Exploring the Dynamics of Career Events in Education: A Study Using Activity Theory

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Numerous educational institutions employ career events (CEs) to enhance students' overall learning experiences, but further research is required to optimize these events. Utilizing activity theory, this study seeks to systematically investigate the interplay between collective and individual factors that shape students' experiences during CEs. 463 survey respondents with recent and significant networking CE exposure participated in the study. The results confirm the proposed research model, indicating that the student experience construct comprises a multi-dimensional framework of second-order components, including individual and peer experiences, each encompassing a set of first-order constructs. The results also validate that students' experiences can predict subsequent perceived value and satisfaction evaluations. The study's limitations, research, and practical implications for crafting meaningful and fulfilling experiences for CE attendees are discussed.

Keywords: activity theory, hierarchical model, career event, networking, SmartPLS

INTRODUCTION

CEs in higher education have recently gained attention as they play a crucial role in career development and building professional networks for attendees. They are essential for students to connect with potential employers, learn about different career paths, and gain valuable industry insights (Amoroso & Burke, 2018). These events allow students to expand their professional network and connect with experts in their field of interest. This builds a holistic consumption experience and can lead to valuable mentorship opportunities, internships, and job offers. Additionally, career events in higher education can provide the student access to a broader range of job opportunities. This is particularly important for students exploring different career paths and determining their preferred industry or job function. Career events also help the student develop soft skills, such as communication, networking, and negotiation (Buff & O'Connor, 2012).

Professional networks play a critical role in shaping an individual's career experience, as noted by previous scholars (see Albinsson & Yasanthi Perera, 2012; Lee & Newby, 1983; Putnam, 2000a). The quality of networks, which can manifest as the degree of connectedness, shared values, and shared norms, is a key factor in an individual's career experience (Etzioni, 1996). With many potential networks today, individuals often identify as members of career communities (Wood & Judikis, 2002).

(Bourdieu & Richardson, 1986, p.248) provides a concise definition of social capital as *"the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition — or in other words, to membership in a group*." According to literature, social capital is comprised of one's social relationships and the norms of trust and reciprocity between individuals; career building and social capital formation require interaction between individuals alongside trust and tolerance (Putnam, 2000b). Putnam (2000b) also suggests that a career network and social capital can bring numerous work-related benefits to an individual, including better career opportunities, professional growth, enhanced workplace relationships, increased job satisfaction, and reduced workplace conflicts.

Research indicates that social events, including career events, serve as a platform for people with common interests to interact and form temporary social structures and communities. The student experience at these events often arises from social occasions distinct from daily life and involves participatory rituals that create shared experiences. It is important to understand the decision-making process of attending these events in a group setting, the overall experience as group attendees, and how individual and communal experiences are shaped. Furthermore, there needs to be a better understanding of how individual and communal experiences actively shape the overall student experience as group attendees.

To maximize event attendance and offer attendees a meaningful experience, event organizers and higher education student experience marketers need to have a deeper comprehension of the holistic student experience arising from group involvement. Nonetheless, the current body of research has not yet fully explored the elements that shape this experience in the context of career events. Previous studies have utilized concepts such as communitas, needs and motivations, personal and social interactions, and a sense of social presence to elucidate individual or collective experiences (Engeström, 1999). Engeström (1999) also emphasizes that activity system analysis can contribute to a better understanding of human activity within a collective setting. In a similar approach to the current study, Piyathasanan et al. (2015) uses a hierarchical approach to show that virtual experiences in consumer settings can promote customer loyalty via social presence enhancement. Although this finding supports the approach being used in the current study, this viewpoint focused primarily on economic outcomes, and it is not yet known if the effects in Piyathasanan et al. (2015) would translate into a career development program. Consequently, this study employs activity theory to better understand how individual and collective experiences merge to form a holistic experience. Activity theory suggests that social motives drive most human activities, including individual interactions, and that individuals and communities engage within particular contexts (Allen et al., 2011; Wilson, 2008).

Understanding the Current Impact of Career Events in Higher Education

According to U.S. News, statisticians, financial managers, accountants, and management analysts are a few of the best business jobs in 2022. Within this domain, an aspect attracting increased researcher and practitioner attention is understanding student career decisions and the impact of attending career events during their education. Despite this recent interest, experienced educators recall that before career centers on business college campuses, faculty were tasked with mentoring their students and preparing them for the workforce as the primary source of career development (Herr et al., 1993). The development of vocational guidance in the early 1900s and the establishment of Frank Parson's first career center, the Vocations Bureau in the Civic Service House (Boston, Massachusetts), a nonprofit organization that assisted new immigrants in adjusting to life in America, are the roots of career guidance in higher education (Vinson et al., 2011).

In higher education settings, fostering a career readiness culture is challenging. Schools, career services, and employers need heightened brand awareness to establish a presence and demonstrate institutional value. Building a solid and appealing career brand on campus is essential for employers to have a successful recruitment strategy (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2014). Career events and word-of-mouth advertising are still the most effective strategies; additionally, a company's reputation among students can have a significant impact on recruiting efforts in any given university (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009)Professionals in network career events have the chance to play a crucial

part in helping companies stand out from rivals and communicate the values that are most important to the institution.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

To understand the holistic student experience in CE and how it influences career choices, we will now provide literature support for a higher-order model (hierarchical model) based on activity theory as the main framework to incorporate individual and social level constructs (Engeström, 1999; Piyathasanan et al., 2015). The context of a group event consists of two main elements: a) the communal experience (the quality of peer-to-peer interactions and the sense of communitas), and b) the individual experience (enjoyment, curiosity, and a lasting sense of involvement). In our study, the model explains the potential outcomes that arise from engaging in a group event, such as the CE.

