

Chronicles of Consumer-Brand Experience: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda

Sara Amoroso¹

¹Department of Management and Law, University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Italy

Correspondence: Sara Amoroso, Department of Management and Law, University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Columbia Street 2 – 00133, Rome, Italy. E-mail: sara.amoroso@uniroma2.it

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Abstract

This study makes an effort to unify and consolidate the concept of experience in marketing research by analyzing all the academic articles since its inception in a systematic way. The review of existing literature reveals gaps in the conceptualization, definition, relations and measurement of Consumer-Brand Experience (CBEx) from theoretical and practical perspectives. Therefore, this study significantly contributes by exploring and discussing the concept of CBEx, proposing a definition, describing its state of the art dimensions, relationships and measurement. A new and broader conceptual model is provided too. This work also highlights important challenges for future research and practice. Academics and managers are called to consider CBEx as a key determinant of consumer behavior and as an important strategic objective for brands. In particular, CBEx is the key to creating uniqueness and long-lasting brands so managers should take into account this concept in defining their marketing strategies.

Keywords: consumer experience, brand experience, consumer behavior, systematic literature review, research agenda

1. Introduction

Brands have been essential in building durable relations with consumers for several years ensuring long-term business success. However, in this time of consumer skepticism toward brands, influenced also from the digital environment, economic crisis, new life-style and the new peer to peer relationship between customers and brands, an innovative way to conceive brands is required.

In this scenario, the concept of experience has emerged as an important marketing driver anticipating unique, satisfying and memorable experiences and it has gained greater attention during these years. Furthermore, over the past three decades, marketing literature has emphasized the need to create better and more unique consumer experiences in order to develop stronger brands (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Morrison & Crane, 2007). Thus, the concept of experience has become even more important also for marketing management. Actually, the idea that consumers are searching for unique and meaningful experiences is not new and it is well established among managers and academics. In their influential and historical introduction contained in the seminal paper on Consumption Experience, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 132) state that “*Consumption has begun to be seen as involving a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun encompassed by what we call the “experiential view”.*” Schmitt (1999, p. 53) opined that “*companies have moved away from traditional “features-and-benefits” marketing toward creating experiences for their customers.*” Along this line, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) point out organizations are redefining their offerings in terms of “*personalized co-created experiences.*”

The relevance of this topic is also underlined by the Marketing Science Institute (2014, 2016, 2018) that recognizes customer experience as one of its most important research challenges of these years.

The importance of CBEx is also acknowledged by the fact that consumers are not at all rational in their decisions and the evaluation about price and other technical and functional features are only a little part of consumer’s behavior. In other words, consumers - now more than ever - do not just buy goods or services; they buy brands and the emotions correlated to it.

This school of thought believes that experiences resulting from various interactions with brands have a substantial impact on consumer behavior (Brakus et al., 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Thanks to

its nature this construct can be labelled as Consumer-Brand Experience (CBEx) to emphasize the relational and dyadic essence.

In fact, a consumer may establish a deep and meaningful relationship with a brand (Fournier 1998); he becomes emotionally attached to it (Thomson et al., 2005) and uses it to express his personality (Swaminathan et al., 2009) and his social self (Escalas & Bettman 2005). Thus, if a brand betrays the consumer, the consumer-brand relationship becomes similar to a relationship cut-off (Aaker et al., 2004; Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2010). Instead, providing unique and memorable experiences allows firms to make stronger consumer-brand relationships and increase the success of performance outcomes (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014).

In this scenario, scholars have acknowledged the importance of the CBEx concept in the marketing, branding and consumer behavior literature and this is evident by the increasing amount of research in the marketing experience field.

However, to better understand Consumer-Brand Experience (CBEx) and its conceptualization in this complicated environment, broader knowledge of this construct is required.

2. Aim of the Study

Living a positive experience today, more than so in the past, seems to be one of the cornerstones of consumers when they interact with a brand. Moreover, because the experience concept has become one of the most important buzzwords in marketing, it is particularly an effort to bring together what it is known to provide a solid theoretical perspective on this topic. Despite this consensus, the CBEx phenomenon is still fragmented and it is limited by a lack of conceptual clarity. In general, researches tend to focus more on managerial actions and less on theories concerning dimensions, antecedents and consequences of Consumer-Brand Experience. In this regard, some effort has been made to understand and conceptualize Consumer-Brand Experience and to define its relationship with others variables but there is no consensus yet about the term, construct and definition.

Moreover, even if prior studies offer important insight about Consumer-Brand Experience and its related constructs, present research should fill some important gaps in this scholarly inquiry. In other words, research has not accurately examined the stage at which the Consumer-Brand Experience concept stands and in which direction it is moving.

First, whilst much research recognizes the importance of the experience in interacting with a brand, there is little attempt to show the factors that affect brand experience and relate CBEx with other constructs. Second, until now the literature has mostly focused on the concepts of brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand trust but less on the concept of experience. As pointed out by Palmer (2010), in order to have a clear idea of this construct, systematic and in-depth assessments are required. Moreover, this study tries to answer Lemon and Verhoef's (2016, p. 74) call that states "*To date, no research has clearly shown the nomological network of customer experience and how this construct relates to other customer-focused constructs.*" So far, studies have stressed the necessity to understand the effects and the factors that shape CBEx but a comprehensive Consumer-Brand Experience model remains underdeveloped.

Thus, to the best of our knowledge, only a limited number of studies explore the concept of experience in depth from a theoretical perspective.

The scarcity of systematic scholarly research on the experience construct in marketing literature calls urgently for a theory-based conceptual framework that can provide stimuli and operates as groundwork for future research.

This study attempts to offer a threefold contribution. First, this article reviews the main findings of the consumer and brand experience literature, providing a systematization of the literature of the Consumer-Brand Experience construct covering 35 years. Thus, the present study aims to develop a significant conceptualization of the growth, theorization and management of Consumer-Brand Experience by doing a systematic review on the above-mentioned topic. Second, the present paper tries to satisfy the need of a unified conceptual model of CBEx on the basis of current literature. Third, this study provides a research agenda for future research.

