

Customer Experience in Marketing Research: a state-of-the-art Literature Review

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Pour citer cet article : LAZAARE. G & GHANNAM Z. O (2023) «Customer Experience in Marketing Research: a state-of-the-art Literature Review », African Scientific Journal « Volume 03, Numéro 19 » pp: 1099 – 1128.

Date de soumission : Juillet 2023

Date de publication : Août 2023



DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.8402694
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Abstract

Customer experience has become a central research theme within the field of marketing. This study presents a comprehensive and chronological exploration of the concept of customer experience, tracing its evolution from its emergence in the 80s to its latest developments up to 2018. Through a meticulous analysis of the existing literature, this paper shows the evolution of the concept, the diverse angles under which it was examined, and the seminal contributions that shaped it. It studies the work of founding researchers who laid the groundwork for the study of customer experience in marketing in the early 1980s and 1990s, and then describes the different trajectories research has taken in regard to customer experience as the new millennium unfolded, particularly within the context of retail environments. It also highlights the turning point and increasing interest in the concept around the year 2007. Finally, the study navigates the currents of recent scholars in the last decade, as customer experience has gained more importance in the service industry. This paper exposes the different definitions, dimensions and theoretical underpinnings under which the concept has been examined. It presents the converging and contrasting perspectives of the authors and existing frameworks that can be used when undertaking research involving customer experience. Furthermore, the main findings and interpretations are summarized, and a clear demarcation between the concept of customer experience and adjacent concepts of service quality and satisfaction is proposed. In addition to elucidating the historical evolution of the concept, this paper provides a ground analysis researchers can build upon to undertake future research on customer experience.

Keywords: chronological literature review, customer experience, CX, experiential marketing.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CLV	Customer Lifetime Value
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CX	Customer Experience
DART	Dialogue, access, risk-benefits, transparency
EEG	Electroencephalography
FMRI	Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
TISM	Total Interpretive Structural Modeling
UX	User Experience

Introduction

Exceptional companies differentiate themselves by focusing on delivering exceptional customer experiences that have a lasting impact on customers, rather than solely relying on providing logical value for money or cognitive assessments of their services (Johnston & Clark, 2002). If customer experience (CX) is currently a research priority in marketing, the concept has been studied in multiple disciplines such as psychology, education and organizational behavior, philosophy, cognitive science, and management practice (Brakus et al., 2009).

According to Hassenzahl (2008), experience is a complex construct that emerges through interactions with the world. His user experience model is based on the user's perspective and encompasses both the affective and functional needs of users. This is considered a starting point for modeling user experience with websites (Schaik & Ling, 2008). Consumer psychology and marketing scholars have also studied various experience-related concepts such as "brand experiences" and related phenomena such as brand attachment, brand relationships, and brand love (Schmitt et al., 2015). Given that CX is a relatively new concept, understanding its origin and evolution is the key to any study involving it.

The objective of a chronological state-of-the-art literature review is to gain a deeper understanding of the historical context and provide insights into how knowledge has evolved and showcase the cumulative knowledge and progress made in the field (Cooper, 1988). This review aims to present the evolution of research on customer experience over time, by highlighting the progression of ideas, theories, and findings in the field (Baumeister and Leary, 1997).

As CX is a fairly new topic, this study covers the period from the appearance of the concept in the 80s until the late 2010s). This state-of-the-art review reveals patterns, shifts, and inconsistencies in research findings across four decades. This can inform researchers about areas that require further investigation, unresolved debates, or emerging research trends (Grant & Booth, 2009).

The main questions this literature review seeks to answer are as follows:

RQ1: What is customer experience and how did it evolve?

RQ2: What are the main concepts involved in examining customer experience?

This paper is structured in three sections: In the first section, we present our literature review methodology. The second section presents the three main periods in which we divided our body of literature into three main periods: the 1980s and the 1990s, which mark the emergence of the CX concept; the 2000s focused mainly on retail and the 2010s which was mainly about the

service industry. Finally, section three is comprised of a summary of our main findings where we examine the differences between CX and adjacent concepts, namely, service quality and satisfaction.