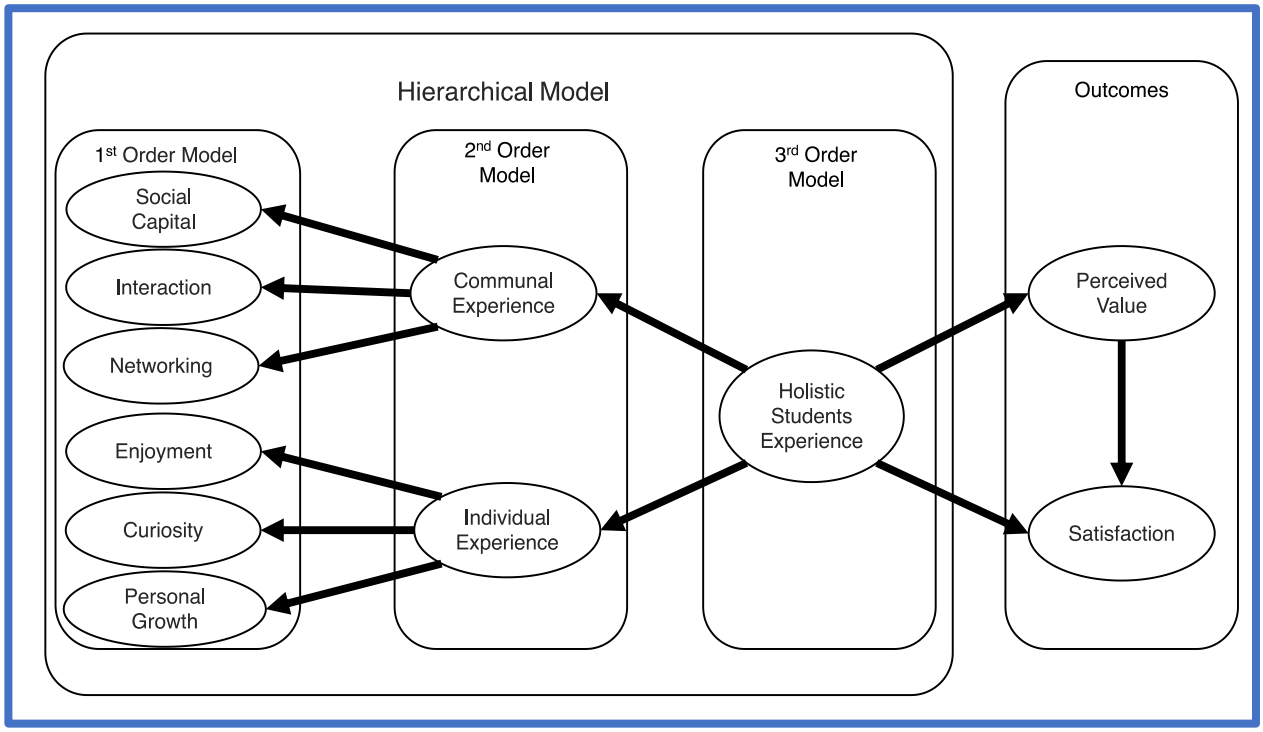
Activity Theory

Activity theory contends that any activity results from an individual's mutual interaction with their surroundings during an effort to achieve an intended or unintended outcome. Therefore, it explains an individual's experience in a hedonic service setting, such as a network-oriented CE (Piyathasanan et al., 2015). According to research, mutual relationships between a subject, an object, and a community make up an activity's fundamental structure (Engestrom, 1987; Engeström, 1999; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), and artifacts mediate these ties. Activity theory has been used to frame studies and produce insights involving human interactions within communities in the study of organizations (Engestrom, 2000; Ogawa et al., 2008), management (Blackler, 1993; Jarzabkowski, 2003), emergency management practice (Chen et al., 2013), social psychology (Hu et al., 2022; Maimaiti et al., 2021; Roth & Lee, 2007; Roth, 2009; Swanberg et al., 2022), and education and human-computer interaction (AL-Sayid & Kirkil, 2022; Kuutti, 1996). Understanding an individual's mental capacity is the fundamental goal of activity theory. However, it often does not seek to focus on isolated individuals as an adequate analytical unit, instead focusing on human behavior's cultural and technical dimensions (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

In this study, we hypothesize that student participation in CEs reflect an "*activity*" that is made up of the elements listed below: The "*subject*" is university students; the "*artefacts*" that mediate the experience include the main event itself, connections, and other employment infrastructure components that facilitate the total event experience; the "object" is some desired outcome, like enjoyment (such as enjoyment of getting a job); and the "community" component includes the networking interactions with other students, event organizers, employers, and attendees, as is typical for major (CE)s.

Figure 1 represents the holistic student experience gained through group-oriented CE in a business school. We conceptualize the holistic experience in group-oriented CE as consisting of two essential elements, which is in line with activity theory's emphasis on mutual and communal relationships among individual members embedded in rules, objects, and community (Brown et al., 1999; Engeström, 1999; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) and previous research that notes two essential elements: (1) the communal experience, and (2) the individual experience (Helkkula et al., 2012; Piyathasanan et al., 2015). In our theoretical model, holistic student experience—which includes evaluations of perceived value and student satisfaction—explains the potential results of engaging in an activity system of a group-oriented CE in a business school.

