilitate social connectedness and positive interaction between customers and staff. Ensuring seamless processes may eliminate some of the potential fun disruptors for customers, such as poor service, long waiting times, or technical issues with taking payments. It is important to remember, though, that personal and interpersonal factors leading to fun disruption remain mostly outside of marketers' control.

Better understanding how consumer fun is experienced, interpreted, and reflected upon empowers marketers with new approaches to adopting fun and using it in brand promotion. It enables them to make more informed choices and avoid confusing customers or accidentally accentuating the underlying tensions related to fun.

7.5 Limitations

Every research project is associated with certain limitations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018) and this work is no exception. The first limitation is related to the nature of the phenomenon in question. Fun cannot verifiably be observed from the side while the experience is taking place (since the expressions of fun may vary and can be imitated, therefore, it is impossible to define with any degree of certainty whether someone is genuinely having fun in the moment). Besides, starting to interview a consumer about fun while it is being experienced is straightaway taking them out of the fun framing and brings back to the usual reality. As a result, discussion about lived experiences of fun relies on the recollection which is often prone to distortion.

The memory about a particular experience is not necessary a recall of what exactly happened, but rather a reconstruction of what one thinks happened (Halbwachs, [1950] 1992). Some details people remember and can share exactly as they were, some details get altered through shared reminiscing with other participants of the experience, some other details completely fade in the memory and get replaced by bits of general knowledge, common sense or tropes from cultural artefacts. Reconstruction of the past is also happening in accordance with one's identity of the present and its relationship with the identities occupying the personal history, therefore certain things get accentuated or attenuated to project a coherent identity (ibid.).

Additionally, individual recollection of fun experiences is often influenced by the collective memory and the collective ideas about appropriateness of certain fun practices (Fincham, 2016). Elements that fit with the collective memory (memory of the individuals directly participating in the experience as well as those who heard the story about it) can be amplified and highlighted, while the elements that do not fit or considered unimportant can be toned down or excluded (Fine & Corte, 2017). The researcher is then left with only approximate projection of what the particular lived experience was like.

The interview guide implied that every conversation began with a detailed discussion of the specific occasion a participant considered fun and then moved onto talking about more general and abstract elements of the phenomenon. The interviewees were free to recall any experience, either recent or far away in time, therefore, the examples ranged from the occasions that happened a few days before the interview to the events that took place 20-30 years ago (these were typically more 'grand' events, including jubilees, silver and gold wedding anniversaries, or unforgettable vacations in remote locations). Although the issue of recall bias (te Braak et al., 2023) was taken into consideration, the respondents provided a significant amount of diverse details about their experiences that resulted in rich data allowing for deep insights. Besides, throughout the interview all the participants shared multiple other examples of fun experiences and actively reflected on those, therefore, the consistency in the consumer interpretations of such experiences could be tracked intratextually within separate interview verbatims, and intertextually, across the range of the narratives.

Considering the strong connection between fun and the sense of self, another potential limitation is the social desirability bias (Ried et al., 2022), when participants may deliberately or unconsciously try to conceal certain aspects of their experiences that they perceive as 'embarrassing', 'weird' or harmful to their identity in any way. Establishing rapport throughout the interviews and ensuring the anonymity of the transcripts were part of the strategy aimed to alleviate this type of bias. Besides, the projective techniques adopted for this study (sensory metaphors and visual elicitation) were supposed to reduce the impact of conventional thinking and loosen some inhibitions, overcoming the barrier of consciousness (Mariampolski, 2011). The fact that the connection between constrained self, social influence and socially constructed norms was revealed through the data signals that at least a part of participants was to

a certain degree open and honest about their thoughts, feelings, anxieties, and tensions.

The next limitation is related to the depth of exploration of the aforementioned relationship. This study emphasises that the rules circulating in the consumer society in the form of implicit knowledge and regulating how the representatives of specific social groups are supposed to have fun may lie along the lines of age, gender, social status and social roles, culture, etc., but does not explore every single one of those separately. Due to the temporal constraints of the PhD programme and the spatial confines of the thesis, this works examines the general dynamics of self, society and norm on the levels of fun as experienced and fun as disposition, while in-depth investigation of how representatives of different genders / social classes / races are 'supposed' to have fun and why (taking a deep dive into historical and socio-cultural factors) may become a whole doctoral thesis on its own for every separate case. This constraint, on the other hand, serves as an invitation for future research that may adopt a much more critical approach to the analysis through the application of critical theory and exploration of power dynamics surrounding the phenomenon of fun in consumer society.

