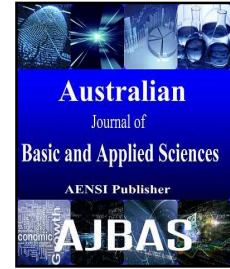




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**Empathizing Customer Experience: A Critical Stride Of Customer Experience Management**

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**ABSTRACT**

A critical review of literature is structured around the key components of brand performance, experiential relationships and perceptions, viewed from a consumer’s perspective to analytically assess the conceptual validity of customer experience as a construct and propose an integrated model which assimilates brand performance, perception and Loyalty. The study identified the multi-dimensional, temper and contextual precise subject of “Customer experiential perception” remains shattered and ambiguous. The approaches to its measurement are suggested but techniques to regulate its governance remains uncovered. Since the customer experience being measured through the measurement of its upshot element “Loyalty” in terms of trust worthiness and confidence; it is complicated to structure the regulatory rubrics for Customer experience. By incorporating emotional and perceptual distortion over time, customer experience is subjective to unpredicted static, partial dimensions. The unique Customer Experiential Perception, which is precise to an individual customer, at a certain point of time and location, in the context of a precise event, limits its managerial efficacy for planning and governance purposes. However many companies which have seen customer experience management (CEM) as a successor to customer relationship management (CRM) faced enormous complications of inter-functional integration. Originality/ Value: Responding to calls for further research on Consumers’ Experience and their measures, this paper has provided a critical review of an embryonic topic and suggested that practical deployment of customer experience management is challenging and may be overpowering to achieve despite of the growing essentiality and interest in the concept.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Customer experience incorporates every aspect of a company’s contribution to the quality of customer care; of course also to the product and service features, advertising, packaging, ease of use, and reliability. Yet few of the people responsible for those experiences and relationships things have given sustained thought to how their distinct and unique decisions shape customer experience. To the extent they do think about it, they all have different ideas and perceptions of what customer experience is. Some companies don’t understand why they should be worried about customer experience; whereas the others collect and quantify data on it but don’t circulate the finding. Still others do the measuring, assessment and distribution but fail to make anyone responsible for deploying the information and the system to use. Though there is an enormous need; the prospects for improvement

are too small with a huge disparity between the perception and measurement of customer experience between different companies. With the presence of greater number of choices for the customers today than ever before, the customers are pursuing more channels to decide upon the more complex choices. In such an environment, simple, integrated solutions to unregimented and burdensome problems will win the allegiance of the time-pressed consumer. Moreover, in markets that are increasingly global, it is treacherous to assume that a given product or service offering, communication, or other contact will affect faraway consumers the same way it does those at the headquartered nation. Although few companies have zeroed in on customer experience, many have been trying to measure customer satisfaction adopting myriad techniques and methodologies ultimately procuring plenty of data as a result. The problem is that measuring customer satisfaction does not tell anyone how to achieve it.

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Customer satisfaction is essentially the culmination of a series of customer experiences or, one could say, the net result of the good ones minus the bad ones. It occurs when the gap between customers' expectations and their subsequent experiences has been closed and this satisfaction may differ from the product and service, the climate, the mood and perception of the customer, the time of purchase and even be impacted heavily by his emotions. To understand how to achieve satisfaction, a company must deconstruct it into its component wise experiences. Because many customer experiences aren't the direct consequence of the brand's messages or the company's actual product or service offerings, a company's reexamination of its initiatives and choices will not suffice. The customers themselves; the packed range and straightforward reality of their prior experiences, and then their expectations, warm or harsh, those have conjured up must be monitored and probed. The attention to customers requires a closed-loop process in which every function worries about delivering a good experience, and senior management ensures that the offering keeps all those parochial conceptions in balance and thus linked to the bottom line. This article will elucidate how such experiences are created by understanding the patterns a company can turn pipe dreams of customer focus into a real business system.