FIGURE 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF HOLISTIC STUDENT EXPERIENCE



Communal Experience

In the realm of research, the predominant explanation for group-oriented activities, such as CE, revolves around activity theory. Activity theory is an interactive, cohesive activity system involving individual participation and community relationships. We contend that communal experience derives from a sense of community formed by social contact among collective members, which is consistent with previous student-experience theorizing (Helkkula et al., 2012). The community in this study refers to the students.

According to activity theory, an event is an interactive, intact activity that includes both individual participation and communal ties. A feeling of community is developed by member contact and involvement in an event, which gives rise to a communal experience. In this view, a communal experience entails participation, mutual reliance, awareness of other students and CE attendees, and a sense of immersion in the group, fostering community, cognitive engrossment, and trust. Students who participate in a CE share experiences with their peers, such as classmates and other event attendees (e.g., industry partners, other students, faculty, staff, and guests; Ayob et al., 2013; Prado-Gascó et al., 2017; Wood & Kenyon, 2018). Thus, we examine interactions between participants, networking activity. and social capital.

Interaction

Student-employee interaction during CEs involves communication between participants and mediating artifacts using complementing representational modalities. A CE interaction often lasts no more than two to three minutes and provides an opportunity for both sides to engage in an initial discussion. Students use this time to convey their interest in the company and frequently offer their resumes, for the partners' goal is to find the best fit for their company's positions.

Only a few previous studies have explored variables that might moderate the interaction between companies and job seekers, despite the evidence suggesting that CEs impact career development (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996; Bright et al., 2009; Rice, 2014). According to one study by Hart et al. (1971), unskilled workers were far more likely than professional workers to report that a CE impacted their career progress.

The workers said that professionals were more likely to have planned and prepared for their careers than laypeople and were also more likely to stick to these plans regardless of unforeseen circumstances. Furthermore, interaction and networking is a critical aspect of human capital that offers a unique advantage in enhancing an individual's social capital (de Janasz & Forret, 2008) as current college students can offer a degree, but tend to lack infield work experience. This acknowledges why establishing a professional network through CEs is important as event connections may lead to internship and job opportunities despite lack of job-specific training.

Networking

Networking involves actively building and sustaining personal and professional connections with others for mutual gain in one's work or career (de Janasz & Forret, 2008; Forret & Dougherty, 2001). Forming numerous developmental relationships through networking to support one's career has become more important due to a boundary-less work environment, which is marked by frequent movement within and across organizations (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999) as well as the fact that the responsibility for one's career has shifted from the organization to the individual (de Janasz et al., 2003; Hall, 1996; Hall, 2002). This supports the connection constellation notion, which suggests that professional and psychosocial support can come from a number of people both inside and outside one's organization, where several developmental ties are built (Arthur, 1985).

Social Capital

To capture the aspect of social capital, which is highly complementary to the communal experience, we need to understand the activity theory perspective on social capital. More specifically, we are concerned with the interactions between closely connected communities, objects, and subjects that lead to results (Engeström & Pyörälä, 2021; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999; Russell, 2002; Wells, 2002). Self-presence, copresence, and identification are the three components of social presence (Lee, 2004; Oh et al., 2018), which is defined as a feeling of "being together" with others at the same time and place. Self-presence in a social environment is the ability to project oneself socially and emotionally as a "real person" in a community (Oh et al., 2018), which results in the subjective experience of being present (Heater, 1992). A role for social capital is also possible. The knowledge resources a person has access to is determined by their network of contacts in the scientific community, which can predict their potential productivity. As an alternative, these contacts might be used to exert influence over the committees in charge of reviewing job applications or promotion requests. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis #1: *Communal Experience is positively associated with (a) Social Capital, (b) Interaction, and (c) Networking.*

Individual Experience

Previous researchers found that individual experiences echo what the individual stands to gain from an activity, representing their intrinsic or extrinsic desire to engage in it (Piyathasanan et al., 2015). Furthermore, other researchers perceive motivation as the key to individual experiences (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). A significant individual experience has personal impact on the individual, offering an element of surprise and learning, while engaging the individual. According to activity theory, regardless of their motivations, each individual in any activity must be willing to take initiative to accomplish specific objectives (Karanasios & Allen, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2001). Accordingly, an essential portion of the individual experience in the context of CE consumption results from the hedonic aspects of the consumption experience that includes the elements of individual career choices and aspects relating to the enjoyment and curiosity in the activities of the event itself.

Enjoyment

Contrarily, the majority of studies on emotional psychological constructs have only looked at a limited range of emotions and fail to qualify their analyses as such. In the instance of enjoyment, current research

on subjective well-being (Diener, 2000), and quality of life (Endicott et al., 1993) has revealed that life satisfaction and enjoyment of life are two important factors underlying these categories. Recent educational study has investigated links between enjoyment and school outcomes (Madrigal, 1995), enjoyment's relationship to learning (Goetz, Pekrun, et al., 2006; Goetz, Hall, et al., 2006), enjoyment connected to tests (Pekrun et al., 2002), and enjoyment related to students finishing an accomplishment exam (Pekrun et al., 2004). The relationships between enjoyment experiences at various degrees of generalization is important. However, these effects have mainly gone unexplored because each study only evaluated enjoyment at one level of generalization. For instance, numerous activities are intertwined to depict a wide range of individual emotions within a group context. These emotions share similarities along specific dimensions and can be applied broadly to diverse emotional encounters. Considering the differences found with certain emotions, such enjoyment would be crucial. For instance, one could distinguish between various generalization levels in their enjoyment experiences, such as enjoying of life, enjoyment of school, enjoyment of learning, or enjoyment of participating in an event. The enjoyment component refers to how greatly the individual experience scores across all activities; when all experience areas score high that is regarded as enjoyable and represents a form of intrinsic curiosity, which is the focus of this study.