To sum up, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the state of the art of the CBEx concept?

RQ1a: What are the dimensions that shape the CBEx?

RQ1b: How does CBEx impact on consumer behavior?

3. Methodology

This study adopted the systematic method for the literature review (Cook et al., 1997; Denyer & Tranfield, 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003) as it is arguably the most efficient, reliable and high-quality method for examining extensive bases of literature (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Systematic reviews “*summarize in an explicit way, what is known and not known about a specific practice related question*” (Briner et al., 2009). On the other hand, traditional narrative reviews generally lack thoroughness, are unable to accurately comprehend and interpret the findings of multiple studies (Popay et al., 2006; Tranfield et al., 2003), and are also limited in scope due to lack of objectivity in approach (Keränen et al., 2012). The systematic method, instead, aims to collect and link together as many existing relevant studies as possible by adopting a structured and systematic process of reviewing the literature (Callahan, 2014).

The basic principles behind adopting a systematic review method are (Thorpe et al., 2005):

- transparency;
- clarity;
- focus;
- unifies research and practitioner communities;
- equality;
- accessibility;
- broad coverage;
- synthesis.

Thus, consistent with previous researches that have used this methodology, this systematic review followed six stages. The first step of the study involved the delineation of the field of research, the choice of the keywords and the databases. Moreover, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. The research string was developed through the previous knowledge on all marketing experience literature so that no keyword related to customer and brand experience was left out. This study has no time restrictions and presents a review of published research articles on consumer and brand experience in academic journals since its inception.

The review comprises English-language peer-reviewed journal articles only. “EBSCO Host – Business Source Complete” was used as the first database and abstracts as the target. The substantive relevance of the articles focusing on consumer and brand experience was safeguarded by ensuring all the selected articles contained the following keywords: “brand experience” OR “customer experience” OR “consumer experience” OR “experience marketing” OR “customer experience management” OR “experience branding” OR “service experience” OR “consumption experience” OR “product experience”. The selection of the EBSCO database was due to its wider coverage of journals. This yielded 595 papers. Additionally, the same search was run in Scopus, another highly-used database to ensure that no important researches on this topic were excluded.

A last check with the same search was made on Google Scholar in order to ensure the best data collection.

After integrating and eliminating duplicate documents, a total of 945 papers were initially identified. The last search was performed in September 2018.

As mentioned above, consistent with several recent systematic assessments of the management literature (Newbert, 2007; Pittaway et al., 2004; Thorpe et al., 2005), a set of criteria was established for step-by-step screening of the papers found (see Table 1).

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

INCLUSION	EXCLUSION
Published academic journal articles	Books, conference proceedings, editorials, viewpoints, newspaper
Full text available	articles, working papers
English articles	Full text unavailable
Studies in marketing and psychology focusing on Consumer/Customer or Brand Experience	Non-English articles
Studies mainly focused on B2C experience	Studies mainly focused on engineering or medical issues
	Studies mainly focused on B2B experience

The selection process followed a step-by-step research protocol (Table 2), which is consistent with the previous research (Newbert, 2007; Thorpe et al., 2005).

Thus, the following step was to select a list of pertinent articles by a preliminary extensive reading of all the abstracts to ensure substantive context. As a result, the number of papers discharged in this preliminary screening was significant and only 153 papers were kept for the subsequent steps. Similar drops in numbers are common in systematic literature reviews (Newbert, 2007; Pittaway et al., 2004) and, in this case, it is attributed to ensuring coherence and conformity with the research objectives.

The fifth step was to read every selected article in full. Finally, references of studies were checked to make sure no study was left without review, so a “snowballing” technique was adopted to support the results from the previous phases. This ensured reliability of the research process. After all these stages, the final number of articles analyzed was 107.

Table 2. Summary of the results

Step	Description	Total articles
3	Articles retrieved from EBSCO, Scopus and Google Scholar (after the elimination of duplicate papers)	945
4	All the articles where abstracts are substantively relevant	153
5	Articles whose text was relevant	104
6	Snowballing technique	107

Source: Elaboration on the dataset.

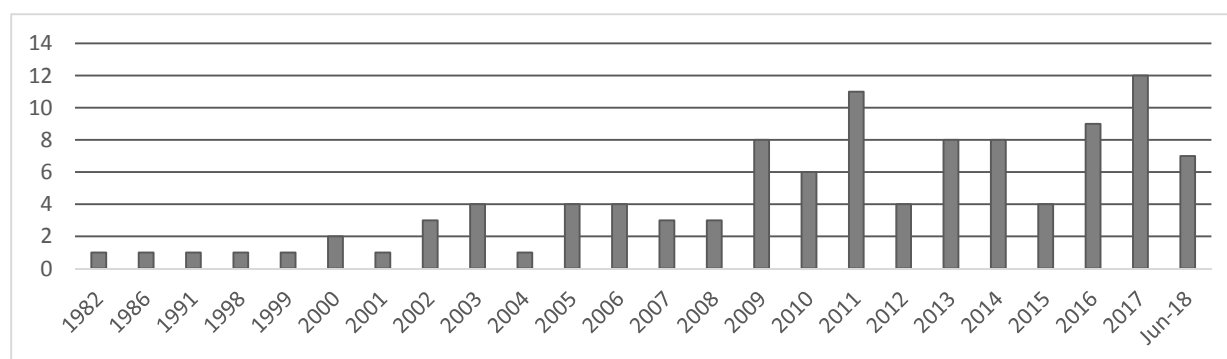
The articles, consistent with recent systematic literature reviews, were thoroughly studied and analyzed in a qualitative fashion (Barclay et al., 2011; Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Moreover, the content analysis of text was done manually and a data extraction form was used to summarize critical data, such as key findings and methodological features. The articles were also analyzed in terms of context, purpose, conceptualization, dimensions, relationships, research design, findings, implications and contributions. An Excel dataset was set up to collect all the qualitative information on the selected papers. Such a procedure allowed the researcher to investigate evolutionary trends and topics of interest through the use of ad hoc pivot tables. This enabled the researcher to identify quickly the overall nature of the existing research, its epistemological assumptions and methodological features.

