

Brand Experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty?

Brand experience is conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments. The authors distinguish several experience dimensions and construct a brand experience scale that includes four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. In six studies, the authors show that the scale is reliable, valid, and distinct from other brand measures, including brand evaluations, brand involvement, brand attachment, customer delight, and brand personality. Moreover, brand experience affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty directly and indirectly through brand personality associations.

Keywords: experience marketing, brand experience, customer experience management, scale development, marketing communications

How do consumers experience a brand? How is brand experience measured? Does brand experience affect consumer behavior? Many useful constructs and measurements have been developed recently in the branding literature, including brand personality, brand community, brand trust, brand attachment, and brand love (Aaker 1997; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán, and Yagüe-Guillén 2003; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). However, a conceptualization and scale for measuring brand experiences has not yet been developed. In addition, research has studied contexts in which specific product and service experiences arise (Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2002). However, research has largely ignored the exact nature and dimensional structure of brand experiences.

Notably, brand experience has attracted a lot of attention in marketing practice. Marketing practitioners have come to realize that understanding how consumers experience brands is critical for developing marketing strategies for goods and services. Many trade writings have appeared that present useful concepts as well as some ad hoc experience measurements (Chattopadhyay and Laborie 2005; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999, 2003; Shaw and Ivens 2002; Smith and Wheeler 2002).

In this article, we present both a conceptual analysis of brand experience and a brand experience scale. As with other brand research, the development of a brand experience scale must go hand-in-hand with conceptual development of the construct itself. We need to identify the underlying dimensions of brand experience (analogous to the "Big Five" dimensions of brand personality or the dimensions of affection, connection, and passion that make up

brand attachment) and develop a scale that can measure the strength with which a brand evokes each experience dimension. However, the experience construct is not as clearly associated with one particular basic discipline (e.g., psychology) as other brand constructs are. For example, brand personality and brand attachment have been defined on the basis of equivalent concepts in personality and developmental psychology; as a result, the development of scale items was relatively straightforward. In contrast, writing on experience can be found in a wide range of fields, including marketing, philosophy, cognitive science, and management practice. Therefore, we must clearly conceptualize our construct and develop scale items based on this conceptualization.

To define and conceptualize the brand experience construct, we begin with a review of consumer and marketing research, which examines when experiences occur and how they affect judgments, attitudes, and other aspects of consumer behavior. Next, we review the literature in philosophy, cognitive science, and applied management to distinguish brand experience dimensions and develop a brand experience scale. We then examine the psychometric properties of the scale using standard scale validation procedures. Finally, we test whether brand experience affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty.

The Experience Concept in Consumer and Marketing Research

Consumer and marketing research has shown that experiences occur when consumers search for products, when they shop for them and receive service, and when they consume them (Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2002; Brakus, Schmitt, and Zhang 2008; Holbrook 2000). We discuss each in turn.

Product Experience

Product experiences occur when consumers interact with products—for example, when consumers search for products and examine and evaluate them (Hoch 2002). The product experience can be direct when there is physical

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contact with the product (Hoch and Ha 1986) or indirect when a product is presented virtually or in an advertisement (Hoch and Ha 1986; Kempf and Smith 1998). Respondents are typically asked to reflect on a combination of direct and indirect product experiences to investigate how the combination affects product judgments, attitudes, preferences, purchase intent, and recall (Hoch and Deighton 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986; Huffman and Houston 1993).

Shopping and Service Experience

Shopping and service experiences occur when a consumer interacts with a store's physical environment, its personnel, and its policies and practices (Hui and Bateson 1991; Kerin, Jain, and Howard 2002). Thus, research in this area investigates how atmospheric variables and salespeople affect the experience (Arnold et al. 2005; Boulding et al. 1993; Jones 1999; Ofir and Simonson 2007). Several articles have investigated customers' interaction with salespeople and how that experience affects customers' feelings, brand attitudes, and satisfaction (Grace and O'Cass 2004).