Finally, this research is underpinned by the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy informed particularly by the writings of Heidegger and Gadamer. 'Being and Time' as well as 'Truth and Method' were addressed in English with the possibility of subtle details being lost in translation from German. Additionally, in order to develop a clearer comprehension of the complex ideas proposed by the authors, multiple secondary accounts and explanatory sources were explored. As a result, the researcher's understanding of the hermeneutic phenomenology through the lens of Heidegger's and Gadamer's texts may be limited and represent the interpretation of the interpretation rather than a direct gasp of the original ideas, which, however, in itself illustrates one of the HP tenets.

7.6 Future research avenues

This study deliberately adopted a narrow focus on fun itself aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The reason for avoiding the hyperopic stance that implies looking at the potential outcomes of fun experiences or the connection of fun with other constructs of interest for marketing and consumer

researchers was the lack of thorough comprehension of what fun actually is. By presenting a framework of consumer fun that embraces not just the level of experience but the level of disposition and their interconnections this work delivers a missing stepping stone that can be further used for exploring the phenomenon in more specific contexts and opens several prospects for future research discussed below. The suggested research avenues include methodological and thematic considerations.

From a methodological point of view, future research could undertake an in-depth case study exploration of one or several specific brands utilising the construct of fun. Considering that fun can be adopted as an appeal in brand communications or be a focus of the brand experience design (whether it is happening in store, online or during service delivery), diverse marketing teams can be involved in the development of fun-induced strategies, including brand, product, communications, and content managers and executives, as well as the marketing and advertising agency teams working with a brand. A case study could investigate objectives, strategies and approaches of different parties involved in utilising the construct of fun for a particular brand, elucidating potential conflicting priorities or tensions. Additionally, consumers engaging with the chosen brand could be interviewed specifically about their brand-related experiences to understand whether and how the marketers' effort translates into fun for customers.

Proposed thematic directions for future research are driven by the further questions and unexplored issues deriving from and illuminated by the findings of this study. These avenues are also associated with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; UN, 2023) that emphasise their importance for researchers, industry professionals, and consumer society.

SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing: Fun and risky consumer behaviours

Experienced fun is mostly discussed in the literature in the positive terms. However, being in an alternative frame of reality defined as fun and characterised by liberation of self and transgression of normality can potentially encourage more frivolous behaviours, going a step further than one usually goes in the search for intense affect. Fun can provide a space for the enjoyable violation of social order that may pose serious threats to health and wellbeing of those having fun and others around them. Considering that anything can be perceived as fun, dangerous, risky, and harmful

practices are no exclusion and consumers can and do perform multiple types of such practices ‘for fun’. Fine & Corte (2021) explore ‘dark’ fun of gang activity, bullying, hooliganism, political violence, and military brutality and reveal that such fun revolves around the establishment of power hierarchies, group belonging, and collective effervescence. Coupling these findings with the insights from this work (particularly the links between fun and self, as well as social influence in the process of fun dispositions development) future research could look at the role of peer pressure in the engagement with overtly transgressive consumer fun (e.g. excessive alcohol consumption, drug abuse, reckless driving, playing harmful pranks on others), the process of building an identity through ‘dark’ fun, the potential connections between the need for tension release and dangerous fun, and the exit strategies after prolonged engagement with such fun.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality: Fun and gender through the lens of feminist critique

The findings of this study indicate that consumers may stick to the set of socially constructed and implicitly known ideas about how representatives of different genders are supposed to have fun. Exploring the cultural discourses of femininity and ageing within the Red Hat Society members (international movement of women aged over 50 known for its distinct group performances) van Bohemen et al. (2013) discovered that compliance with the social expectations of being a ‘good’ woman has held many of the participants back in fully enjoying life and engaging with fun practices they liked but could not perform due to the potential reputational risks. Being a ‘Red Hatter’, in contrast, enables liberation of the fun self. The future research could therefore investigate how the gendered norms of behaviour constrain and enable certain forms of fun and how it affects consumers’ identities, potentially through the application of feminist critique.

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth: Fun and value in service research

The issue of value experienced by consumers is crucial for companies having to deal with demanding and well-informed customers, global competition, and unstable economies (Zeithaml et al., 2020). Play (and fun) as a type of value first appeared in the work of Holbrook (1999). It was presented in the multidimensional model of value as intrinsic, self-oriented and active. However, since then fun has not been analysed from the value-creating perspective. Considering that experienced fun is characterised

by a surge of positive affective states, social connectedness, liberated self and normality transgression and is considered a very important part of life by consumers, it may have a significant contribution to the emergence of value when a brand experience is perceived as fun.

A number of approaches to researching consumer value has been developed since the early 2000s and currently one of the major views that service research is concerned with is value-in-use (as opposed to value in exchange), the approach adopted by Service Logic (SL, Grönroos, 2006), Service Dominant Logic (SDL, Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008) and Customer Dominant Logic (CDL, Heinonen et al., 2010). CDL might be the most relevant framework for fun research since the centres of interest are not exchange and service as such but how a company's service can be embedded in the customers' experiences, activities, practices, and contexts, and what implications it has for service companies. It puts the customer in the heart of value formation process (Heinonen et al., 2013).