4. Findings

4.1 Trends of CBEx

This section shows the findings from the 107 relevant articles from which discussion and managerial implications expressed in the next sections are drawn.

Some statistics on the time period and journal distribution are provided too. Fig. 1 lists the temporal trends of the articles. One can see a consistent interest in the researched topic during the time period.



Source: Elaboration on the dataset.

Figure 1. Temporal trends of the articles

Studies on experience in marketing literature were initiated by Holbrook and Hirschman in 1982. While the concept of “brand experience” appears for the first time in 1991 with Ortmeier and Huber, it was thoroughly defined and measured by Brakus et al. in 2009. Until this year the studies on brand and consumer experience were few and fragmented, even though by 2005 researchers had started explaining the experience concept in depth and from various points of view (Chattopadhyay & Laborie, 2005; Ha & Perks, 2005; Pettit, 2005). During that year the first paper on digital experience was published (Ha & Perks, 2005).

Over these years, CBEx has been defined by various authors and there is also a fragmentation among the different journals that have focused on experience in the marketing field.

Table 3 categorizes the overall population per academic journal. Results show that the works within the dataset are published in 53 different international journals.

Table 3. List of journals and distributions of articles

#	Journal	Number of Studies	% (J)
1	Journal of Brand Management	16	14.95
2	Journal of Marketing Management	7	6.54
3	International Journal of Market Research	5	4.67
4	Journal of Business Research	4	3.74
5	Journal of Consumer Research	4	3.74
6	Journal of Product and Brand Management	4	3.74
7	Advances in Consumer Research	3	2.80
8	Journal of Consumer Behaviour	3	2.80
9	Journal of Marketing	3	2.80
10	Journal of Marketing & Communication	3	2.80
11	Journal of Services Research	3	2.80
12	CLEAR International Journal of Research in Commerce & Management	2	1.87
13	IUP Journal of Brand Management	2	1.87
14	Journal of Advertising Research	2	1.87
15	Journal of Retailing	2	1.87
16	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	2	1.87
17	Journal of Strategic Marketing	2	1.87
18	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	2	1.87
19	Marketing Theory	2	1.87
20	Service Industries Journal	2	1.87
21	Academy of Marketing Studies Journal	2	1.87
22	California Management Review	1	0.93
23	Entrepreneurial Executive	1	0.93
24	European Business Review	1	0.93
25	European Management Journal	1	0.93
26	Foundations and Trends in Marketing	1	0.93
27	Global Business Review	1	0.93
28	Harvard Business Review	1	0.93
29	International Business Management	1	0.93
30	International Journal of Business & Information	1	0.93
31	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	0.93
32	International Journal of Hospitality Management	1	0.93
33	International Journal of Management Reviews	1	0.93
34	Journal of Advertising	1	0.93
35	Journal of Consumer Marketing	1	0.93
36	Journal of Consumer Psychology	1	0.93
37	Journal of Customer Behaviour	1	0.93
38	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management,	1	0.93
39	Journal of Marketing Communications	1	0.93
40	Journal of Relationship Marketing	1	0.93
41	Journal of Service Theory and Practice	1	0.93
42	Journal of Services Marketing	1	0.93
43	Management Decision	1	0.93
44	Management Review	1	0.93
45	Marketing Letters	1	0.93

46	Marketing Management	1	0.93
47	Marketing Research	1	0.93
48	Marketing Science	1	0.93
49	MIT Sloan Management Review	1	0.93
50	Psychology & Marketing	1	0.93
51	Research in Economics & Business: Central & Eastern Europe	1	0.93
52	Review of Marketing Research	1	0.93
53	Studies in Business & Economics	1	0.93
Total		107	100%

Source: Elaboration on the dataset.

The major contributions come from Journal of Brand Management, Journal of Marketing Management and by journals focused on consumer behavior (such as Journal of Consumer Research, Consumer Behaviour and Advances in Consumer Research).

Moreover, 77% of the papers are empirical studies (in particular 66% have a quantitative research design and 11% have a qualitative research design) and the remaining 33% are conceptual studies.

With regard to the notion of experience, it has appeared in the marketing literature in many ways. Table 4 illustrates the different names used to define the experience concept.

Table 4. Experience' constructs, authors and definitions

Type of Construct	Number of studies	Authors	Main Definitions
Customer experience	37	Carbone, 1998; Novak et al., 2000; Berry et al., 2002; Cole-Colander, 2003; Haeckel et al., 2003; Frow & Payne, 2007; Gentile et al., 2007; Ryder, 2007; Patterson et al., 2008; Jain & Bagdare, 2009; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009; Chang & Hornig, 2010; Palmer, 2010; Chakravorti, 2011; Ismail, 2011; Maklan & Klause, 2011; Lemke et al., 2011; Walls et al., 2011; Nambisan & Watt, 2011; Dumitrescu et al., 2012; Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Popa & Barna, 2013; Rawson et al., 2013; Sharma & Chaubey, 2014; Chahal et al., 2015; Bhandari, 2016; Hwang & Seo, 2016; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016; Sharma et al., 2016; Brun et al., 2017; Manhas & Chauhan, 2017; Homburg et al., 2017; Jain et al., 2017; Maklan et al., 2017; Shobeiri et al., 2018.	<p>“The Customer Experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer’s involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer’s expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touch-points” (Gentile et al., 2007).</p> <p>“Customer experience is the aggregate of feelings, perceptions and attitudes formed during the entire process of decision making and consumption chain involving an integrated series of interaction with people, objects, processes and environment, leading to cognitive, emotional, sensorial and behavioural responses” (Jain et al., 2017).</p>
Brand experience	30	Ortmeyer & Huber, 1991; Andrew, 2003; Chattopadhyay & Laborie, 2005; Pettit, 2005; Alloza, 2008; Barnham, 2008; Atwal & Williams, 2009; Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 2009; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010; Hultén, 2011; Iglesias et al., 2011; Jung & Soo, 2012; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Nysveen et al., 2013; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Cleff et al., 2014; Başer et al., 2015; Nejad et al., 2015; Khan & Rahman, 2015; Schmitt et al., 2015; Hepola et al., 2017; Huang, 2017; Khan & Fatma, 2017; Saari & Mäkinen, 2017; Andreini et al., 2018; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018; Ong et al., 2018; van der Westhuizen, 2018; Wiedmann et al., 2018.	<p>“The perception of the consumers, at every moment of contact they have with the brand, whether it is in the brand images projected in advertising, during the first personal contact, or the level of quality concerning the personal treatment they receive” (Alloza, 2008).</p> <p>“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” (Brakus et al., 2009).</p>
Consumption experience	12	Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Havlena & Holbrook, 1986; Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Carù & Cova, 2003; Novak et al., 2003; Holbrook, 2006; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Schmitt, 2011; Roederer, 2012; Minkiewicz et al., 2014; Lanier & Rader, 2015; Chun et al., 2017.	<p>“Consumption has begun to be seen as involving a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun encompassed by what we call the “experiential view”. This experiential perspective is phenomenological in spirit and regards consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).</p>

