

A Framework Defining Customer Experience Construct and Measurement

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ABSTRACT

The time has gone when the organizations talk about achieving customer satisfaction through quality of goods and services. The impact of globalization, change in consumer lifestyle has made customer highly demanding and enforces him to think before making a purchase of product is it going to portray what I am? Will it fulfil my fantasies? Therefore the marketer needs to explore the experiential perspective of consumer behaviour that is directed towards emotions, fun and fantasies. As today's customer seek experiences whether from the product, service or the brand. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide product, service, and consumption and brand as experiential components of upcoming economy on the basis of review of literature. Moreover, we develop a conceptual model that highlights these dimensions in the measurement of customer experience. In addition to this, study identifies customer experience as a two way interaction between consumer construct and experiential construct.

Keywords: customer experience, product, service, servicescape, brand, consumption, emotion, emotional association, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

INTRODUCTION:

Today's customer is looking for the experience that goods and services provide, directed towards fantasies, feelings and fun (Frow and Payne, 2007; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Experiences are seen as memorable, personally inherent and exist in the minds of an individual who have been engaged on the physical, emotional, and intellectual or even on spiritual level (Pine II and Gilmore 1998; Gilmore and Pine II 1997).

Therefore, Mac Millan and Mac Grath (1999) opine that the organizations will have to open up their creative thinking to their customer's entire experience with a product or service called consumption chain. As a result the organizations will be able to discover the new opportunities to position their offerings in ways that they and their competitors, would never have thought possible.

Various authors have defined customer experience differently. Robinette et al., (2001) defined customer experience as the collection of points at which companies and customers exchange sensory stimuli, information and emotion. Berry et al., (2002) defined customer experience as clues that include three components that are functional (technical quality of the offering), mechanical (sensory presentation of offering) and humanic (behaviour and appearance of offering). Veroeff et al., (2009) states customer experience involves customers cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical response including search, purchase, consumption and after sale phase of experience emotion. According to Meyer and Schwanger, (2007) customer experience is the internal and subjective response resulting from direct or indirect contact with the company. Direct contact occurs with purchase and use of product and services whereas indirect contact involves advertisement and reports. Moreover, Klaus and Maklan (2013) state customer experience involves customer's cognitive and affective assessment of all direct and indirect encounters with the firm relating to their purchasing behaviour. Recognizing the importance of experience researchers has presented differently the conceptualisation and

measurement of customer experience. The literature suggests that the experience can result from interaction with product (Malhalke, 2008; Desmet and Hekkert, 2007; Hamilton and Thompson 2007), servicescape (Bettencort and Gwinner, 1996; Hui and Bateson, 1991; Padgett and Allen, 1997), brand (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010; Valenico, 2005; Barkus et al., 2009, Keller, 2003) consumption (Holbrook et al. 1984, Havlena and Holbrook, 1986, Caru and Cova, 2003). Further emotions (Schifferstein and Hekkert 2007, Alvarez and Alvarez, 2003; Westbrook, 1987; Philips and Baumgartner, 1999; Richins, 1997) act as mediator that lead towards satisfaction (Cardozo, 1965 Westbrook, 1987; Oliver 1999) and loyalty (Mascarenhas et al., 2006, Chaudhari and Holbrook, 2001; Barkus et al., 2009).

However, prior research has not defined them the essential elements of customer experience. Moreover, these studies have not defined the role of consumer in creating customer experience. Thus, we suggest that while 'designing customer experience' role of consumer should be considered, as the interaction of the consumer with these experiential constructs create customer experience and contributes towards a better understanding to firms manage it effectively. (Mann and Rawat, 2017; and Kranzbuhler, Kleijnen, Morgan and Teerling, 2018) .

This study aims to present comprehensive, detailed, and operational framework to measure the concept customer experience by clearly defining the product, service, brand, emotion and consumption as the essential elements of customer experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

On the basis of review of literature we have identified product, servicescape, brand and consumption as essential elements of customer experience. This helps us to propose a framework that closely defines the concept customer experience, its construct, and consequences as shown in figure 1.