Fun is motivated intrinsically, cannot be imposed or delivered as a packaged offer. An alternative approach to looking at how marketers can make their offers more fun may be investigating how specific consumer groups (the target audience) are willing to have fun on their own, when, where and how much they want to have it and whether fun contributes to their perceived value of the experience and then understand how a company offer may be embedded in these fun experiences. This approach will bring together the literature on fun, experiential consumption, service and value research. Besides, CDL extends the scope from just customer-service encounter to the full array of consumer activities and experiences in the history, pre-service, during service, post-service, and the future (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2015). Fun related to a core experience within a service may be present in all these time frames in the form of anticipation / expectation / imagination (history and pre-service), experience in the moment (during service), reflection and memory (post-service and the future), contributing to the emergence of value throughout. Therefore, understanding the role of fun in the emergence of value at different stages of service encounter would enable marketers (especially in the entertainment and leisure sectors) to better plan onstage and backstage actions and support processes.

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: Cross-cultural analysis of consumer fun

This research investigated the meanings of fun developed by and circulating between consumers embedded in the British culture. Specifically, while the consumer sample was mostly diverse in terms of geography, age, and type of occupation, all the participants were white. Future research could explore the meanings of fun for ethnically diverse groups in the UK and how their lived experiences of fun as well as their interpretations are shaped by socio-cultural and political factors.

Additionally, while the word 'fun' does not translate easily into other languages (Huizinga,1949 [1938]), the cross-cultural analysis of fun could be performed in the countries where English is an official language of communication (or one of the official languages and widely spoken). While fun of Americans has the broadest representation in the academic literature, Canadian and Australian understandings of fun are overlooked. Besides, consumers in the English-speaking countries in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean region may have their own ideas about what it means to have fun, how one comes to realisation that something is fun and how socio-cultural environment affects the perception of self when it comes to fun. A subject of separate interest may be the comparison of fun practices in developed vs developing countries, exploring how economic factors and/or postcolonial conditions affect consumer fun.

SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 13 – Climate Action: Fun as a means of promoting sustainable consumption

The power of marketing communications to normalise certain practices as fun can be potentially utilised in the promotion of sustainable consumption. Wilk (2022) analyses the conventional entertainment (various types of offers that people consume for fun, from tourism to consumer electronics) from the sustainability perspective and concludes that the perpetual search for fun has a huge footprint on the environment that the planet cannot accommodate anymore. A lot of scholars, policy makers and climate activists recognise that on the way to establishing a more balanced relationship with the natural environment the society will need to ban, ration or otherwise eliminate some energy- and materials-intensive forms of consumption. On the other hand, Wilk (2022) continues, 'we cannot move people to sustainable lifestyles just by scaring them, educating them or making them feel guilty about their everyday pleasures. There has to be a positive vision that offers activity, engagement,

play, sensuality and excitement, all the dimensions of fun' (p. 266). Future research could then explore how could more sustainable practices be positioned as fun through marketing effort and if such dispositions stick to certain activities, how can they be solidified by the (elicited but not guaranteed) experienced fun.

Besides, the development of fun dispositions that can benefit individual consumers and society need not stop only on the promotion of sustainable consumption and could be applied to normalisation of healthy lifestyles, volunteering and helping communities, etc. Future research could investigate the role of fun as a motivator of engagement with socially significant behaviours and how social marketing can adopt the construct of fun. However, it is important to remember that not everything in human life is or should be fun and some issues are better off remaining 'funless'. Thus, analysing the practice of having fun activities as fundraisers for victims of traumatic events, Chen et al. (2020) reveal that, while the appeal to fun may be effective in raising funds from purely economic point of view, it carnivalises others' misery and is not ethically appropriate for supporting people affected by diseases or natural disasters.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals: Further explorations of the social nature of fun

This study argues that fun is social not because others are necessarily needed for experienced fun to emerge, but because consumers learn to appreciate certain things in their lives as fun through socialisation, and socio-cultural factors have a strong influence on where fun is found and how it is interpreted. Yet, while solitary experienced fun is possible, having it with others and sharing it in the moment boosts its intensity and memorability. In line with Podilchak (1986), Fincham (2016), Fine & Corte (2017), Reis et al. (2017) and Oh & Pham (2022) this work underlines the importance of social connectedness for experienced fun. Adding a stronger marketing focus, future research could explore whether fun experienced together within brand encounters can affect the relationships between the fans of the brand and their relationship with the brand (bringing on the research on brand communities, e.g. Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Schau et al., 2009). The differences in such potential effects can also be compared between offline and online brand communities.