Consumer experience	9	Schmitt, 1999; Harris et al., 2000; O'Cass & Grace, 2004; Long-Tolbert et al., 2006; Bettingen & Luedicke, 2009; Janiszewski, 2010; Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013; Riiivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2014; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017; Yang et al., 2017.	“Five different types of experiences, or strategic experiential modules (SEMs), that Marketers can create for customers are distinguished: sensory experiences (SENSE); affective experiences (FEEL); creative cognitive experiences (THINK); physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyles (ACT); and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE). These experiences are implemented through so-called experience providers (ExPros) such as communications, visual and verbal identity, product presence, electronic media, etc.” (Schmitt, 1999).
Service experience	4	Bonnin, 2006; Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010; Beltagui et al., 2015; Wall-Mullen & Envick, 2015.	“Customer service experience (..) is understood as a holistic phenomenon, which is subjective, event specific, personal and individually and socially-constructed” (Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010).
Online brand experience	5	Ha & Perks, 2005; Chen, 2012; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Jafari et al., 2016; Cleff et al., 2018.	“Brand experience as a consumer’s positive navigations (ie using web-based communities and participating in events) and perceptions (ie the attractiveness of cookies, variety and uniqueness of visual displays and value for money) with a specific website” (Ha & Perks, 2005).
Online customer experience	5	Rose et al., 2010; Ishida & Taylor, 2012; Rose et al., 2012; Klaus & Nguyen, 2013; Song, 2015.	“We assume OCE to be a psychological state manifested as a subjective response to the e-retailer’s website. The customer engages in cognitive and affective processing of incoming sensory information from the website, the result of which is the formation of an impression in memory” (Rose et al., 2012).
Retail experience	3	Ishida & Taylor, 2012; Bagdare, 2013, 2016.	“Retail customer experience has all the elements that encourage or inhibit customers during their contact with a retailer” (Bagdare, 2013).
Product experience	2	Hoch, 2002; Daugherty, et al. 2008.	“Product experience seduces consumers into believing that they learn more than is actually so (..) Product experience often proceeds like a seduction (..) The engaging aspects of experience catch the consumer's attention” (Hoch, 2002).

Source: Elaboration on the dataset.

Findings suggest that there is no agreement regarding the label, the definition, the different dimensions of the constructs and the behavioral outcomes.

4.2 Dimensions and features of CBEx

There are various dimensions that make up experience concepts. Table 5 shows that constructs and definitions vary in breadth and focus. Some of the definitions are explicit in their conceptualization and in underlying specific dimensions, whereas others are more generic and comprehensive. With respect to dimensionality, 4 of the 9 above definitions of experience identify what kind of response the experience elicits.

Table 5. Underlying experience dimensions in literature definitions

Construct	Dimensions	Authors
Consumption Experience	Cognitive, Behavioral, Affective, Praxeological, Hedonico-Sensorial, Rethoric, Relationship with time.	Holbrook & Hirschmann, 1982; Roederer, 2012.
Customer/Consumer Experience	Hedonic, Personal Progression, Social Interaction, Efficiency, Surreal Feelings, Rational, Emotional, Sensorial, Physical, Spiritual, Cognitive.	Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009; Maklan & Klaus, 2011; Popa & Barna, 2013; Bagdara, 2016.
Brand Experience	Sensorial, Affective, Behavioral, Intellectual, Cognitive, Emotional, Relational.	Ha & Perks, 2005; Brakus et al., 2009; Jung & Soo, 2012; Cleff et al., 2014.
Online Experience	Emotional, Behavioral, Affective, Cognitive, Sensorial, Psychological.	Rose et al., 2010; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013.

Source: Elaboration on the dataset.

4.3 Antecedents and consequences of CBEx

The review of the literature shows a very heterogeneous scenario regarding the relationships between CBEx and the other constructs. Until now, studies on antecedents and outcomes on CBEx have focused on specific settings or industries, such as: services and food services context (Beltagui et al., 2016; Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010; Khan & Fatma, 2017; Wall-Mullen & Envick, 2015), retail context (Bagdare, 2013, 2016; Ishida & Taylor, 2012), online context (Chen, 2012; Ha & Perks, 2005; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Rose et al., 2010), and tourism industry (Maklan & Klaus, 2011; Ong et al., 2018).

A shared and unified model is difficult to achieve especially because constructs, such as brand trust, seem to be an antecedent in some studies and an outcome in others (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016); probably its relation with CBEx depends on the reference context.

Literature has come to agree that the strength of the Consumer-Brand Experience influences consumers' ability to draw inferences about the brand personality and influences brand satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). Scholars also recognize that a favorable Consumer-Brand Experience positively affects marketing and consumer behavior outcomes. In particular, satisfaction and loyalty of a brand play an important role in predicting future intentions. At the same time studies have mainly focused on factors such as satisfaction and loyalty but have not considered the drivers of CBEx as a broad construct.