Curiosity

The idea that curiosity can motivate learning, growth, and development has a long history in psychology (Silvia, 2006; Silvia, 2012). Curiosity has been studied as a trait and as a mood, like other aspects of human motivation. Numerous fields of study, including neurology, emotion, human development, and human interactions have been done on the state of curiosity (Vogl et al., 2020). According to Kashdan et al. (2004), highly interested people are more likely to notice, pursue, and become engrossed in unusual and difficult events, such as participating in a CE with their classmates.

Personal Growth

Personal growth is a fundamental aspect of human existence and development that holds immense value and significance. It refers to the continuous process of self-improvement, self-awareness, and pursuing one's potential (Rubens et al., 2018; Sheldon et al., 2014). Personal growth is intricately tied to fulfillment and happiness. As individuals, we inherently desire to lead meaningful lives and experience a sense of purpose. Embracing personal growth allows us to uncover our enjoyment, curiosity, and values, leading to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. As we progress along the path of personal growth, we experience a greater sense of fulfillment and lasting happiness derived from aligning our actions with our true selves. In the professional realm, personal growth is a catalyst for career advancement. Continuous learning, skill development, and a growth mindset are highly valued by employers, as they are key requirements for organizational success (van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019). Those actively pursuing personal growth are more likely to seize opportunities, take on challenges, and excel in their careers. As such, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis #2: *Individual Experience is positively associated with (a) Enjoyment, (b) Curiosity, and (c) Personal Growth.*

Bridging Communal and Individual Experiences

The interplay between communal and individual experiences forms the foundation for vibrant and enriching human interactions (Ghani & Deshpande, 1994; Hari & Kujala, 2009; Hoffman & Novak, 2018; Rozin, 1982; Tung & Law, 2017; Van Dijck, 2011) . Understanding how these two dimensions intertwine is essential for fostering a sense of belonging, personal growth, and mutual understanding within communities. Bridging communal and individual experiences allows us to harness the collective power of shared activities while nurturing the uniqueness of each individual within the group. In parallel, individual experiences are enriched through communal activities (White et al., 2015). As individuals engage in group-oriented pursuits, they find themselves immersed in a shared sense of purpose, which can lead to personal growth and a deeper understanding of oneself (Bandura, 2002). Communal experiences often expose

individuals to new perspectives, challenges, and learning opportunities that can spark curiosity and drive intrinsic motivation.

To achieve the harmonious integration of communal and individual experiences, creating an environment that values diversity, fosters collaboration, and encourages self-discovery (Harris & De Bruin, 2018; Debebe, 2011; Mavrinac, 2005). Empowering individuals within the community to pursue their passions, while contributing to shared goals, amplifies the collective impact. By recognizing and nurturing individuality within the context of shared activities, we create an environment where people feel valued, empowered, and connected. Such a cohesive and supportive community enhances personal growth, ignites curiosity, and fosters a sense of belonging that transcends the boundaries of the group. Through the seamless integration of communal and individual experiences, we unlock the potential for meaningful interactions and collective achievements, enriching the lives of all involved. As such, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis #3: *The holistic student experience is positively associated with (a) the communal experience and (b) the individual experience.*

Hierarchical Construct in a Structural Model

Post-Consumption Evaluations

In this study, we examine the relationship between holistic student experience, perceived value, and satisfaction in group-oriented CEs. We define perceived value as the individual's overall assessment of the trade-off between benefits and sacrifices associated with the event experience (Chung & Koo, 2015; Chang & Dibb, 2012). This can include factors such as the quality of the event, the cost of the experience, and any additional benefits the individual may have received. Alternatively, satisfaction is defined as the overall affective response based on the student's evaluation of the discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the event (Giese & Cote, 2000; Oliver, 1996; Oliver, 1993; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). This can include factors such as the level of enjoyment or absorption the individual experienced during the event and their overall satisfaction with the event.

Individuals consider what they gain (i.e., benefits derived from the consumption experience) versus what they have to give up (i.e., sacrifices required to obtain the consumption experience) to receive a service. It is worth noting that when evaluating exceptional experiences (e.g., events), individuals do not rely on well-defined expectations of service quality across various attributes (i.e., event quality). Instead, they tend to base their evaluation on their expectations of intense emotional experiences (e.g., enjoyment or absorption), where overall satisfaction emerges from these experiences over the entire event duration (Arnould & Price, 1993; Morgan et al., 2008).