Product:

Customer experience is a method that generates a link between the customer and the product, thereby adding value to the product (Chen and Lin, 2015). The customer's experience is impacted by the interaction between customer's inherent needs, values and interest; and those qualities of the product, that not only include instrumental qualities that is using and operating of products, but also non-instrumental qualities such as aesthetics and symbolic aspect of the product.

Moreover, consumer experience with the product is influenced by the type of involvement the consumer has for the purchase of the product. As proposed by Zaichkowsky (1985) customer involves in the purchase of product for personal relevance based on inherent needs, values and interest. Thus, consumer involvement in purchase of product provides a source about what customers are looking for. On this, Dhar and Wertenbroch, (2000); Batra and Ahtola, (1990); Park et al., (1986); Voss et al., (2003); Assael (2006) and Mittal, (1990) provide that while experiencing the product consumer considers not only the utilitarian values but also hedonic values that a product can generate for her/him. Here utilitarian refers to the performance of the product in everyday life of the consumer and hedonic defines the pleasure potential of the product, or the experiential aspect of the product or the cues that provides sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognitive stimulation.

Moreover, it has been found that consumer experience with product, whether utilitarian and hedonic, is used as an input to the product-elicited affective experience (Mano and Oliver, 1993). That's why today marketers are increasingly interested in understanding the nature of affect in post purchase process, as the term affect is conceived as an umbrella for a set of more specific mental process, including emotions, moods and attitude to explain consumer's emotion towards a product usage (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

Service:

Services encourage interaction between the customer and product, but its physical surrounding known as cues or environmental dimension that creates experience (Baker et al, 1992). Therefore it has been studied that servicescape such as 1) ambient conditions like temperature, air quality, noise, music, odour, lighting and physical odour 2) spatial layout and functionality that defines the arrangement and design of the physical environment including floor space, furniture and other equipment, where functionality refers to the ability of the same items to facilitate the accomplishment of customer and employee goal; and 3) Signs, symbols, and artifacts that communicates the impression of image and quality (Ward et al., 2007). Here signs are defined as explicit communicators that are displayed on the exterior and interior of the structure and are used as labels (name of company, name of department). Other symbols and artifacts provides implicit cues to user about a) the meaning of place and norms for expectations for behavior in the place, quality of construction material, artwork, certificates and photographs, floor coverings, and b) personal objects that communicate symbolic meaning and

create an overall aesthetic impression generate experiences (Zeithaml, 2008, p.327-330).

Moreover, it has been found that experience is created when a series of interactions between the customer and the employees of the organization takes place. This not only includes employee ability, but also includes their dresses (Solomon 1985), manners (Berry et al. 1985), technical skills (Gronroos 1990; Davidow and Uttal 1989), commitment (Bittner et al. 1990), and other characteristics that are significant in creation of customer service experience i.e., their conduct, act and appearance (Berry and Parasuraman 1991).

In addition, Baker et al. (2002) opine that the greater the number of employees, the more active and arousing is the physical environment. Moreover, it is the consumer's feelings that rate the service (Hui and Bateson 1991).

To conclude, Helkkula (2011) revealed three important characterizations of the concept service experience as a) a process, b) an outcome, and c) a phenomenon. Moreover, Stein and Ramaseshan (2016) confer seven distinct elements of customer experience touch points, which include; atmospheric, technological, communicative, process, employee–customer interaction, customer–customer interaction and product interaction elements.

Thus, all these features have an impact upon the interaction between service providers and their customers to provide experience (Grove et al., 2010; Zeithaml p 343-346, 2008).

Moreover, when these elements arouse the consumer (say, from design of the building, the interior space, the layout of aisles, the texture of carpet to bright colours and a strong scent) positive emotions will exist, the buyer will tend to spend more time in the store and have an increased tendency to affiliate with people resulting into buying tendency (Mowen, p 543, 1990, John, Adiele and Nkoro, 2013).

Brand:

The consumers look for brands that provide them unique and memorable experiences (Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010). That not only solves externally generated needs but associates them with a group, role or self-image and even fulfils internally generated needs for stimulation and/or variety (Sreedhar and Singh 2006).

As a consequence, the brand has been an active partner in their lives who has its own personality, on whom trust can be drawn, emotional attachment can be built, as well as brand communities can be made (Schmitt and Rogers 2008).