Experiential outcomes have broadly been explained as a combination of cognitive, emotional, behavioral and sensorial responses by the consumer, however, hedonic and emotional benefits have been reported to play a more dominant role in shaping customers' experiences (Babin et al., 1994; Carpenter & Moore, 2009; Jones et al., 2006).

Table 6 provides an overview and a classification of antecedents and outcomes that have been investigated in previous studies.

Table 6. Antecedents and outcomes of the experience construct

Antecedents		
Key supporting literature	Experience Construct	Constructs
Mascarenhas et al., 2006	Customer Experience	Anticipation and fulfilment of customer needs and wants, Provision of real consumer experiences, Provision of real emotional experiences, Experiences as distinct market offering, Experiences as interactions, Experiences as engaging memories
Verhoef et al., 2009	Customer Experience	Customer-brand perception, Social environment, Service interface, Retail atmosphere, Assortment, Price, Customer experiences in alternative channels, Retail brand, Past customer experience
Palmer, 2010	Customer Experience	Tangible and process quality, Brand relationships, Interpersonal relationships, Sequencing of clues and relationships, Effects of emotions on encoding, Perceptual distortion over time, attitude
Rose et al., 2010	Online Customer Experience	Perceived usefulness, Perceived benefits, Perceived control, Skill, Trust propensity, Perceived risk, Enjoyment
Maklan & Klaus, 2011	Customer Experience Quality	Peace of mind, Outcomes focus, Moment of truth, Product experience
Ismail, 2011	Customer Experience (services)	Advertising, price, Employees, Service scape, Core service, WOM, Mood, Perceived service quality
Kim et al., 2011	Service Experience	Environment, Benefits, Convenience, Accessibility, Utility Incentive, Trust
Lemke et al., 2011	Customer Experience	Communication Encounter (Communication, Relationship with company), Service Encounter (Service Quality, Product Quality, Network Quality), Usage Encounter (Relationship with other customers, Social impact)
Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013	Online Brand Experience	Perceived ease of use, Perceived usefulness, Brand Reputation, Brand trust
Bagdare, 2013	Retail Experience	Joy, Mood, Leisure, Distinctive
Lemon & Verhoef, 2016	Customer Experience	Engagement (as a part of overall CE), Point of touch, Service quality attributes, Price image, Loyalty programs, External environment
Khan & Fatma, 2017	Brand Experience	Marketing communication, Brand clues, Event marketing

Outcomes		
Construct	Experience Construct	Constructs
Grace & O'Cass, 2004	Service Experience	Satisfaction, Brand Attitude
Ha & Perks, 2005	Online Brand Experience	Familiarity, Satisfaction, Brand Trust
Brakus et al., 2009	Brand Experience	Brand Personality, Loyalty, Satisfaction
Biedenbach & Marell, 2009	Customer Experience	Brand Equity
Rose et al., 2010	Online Customer Experience	Customer Satisfaction, Re-purchase Intentions
Iglesias et al., 2011	Brand Experience	Brand Loyalty, Affective Commitment
Lemke et al., 2011	Customer Experience	Commitment, Purchase, Retention, WOM
Lemon & Verhoef 2016	Customer Experience	Customer satisfaction, Trust, Commitment, Engagement (as a part of overall CE).
Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013	Online Brand Experience	Behavioral intentions, Satisfaction, Online Brand Relationships
Maklan & Klaus, 2011	Customer Experience Quality	Loyalty, WOM, Satisfaction
Ismail, 2011	Customer Experience (services)	Brand Loyalty
Khan & Fatma, 2017	Brand Experience	Brand Trust, Purchase Brand Loyalty, Attitudinal Brand Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, WOM, Brand Credibility, Brand Attitude
de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018	Brand Experience	Brand Satisfaction, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, WOM

5. Discussion

The concept of experience in marketing literature is not new but it is fragmented and still open. In particular, the most crucial matter is the necessity to keep in mind that the service or product or online experiences are only a little part of the overall process while the CBEx embraces all the emotional and psychological aspects of the interactions between a brand and a consumer. Thus, literature until now has failed to focus on a broadest construct, focusing mainly on small parts of the whole experience system.

In addition, most studies identify experiences as not only emotional responses and undertake a holistic approach by identifying affective, cognitive, behavioral and psychological processes. Hence, multidimensionality is expressed in several formal definitions (Brakus et al., 2009; Gentile et al., 2007; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Thus, CBEx is a coalescence of significant meaning with combined behaviors, thoughts and the “three Fs” of fantasies, feelings and fun that occur during the consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Along these lines, experience with a brand has more impact than product features and benefits. As a result, modern consumers that are rational as well as emotional buy products and services not only on the basis of their functional and utilitarian benefits (Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt & Rogers, 2008) but also to obtain satisfying experiences from consumption (Morrison & Crane, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1998.). Thus, a meaningful experience can produce a deeper meaning and be more memorable, which can affect many constructs of consumer behavior, such as: repurchase intention, engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, the willingness to pay a premium price and the word-of-mouth (WOM) about the brand (Brakus et al., 2009; Hoch, 2002; Islam & Rahman, 2016; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rose et al., 2010; Schmitt, 1999).

After the analysis of the findings, five main dimensions of Consumer-Brand Experience have arisen:

- 1) Multi-dimensional
- 2) Subjective
- 3) Holistic
- 4) Co-created
- 5) Systemic

Boundaries are permeable and dimensions intersected and intertwined among them. Fig. 2 represents these 5 characteristic of CBEx.