Therefore, in this study, we propose that a favorable, holistic, group-oriented event consumption experience will be directly related to perceived value (a cognitive judgment reflecting a benefits-sacrifice trade-off) and satisfaction (an affect-based judgment reflecting an overall consumption experience of the even). As such, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis #4: *The holistic student experience has a positive relationship with perceived value.*

Hypothesis #5: *The holistic student experience has a positive relationship with satisfaction.*

Zeithaml (1988) contended that individuals who perceive that they received 'value for money' are more satisfied than those who do not. Moreover, a substantial body of education research has demonstrated that favorable perceived-value assessments impact satisfaction in an educational environment (e.g., Brotherson et al., 2010; Dachner & Saxton, 2015; Ledden et al., 2007). Based on this, we argue that positive perceived-value evaluations of the group event experience to a major event are directly related to satisfaction with the group experience to a major event (as depicted in Figure 1). In other words, a higher (lower) level of perceived value is anticipated to increase (decrease) individuals satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis #6: *Perceived value is positively related to satisfaction.*

SYSTEMATIZED DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A post-event evaluation of the event becomes necessary to gain insights into the consumption process of CE. We conducted a web-based, self-administered survey among students who had attended CEs over the past four years, divided into four waves. The CE in question is an indispensable and compulsory element of a 16-week gateway business course designed to prepare declared business majors for their chosen fields. Every student enrolled in the 16-week course is expected to attend this event, which serves as the course's crowning achievement.

In preparation for the event, students undergo a comprehensive process over the 16 weeks of the course. This process includes confirming their chosen majors, dedicating time to refining their writing skills, and crafting cover letters, resumes, and portfolios. Additionally, their speaking skills are honed through mock-interviews with industry partners in the local area. The specific CE preparation involves creating a LinkedIn profile that aligns with their updated resume and establishing connections with more than 80 industry partners actively involved in the course. Each student also develops and practices their brand statement, benefiting from industry partner networking tips provided by guest speakers. These tips cover essential topics such as seamlessly integrating a brand statement into conversations, professionally engaging in group discussions, and maintaining appropriate social decorum.

Furthermore, the capstone preparation includes insightful guest speaker sessions on pursuing one's passion and building a standout LinkedIn profile. The event is conducted face-to-face, allowing students to directly interact with over 60 companies represented by industry partners. It is akin to a grand festival, fostering meaningful engagement with industry partners from various fields, such as Accounting, Management, Marketing, and Finance. The survey was distributed to students after the annual event in 4 consecutive years. Overall, this collection yielded a total of 463 student responses across 4 successive annual events (Appendix). Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of the data sample.

TABLE 1
THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE DATA SAMPLE

	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	58%
	Female	42%
Age	18 to 25	67%
	26 to 30	16%
	31 to 35	9%
	36 or older	8%

	Category	Percentage
Hours Employed Weekly	**< 5**	**4%**
	5 to 10	**15%**
	11 to 20	**12%**
	21 to 30	**26%**
	> 30	**42%**
Income	**< 25 K**	**21%**
	25 K – 50 K	**40%**
	51 K – 75 K	**22%**
	76 K-100 K	**7%**
	101 K-125 K	**5%**
	126 K-150 K	**3%**
	>150 K	**2%**

METHOD

The survey data was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with partial least squares (PLS) using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2015), following the 5000 bootstrap-samples procedure (a resampling procedure which helps to ensure more accurate statistical estimates of effects). PLS-SEM is best suited for studies with smaller sample sizes (e.g., less than 500; Fornell & Bookstein, 1982) and is more appropriate for investigating relationships in a predictive rather than confirmatory manner—this approach is also helpful for models which are still in the early stages of theory development, such as the theoretical model of this study depicted in Figure 1. PLS-SEM is also preferred when data deviate from normal distribution assumptions, when formative constructs are included, and when higher-order constructs are integral to the study (Hair Jr. et al., 2014).

The theoretical model's first-order constructs (Figure 1) were measured using reflective multi-item scales, adapted to fit the group-based tourism context. The items for communal experience constructs were sourced from, peer-to-peer interaction (Kidd et al., 2006), networking (Wolff & Moser, 2006; Wolff & Spurk, 2020), and social capital (Chiu et al., 2006). The measures for individual experience constructs were sourced from enjoyment (Tsai & Pai, 2013), curiosity (Kashdan et al., 2020), and personal growth (Robitschek et al., 2012). Perceived value was measured using adapted items from (Petrick, 2002). To evaluate overall satisfaction, items used were sourced from Oliver (2014).

Construct Reliability and Validity

The holistic student experience model, which is based on a reflective-reflective configuration, follows the standard methods used to assess the validity and reliability of scales made up of reflective indicators (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). As a result, the reflective outer-measurement models were evaluated using various indices, such as individual indicator loadings, composite reliability, average variance explained (AVE), bootstrapped *t*-statistics, convergent validity indices (our study evaluates the

convergent validity of measures for a given construct by determining if constructs are more highly correlated with each other than with measures for other constructs), and discriminant validity indices [the study utilized the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross loadings, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)], to determine a model's suitability and importance.

The measurement model exhibited strong internal consistency, as evidenced by the composite reliability values in Table 2, which surpassed the benchmark of .70. In addition, the AVE, which indicates the proportion of variance in the reflective indicator block that can be attributed to the corresponding construct, exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .50 for all reflective constructs, as seen in Table 2. As a result, all reflective scales showed adequate internal consistency.

The dataset included significant and high indicator loadings for all reflective constructs, with values surpassing the .70 threshold (see Table 2). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is present when the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) square root is higher than all corresponding correlations. As depicted in Table 3, the square roots of the AVE values consistently exceeded the off-diagonal correlations, indicating that the study had achieved discriminant validity at the construct level.