## II. Customer Experience:

The term 'customer experience' has been getting immense attention from the corporate as it turning out to be the driving factor which is making the customer to be loyal to the brand or to the product. Customer experience can be termed as the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom, such that an individual could be expected to respond to stimuli with a learned response. Experience can also be termed as a unique event, and therefore, by implication learning from previous experience is of little value in attempts to understand consumers' response (cognitive, affective or behavioral). Customer experiences include not only interactions through traditional channels, such as purchases, customer service requests and call center communications but also, increasingly, through social CRM channels such as Twitter and Facebook. To manage the customer experience, companies need to create a strategy that encompasses all customer touch points across the organization. Schmitt (1999, p.26) stated that experiences "provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values that replace functional values". Definition of customer experience is provided by Gupta and Vajic (2000, p.34) who state that "an experience occurs when a customer has any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by the service

provider." Other authors have sought to broaden the concept of customer experience, sometimes with seemingly circular definitions, for example "total customer experience emphasizes the importance of all contacts that a consumer has with an organization and the consumer's holistic experience" (Harris *et al.*, 2003). However, such broad definitions take us back to Abbott's understanding of experience as being the transformation of products into value as perceived by the consumer.

## III. Review of Literature:

The marketing-based competitive advantage has shifted from product qualities during the 1950s to the services in 1970s. In turn the services became so generic and the quality of ongoing relationships became a new differentiator since 1980s (Christopher *et al.*, 1991). "In spite of the contentment in the relationship with the service provider; the customers may not return to a service provider" remains as a challenge of what has become known as Relationship marketing (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Gerpott *et al.*, 2001). An emerging frame of literature today infers to the role of optimistic and pessimistic emotions consumers associate with a service happenstance, or sequence of such encounters, in determining future behavioral intentions (Allen *et al.*, 1992; Oliver, 1993; Richins, 1997; Barsky and Nash, 2002). The effects of individual stimuli that create the value to the customers have been broadly researched, for example: customer-focused product design with expected levels of quality (Price, Arnould and Tierney, 1995); the physical setting of a service encounter (Grove *et al.*, 1992; Gupta and Vajic, 2000); aspirational and utilitarian brands (De Chernatony and McDonald, 2003); the service delivery processes (Harris *et al.*, 2001); and supporting relationships (Gummesson, 1997). The emotional predisposition plays a key role affecting the outcomes of the consumers where a stimulus that has a positive affective outcome for one consumer may have a negative outcome for another there by ultimately impacting the customer experience (Oliver, 1997). What people get emotional about is indicative of what they contemplate to be particularly vital (O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Sense, Feel, Think, Act and Relate are the five types of customer experiences that form the basis of the Experiential Marketing Framework (Schmitt, 1999). Sense, Feel, Think, Act and Relate do not just create functional benefit but also creates customer experiences by the Management Of Technology approach. The complementarity between functional benefits and customer experience creates a totally different and innovative value for the customers (Shin'ya Nagasawa, 2008). Combining multidisciplinary contributions to represent customer experience elements provides more insightful inputs to service design (Jorge Teixeira *et al.* 2011). Companies have

incorporated customer experience as a way to obtain ecological competitive advantages (*Shaw and Ivens, 2005*). Customer orientation, barriers to imitation, unique company capabilities, employee empowerment, internal marketing, and visionary leadership are the six dimensions of business strategy that were found to be interrelated with experience marketing (*Seema Gupta, 2012*). The concern of marketers beyond the realm of customer satisfaction is the Customers experiential attachment to product or service; which is replicated as the crux of experiential marketing paradigm (*Brakus et al., 2009*). Emotions play a fundamental role in consumption experience (*Richins, 1997*). Traditional marketing assumes that a customer is not only rational but also the one who selects products and services grounded on a methodical analysis of utility (*Schmitt, 1999*). The current trend in the marketing practices is to generate engaging and long-lasting shopping experiences for the customers (*Ramakrishnan et al., 2010*). Customer experience management is a strategic act that comprises the whole organization in methodically arousing customer experiences in a way that crafts value for both customers and the organization (*Andrus Kotri, 2011*). The problem of shaping a method to quantify the impact of Customer experience quality (EXQ) on the key marketing upshots and to design an analogous CE strategy still remains a challenge in need to be addressed (*Klaus, 2013*). Service operations today play a major role in the growing importance of the service sector. The best way to enhance the service operations of an organization is by mapping the service experience of customers from their point of view and there by drawing the implications that service experience of the customers can be enhanced continuously with proper understanding of the customer expectations and delivering them accordingly. (*Mitchell M. Tseng, Ma Qinhai and Chuan-Jun Su, 1999*) Companies consider retention of the existing customers is quite difficult when compared to that of acquiring a new customer because customer needs are varying during the course of the product life cycle. Customer relationship life cycle can be used in order to better manage the relationship with the dynamic nature of the customers. Therefore companies in the current scenario are focusing more in the acquisition of the customers than in the retention of the customers. (*Satya P. Chattopadhyay*) Loyalty, customer satisfaction and the image of the organisation plays an important role in order to maintain and further enhance the relation between the organisation and the customer. Satisfaction of the customer will create an image in the minds of the organisation about the organisation and this drives the customers towards the same organisation which can be termed as loyalty. (*Jay Kandamully, Dwi Suhartanto*) Future CRM systems development can be handled by creating a link between the knowledge management