Consumption Experience

Experiences also occur when consumers consume and use products. Consumption experiences are multidimensional and include hedonic dimensions, such as feelings, fantasies, and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Much of the interpretive research on consumption experiences has analyzed hedonic goals that occur during and after the consumption of, for example, museums, river rafting, baseball, and skydiving (Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Holt 1995; Joy and Sherry 2003).

In summary, experiences arise in a variety of settings. Most experiences occur directly when consumers shop, buy, and consume products. Experiences can also occur indirectly—for example, when consumers are exposed to advertising and marketing communications, including Web sites.

Conceptualizing Brand Experience

Most of the research on experiences to date has focused on utilitarian product attributes and category experiences, not on experiences provided by brands. When consumers search for, shop for, and consume brands, they are exposed to utilitarian product attributes. However, they are also exposed to various specific brand-related stimuli, such as brand-identifying colors (Bellizzi and Hite 1992; Gorn et al. 1997; Meyers-Levy and Peracchio 1995), shapes (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998), typefaces, background design elements (Mandel and Johnson 2002), slogans, mascots, and brand characters (Keller 1987). These brand-related stimuli appear as part of a brand's design and identity (e.g., name, logo, signage), packaging, and marketing communications (e.g., advertisements, brochures, Web sites) and in environments in which the brand is marketed or sold (e.g., stores, events). These brand-related stimuli constitute the major source of subjective, internal consumer responses, which we refer to as "brand experience."

Thus, we conceptualize brand experience as subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related

stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments. In the following sections, we explicate the brand experience construct further and differentiate it from other brand concepts. Most important, we distinguish various dimensions of brand experience.

Further Explication of the Brand Experience Construct

Brand experiences vary in strength and intensity; that is, some brand experiences are stronger or more intense than others. As with product experiences, brand experiences also vary in valence; that is, some are more positive than others, and some experiences may even be negative. Moreover, some brand experiences occur spontaneously without much reflection and are short-lived; others occur more deliberately and last longer. Over time, these long-lasting brand experiences, stored in consumer memory, should affect consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Oliver 1997; Reicheld 1996).

Differences Between Brand Experience and Other Brand Constructs

Brand experience is related but also conceptually distinct from other brand constructs. In particular, brand experience differs from evaluative, affective, and associative constructs, such as brand attitudes, brand involvement, brand attachment, customer delight, and brand personality.

Attitudes are general evaluations based on beliefs or automatic affective reactions (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Murphy and Zajonc 1993). In contrast, brand experiences are not general evaluative judgments about the brand (e.g., "I like the brand"). They include specific sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses triggered by specific brand-related stimuli. For example, experiences may include specific feelings, not just an overall "liking." At times, experiences may result in general evaluations and attitudes, especially evaluations of the experience itself (e.g., "I like the experience"). However, the overall attitude toward the experience captures only a small part of the entire brand experience.

Brand experience also differs from motivational and affective concepts, such as involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985), brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005), and customer delight (Oliver, Rust, and Varki 1997). Involvement is based on needs, values, and interests that motivate a consumer toward an object (e.g., a brand). Antecedents of involvement include the perceived importance and personal relevance of a brand (Zaichkowsky 1985). Brand experience does not presume a motivational state. Experiences can happen when consumers do not show interest in or have a personal connection with the brand. Moreover, brands that consumers are highly involved with are not necessarily brands that evoke the strongest experiences.

If involvement can be characterized by mild affect, brand attachment refers to a strong emotional bond (i.e., "hot affect") between a consumer and a brand, as evidenced by its three dimensions—affection, passion, and connection

(Park and MacInnis 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). In contrast to brand attachment, brand experience is not an emotional relationship concept. As we described previously, experiences are sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli. Over time, brand experiences may result in emotional bonds, but emotions are only one internal outcome of the stimulation that evokes experiences.

As with brand attachment, customer delight is characterized by arousal and positive affect; it can be considered the affective component of satisfaction (Oliver, Rust, and Varki 1997). Customer delight results from disconfirming, surprising consumption (Oliver, Rust, and Varki 1997). In contrast to customer delight, brand experiences do not occur only after consumption; they occur whenever there is a direct or indirect interaction with the brand. Moreover, a brand experience does not need to be surprising; it can be both expected or unexpected.