Thus, the experience provided by the brand can be conceptualised as sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural responses evoked by brand related stimuli that are part of the brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments that in turn helps to form quality relationship and emotional association between the consumer and the brand i.e. of love/passion, self connection, commitment, interdependence, and intimacy (Barkus et al. 2009; Fournier 1998). Moreover, impacts long-term and short-term consequences, such as customer experiential value that includes aesthetics, playfulness, service excellence, and customer return on investment (Keng, Tran, and Le Thi, 2013).

Moreover, Percy and Hansen (2000) opine that the consumer experiences with the brand, whether in terms of actual use or simply an understanding of it, results into emotional association in memory. As, more the consumer "experiences" the brand by seeing it, hearing it, the more it is going to register in their memory that results into, emotional bonds.

Therefore, the marketer needs to build a strong brand that ensures the right type of experiences to the customer with its product and services and its accompanying marketing activities in order to imbibe desired thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, opinions, and so on with the brand that maximize their satisfaction (Keller, 2003 and Anderson and Sullivan 1993).

Consumption:

Customer experience with the product is not only oriented towards achieving satisfaction of a need but also motivates consumer towards realization of type of experience received from consuming the product. This provides experience is not limited to use of the product and involves emotional significance that is founded on the interaction with stimuli, which are the products or services consumed. (Padgett and Allen, 1997).

Thus, consumption experiences are considered as multidimensional which not only focus on utilitarian but also on hedonic dimensions of the product oriented towards providing emotional experiences (Caru and Cova 2003; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). For example, activities like vacation, restaurant visits, shopping, games, music, even spiritual responses and religious activities, and some other forms of consumption, such as, eating or dressing, are not only objective oriented, but also involve a subjective aspect associated emotions (Derbaix and Pham 1991; Havlena and Holbrook, 1986 and ; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982).

Moreover, Arnould and Price (1993) study affective dimensions of consumption in the context of river rafting and find that emotion plays important role in the delivery of extraordinary experiences. Thus, it is necessary for

the marketer to study the nature of emotions in order to understand his choice of brand, and the product he/she uses (Havlena and Holbrook 1986; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982).

Emotions acting as a mediator:

Emotions in consumer research have been reflected by the following concepts: affect, hedonism, mood, feelings, and emotions but does not reflect the actual function of emotion (Sorensen 2008). Therefore, Bagozzi et al., (1999) define emotion as a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it. More specifically, explained by two groups of emotions, positive and negative valence emotions (Sorensen 2008, Kim and Gupta 2012).

Various authors have measure the specific emotion the consumer experiences during consumption of product, services and brand. Such as, Schifferstein and Hekkert (2007) study the relationship between emotion and consumption of the product. Empirically, Oliver (1999) provides the consumption of automobiles and cable pay television (CATV) subscription elicit positive and negative emotions. Oliver (1993) extends this work by showing that emotional responses mediate the effects of product attributes on satisfaction. Thus, Mano and Oliver (1993) investigate the role of evaluations, feelings, and satisfaction in the post consumption behaviour. And Westbrook (1987) provides emotion and consumption relationship to several central aspects of post purchase processes. In addition to this, Phillips and Baumgartner (2002) confirm the importance of including positive and negative affectivity in explaining satisfaction.