Discriminant validity was further supported by examining the cross loadings of the measurement items, which showed that each item had a higher loading on its assigned construct than on other constructs. To assess the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT), SmartPLS was used with bootstrapping procedures following the recommendation by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT values for all reflective constructs, presented in Table 4, were found to be lower than the most conservative critical value of 0.85. Additionally, the upper confidence interval limit (98.1%) for the HTMT inference criterion was below 1.0 for all constructs, indicating that all HTMT values were significantly different from one. Therefore, we conclude that the model provided evidence for support of discriminant validity. Table 5 reports the mean and standard deviation of the latent variables for the First-Order constructs, both of which meet the threshold point.

TABLE 2
CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Measurement Model				
Communal Experience				
Interaction	0.92	0.92	0.94	0.76
Networking	0.93	0.94	0.95	0.80
Social Capital	0.93	0.94	0.95	0.80
Individual Experience				
Curiosity	0.93	0.93	0.95	0.83
Enjoyment	0.92	0.92	0.94	0.75
Personal Growth	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.82
Structural Model Constructs				
Perceived Value	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.80
Satisfaction	na	na	na	na
na=not applicable.				

TABLE 3
INTERCORRELATIONS OF THE LATENT VARIABLES FOR THE FIRST-ORDER CONSTRUCTS

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	0.84										
2	0.37	0.88									
3	0.26	0.36	0.84								
4	0.27	0.24	0.52	0.81							
5	0.32	0.38	0.25	0.44	0.83						
6	0.40	0.32	0.21	0.26	0.25	0.83					
7	0.22	0.27	0.36	0.39	0.46	0.46	0.84				
8	0.31	0.36	0.35	0.33	0.24	0.21	0.30	0.83			
9	0.41	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.27	0.33	0.23	0.32	0.88		
10	0.31	0.27	0.36	0.31	0.25	0.20	0.34	0.42	0.37	0.87	
11	0.23	0.35	0.20	0.32	0.51	0.26	0.36	0.41	0.48	0.42	0.85
1=Communal Experience, 2=Curiosity, 3= Personal Growth, 4=Enjoyment, 5=Holistic Experience, 6=Individual Experience, 7=Interaction, 8=Networking, 9=Perceived Value, 10=Satisfaction, 11=Social Capital.											

TABLE 4
HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT RATIO (HTMT) RESULTS

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Curiosity	-							
Personal Growth	0.33	-						
Enjoyment	0.53	0.41	-					
Interaction	0.43	0.34	0.69	-				
Networking	0.61	0.61	0.75	0.52	-			
Perceived Value	0.29	0.38	0.41	0.42	0.54	-		
Satisfaction	0.71	0.76	0.27	0.61	0.59	0.41	-	
Social Capital	0.62	0.35	0.50	0.52	0.41	0.06	0.66	-
All HTMT values <0.85 criterion.								

TABLE 5
MEAN, AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE LATENT VARIABLES FOR THE FIRST-ORDER CONSTRUCTS

Constructs	Standard Deviation	Mean
Curiosity	0.37	5.16
Personal Growth	0.39	5.43
Enjoyment	0.39	5.24
Holistic Experience	0.51	N/A
Interaction	0.38	5.20
Networking	0.40	5.51
Perceived Value	0.22	5.28
Satisfaction	0.28	5.17
Social Capital	0.54	5.28

TABLE 6
HYPOTHESES RESULTS FOR THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

	2nd Order Constructs	1st Order Constructs	R^2	Loadings	Critical Ration	Conclusion
H1a	Communal experience	Social Capital	0.78+	0.83	24.85*	Supported
H1b	Communal experience	Interaction	0.85+	0.92	26.88*	Supported
H1c	Communal experience	Networking	0.83+	0.91	25.28*	Supported
H2a	Individual Experience	Enjoyment	0.84+	0.92	28.29*	Supported
H2b	Individual Experience	Curiosity	0.86+	0.92	26.78*	Supported
H2c	Individual Experience	Personal Growth	0.84+	0.97	32.82*	Supported
	3rd Order Construct	2nd Order Constructs				
H3a	Holistic Students Experience	Communal Experience		0.89	18.22*	Supported
H3b	Holistic Students Experience	Individual Experience		0.92	17.68*	Supported
	Predicted Constructs	Predictor Constructs				
H4a	Perceived Value	Holistic Students Experience	0.82+	0.87	18.24*	Supported
H4b	Satisfaction	Holistic Students Experience	0.78+	0.75	15.74*	Supported
H5	Satisfaction	Perceived Value	0.77+	0.43	12.97*	Supported
		AVA	0.81			

*: Meets or exceeds criterion of $t > 1.96$, $p < .01$.
+: Meets or exceeds criterion of $R^2 > .50$.
AVA: Average Variance Accounted

The Hierarchical Structure

This study utilized PLS path modeling to investigate the relationships in the hierarchical model, and the results of the analysis are presented in Table 6, which includes the path coefficients and loadings. All loadings were found to be statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, indicating strong support for the higher-order structure of the holistic students experience construct. Specifically, as displayed in Figure 2 and Table 6, the loadings of all first-order factors on the second-order factors were greater than .71, providing evidence in support of H1a, H1b, H1c and H2a, H2b, H2c. Additionally, the second-order factors exhibited strong loadings on the third-order factor, with communal experience loading at .89 and individual experience loading at .92 on the holistic students experience construct, thus supporting H3a and H3b, respectively.