Furthermore, fun experienced in the social context can contribute to the feeling of unity when big groups of people act and feel as one. Lauss & Szigetvari (2010) investigate the management of fan zones at 2008 UEFA European Football Championship and find that fun was the governing principle through which order was maintained inside the fan zones. Fans were offered different roles to positively channel their emotions and help them establish non-violent, friendly relationships with strangers. The macro-architecture of the zones and the types of the offered entertainment enabled the organisers to manage the crowds and their security through fun rather than strict bans and rules. Further research could explore this issue in more depth and investigate whether marketers can use the appeal to experienced fun as an instrument facilitating the organisation of group behaviours at mass events, such as concerts, sports competitions or brand fests.

Another important aspect lying at the intersection of the social nature of consumer fun and its link to self-identity is the representation of personal fun to the public. Fincham (2016) argues on the conceptual level that a lot of effort is being invested in demonstrating how much fun people are having in their lives in order to create an image of a fun person, often at the expense of actually having all that fun. Future research could look into the public presentation of fun identities, particularly on social media through the user-generated content, and the degree of its consistency with the amount of fun experienced, elucidating potential tensions between the two.

Table 17 below presents potential research questions associated with the suggested research avenues, aligned in turn with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 17. Examples of research questions for future research

Sustainable Development Goal	Associated Topic	Potential Research Questions
SDG 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing	Fun and risky consumer behaviours	- How does peer pressure affect consumer engagement with transgressive / dangerous fun practices? - How do consumers develop an identity through the participation in risky and harmful behaviours ‘for fun’?

SDG 5 – Gender Equality	Fun and gender through the lens of feminist critique	- How can the gendered norms of behaviour constrain and enable certain forms of fun from the perspective of liberal vs radical feminism? - What are the socio-cultural factors driving the choices of fun practices for women?
SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	Fun and value in service research	- What is the role of consumer fun in the emergence of perceived value at the different stages of service encounter? - How can marketers boost consumer fun through the application of the Customer Dominant Logic?
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities	Cross-cultural analysis of consumer fun	- How do meanings and interpretations of consumer fun differ across cultures in the English-speaking countries? - What socio-cultural and economic factors shape the meanings and interpretations of consumer fun in developed vs developing countries?
SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production; SDG 13 – Climate Action	Fun as a means of promoting sustainable consumption	- How can appeal to fun be used in the promotion of sustainable behaviours? - How effectively can fun positioning through public policy motivate healthy lifestyle choices for consumers?
SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	Explorations of the social nature of fun	- How can fun experienced within brand encounters affect the relationships between consumers and brands? - To what extent is the representation of consumer fun on social media consistent with the real-life experiences of fun?

7.7 Concluding remarks and paradoxical reflections

While the word ‘fun’ is used in this thesis more times than any reader may care to count, working on it was a journey that may be described by a myriad of any words, other than ‘fun’. The work has taken several unexpected turns both driven and followed by significant changes in the researcher’s worldview and the world around us. First of all, this study was initially conceived as an exploration of fun as a new approach towards motivating sustainable consumer behaviours, one which represented an area of strong personal interest for the researcher. This intention fell into the same trap as the part of the literature that views fun as a link in the chain and prefers to look ahead, focussing only on the ‘useful’ outcomes of fun experiences that can be adopted for ‘noble’ goals. Positioning fun as a driver for achieving external goals did not prove to be successful since the existing knowledge about the fun itself was limited, scattered across disciplines, and did not provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon sufficient for making the next steps. Therefore, the study shifted the focus solely to fun.

Then, the construct was initially approached from quite a rigid positivistic position. Perhaps, being raised and schooled in the post-Soviet society where hard science is considered the most respectable intellectual pursuit and social science has only started to get out of infancy[2] created conditions for a stronger push towards adopting positivistic design in research. Although both researcher’s bachelor’s (in journalism) and master’s (in marketing) dissertations were constructed in the interpretive manner, somehow, approaching research at the doctoral level meant doing it ‘properly’, ‘rigorously’ and ‘scientifically’, therefore, in the beginning of the journey the positivistic worldview, as a metaphorical flag, was flying high. However, through the engagement with more and more literature (where research within the tradition of Consumer Culture Theory seems to have played the most prominent role), as well as a deeper self-reflection, the shift started to happen. Firstly, because the exploration of fun was stubbornly resisting to fit into positivistic worldview and methods. Secondly, because

[2] For a major part of the twentieth century Soviet social scientists were only allowed to proceed with their inquiries as long as those were aligned with the principles of Marxism-Leninism (Graham, 1994), which clearly could not take them very far.

observing the world and people who were looking at the same issues or events but seeing entirely different things and coming to strikingly contrasting conclusions, led to recognising and understanding the notion of multiple socially constructed realities, which ultimately helped to solidify a position of the interpretive researcher.

Furthermore, this doctoral journey began in September 2019 and was unfolding during some of the least 'fun' times in terms of its socio-historical context, with the consequences of Brexit, the coronavirus pandemic, war in Eastern Europe and numerous concomitant crises affecting thinking, reading, interviewing, and writing about fun while having none.