Review Methodology

The researcher employed a keyword search strategy using various databases (EBSCO, JSTOR, Google Scholar, etc.) to identify pertinent papers for their study. The search terms included customer experience, CX, digital experience, client experience, user experience, and UX. The search specifically focused on peer-reviewed articles longer than two pages with the aim of excluding book reviews, editorials, opinion statements, trade magazine articles, and other non-scholarly sources. However, because we believe that knowledge is constructed and multifaceted, it is worth noting that since customer experience was given much importance in professional contexts, some of these concepts were also examined.

Based on a constructivist epistemology, this research examines the evolution of paradigms and conceptions, under the influence of various factors. An exhaustive list of the literature was gathered, including academic journals, conference proceedings, and book chapters. Abstracts of the articles were reviewed to ensure the relevance of the sources. Additionally, references within the initially identified articles were examined to identify further relevant sources in the field (Hoehle et al., 2012). This yielded a final list of 98 articles. They were evaluated for relevance and chronologically organized. Pertinent studies were analyzed and synthesized as described in the following section.

Chronological State of the Art

The emergence of Customer Experience in the 80s and 90s

While the term ‘customer experience’ is commonly attributed to Holbrook and Hirschman's work in 1982 (Holbrook et al., 1982), its roots in the literature can be traced back even further. Lebergott (1993), in his book "Pursuing Happiness: American Consumers in the Twentieth Century," identified the concept of consumption experience in the writings of influential figures such as John Maynard Keynes, Alfred Marshall, and Adam Smith (Frow & Payne, 2007). Additionally, early perspectives on the notion of experiential consumption can be found in the works of Abbott (1955) and Alderson (1957) (Keyser et al., 2015).

However, Holbrook and Hirschman delved into this concept in greater detail, pioneering its exploration in consumer research. They challenged the prevailing information processing model proposed by Bettman (1979), who viewed consumers as rational problem-solvers and

instead introduced an experiential view. This phenomenological perspective considers consumption to encompass sensory pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, and emotional responses. Holbrook and Hirschman examined distinctions across various elements including environmental inputs, consumer inputs, intervening responses, output consequences, criteria, and learning effects. By incorporating the experiential aspect overlooked in prior research, In the marketing literature, experiences are often associated with hedonic consumption and commonly encompass services such as travel, music, theater, restaurants, hotels, and cultural activities (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

Furthermore, in the 1980s, Thompson et al. (1989) adopted an existential-phenomenological perspective to describe experiences as "lived." They defined experience as emerging from a contextual setting, neither solely within the person nor external to them, but rather subject-free (Thompson et al., 1989).

Notably, early research of the 80s on experience was primarily conceptual, and did not provide a clear understanding of this concept. However, the contributions of scholars such as Holbrook and Hirschman and Thompson et al. have laid the foundation for further exploration and development of the concept of CX.

In the early 90s, Babin et al. (1994) built upon previous research to develop a scale that assesses consumers' evaluations of shopping experiences, considering both utilitarian and hedonic dimensions (Babin et al., 1994). Their work was inspired by Holbrook's (1983) argument that value (pleasurable emotional responses and tangible outcomes) is important in a comprehensive model of the consumption experience. They conducted interviews and identified factors, such as heightened affect, task performance, and gender, that influence whether different consumption experiences provide utilitarian, hedonic, or both types of value. Through literature and focus group analysis, they developed a scale and employed a psychometric analysis to refine it. Ultimately, their research concluded that consumers were both intellectual and emotional.

There are relatively few historical studies on CX. Nonetheless, authors such as Carbone and Haeckel (1994) have focused on practical environments and introduced a new perspective on experience management. They proposed experience engineering, which involves controlling signals from products, services, and the environment to create the desired customer perceptions. They defined customer experience as the impression formed from sensory information from products, services, and businesses. Context and environmental clues, such as appearance, decor, smell, cleanliness, and privacy, are essential in forming these impressions. Carbone and

Haeckel (1994) proposed a purposeful design to manage mechanics (smell, taste, sound, and textures) and humanics (emitted by people) to create positive impressions and customer preferences. Their experience engineering approach included acquiring design skills, collecting and analyzing data, designing service clues, and implementing and verifying experiences. (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994)