To evaluate the structural model, we calculated our internal latent variables' coefficient of determination (R2). Following the recommended Chin (1998) classification, R^2 values of .19 are considered "weak", values of .33 are considered "moderate", and values of .67 are considered "strong". These R^2 values provide

a useful way to assess the strength of our model and the extent to which our internal variables explain the observed variance

In order to examine the validity of our model, we added the construct of holistic event experience to a nomological network that included post-consumption evaluations of perceived value and satisfaction. Table 6 presents our findings, which demonstrates a significant and positive impact of the holistic student experience on both perceived value (H4: $\beta = .87$, $p < .01$; $R^2 = .82$) and satisfaction (H5: $\beta = .75$, $p < .01$; $R^2 = .78$). Furthermore, our results indicate that perceived value has a positive effect on student satisfaction with a major event experience (H6: $\beta = .43$, $p < .01$; $R^2 = .77$). To evaluate the structural model, we examined the coefficient of determination (R^2) of our endogenous latent constructs. According to Hair et al. (2014), a rough rule of thumb is that R2 values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are weak, moderate, and strong. Our analysis indicates that the endogenous latent constructs in our model had an average to substantial impact on our endogenous latent constructs, as presented in Table 2. Specifically, the perceived value and satisfaction constructs had R^2 values of .82 and .78, respectively, indicating above average strength. In accordance with (Hair Jr. et al., 2014), we employed cross-validated redundancy as a metric for Stone-Geisser's (Q2) (Geisser, 1974) in our use of SmartPLS. Q2 values can be obtained by the Bindfolding procedure in SmartPLS, in the Bindfolding setting window, an omission distance (OD) of 5 to 10 is suggested for most research (Hair et al., 2012). This metric incorporates the structural model, a fundamental component of the path model, to forecast eliminated data points. Q2 values greater than zero signify the predictive significance of exogenous latent variables for a given endogenous latent variable (Henseler et al., 2009). This method allowed us to evaluate predictive relevance (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). We observed that all variables had Q2 values greater than 0, indicating adequate predictive relevance. We conducted a test on our model to see if perceived value played a mediating role between the overall student experience and satisfaction. However, we found that there was neither partial nor complete mediation. To ensure that our results were accurate, we also considered and controlled for factors such as gender, prior CE experience, and age. Our analysis indicated that these control variables did not have any significant correlation with the dependent variables, which were perceived value and satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated how a CE held in an educational institution influences a student's career decisions. By utilizing a theoretical model and empirical evidence, our research aims to gain a deeper understanding of student's experience in the hedonic, service-consumption context of CE. Our study's contributions to the academic literature and the education system are noteworthy and explicated in detail below.

Literature Leverage

This study contributes significantly to the existing literature on student experiences (Marshall et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2008; Silkes et al., 2010), particularly in the context of career group-oriented events (Lee et al., 2020). The novelty of this approach lies in the development of a holistic student-experience model that considers both individual and communal aspects, encompassing six underlying constructs derived from 30 survey questions. This study model provides a more comprehensive understanding compared to previous research that predominantly focused on individual experiences, and conceptually extends the prior work of consumer loyalty research (e.g., Piyathasanan et al., 2015) into an educational context. One notable advancement is the explicit calculation and equal consideration of individual and communal experiences in assessing student benefits within the context of communal events. The study identifies key drivers for each dimension, with communal experiences being influenced by social capital, networking quality, and interaction, while individual experiences are shaped by curiosity, enjoyment, and enduring involvement. This nuanced analysis sheds light on the multifaceted nature of student experiences and enhances our understanding of the factors that contribute to both individual and communal satisfaction.

Moreover, the main objective of this study was to establish the nomological validity of the holistic student experience by confirming its perceived value and satisfaction outcomes. Results showed that the

holistic students experience construct had a strong explanatory power, accounting for 82% of the variance in perceived value and 78% of the variance in satisfaction. Similarly, the construct was found to significantly influence CE satisfaction when combined with perceived value, explaining 77% of the variance. These findings are important for understanding the impact of CEs and are also consistent with prior studies (Piyathasanan et al., 2015). The use of a holistic experience framework contributes to the existing literature by providing a deeper understanding of how it affects perceived value and satisfaction, both of which are crucial post-consumption constructs.

While previous research has examined CE (Lee et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2008; Yilmaz et al., 2016), our study brings a fresh perspective to the student experience in group-oriented CE by utilizing activity theory to enhance existing literature. Through an activity theory lens, we examined consumption experiences and analyzed data elements contributing to various student group experiences, going beyond individual experiences. This approach recognizes group students as active participants in peer-to-peer interactions related to event activities. It also acknowledges their collaboration to achieve desired outcomes and perform event-related rituals with others. These principles are integral to activity theory and help illustrate the formation of holistic individual experiences involving individual and communal components. Consequently, our study found that activity theory provided a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing empirical evidence of holistic students experiences in the unique contextual condition of group-oriented CE.

Education Leverage

This study identified enjoyment, curiosity, and personal growth as key constructs of the individual experience. To engage with students, universities can design enjoyable activities centered around interesting and relevant themes related to the event. For example, besides roleplays, guest speakers, or mock-interview activities, universities can incorporate other stimuli to enhance curiosity and enjoyment. Examples of such supporting activities include incorporating a job fair at the university level (Beam, 2016). As a subcomponent, universities can have alumni share a success story, or hold related activities surrounding jobsii interviews as employers aligned with the CE can add value and interest. Incorporating such supporting activities can broaden the appeal of the event and enhance the consumption experience by increasing curiosity and enjoyment.