While it would be injudicious to claim that doing postgraduate research is by definition no fun, an overwhelming majority of PhD students agree that it implies lots of stress, uncertainty, and hard work (De Vita et al., 2021) that is not typically associated with fun. Just working on the thesis on its own rarely felt as fun from the very beginning. In the early 2020 COVID-19 struck, changing the meanings and ways of obtaining fun for millions of people on the planet. The day when researcher's fun disappeared completely, without a trace – February 24th, 2022. Researcher's home country started an aggressive war of conquest against the neighbour. Since then, days have been mostly filled with anger, fear, grief, desperation, and guilt, leaving little space for fun. The attempts to recreate the experience in the situations previously considered fun were futile, it was not coming. Moreover, seeing people who actually managed to have fun (especially within the aggressor's society) brought nothing but irritation, as if those on the wrong side of the conflict did not have any moral rights to have fun anymore.

Reflection on personal experiences added several new layers to the researcher's pre-understanding of fun. It highlighted the role of one's general emotional condition in fun emergence (and cast further doubt on the view that fun resides readily available in specific situations, where one can just come and grab it). It emphasised the issue of varying degrees of personal agency in fun: while some people 'bring fun on' whenever they want, others find it impossible even when they make a conscious effort to do so. It brought the new angle of looking at the relationships between fun and morality in addition to the one discussed in the literature review. Finally, with so many meanings being constructed by humans around fun, it turned out that in a blink of an eye fun can also become completely meaningless and irrelevant. Nevertheless, working in the

interpretivist tradition, the researcher considered her reality and the realities of the participants to be different, therefore, personal reflections and pre-understanding of fun (however strongly charged emotionally) represented only the first step in the process of interpretation and only one horizon that was getting into fusion with the horizons of others in the process of conducting interviews, as well as data analysis and interpretation that followed.

Fun is a curious, complex, and multi-faceted phenomenon that often fills lives with positivity, brings people together, provides subsequent narrative possibilities when reminiscing on previous fun experiences becomes a fun experience in itself. It is lived through personally but interpreted socially, making sense of the experience happens in the specific socio-cultural context that can enable or constrain it. There are still a lot of unexplored issues related to fun that future research can address, and it is strongly recommended to embed that research with humanistic mission in order to reveal and find the ways to challenge multiple layers of stigma surrounding various manifestations of fun. McKee's (2008) quote is worth repeating once again: 'politics is important only to the extent to which it enables more people to have more fun, more often' (p. 6). Another McKee's point from the same book, shared by the researcher, is that reading academic literature on fun is not an obvious way of having fun and can be seen as extremely boring. Every reader will make their own judgement on whether the engagement with this thesis was fun, boring, serious or something completely different, but regardless of the verdict, at this point everyone is invited to go and try having some fun, just because they can. And the researcher is going to do the same. It is about time…

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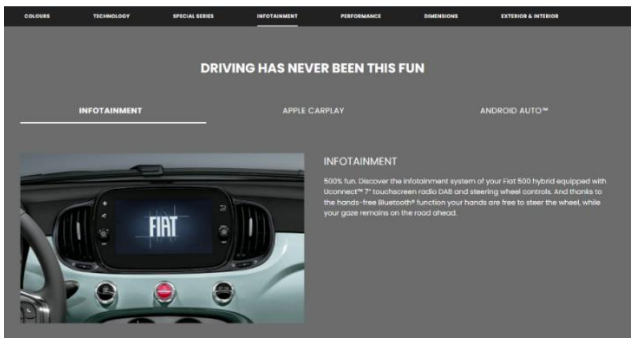
Appendices