and customer relation management which helps in enhancing not only operational, but also strategic efficiency of CRM. This can be achieved through gaining and sharing of knowledge about customers. (*Campbell, 2003; Rowley, 2004; Minna and Aino, 2005*) An unsatisfied customer would give negative publicity about the product to at least 3 people. Therefore satisfaction becomes an important factor for the organisations in maintaining an efficient relationship with the customer. (*Horovitz, 1990*) Providing efficient service to the customers plays an important role for the effective running of the business, and moreover it is also considered as strategic importance, which requires companies to continually enhance customer experience and satisfaction. (*Schneider and Bowen, 1999*) Customer database can be efficiently managed and further developed by providing insights such as informing about the new product innovation, providing product customization options to the customers and engaging customers in the co-creation of a consumption experience. (*Jennifer Rowley, Beata Kupiec- Teahan and Edward Leeming*) Relationship marketing is considered to be one of the marketing strategy, which creates a long term, mutually satisfying relations with the stakeholders i.e. customers, distributors, employees, suppliers with profit as the primary goal and also to maintain the long term preference and enhancing the loyalty of the customer. (*Foss and stone, 2001; Peck et al., 1999; Buttle, 1996*) Companies in the current era should show keen interest towards on the interactions that they could develop with the customers and also a network of interactions between the customers and the organisations. This ultimately results in efficient management of customers with the help of marketing, i.e. relationship marketing. (*Healy et al., 2001; Zoliewski, 2004*) Development and management of customer community is an important aspect in maintaining the relation with the brand. This can be achieved by informing the customers about the product innovation and further engaging them in the co-creation based on their consumption experience. (*Jennifer Rowley, Beata Kupiec- Teahan and Edward Leeming, 2005*) Factors such as management behaviour, organisational climate, self efficacy helps the organisation in providing the customer specific service behaviour to the customers by the employees. (*Wen-Bao Lin, 2008*) The satisfaction of the customers depends on the motivation level provided by the organisation to its employees. Higher motivation level by the organisation to its employees will lead to internal service quality which in turn will result in satisfied customer. (*Gronroos, 1984*) The relationship with the customers does not exist in a simple fashion. They enhance with the time and experience. For effective management of the relationship, organisation should take care of their practices according to the customer needs. Basically with the evolution of the

relationship, the relationship changes and further progresses as desired. (Czepiel, 1990; Cooil *et al.*, 2007). Development of a relationship between an organisation and the customers happen incrementally and that too with experience by updating the view of the customer's experience after every service encounter. (Bolton, 1998) Front line employees of the organisation play a crucial role in the customer relationship management as they acts as the medium of communication for the organisations to communicate with the customers. They enhance the interaction level of the customers and the company. (Kelly O'Reilly; David Paper) Operational CRM is the concept of CRM which industries are practising in the current era of business to retain the customers to the maximum. Nowadays customers and firms are constantly being adjusted and refigured about their roles. They are mainly focusing on the supporting customer value creating process. (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) Usually banks were dependant on attractive interest rates and short term techniques in order to maintain and enhance the relation with the customers. But it is the trust and loyalty that the customer perceives from the brand of the banks, creates the bond between the banks and the customers. (Kim Ngoc Phan, Nabil Ghantous) Banks is of the perception that customers look for the name of the brand and that think that it acts as an influencing factor in their decision making. They consider it as a strategic tool in attracting new customers and developing strong bonds. (de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006; Devlin, 2004; O'Loughlin and Szmigin, 2005) Banks need to build their brands based on the psycho-cognitive perception of branding which considers a cluster of associations in the minds of the consumers. This adds value to the consumer experience and hence creates a positive reaction in the minds towards the company. (Keller, 1993) Brand trust acts as prominent role in creating and enhancing the long term relationships between the customers and the goods and services of

the organisation with a presence of high perceived risk (Fischer *et al.* 2004; Sichtmann, 2007).