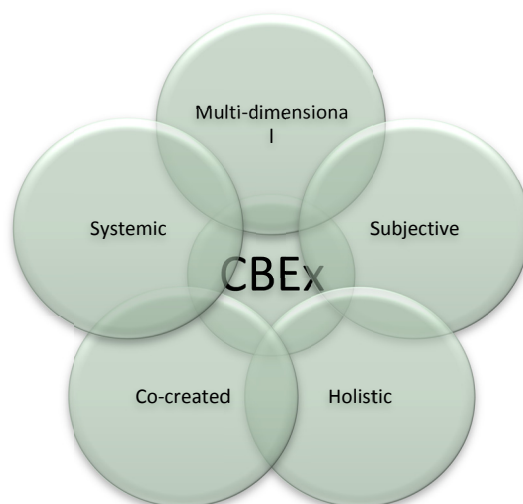


Figure 2. The CBEx “flower”

5.1 CBEx Is Multi-Dimensional

The current literature states that CBEx is a polyhedric construct focusing on various consumers’ responses to a firm’s offerings during the entire decision-making process. Scholars have come to agree that the CBEx is multi-dimensional in nature involving cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, social, and spiritual responses to all interactions with a firm (Bolton et al., 2014; Gentile et al., 2007; Lemke et al., 2011; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Schmitt, 1999, 2011; Verhoef et al., 2009). Thus, CBEx includes a combination of sensing, feeling, thinking (rationally as well as irrationally), acting (interacting with the environment through physical actions) and, in a social context, relating to others individuals through the brand (Brakus et al., 2009; Fournier, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt et al., 2015). To be precise, Schmitt (1999) was the first to explain the concept of brand experience from a multi-dimensional point of view, specifically cognitive, sensory, affective, behavioral and social. Along the same lines, Gentile and colleagues (2007) find evidence of six components of customer experience. These are defined as: sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational. While, Brakus et al. (2009) have conceptualized experiences as multi-dimensional, including sensory, affective-cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. The two psychological constructs of cognition and affect have been consistently identified as influential components of consumer behavior and consumer experience (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Frow & Payne, 2007; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009) and are incorporated in models of consumer and brand experience.

5.2 CBEx Is Subjective

Findings reveal that CBEx can be conceptualized as a psychological construct, which is a holistic, subjective response resulting from consumer interactions with the brand and which may involve different levels of involvement (Gentile et al., 2007; Lemke et al., 2011).

The characteristic of “non-linearity” of the CBEx has emerged from the review. This school of thought is made by the fact that two similar stimuli should be perceived as very different from two different consumers. It has been noted that perception fluctuates between individuals, and for any individual and any fluctuations may be related to situational factors. Impression formation is highly personal, being based on the individual’s interpretation of incoming sensory data from the external environment (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994).

Regarding this argument, Sheth et al. (1999) identified a combination of three factors that help shape a consumer’s attitude to experience. Firstly, stimulus characteristics; individuals should perceive a stimulus differently in relation to their sensory characteristics and information. The second element is the context; in perceiving stimuli, individuals are also affected by the context they live in. Finally, the situational factors; in fact, information received includes prior experiences that are filtered by social, cultural and personal characteristics. Thus, the experience is strictly personal and implies the customer’s involvement at different levels; the experience is conditioned by differences between individuals, differences over time in an individual’s emotional state, and a variety of situation-specific factors.

Thus, the role of emotions that has a positive affective outcome for one consumer may have a negative outcome for another consumer with a different emotional predisposition (Oliver, 1999; Palmer, 2010).

Accordingly, it can be concluded that every experience is a reflection of internal, subjective and unique mental processing by a consumer.

5.3 CBEx Is Holistic

CBEx can be viewed as an umbrella construct (Kranzbühler et al., 2018) defined as a broad concept used to embrace all the stages of consumer decision making and consumption process.

Gronroos (2006) states that “*customer value is not created by one element alone, but by the total experience of all elements.*”

Therefore, a Consumer-Brand Experience may relate to specific aspects of the offering, such as online brand experience (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Rose et al., 2010, 2012) or service experience (Kim et al., 2011; Verhoef et al., 2009) and it consists of individual contacts between the firm and the customer at distinct points in the experience (the so called “touchpoints”). At these touchpoints with consumers, brands provide multiple stimulations through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. Meanwhile, when consumers have an experience with a brand, they collect various stimuli of a brand (logo, brand characteristics, jingles, etc.). In perceiving most brands, however, more than one sense is involved and mostly, at the moment of consumption, brands involve all five senses (Schmitt, 1999).

The overall experience between a brand and a consumer is also created through a collection of these touchpoints in multiple phases of a customer’s decision-making process, multiple times and in multiple spaces (both online and offline).

In fact, consumers interact and experience with a brand over time: at the very beginning during the information search, successively during the purchase, then with the response and the consumption, and finally during the evaluation post consumption; in other words, during the entire buying decision process (Arnould et al., 2002; Chang & Chieng, 2006; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt & Rogers, 2008). Along this line, O’Loughlin et al. (2004) also proposed three levels of customer experience: brand experience, transactional experience and relational experience. Meanwhile, Jain et al. (2017) distinguished three value creation stages in regard to customer experience: value in pre-use, value in use and value in post-use.

Ramaseshan and Stein (2014) also specify that a consumer’s experience with a brand is influenced by several brand clues, such as product design, identity, packaging, distribution, locations and marketing communications. This approach is built on the foundation that consumers “consume” and continually experience a series of multisensory interactions between them and firms at every touchpoint from pre-purchase through to post-purchase stages. Studies have also stated that from the consumer’s perspective, Consumer-Brand Experience forms the basis for a holistic evaluation of the brand (Khan & Rahman, 2015; Nysveen et al., 2013). Thus, the behavioral intentions are influenced by emotions during the pre-, actual and post-consumption stages (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1999; Palmer, 2010).

5.4 CBEx Is Co-created

A number of authors have highlighted the importance of developing brands with strong personality that allow consumers to “feel the brand” and to “experience the brand” (Palmer, 2010; Smith & Wheeler, 2002). In the context of CBEx, experiences are about interactions (contacts) of consumers (human beings) who choose the brands when it matches their needs, values and lifestyle.