While Carbone and Haeckel's approach emphasized the systematic design and implementation of context clues emitted by products, services, and the environment, Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduced the concept of the experience economy. They argued that creating distinctive customer experiences can provide firms with substantial economic value. Pine and Gilmore conceptualized experiences as distinct from goods and services, highlighting that consumers seek memorable events staged by companies to engage them in a personalized manner (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

In 1998, Lanning (1998) emphasized that experiences lie at the core of value propositions and that the value derived from experiences is linked to their intensity and the feelings of enchantment they evoke. Building upon these ideas, Schmitt (1999) presented, in his book "Experiential marketing" (1999), which is considered a turning point in the history of customer experience, a multidimensional view of experiential marketing through five strategic experiential modules: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. First, sensory features which include aesthetics and sensory qualities. Second, the affective dimension that includes moods and emotions. Third, the creative cognitive dimension, which refers to convergent/analytics and divergent/imaginative thinking. The fourth is the physical dimension, which refers to motor actions and behavioral/lifestyle experiences. Finally, social identity refers to one's social experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). The pioneer researcher of CX argued that companies strictly create personal experiences based on the involvement of customers. The author presented the 'experiences' as a new economic offering, which emerges as the next step after commodities, goods and services, in what they call the progression of economic value (Gentile et al., 2007). His main argument was that "as a marketer you need to provide the right environment and setting for the desired customer experiences to emerge."

While several of these works have received significant attention in the field of CX, it should be noted that a few lack the foundations of academic research (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Overall, the seminal works of Babin et al., Lanning, and Schmitt have significantly shaped the understanding and management of customer experience. They have

contributed to the development of scales, experience engineering approaches, and the recognition of experiences as distinct economic offerings.

Exploring different angles of customer experience

The beginning of 2000s

The topic of customer experience gained much interest in the 2000s. Addis and Holbrook (2001) focused on the concept of hedonic consumption, which refers to the emotional and experiential aspects of consumer behavior. They proposed a typology of customer value that includes four values: functional, social, emotional, and epistemic. They argued that hedonic products, which provide emotional and experiential benefits, are becoming increasingly important in consumer culture. They also suggested that marketers should focus on creating a balanced product that provides both utilitarian and hedonic benefits to consumers (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). Holbrook (2006) built on this work and added a social dimension. According to him, when evaluating the social dimension of value, customers evaluate how a service influences their social status, or how it affects their identity (Holbrook, 2006). These dimensional boundaries (utilitarian, hedonic and social boundaries) related to the nature of value are not clear and are not mutually exclusive; therefore, they can have a parallel effect within the context of a service or product (Komulainen & Saraniemi, 2019a)

In the 2000s, several authors expanded the concepts they introduced previously. For example, Berry et al. (2002) extended the work of Carbone et al. (1994). They follow up on the idea of customer value with a definition of customer value as “it is composed of both the functional and the emotional benefits customers receive minus the financial and the nonfinancial burdens they bear.” (Berry et al., 2002) and introduced the concept of total CX through the customer’s journey, which starts with the expectations of customers before the experience occurs and ends with their assessment of it when it is over. They consider that “Customers always have an experience—good, bad, or indifferent— when they purchase a product or service from a company. The key is how effectively the company manages the experience.” (Berry et al., 2002) Similarly, Schmitt elaborated on his previous work with a new book in 2003: *Customer Experience Management*. This study proposed a revolutionary approach to connecting with customers through experiential marketing. He suggested that any form of customer-focused marketing activity that creates a connection with customers is experiential marketing. Schmitt's framework for experiential marketing included five components: experiential environments, experience platforms, desired experiences for the brand, customer interaction interfaces, and continuous innovation. He argued that companies should focus on creating memorable and

value-enhancing marketing experiences that "dazzle their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds." (Schmitt, 2003) Schmitt's work highlighted the importance of managing customer experiences to create a connection with customers and differentiate oneself from the competition.