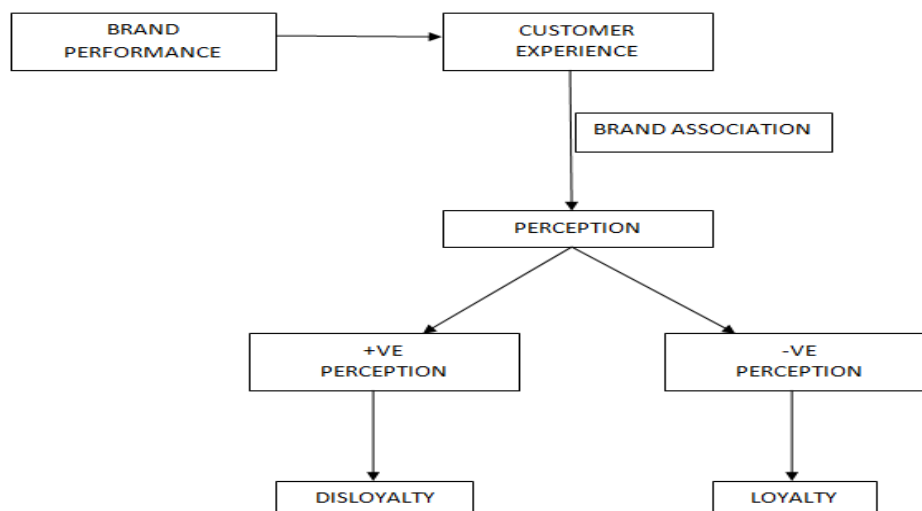
#### IV. Customer Experience Management:

This crosses the boundary from contact center to customer centric production and customization that differentiates a company and leads to its progress in this competitive scenario. Those who shift their focus to address the novel and fluctuating realities of CEM will ride the wave of the generational shift.

CEM is the discipline of managing and considering customer relationships as assets, with the objective of converting customers into loyal brand advocates. CEM balances customers' needs such as value, resolution, convenience and competence with the organization's needs for development and revenue, efficiency and gaining the highest customer lifetime value (CLV). CEM instigates with an amendment in mindset, but that's just the beginning. The opportunity and rewards are substantial for organizations that recognize that the customer experience is their brand and that understanding and responding to the customer journey drives customer lifetime value.

##### 4.1. Proposed Integrated framework:

The framework presented below explicates about the valued customer experience and how it leads to the customer loyalty. Customer experience management can be enhanced by making sure that the performance of the brand is according to the standards, as it leads to the experience of the respective brand by the customer. Through that experience, the customer creates an association with the brand and develops a perception (can be in either way) based on the performance with respect to his expectations. If the brand performance matches with the expectations, it creates a positive perception in the minds of the customers and ultimately the customer turns into a loyal customer for the brand and vice versa.



4

**2. Brand performance:**

There are many insights based on which the performance of the brand can be estimated product performance, the performance of the service, Customer satisfactions, Customer delight, market share of the brand and the profit to the company from the brand.

- **Product Performance** – The performance of the product can be rated as good based on the response from the users. A product is evaluated based on its quality, innovation, price, brand name, features, durability and reliability before providing an opinion about the performance of the product.

- **Service Performance** – Service provided by the corporate for its customers can be evaluated based on its response time to the customer complaints, warranties, efficiency of the staff in installation and handling repair works, hospitality and the service levels.

- **Customer Satisfaction** – Efficient performance of the product and the service from a company leads to the satisfaction of the customer towards their product. Satisfaction of the customer can lead to positive word of mouth and therefore it enhances the brand performance.

- **Market Share** – Market share of the brand plays a significant role in enhancing the performance of the brand as it creates an interest in the minds of the customers towards the brand products. Market share of the company not only defines the position of the company in the industry but also the degree of the performance of the brand against its competitors.

- **Profit** – Profitability of the company enhances the revenue of the company which is considered to be a positive sign towards the growth the company and therefore the brand performance.