Finally, brand experience is distinct from brand associations and brand image (Keller 1993). One of the most studied constructs of brand associations is brand personality (Aaker 1997). Consumers tend to endow brands with human characteristics that result in a brand personality, which consists of five dimensions—sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker 1997). Brand personality is based on inferential processes (Johar, Sengupta, and Aaker 2005). That is, consumers are not sincere or excited about the brand; they merely project these traits onto brands. In contrast, brand experiences are actual sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses. Thus, because brand experience differs from brand evaluations, involvement, attachment, and customer delight, brand experience is also conceptually and empirically distinct from brand personality.

Dimensions of Brand Experience

To identify dimensions of brand experience, we next review pertinent work in philosophy, cognitive science, and applied writings on experiential marketing and management. In this literature, across a variety of disciplines, a fairly consistent set of experience dimensions, which are highly relevant to brands, has been proposed.

Philosophical Investigations

The philosopher John Dewey (1922, 1925) views experience as the intertwining of human beings and their environments. He critiques the purely cognitive Kantian view of experience as knowledge, arguing that knowledge (classifying, analyzing, and reasoning about things) is only one part of a person's understanding of the world. In addition to intellectual experiences resulting from knowledge, experiences also include perceiving (through the senses), feeling, and doing. Moreover, human beings are fundamentally connected with other people. Following Dewey, Dubé and LeBel (2003) distinguish four "pleasure dimensions": intellectual, emotional, social, and physical pleasures.

Cognitive Science

Cognitive scientists have investigated "mental modules," or special purpose computational systems that respond to specific environmental cues and solve a restricted class of problems (Fodor 1998). Pinker (1997) identifies four mental modules that correspond closely to the experiences that Dewey (1922, 1925) postulates: sensory perception, feelings and emotions, creativity and reasoning, and social relationships. However, Pinker does not list a separate "doing" module; he considers bodily experiences and motor actions and behaviors part of the "sensory-motor module," similar to Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) concept of embodied cognition.

Applied Writings on Experience Marketing and Management

Pine and Gilmore (1999) study "staged experiences" in retail environments and events. For these settings, they distinguish aesthetic (including visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile aspects), educational, entertaining, and escapist experiences. Although Pine and Gilmore's framework is limited to retail settings and events, their four experience dimensions nonetheless overlap with some of the dimensions of experience we discussed previously, thus confirming the need for conceptualizing a sensory/aesthetic, intellectual/educational, and emotional/entertaining dimension.

Schmitt (1999) proposes five experiences: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. The sense experience includes aesthetics and sensory qualities. Consistent with recent research in consumer behavior (Richins 1997), the feel experience includes moods and emotions. The think experience includes convergent/analytical and divergent/imaginative thinking. The act experience refers to motor actions and behavioral experiences. Finally, the relate experience refers to social experiences, such as relating to a reference group. The five experiences are closely related to Dewey's (1922, 1925) categorization, Dubé and LeBel's (2003) pleasure construct, and Pinker's (1997) mental modules, especially if we view Pinker's sensory module as including sensory and behavioral components.

Summary

There has been considerable agreement in the categorization of experiences by philosophers, cognitive scientists, and management thinkers. Therefore, for the scale development that follows, it is necessary to generate items along the five experience dimensions that broadly emerged from our literature review: sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral, and social.

In line with our conceptualization, the experience dimensions are evoked by brand-related stimuli (e.g., colors, shapes, typefaces, designs, slogans, mascots, brand characters). Note that there is no one-to-one correspondence, such that a certain stimulus type would trigger a certain experience dimension and only that dimension. For example, although colors, shapes, typefaces, and designs usually result in sensory experience, they may also result in emotions (e.g., red for Coca-Cola) or intellectual experiences (e.g., when designs use complex patterns). Similarly,