

Experiences that Make Consumers Think: Cognitive Experiences

Rouxelle de Villiers*

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Abstract

Consumer experiences, as they relate to the function or purpose of a product or service links to the thinking and meta-thinking of prospects and customers – thus the name, cognitive customer experiences (CCX). The cases in the section on cognitive CX, clearly demonstrate how experiences connected with mental processes can alter the entire brand experience for consumers.

Key words: functional value; holistic evaluation; utilitarian; purpose, solution

Customer experiences (CX) can generate positive or negative shifts in beliefs and attitudes toward products and brands. Hardly any interaction with the product or service, or any experiences of the brand and its augmented products are neutral. These customer experiences (CXs) fit into two categories. The first category relates to the utilitarian or cognitive value that is the functioning of the good or service, and the second to hedonic, or emotional experiences and values (Gentile et al., 2007). Utilitarian CXs are primarily logical and are linked to the thinking and meta-thinking of prospects and customers – thus the name, cognitive CX. Did the hairdresser style my hair to suit my face? Was my room ready and did the Wi-Fi connection work? Did the furniture arrive on time or did I have to wait an unacceptably long time for the delivery truck? On the other hand, hedonic experiences stimulate the emotional, or sensory, part of the brain and include experiences such as texture, taste, sounds, sights and smells, as well as the level of service and the context (environment) in which the services are offered. Did the service allow me to feel appreciated and nurtured? How will this product enhance my sense of self-worth? Does the product quality align with my perception of luxury and sense of quality? CXs can be divided into two types of cues that consumers receive (Berry et al., 2002): mechanics (produced by things) and humanics (emanating from people). How different prospects and customers perceive that the emitted signals from products and people will differ and will thus shape or influence customers' attitudes and behaviour in different ways.

* Correspondence to: Waikato University, Corporate and Executive Education, Waikato Management School, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, telephone: +64 7 838 4089 or mobile phone: +64 21 82 81 80, email: rdevilli@waikato.ac.nz.

Customer experience (CX) is conceptualized as “the customer’s subjective response to the holistic direct and indirect encounter with the firm,” and customer experience quality (CXQ) as its perceived excellence or superiority (Lemke, 2011, p. 851). Various studies confirm that customers assess their experiences (CX) and the quality (CXQ) holistically (Lemke, 2011; Payne et al., 2008; Verhoef et al., 2009). For example, “Companies must manage the emotional component of experiences with the same rigor they bring to the management of product and service functionality [cognitive experiences]...Organizations that simply tweak design elements or focus on the customer experience in isolated pockets of their business will be disappointed in the results” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 87). The holistic approach to the cognitive CXs does not merely refer to the utilitarian and hedonic components, but also to the combined result of the humanics and mechanics of the product or service offering. Value creation (especially for innovation) thus needs to focus on more than designing and building product and service enhancements—it needs to be combined with a holistic CX enhancement. Holistic value enhancements make innovations difficult for competitors to copy, thus providing a sustainable competitive advantage.

Besides Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Verhoef and colleagues (2009, p.32) report that CXs are co-created: “created not only by those elements which the retailer can control ... but also by those elements that are outside of the retailer’s control (e.g. influence of others, purpose of shopping).” It is thus important for marketers, product developers and customer service officers to “get out” (Woodside, 2016) and observe which aspects of the product, service, communication, contexts and social interactions prospective customers and existing customers value and enjoy (or not). This can be done in person, by video recording consumers as they purchase or consume products and services and by conducting in-depth interviews with prospects, service staff and loyal customers (Berry et al., 2002). A further valuable resource is the collection of stories, as told by real customers telling their own stories as you will find in this special edition. Have a close read and you might be astounded about how much they reveal about the cognitive and hedonic processes of consumers. Collect and analyse similar stories from your employees, customers and those you see leaving your store empty-handed.

The cases in the section on cognitive CX clearly demonstrate how experiences connected with mental processes can alter the entire brand experience for consumers. Some product offerings and service providers manage to alter consumers’ mindsets by leading consumers to alter the way in which they think about a product/service and all their assumptions about the offering (both positively and negatively). The cases further demonstrate that customers do not neglect or sacrifice functional (utilitarian) value for hedonic (emotional experience) value. They expect both. The cases reiterate the importance of achieving an adequate balance between utilitarian and hedonic values as Gentile et al. (2007) report.

References

- Berry, L. L., L. P. Carbone, and S. H. Haeckel, (2002), "Managing the Total Customer Experience," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 43(3), 85.
- Gentile, C., N. Spiller, and G. Noci, (2007), "How to Sustain the Customer Experience: An Overview of Experience Components that Co-create Value with the Customer," *European Management Journal*, 25(5), 395-410.
- Lemke, F., M. Clark, and H. Wilson, (2011), "Customer Experience Quality: An Exploration in Business and Consumer Contexts Using Repertory Grid Technique," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(6), 846-869.
- Prahalad, C. K. and V. Ramaswamy, (2004), "Co-creation Experiences: The Next Practice in Value Creation," *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14.
- Verhoef, P., K. N. Lemon, A. Parasuraman, A. Roggeveen, M. Tsiros, and L. A. Schlesinger, (2009), "Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies," *Journal of Retailing*, 85, 31-41.
- Woodside, A. G., (2016), "Moving Away from Bad Practices in Research toward Constructing Useful Theory and Doing Useful Research," in *Bad to Good: Achieving High Quality and Impact in Your Research*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 1-56.