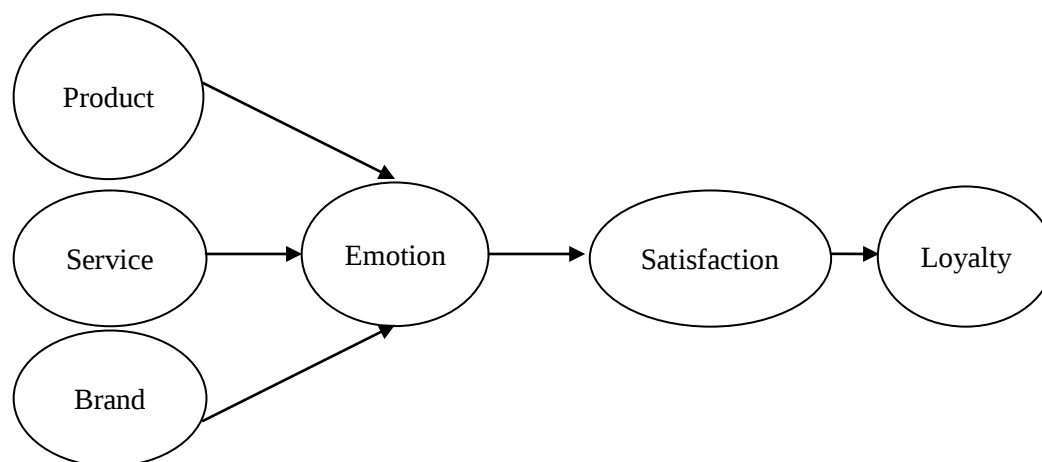
In addition to above, it has been examined that the emotion elicited by physical environment too influences customer satisfaction such as in case of restaurants and heritage attraction (Ryu and Han, 2010; Bonn et al., 2007). Therefore Andreu et al., (2006) proposes a comprehensive model that states relationship exists between environmental elements, emotion satisfaction and behavioural response. Thus, Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006); Sharma and Stafford 2000; Krafft and Mantrala (c 1, p23, 2010 and Ouyang, Behnke, Almanza and Ghiselli (2018) examine that the arousal-inducing features such as ambience and number of salespeople in a physical environment not only influences consumer affective responses to the environment but also subsequent buying intention. In addition to this, Pullman and Gross (2004) explores the relationship between different service elements designed to create enhanced experience and customer loyalty. Smith and Bolton (2002) investigate the role of consumer emotions in the context of service failure and recovery encounters. Holbrook and Gardner (1993) investigated the relation between the emotional dimensions pleasure and arousal and the duration of a consumption experience, in case of listening to music (cited in Loras et al, 2002).

Moreover Percy and Hansen (2004) find that consumer associates both positive and negative emotion with the brand. These are aroused when the consumer encounters a product, brand or other marketing stimuli or by his thinking about them. Moreover, consumer experience with the brand of a particular product category, whether in terms of actual use or simply an understanding of it also results into emotional association in memory. By measuring the consumer-brand emotional association, the marketer can better understand and develop advertising communication strategy for their brand (Percy et al. 2004). As the emotional association not only attaches the consumer with the brand but also elicit feelings such as affection, passion and connection towards that brand (Thomson et al. 2005). Thus, a good experience provided by the product makes the customer feel much closer to its brand and evokes positive internal feelings that help to register brand in the memory of customer (Valenico 2005). Therefore, it can be said that the total experience delivered by these factors elicit emotion that act as a mediator in determining consumer buying intention (Andreu et al., 2006). Thus positive and negative affect are ever present in the experience of emotions that impacts both behavioural intentions and actual behaviour of consumers (Laros and Steenkamp 2005; Nyer 1998).

Thus customer experience reflects how the product or services has fulfilled its purpose resulting into some level of post purchase affect towards the experience which can be positive or negative and makes customer to think whether they have attained a certain level of satisfaction or not. Thus, satisfaction results from the good experiences when the customer encounter with the brand and is enough to make emotional association in the mind of customer (Oliver, 1999; Cardozo, 1965).

Given these elements and consequences of customer experience we provide a theoretical framework (shown in Figure 1) that defines customer experience is created when customer interacts with aesthetic and meaning level of product, social environment, music, scent, of store and those characteristics of brand that involves stimuli, design and identity. This elicits emotions and further produces effect on behavioural intention. Thus, these four constituents are directly defied as essential element of customer experience.

Figure 1: The framework of customer experience



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

For creating superior customer experience we provide that marketing manager need to shift their focus from a product-and firm centric approach to a personalized customer experience centric approach. Many researchers have identified customer experience by measuring experience with product, service, consumption and brand but have not defined them as elements of customer experience. On the basis of literature review this paper proposes a framework that closely defines the concept customer experience, its elements and subelements, and their consequences.

Moreover, we suggest that while ‘designing customer experience’ role of consumer should be considered, as the interaction of the consumer with these experiential construct creates customer experience. Thus, we conclude that customer experience is a two way interactivity between the consumer construct and experiential construct created by the organization.

Therefore, future research should be oriented towards creating customer experience which integrates these experiential elements and includes a process whereby consumer construct interacts with product that focuses on his/her involvement with the product. This will help the marketing manager to create experience as desired by the customer according to their personality trait.

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