CBEx could be viewed from a double point of view. From the firm’s perspective, the firm essentially designs, crafts and shapes the experience for the consumer (Berry et al., 2002; Stuart & Tax, 2004); and from the consumer’s perspective (Schmitt, 2011) who shapes and lives the experience on the basis of their being. For this reason, The CBEx is considered a culmination of a customer’s interaction (brand relationship) with the brand and also with other actors and factors in a broader environment. Due to the dyadic nature of consumer-brand relationships (Kranzbühler et al., 2018), this experience is co-created by an alignment between the customer’s goals and an organization’s offering. Thus, brands are no longer under the control of the managers but are progressively created by a continuous set of reciprocal dynamics between firms and consumers as a maker of brand meanings (Andreini et al., 2018; Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Cova & Dalli, 2009). In other words, the customer becomes a co-creator and an actor of the entire experience process (Chandler & Lusch, 2015; De Keyser et al., 2015; Jain et al., 2017; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

5.5 CBEx Is Systemic

CBEx could be approached both as an outcome as well as a process (Jain et al., 2017). There is a great accordance that shows positive CBEx is essential to achieving competitive advantage through customer satisfaction, loyalty and word-of-mouth (Berry et al., 2002; Brakus et al., 2009; Carbone & Haeckel, 1994; Gentile et al., 2007; Palmer, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Rawson et al., 2013; Schmitt, 1999; Shaw & Ivens, 2002; Verhoef et al., 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The experience system includes sensory perceptions of the brand, brand affect, and the participatory experiences that a consumer may seek with a brand. As research shows, the strength of the brand experience influences consumers' ability to draw inferences about the brand personality that influences brand satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009).

CBEx could be viewed as a consequential process or system shaped by multiple factors (antecedents) and affecting, in turn, the consequences (outcomes). In this regard, the literature is very fragmented and all the antecedents and the consequences that have been studied conceptually or empirically were context specific. From this point of view, it is so necessary for the development of a unified conceptual model with the capacity to mirror this process so it is interpreted as a co-created relationship between consumer and brand.

Actually, CBEx is not just modelled by all those elements set by the firm, instead all these inputs are filtered by environmental characteristics (such as social and economic situations) and by the individual's characteristics (such as prior experiences, mood, feelings, life-style, etc.). Once the CBEx has taken shape, in turn, it causes effects on consumer behavior.

On the basis of the literature, a comprehensive conceptual model can be drawn (Figure 3).

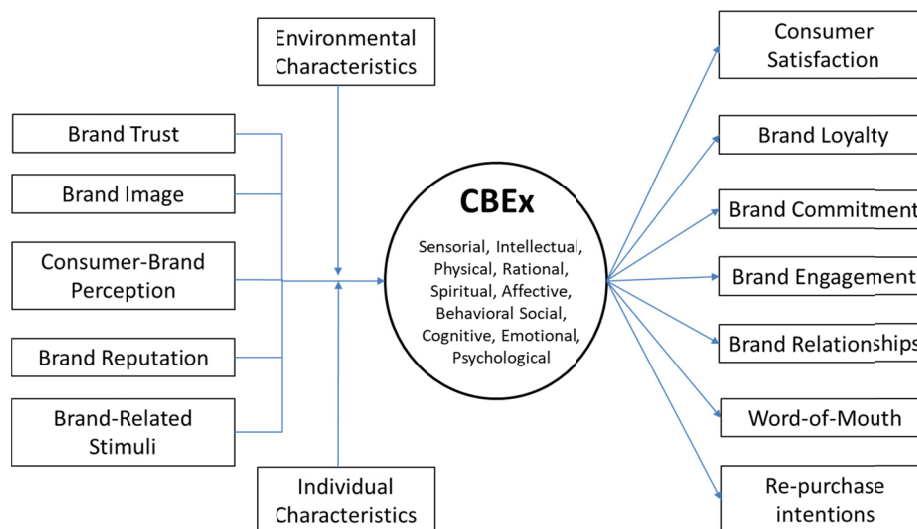


Figure 3. CBEx conceptual model

In conclusion, on the basis of the analysis of the reported studies, Consumer-Brand Experience can be defined as follows:

CBEx is a multi-dimensional and holistic process, characterized by the stratification of all the interactions between the brand and the consumer, which occur in different times and different spaces. It is co-created by both the firm and the consumers and influenced by the environmental and individual characteristics that shape and alter the perception of the experience.

6. Research Agenda

This study presents a review of the consumer and brand experience literature, discusses current definitions and understandings of the concept of CBEx and explores the nature and its relation with the consumer behavior. Findings suggest that many significant features of CBEx research have been ignored in prior studies. In this section, the author points out some of the important issues of existing knowledge and provides directions for future

research. A review of key literature is presented and it gives insight and direction to an understanding of the dimensions of CBEx that help a conceptual framework for future challenges. A number of deductions can be drawn.

The review of the literature shows that even though there is a broad agreement about the importance of Consumer-Brand Experience, there are dissimilar interpretations about its definition, conceptualization, characterization, process and other related concerns. For these reasons, the concept of CBEx calls for more researches in order to establish a shared conceptualization, theoretical background and managerial applications.

This research provides also a comprehensive overview of the Consumer-Brand Experience relationships, antecedents and outcomes and proposes an extension in respect of the previous models. The findings reveal new generalizations about the relationship between CBEx and the other relevant constructs. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that the stronger the consumer experience is with a brand, the stronger the consumer tends to commit to this brand and it is more probable he or she becomes attached to it.

Considering the subjective dimension of the CBEx, the next stage of research is to move beyond the focus of a limited set of elements under the control of the firm to a broader understanding of the multiple factors both within and outside the firm's control that impact on the consumer's experience. Additionally, the next stage of research should focus on a richer conceptualization of the CBEx that not only catches cognitive and affective evaluations but also includes intellectual, psychological and behavioral components. In fact, although a solid background exists, there is a need for additional research to understand how social environment and subjective dimensions impact on CBEx. The study highlights the importance of CBEx as a basic psychological process that enables formation of committed and meaningful relations between brands and consumers. Even though the literature provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the related key concepts to CBEx, the next step of the development of the literature should move towards a deeper comprehension of the components of the CBEx. There is a need for the exploration of these components that shape CBEx, in fact, in addition to the affective and cognitive state, CBEx seems to incorporate other states including sensorial, relational and psychological aspects of the consumer.