The notion of value was first explored by LaSalle and Britton (2003) emphasized the importance of customer experiences and their influence on perceiving value. They highlighted the need to consider physical environment, social interactions, and emotional responses. The authors argued that experiences create stronger emotional connections, increase satisfaction, and encourage loyalty. They suggested a strategic design and management of experiences to create meaningful and memorable customer encounters. Storytelling has been highlighted as a way to engage customers and to create personal relevance. Value lies in providing excellent experiences throughout the customer relationship, exceeding expectations rather than just focusing on memorable events (LaSalle & Britton, 2003).

In contrast, Haeckel et al. (2003), built upon the work of Pine and Gilmore (1998), suggested that companies should aim to create memorable and value-enhancing marketing experiences that engage customers on an emotional and cognitive level. They argued that achieving a competitive advantage goes beyond traditional factors such as price, quality, and service. Consequently, managing CX becomes a crucial aspect in creating connections with customers and differentiating oneself from competitors. The researchers recall the same clues evoked by their previous work of 1994: functional clues related to the product or service, mechanic clues that evoke emotional responses, and humanic clues emitted by people (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994)

In 2004, Vargo and Lush (2004) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) emphasized the importance of customers and suppliers' co-creation of value. Vargo and Lush proposed a service-dominant logic of marketing that focused on CX and value co-creation, while Prahalad and Ramaswamy argued that value is embedded in the co-creation process. Vargo and Lush highlighted that customers are involved in value creation and that value is subjective and context-dependent. Their service-oriented view suggests customizing offerings, recognizing consumers as co-producers, and maximizing consumer involvement in customization to meet their needs. Businesses should view themselves as service providers and focus on relationships, collaboration, and resource integration to create value. Prahalad and Ramaswamy define co-creation of value as the joint creation of value by the company and the customer, not the firm trying to please the customer, thus discarding the 'customer is king' notion. Both studies

highlighted the need to manage customer experiences to build a connection and stand out from competitors. This was a major shift from traditional marketing, as customers were no longer targets but participants in a two-way interaction. The studies suggested companies should create memorable, value-enhancing experiences that "dazzle their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds." Both studies emphasized the importance of considering emotional and experiential aspects of consumer behavior and product design in value co-creation. Customer involvement requires dialogue, access, risk, benefits, and transparency (DART). Researchers argued that traditional market research techniques were inadequate and should be replaced by better methods to "grasp co-creation experiences." They predicted new approaches and tools, and companies must build new infrastructure and capabilities to enable value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004)

Research on CX has become increasingly specific to various fields. An illustration of this is McCarthy and Wright's (2004) work on "Technology as Experience, which introduced a framework that recognizes technology as an interactive experience that engages the senses, emotions, and intellect of users. The framework comprised four dimensions: sensory, affective, compositional, and spatiotemporal. The sensory dimension focuses on physical and perceptual qualities, whereas the affective dimension explores the emotional and psychological responses. The compositional dimension examines the structure and organization of technology, whereas the spatiotemporal dimension considers contextual usage. Their research emphasizes the significance of experiential aspects in technology design and evaluation. Moreover, their work highlights the relationship between motivation, value, and the emotional and pragmatic aspects of the technology experience. McCarthy and Wright's approach provides insights into the human-computer interaction and promotes a holistic understanding of technology's impact on users (McCarthy & Wright, 2004)

Some scholars have also studied the outcomes of the CX rather than its dimensions; this is the case in Johnston and Clark (2005). They presented an operational view of services, defining them as a combination of CX and perception of outcomes. According to them, service experience encompasses interactions with the service process, organization, facilities, and other customers. The outcomes include tangible outputs, values, emotions, judgments, and intentions. Customers contribute their own resources such as time, money, and effort. This perspective enhances the understanding of service management and CX evaluation (Walter et al., 2010)

Edvardsson et al. (2005) introduced the significance of customer emotions in service experiences, expanding the research focus beyond cognitive dimensions and quality factors

associated with service offerings. They highlighted that both favorable and unfavorable experiences leave lasting impressions in customers' memories, influencing their perceptions of service quality. This study draws upon the definitions of Hirschman and Holbrook, who linked experiences to hedonic consumption, as well as the concept of service experience by Johnston and Clark, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses resulting in a memorable encounter. Edvardsson et al. (2005) emphasized that quality extends beyond the product or service itself to encompass overall experience (Edvardsson, 2005). However, although their study presented interesting propositions, it lacked empirical justification for their claims.