Appendix 1. Examples of fun appeals in marketing communications

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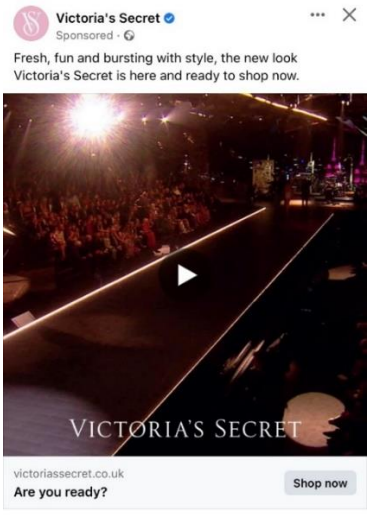
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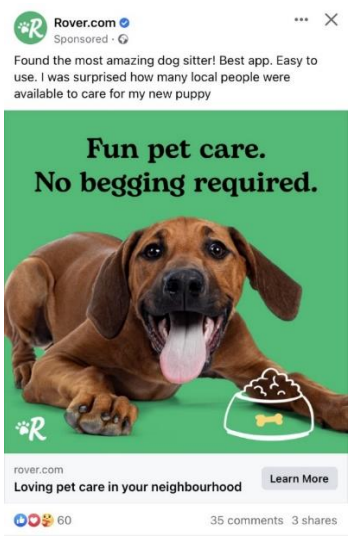
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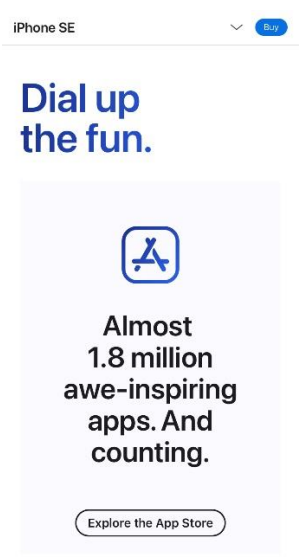
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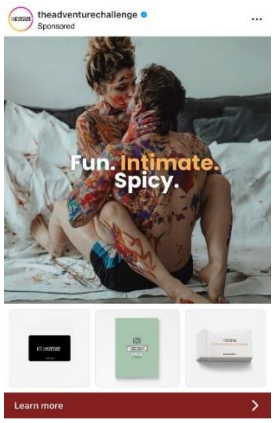

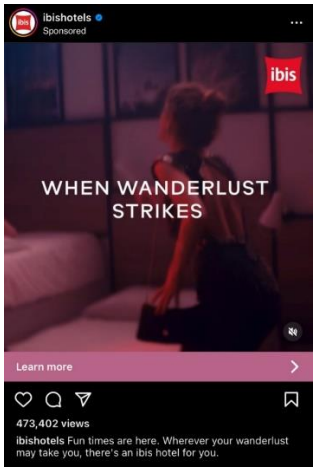

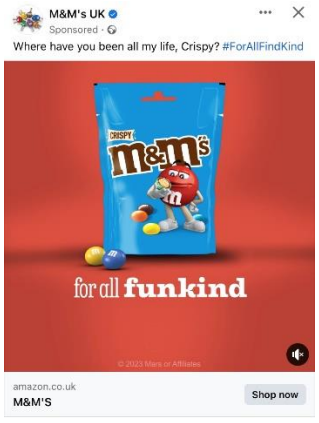

All images represent the pictures taken by the researcher either as screenshots from social media feeds or during personal offline consumer experiences in the UK.

Appendix 2. Interview guide for consumers

RQ1: How is fun experienced by consumers?

RQ2: How are dispositions of fun constructed, shared and reflected upon by consumers?

Introductory section

Hi …, my name is Nataliia, it is a pleasure to meet you. Thank you very much for joining me on this call today.

We will talk about your experiences, thoughts and feelings about fun, and it will take between an hour and hour and a half. My project aims to explore what fun means to people, how and when it emerges and how it can benefit us. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers, the contribution of every participant is unique and valuable.

With your consent this interview will be video recorded and later transcribed. All data will comply with the University's ethics regulation, which means the transcript will be anonymised (you will not be identified), data is securely stored, and no results can be traced back to you. Also, you can withdraw from the study at any point.

Before we start, do you have any questions? Would you like me to explain anything in more detail?

- **Intro question / ice breaker**

How is your week going / how was your weekend?

Did you do anything that made you feel good?

- **Fun experience story (RQ1)**

Can you please tell me about an experience that you vividly remember and that was really fun for you?

Follow-up questions to reveal more details:

- What did you do?

- How did you feel?

- What was special about this experience?

- Who were you with?

- Do you think they were having fun too?

- How did it feel to be with them?

- Was it something you planned in advance?

- Did you have any expectations prior to this experience? Did it meet your expectations?

- How did you feel when it was over?

- Did you do anything similar before or after that?

- **Social nature of fun (RQs 1 and 2)**

In your story you were with friends / family / colleagues, etc. Who else do you like having fun with? How do you choose what to do for fun with them?

Is it something people like you would typically do for fun?

Do you have fun when you are on your own?

Do you know anyone (or maybe it's yourself) you can call a fun person? What makes a person a 'fun person'?

- **Fun meaning (RQs 1 and 2)**

What does it mean to you to have fun?

What is the opposite of fun from your point of view?

Have you ever been in the situation when you faked fun? What was it like?

- **Attitudes to fun (RQ2)**

How important it is for you to have fun in life?

- **Barriers to fun (RQ1)**

What ruins fun for you?

- **Fun repetition, progression, and habituation (RQ2)**

Are there situations or activities that have always been fun for you?

What makes them special?

Is there something that you used to consider fun, but it is not fun anymore?

What do you think has changed?

- **Marketisation of fun (RQ2)**

Is fun something you would spend money on? Can you tell me about your most expensive fun experience?