**4.3. Customer Experience:**

Experience of the consumer can be judged by his intention of whether to purchasing the product further or not. Experience of the product by the consumer plays a crucial role in building a perception about the brand and the product. If a company is successful in providing a good experience to the customer with their product, his success in the market can be substantiated. Customer experience generally meant to be an interaction between the organisation and the customers as perceived through the customer's sub-conscious and conscious mind. It can be considered as a flux of an organization's rational performance, the senses stimulated and the emotions evoked and non-rationally measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact. The journey of customer experience initiates from moment of purchase to the usage of the product.

**4.4. Brand Association:**

Brand association can be termed as an underlying value of the brand which is based upon specific associations linked to it. An individual can consider the brand through many associations such as the customer benefits, relative price, use/application, user/customer, celebrity/person, lifestyle/personality, product class, competitors, country/ geographical area. Brand association comes into picture when consumers are not aware of the new or upcoming brand. Therefore it leads to different approach towards the brand. Thus consumer can infer brand value by 'borrowing' from other information sources than the product itself.

**4.5. Perception:**

Perception is basically how you think about the world around you. In marketing aspect, it is about how you perceive the product when you have the first contact with the product. Perception involves both the recognition of environmental stimuli and action response to these stimuli. Through perception, one can get access to the information about properties and elements of the product that are of our interest. Generally brand perceptions are developed over time through a variety of sources such as previous experience with the brand, interactions with sales, customer service, and other employees, recommendations from friends and colleagues, reviews by reputable sources, advertising.

**4.6. Loyalty:**

Loyalty is the ultimate element that any organisation strives for from a customer. It entails commitment and repeat purchase of the product by the customer. Customer's perceived value, brand trust, satisfaction, repeat purchase behaviour, and commitment are found to be the key influencing factors of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty provides many benefits to the organisation such as longer tenure with the customer, lower sensitivity towards the price change, reference by the customer to others. Brand loyalty is considered to be free word of mouth and is considered to be very effective. If a customer is fully convinced with the product he will continue with the product by being loyal to the brand and the product or else turn out to be disloyal and shift to the competitor's product.

**V. Management Implications:****5.1. Anticipating customer needs:**

Switching providers is easy and inexpensive because of the myriad choices available for the consumers. Organizations in this milieu have two choices; to compete on price or to add value. CEM is a proactive process through which a buyer's needs are predicted and unraveled. It requires not just understanding, but empathizing of every touch point when a buyer interacts with an organization and leaves an impression. Positive interactions energies

customer satisfaction, loyalty and multiplies the lifetime value. It is easier and cheaper to retain an existing customer than acquiring a new one. CEM helps in managing the customer experience throughout the customer life cycle there by delivering a higher ROI on initial acquisition costs and increase the CLV.

### 5.2. Embracing a CEM mindset:

CEM seems to be a potential fit for the customer relationship department. However, its success relies on the commitment throughout the enterprise. The customer service representatives should have a mindset to serve the customers by empathizing their needs and problems; this should not only be restrained to the CRM team, but should be among them developers, engineers and the managers of all the other departments of the organization.

### 5.3. Understanding the customer's perspective is critical:

Employees should realize that it is a good idea and would be easier for them to do their own shopping or self-service support and report their experiences as a customer rather than an employee. Focus group discussions and customer surveys can provide a deeper understanding of what customers really think. In addition to surveying customers and walking in their shoes, organizations should be able to identify every possible interface that a customer will experience; may it be in a traditional store or an e-commerce site. And all the experiences that arise out of these interactions and interfaces are to be personalized in a way that it overwhelms the customer improving his overall experience is a small pinch or in an acknowledgment of an issue.

### Conclusion:

Deploying CEM is one juncture; upholding and monitoring the same is another juncture where the organization and the CRM team have to set specific goals and define how success of CEM will be measured. Both the front-end and back-end processes need to be aligned to support the CEM initiative. The IT department has to play an integral role in CEM; they should be included from the beginning of the CEM and must be given same consideration as of the CRM team. Delivering a decent customer experience addresses both customer and business needs, resulting in value for both the end consumer and the business. The customer, CEM delivers not just a satisfying experience; but a delightful experience so that they feel valued and understood. Loyalty for life and positive word of mouth is likely. The business, CEM improves CLV and drives higher revenue and improved margins throughout the customer journey with an ensued long term association with the customer. CEM has the potential to transform a cost center into a profit center; if it is used precisely.

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