A turning point in the research on customer experience

Our chronological literature review revealed an important number of studies on customer experiences in 2007. Around the same time, a couple of management conferences chose the topic of CX and gathered professionals from workshops on this theme, such as the Customer Experience Management Conference organized by The Conference Board IN New York. In fact, 2007 constituted a turning point for the world for various reasons: the launch of the iPhone, the introduction of Amazon Kindle, and the rise of Facebook following its launch to the public in 2006. This has drawn increasing attention to CX management as a strategic business priority. Companies have begun to recognize the importance of delivering exceptional experiences across touchpoints and throughout the customer journey. This shift has led to greater emphasis on customer-centric strategies, personalization, and understanding of customer expectations.

This interest has also taken over the academic scene. An illustration of this is found in the book of Caru and Cova (2007), *Consuming Experience*, which explains the shift from traditional companies adopting traditional marketing strategies to companies providing customers with platforms and raw materials and allowing them to shape their own experiences to companies engaging the customer in immersive experiences they have thought and prepared in detail.

Caru and Cova's extensive work focuses on the co-creation of value and the impact of consumer experience on behavior and beliefs. Their research, first conducted in 2003 and then in 2007, highlighted the need to consider emotional and experiential aspects in both consumer behavior and product design. They proposed frameworks to understand the appropriation process of the consumer experience. According to them, by identifying and promoting positive experiential trajectories while minimizing negative processes, businesses can create enjoyable experiences and limit their hedonic adaptation. The main difference between their work and those of Schmitt (2003) and Lasalle and Britton (2003) is the emphasis on the subjective nature of experiences

and the importance of capturing consumers' imaginations beyond the idea of experiences as extraordinary events. (Carù & Cova, 2003; Caru` and Cova, 2007).

Another group of researchers interested in experience design was Berry and Carbone (2007). They proposed a five-step approach to experience design as follows: (1) identify the emotions that evoke customer commitment, (2) establish an experience motif, (3) make an inventory and evaluate experience clues, (4) determine the experience gap, and (5) close the experience gap and monitor execution (Johnston & Kong, 2011) Carbone (2003) dressed requirements on how to transform an organization into an experience-based one, namely, vision and strategy (clear experience statements, leadership, and transfer of skills and knowledge by getting employees to think in terms of experience clues (Johnston & Kong, 2011). On the other hand, Berry carried out another study with Seltman in 2007, where they mentioned that mechanic clues in certain situations have the ability to influence customers before humanic and functional clues, and hence contribute to creating first-hand expression (Chahal & Dutta, 2015)

In a Harvard Business Review, Meyer and Schwager (2007), considered that "CX encompasses every aspect of a company's offering—the quality of customer care, of course, but also advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use, and reliability." (Meyer & Schwager, 2007) They argued that experience translates the internal and subjective responses that customers express through direct (in the course of purchase/use) and indirect contact (unplanned encounters with external sources: word of mouth, advertising, news reports, etc.) with the company. Experience is thus cumulative and lives throughout time, which is why they advocate that companies should focus on deconstructing the overall experiences to highlight the touch points with their customers (Frow & Payne, 2007) In both B2B and B2C contexts, CX can only be achieved if all teams embed it in the fundamental design of every feature(Walter et al., 2010)

A similar concept was proposed by Gentile et al. (2007). They explained that CX originates from a series of interactions between customers and service providers. Their argument is that focusing on the customer is now the only way companies can survive, and this focus should be translated by monitoring all contact points with the customer, and more precisely, the interaction and involvement (rational, emotional, sensorial physical, and spiritual) of the customer with the company. Their work is based on previous research that highlights the importance of emotional value and the notion of expectations(Gentile et al., 2007)