Regarding the holistic dimension, another important issue is that CBEx is not just limited to the customer's interaction with a brand at the moment of the purchase. Instead, it is impacted by a combination of experiences that evolves over time and space, including search, advertising and other brand stimuli purchases, consumption and after sales phases of the experience (Neslin et al., 2006; Verhoef et al., 2009). This concept calls for a more deep exploration of the construct and the development of measurement scales, which endow the component states to be verified and measured. Future studies should use more interpretive perspectives in order to obtain deeper insight into consumer experience with brands.

Moreover, from an academic point of view, this study contributes to growing research on CBEx by conceptually addressing the relationships across experiences and its antecedents and outcomes. On the basis of the elements identified in consumer and brand experience literature, a conceptual framework has been provided to carry forward CBEx antecedents and consequences together. Future researches need to examine the antecedents of CBEx in different contexts and evaluate their possible outcomes in order to generalize the conceptual model. There is support to suggest that there is a strong relationship between the Consumer-Brand Experience and its antecedents and effects. Researchers should not only determine the validity of this framework in different product or service categories but also empirically highlight the importance of each antecedent in the formation, development and shaping of the CBEx. Consistent with what has already been said, it is, in addition, necessary determine the controllability of the antecedents, in other words, understand which variables are under the firm's control, which are partially controllable, and which variables escape from the firm's control.

Brand loyalty and customer satisfaction are highly discussed and empirically tested as outcomes but only a few studies have focused on other important outcomes, like brand commitment, brand engagement and re-purchase intention. There is a need to examine these brand and consumer behavior-related outcomes, and also in different contexts. Additionally, further development should establish if constructs, such as brand trust or brand engagement, affecting CBEx are affected by them or are parts of the overall process.

Such study could also empirically test these important antecedents and consequences of consumers' experience with a brand and check whether some differences in the degree of consumers' experiences and commitment do appear. In addition, an interesting future research would be to test how CBEx influences re-purchase behavior. Researches should also replicate these findings in the context of different types of brands, such as product, service, and retail brands.

The presented framework in only conceptual and calls for further development and empirical investigations in order to build academic understanding of this topic and to identify the relationships between these outcome variables. Thus, the conceptual model presented should be developed into a research model that must be empirically tested by the support of SEM technique. Moreover, there is a need for a more specific measure of CBEx and its link to firm performance.

Another issue is the identification of an optimal level of experience (Palmer, 2010). Future advancements should also develop a robust measurement of CBEx in order to measure the relationship between CBEx and its antecedents and consequences and in order to predict consumer behavior. A number of challenges call scholars in the development of a measurement scale for CBEx. Probably the main problem in developing a unified measurement scale is the complexity of the environment, the innumerable factors to take into consideration and the fact that CBEx is context specific.

7. Managerial Implications

The increasing importance and the development of consumer and brand experience in the last 35 years has delivered practical insights about shaping, evolving and providing unique and memorable experiences during the overall relationship between consumers and brands to enhance customer satisfaction as an important managerial driver for firms. Creating a strong customer experience is now a leading management objective and marketers now, more than in the past, have the ability to customize experiences. Firms must not only acknowledge the factors that contribute to the CBEx but they should also manage these factors. In short, CBEx requires more attention due to its practical relevance and managerial implications can be drawn from this literature review.

The proposed framework suggests that marketers need to be aware that functional benefits are important but it is also important to recognize the experiential state of the consumer as one of the key drivers in developing marketing strategies. Managers need to focus on consumers' expectations and clearly define the role of consumer as a co-creator of experiences. Therefore, managers should incorporate a bilateral view and identify what constitutes the experience for their customers. Moreover, an understanding of experience factors, elements, and the related responses from consumers can enhance firms in the management of experiences. The findings of the study indicate that brands play an important role in the lives of individuals and can even influence the construction of a person's identity. Specifically, the results suggest that by focusing on factors that influence Consumer-Brand Experience, brand managers could achieve some important and desired consequences, most notably consumers' commitment and their willingness to generate positive WOM.

Firms have to realize the importance of CBEx as an instrument for achieving competitive advantage. Experience is a transitory phenomenon, so a specific experience is incapable of giving a competitive advantage for a firm. Instead, it is more appropriate for managers to think about how a set of experiences will develop over time in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Nowadays, firms must implement apposite measurements, metrics and techniques in order to map the experiential process and its outcomes. It can help the management to design strategies aimed to shape and affect consumers' perceptions about experiences.

To conclude, managers should focus on consumers' behavior processes. The existence of the emotional aspects and the fact that consumers are not perfectly rational can modify the way that brand stimuli are perceived. Through focusing on what constitutes the CBEx and how it is perceived by consumers, firms can try to manage the design and the shape of the experience that they want to create. Focusing on brand strategies around the experience concept will help marketers craft better and effective marketing strategies to enhance Consumer-Brand Experience and, consequently, build more memorable and powerful brands. Furthermore, with appropriate tools, systematically measuring the process of experience and developing marketing strategies to manage this field, firms may be able to enhance the wellness of consumers, the firm itself and, as a last resort, society.

8. Limitations of the Study

Although this study has considered every possible article related to consumer and brand experience, it has some limitations: First, the decision to focus only on the articles published in journals could have some restrictions; in fact, it may exclude some researches, books, thesis dissertations that cover this CBEx topic. Second, this paper explores articles for analysis by searching for the term "brand" or "consumer experience" and related keywords and selects only those papers that appeared in response to the searched terms. This could conduce to the automatic exclusion of papers that might have addressed similar topics. Third, this work takes into account all the papers published in marketing and consumer behavior journals but omits journals concerning philosophy and pure psychological topics.

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