Do you ever have fun for free? Does it feel any different to have fun that you paid and did not pay for?

Have you ever seen a commercial that made you think: That looks like fun? What was special about it?

- **Projective exercises:**

Sensory metaphors (RQ 1 and 2)

- If fun had a colour, what colour would it be?
- How would fun sound?
- How would it smell?
- How would it taste?
- If you could touch it, what kind of texture would it have?

Follow up with:

What do you think of when you imagine this colour (sound, smell, taste, texture)? How does it feel like? Where could you potentially hear that sound / feel that taste, etc.?

Photo elicitation. Before the interview the participants will be asked to choose 2-3 images that represent fun to them (personal photos / images from the internet / newspapers / magazines / any other sources) to be used as prompts during the conversation.

(RQs 1 and 2)

What is happening in the picture? Can you tell me a story behind this photo?

If it is not a personal photo: Have you been in a situation like that?

What do you think about when you look at it?

How does this image make you feel?

- **Closing question**

Is there anything I have not asked regarding your fun experiences that you'd like to share?

- **Demographic information**

Could you please share your age and occupation?

Appendix 3. Interview guide for marketers

RQ3: How do marketing professionals adopt and implement the construct of fun in brand promotional activities?

RQ4: To what extent are marketers' understandings of the construct consistent with the consumers' articulations of fun?

Introductory section

Hi …, my name is Nataliia, it is a pleasure to meet you. Thank you very much for joining me on this call today.

We will talk about the practices and strategies used to positively charge your brand through marketing activities and it will take about an hour. My project aims to explore how marketers adopt and utilise fun in their practice. This study is further supported by the consumer's view of fun and associated meanings.

With your consent this interview will be video recorded and later transcribed. All data will comply with the University's ethics regulation, which means the transcript will be anonymised (you will not be identified), and data is securely stored. Also, you can withdraw from the study at any point.

Before we start, do you have any questions? Would you like me to explain anything in more detail?

- **Intro question / ice breaker**

How is your week going?

Are you working on any specific projects at the moment?

- **Brand response (RQs 3 and 4)**

What kind of emotional response does your brand aim to elicit in customers?

How different is this response from what your competitors evoke?

- **Campaign/communications development (RQ3)**

Interviews were tailored to specific campaigns utilising the concept of fun.

How was that campaign / communication developed? How important is the emphasis on fun?

- **Key channels and messages (RQs 3 and 4)**

What communications channels do you use for these campaigns? What helped you choose these channels?

What are the key messages? How do you want them to be understood by the customers?

- **Campaign effectiveness and feedback (R3)**

How do you measure effectiveness of these communications?

What kind of feedback do you collect from your customers? What are the most interesting insights from the feedback?

- **Facilitating consumer fun within brand encounter (RQ4)**

What are the key components of the customer experience in the encounters with your brand?

Can you generate fun for customers?

Have you ever encountered cases of misbehaviour of customers who were having fun?

- **Personal meaning (RQ4)**

What does it mean to have fun for you personally?

How does it feel to have fun?

Appendix 4. Participant information sheet for consumers

Participant Information Sheet for
Critically evaluating the concept of fun in contemporary consumer society

You are being invited to take part in research on consumer fun. Nataliia Zaboeva, a PhD student at Coventry University, is leading this research. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of the research is to develop an understanding of consumer fun, investigate what having fun means to consumers, what factors contribute to fun emergence and how people reflect on fun experiences.

Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is being organised by Coventry University and funded by the researcher. The research was granted ethical approval by Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee (Project Reference P135421).

Do you have to take part?
No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number and provide this to the lead researcher if you wish to withdraw from the research at a later date. You are free to withdraw your information from the research at any time until the data is destroyed on 31/01/2028. You do not need to provide a reason for withdrawing. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen if I decide to take part?
You will be asked a number of questions regarding your experiences of fun, your thoughts and feelings about them. The interview will take place over Zoom. It should take around an hour and a half and we would like to use the video recording function of Zoom (and will require your consent for this) to save your responses for the following analysis.

Why have you been invited to take part?
You have been invited to participate in this research because you follow '*brand name*' Twitter page, and the brand positioning is associated with having fun. However, our discussion will be built around any fun experience of your choice that you vividly remember and are willing to share in detail, not necessarily related to the brand.

What are the benefits and potential risks in taking part?
By taking part, you will be helping Nataliia Zaboeva and Coventry University to better understand what fun is for the contemporary consumers, how people feel and think about it and how having fun may potentially benefit individuals and society. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

What information is being collected in the research?
Your thoughts and feelings about fun as well as your age and occupation are being collected through this research.

Lawful basis of processing

Under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) 2016 we must have a lawful basis to process your personal data and for the purpose of this research, our lawful basis is that of consent.

What will happen to the results of the research?
The results of this research may be summarised in published articles, reports, and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs.