According to our study, creating a positive and comprehensive student experience is crucial for achieving student satisfaction and perceived value in group-oriented events. This study found that both communal and individual experiences play equally important roles in creating this holistic experience. These lower-order constructs are particularly important for event management, as they offer actionable drivers for improving student experience (Gabriel et al., 2019; Hiatt et al., 2023).

Focusing on individual student experience is insufficient to maintain student engagement in CE. To truly improve the communal experience, prioritizing meaningful social interaction among classmates and with the broader community of event participants, including employers and industry partners, is crucial. Event managers must integrate social features and interaction activities into the event's design and operational planning to achieve this. This includes creating opportunities for socialization and interaction among students, instilling normative beliefs and values to promote social cohesion, and fostering perceptions of sociability. For instance, requiring students to submit a written assignment after the CE that details their interactions with five different industry partners, or their perspectives on five different companies before and after the event could be useful measures to help achieve communal objectives and enhance the overall event experience.

Often business schools measure their positive social impact in terms of the proportion of graduates who find employment by tracking graduate placement rates (Becker et al., 2008; Moleke, 2006; Teichler, 2000). It is essential, yet challenging, to move away from only measuring inputs (education alone) and instead toward outputs or outcomes, such as graduate placement. The easier it is to measure outputs and consequences of a smaller and more narrowly concentrated the scope activity (like CEs). Starting with outputs can be beneficial because data is more easily accessible and is often directly tied to an institution's efforts (such as graduate placement rates). Thus, measuring results repeatedly calls for outside data. For

instance, following a CE, looking at the student's LinkedIn profile can gauge how substantially their professional network grew by comparing their connections before and after the event.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS

As with any research project, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations, which can open new research opportunities. To begin with, this study's research model relied on data collected from one University, College of Business. Despite the limitation, this research provides valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms of the holistic student experience, which can help enhance perceived value and satisfaction. Therefore, conducting future studies in various universities and majors offers diversity that can further illuminate the model's generalizability.

The study adopted a constant-valence, item-response style that may have introduced acquiescence bias. Nevertheless, the impact of such bias is likely to be mitigated. Therefore, it is necessary to exercise caution when extending the findings beyond this context and to countries with different cultural characteristics.

Finally, the correlational nature of these relationships underscores the need for future research to delve deeper into establishing causal relationships. Also, the present understanding of the holistic model may not be complete, and further research can enhance and refine this model by including additional communal and individual experience components. This is especially crucial for events in different categories that offer emotionally intense experiences and occur less frequently than once a year. Consequently, this article serves as a starting point for further activity-theory-driven research in education.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying the holistic student experience in a group-oriented career event context. The hierarchical model presented in the study offers a more comprehensive view of students experience by considering both individual and communal experiences. The study's results demonstrate the significant impact of the holistic students experience construct on perceived value and satisfaction, highlighting the importance of creating a positive and comprehensive student experience to achieve student engagement in CE.

The study's practical implications for event management in the education system are significant, as it offers actionable drivers for improving student engagement and enhancing the overall event experience. The value and importance of this research lie in its potential to inform and guide the design and operational planning of CE events, leading to improved outcomes for both students and employers. The study's methodology and theoretical framework also contribute to the academic literature, advancing the understanding of students experience in the unique contextual condition of group-oriented CE. Overall, this research serves as a starting point for further exploration and development of the holistic students experience concept and its impact on student outcomes in the education system.

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APPENDIX

Survey	
Communal Experience (Thinking about the CE please answer the following questions**)**	
Interaction I interact with others during the CE more than others. I want to share my CE experience with other classmates I enjoy talking to my classmates about my CE interaction experience. I did talk to other during the CE more than usual. I would like to attend such event more.	(Kidd et al., 2006)
Networking I utilize CE to establish connections with individuals from various organizations. My professional network holds significant personal value for me. When considering your peers of the same age, how would you rate your achievements in developing your career network? I lean towards remaining in a company where I am acquainted with its network (connections) rather than seeking opportunities elsewhere. Within the CE, numerous job opportunities align with my skills and experience.	(Wolff & Moser, 2006); (Wolff & Spurk, 2020)
Social Capital I maintain close social relationships with some participants in CE I spend a lot of time interacting with some participants in the CE I frequently communicate with some participants from the CE I know some participants from the CE on a personal level	(Chiu et al., 2006)

Individual Experience (Thinking about the CE please answer the following questions**)**	
Enjoyment I find participating in this CE enjoyable I find participating in this CE interesting and fascinating I find participating in this CE fun	(Tsai & Pai, 2013)
Curiosity I ask a lot of questions to figure out what interests other people. When talking to someone who is excited, I am curious to find out why. When talking to someone, I try to discover interesting details about them. I like finding out why people behave the way they do. When other people are having a conversation, I like to find out what it's about. When around other people, I like listening to their conversations. When people quarrel, I like to know what's going on. I seek out information about the private lives of people in my life.	(Kashdan et al., 2020)
Personal Growth I take every opportunity to grow as it comes up. I figure out what I need to change about myself. I am constantly trying to grow as a person. I know how to set realistic goals to make changes in my career. I use resources when I try to grow. I look for opportunities to grow as a person.	(Robitschek et al., 2012)
Structural Model (Thinking about the CE please answer the following questions**)**	
Perceived Value This event made me feel good. The quality of the event was outstanding. Overall, the event is better than I expected It was a worthy decision to attend the event	(Petrick, 2002)
Satisfaction The CE was exactly what I needed I was satisfied with decision to attend the event It was a wise choice to attend the event It was a good, and satisfying experience	(Oliver, 2014)