Who will have access to the information?
Your data will only be accessed by the researcher.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?
Your data will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. If you consent to being video recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

All electronic data will be stored on the Coventry University One Drive (the account of the researcher). All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Coventry University. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses. The researcher will take responsibility for data destruction and all collected data will be destroyed on or before 31/01/2028.

For further information about how Coventry University will handle your personal data, please read our Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

What will happen next?
If you would like to take part, please contact the lead researcher. You will be asked to complete a consent form before taking part.

Researcher contact details:
Nataliia Zaboeva xxxxxx

Research supervisor

Dr Anvita Kumar xxxxxxx

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this research?
If you have any questions, or concerns about this research, please contact the researcher, or their supervisor. If you still have concerns and wish to make a complaint, please contact the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Manager by e-mailing ethics.uni@coventry.ac.uk. Please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering participating in this research.

Appendix 5. Participant information sheet for marketing professionals

Participant Information Sheet for Critically evaluating the concept of fun in contemporary consumer society

You are being invited to take part in research on consumer fun. Nataliia Zaboeva, a PhD student at Coventry University, is leading this research. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of this research is to develop an in-depth understanding of the consumer fun and its implications for marketing professionals. This research aims to explore how the concept of fun is being adopted and utilised in marketing communications and further support these findings with the investigation of consumers' perspectives on fun and its meanings, their construction, interpretation and sharing.

Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is being organised by Coventry University and funded by the researcher. The research was granted ethical approval by Coventry University's Research Ethics Committee (Project Reference P135421).

Do you have to take part?
No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number and provide this to the lead researcher if you wish to withdraw from the research at a later date. You are free to withdraw your information from the research at any time until the data is destroyed on 31/01/2028. You do not need to provide a reason for withdrawing. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen if I decide to take part?
You will be asked a number of questions regarding promotional practices and marketing communications of your brand related to fun. The interview will take place over Zoom. It should take around an hour and we would like to use the video recording function of Zoom (and will require your consent for this) to save your responses for the following analysis.

Why have you been invited to take part?
You are invited to participate in this study as a representative of the '*brand name*' brand utilising the concept of fun in marketing practice.

What are the benefits and potential risks in taking part?
By sharing your insights and practices with us, you will be helping Nataliia Zaboeva and Coventry University to better understand the place and role of fun in contemporary marketing, its benefits for consumers and marketers. The doctoral thesis will include a comprehensive analysis of marketing and consumer research literature on fun as well as data consisting of perspectives of both sides. The inferences from this work may provide useful insights for you and your team and inform you future practice. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

What information is being collected in the research?
Your insights and opinions related to using the concept of fun in marketing communications as well as your position in the company are being collected through this research.

Lawful basis of processing

Under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) 2016 we must have a lawful basis to process your personal data and for the purpose of this research, our lawful basis is that of consent.

What will happen to the results of the research?
The results of this research may be summarised in published articles, reports, and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs.

Who will have access to the information?
Your data will only be accessed by the researcher.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?
Your data will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. If you consent to being video recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

All electronic data will be stored on the Coventry University One Drive (the account of the researcher). All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Coventry University. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses. The researcher will take responsibility for data destruction and all collected data will be destroyed on or before 31/01/2028.

For further information about how Coventry University will handle your personal data, please read our Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

What will happen next?
If you would like to take part, please contact the lead researcher. You will be asked to complete a consent form before taking part.

Researcher contact details:
Nataliia Zaboeva xxxxxx

Research supervisor

Dr Anvita Kumar xxxxxx

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this research?
If you have any questions, or concerns about this research, please contact the researcher, or their supervisor. If you still have concerns and wish to make a complaint, please contact the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Manager by e-mailing ethics.uni@coventry.ac.uk. Please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering participating in this research.

Appendix 6. Consent form

Similar format for consumers and marketing professionals

CONSENT FORM

Critically evaluating the concept of fun in contemporary consumer society

You are invited to take part in the above research project for the purpose of collecting data on consumer fun in order to explore the meaning and the nature of this phenomenon and its marketing implications.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice**

Researcher: Nataliia Zaboeva
Department: Centre for Business in Society
Contact details: xxxxxx

Supervisor name: Dr Anvita Kumar
Supervisor contact details: xxxxxx

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the research project are, what will be involved and that you agree to take part. If you are happy to participate, please initial each box to indicate your agreement, sign and date the form, and return to the researcher.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.**	
2	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially. I understand who will have access to any personal data provided and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project.**	

3	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation and data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher <u>at any time</u> until the date specified in the Participant Information Sheet.**	
4	**I understand the results of this research will be used in academic papers and other formal research outputs.**	
5	**I am happy for the interview to be <u>video recorded.</u>**	
6	**I agree to take part in the above research project.**	

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	**Signature**	**Date**
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	**Signature**	**Date**