Although the customer perceives experiences as complex but unitary, Gentile et al. deconstructed them based on the psychological concept of modularity of mind. They identified

different aspects that form the CX: sensation, cognition, affect and add actions, the system of values and beliefs, and relationships. This enables them to list the six dimensions of CX. First, the sensorial component is addressed through sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, which arouse aesthetic pleasure, excitement, and satisfaction. Second, emotions involve an affective system (mood and feelings). Third, the cognitive dimension addresses mental processes and allows customers to think about them. Fourth, the pragmatic component comes from the practical act of doing something beyond usability and through all the product lifecycle stages. The fifth dimension is lifestyle, which comes from adhesion to values embedded in the company and shared by the customer. Finally, the relational component involves the person, her relationship with other people or with her ideal self, belonging to a community, or her need to identify or distinguish herself from or from a social group. The model suggested by Gentile et al. (2007) highlights the notions of company value (proposition and realization) and consumer value (perception and expectation). Their empirical research investigated how different experience dimensions (sensorial, emotional, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational) provoke reactions that shape the success of well-known products(Sharma et al., 2016a)

The research of Frow and Payne (2007), based on qualitative case studies, introduced a new concept that is the “perfect” customer experience. Customer experience is approached from two perspectives: information-processing memory-based goal-directed activities (cognition, affect, and behavior) and subconscious experiential views (emotions, contextual, symbolic, and non-utilitarian aspects, including fantasies, feelings, and fun). The “outstanding experience” which leads to an ultimate customer satisfaction, results from the co-creation, the dialogue and the interaction between the customer and the suppliers of different phases of product/service creation, and throughout the whole lifecycle of customer relationship: acquisition, consolidation, and enhancement. They argued “that companies addressing customer experience management should carefully consider which of these two perspectives should to be emphasized. A rational perspective might be the predominant emphasis in a business-to-business context, while an emotional experiential perspective may be emphasized in a business-to-consumer context, such as the leisure industry” (Frow & Payne, 2007). Customer satisfaction and perceived value vary throughout interactions of the customer with the product or brand and both within and across different channels. It should be achieved at an affordable cost, and any improvements made by the company to the CX should be based on the profit potential. A major managerial implication of their work was the recommendations they provided to companies aiming to deliver outstanding experience. They highlight the importance of the company in

recognizing problems and opportunities for improvement. Companies should identify opportunities for co-creation with customers and utilize mapping tools, such as process mapping, service blueprinting, customer activity cycles, and customer-firm touch point analysis. Carefully managing customer touchpoints, ensuring consistency across different channels, and understanding customer requirements through the relationship lifecycle are all trivial to perfect experiences. Flow and Payne highlighted that companies should, in addition to measuring CX using appropriate metrics (not only customer satisfaction but also promoter scores), also focus on employee motivation.

The end of the 2000s: A focus on retail

Since interest in CX emerged in the retail industry, many researchers have studied this specific field. For example, Puccinelli et al. (2009) identified seven consumer behavior research domains that influence customer experience: (1) goals, schemas, and information processing; (2) memory; (3) involvement; (4) attitudes; (5) affect; (6) atmospherics; and (7) consumer attributions and choices. For each of these, they provided insights referring to the standard consumer decision-making stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase (Grewal et al., 2009)

Another study that focused on retailers is that of Grewal, Levy, and Kumar (2009), who considered that small actions taken by retailers, such as the ease of interactions with the firm and the availability of different channels through which the messages are consistent, have a great impact on the satisfaction and loyalty of their customers (Grewal et al., 2009)). Another novelty of their research was the categorization of customer experiences along the lines of the retail mix (i.e., price experience and promotion experience) (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016)

The work of Verhoef et al. (2009) was motivated by the lack of systematic research on CX and customer experience management. They pinned the lack of academic research in opposition to publications in practitioner-oriented journals and management books. Their research builds on that of Gentile et al. and Meyer and Schwagger (2007), as they explicitly defined CX as holistic. These are created by elements inside and outside the retailer's control (Bolton et al., 2018; Grewal et al., 2009) It takes into consideration antecedents (past experience, etc.), and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses to the retailer (Bolton et al., 2018). "Additionally, we submit that the customer experience encompasses the total experience, including the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience, and may involve multiple retail channels." (Verhoef et al., 2009) The conceptual model they built explores five main aspects: social environment, service interface,

retail brand, CX dynamics and CX management strategies (Verhoef et al., 2009) Noticing that marketing practitioners have concluded that developing marketing strategies relies on understanding how consumers experience brands. Brakus et al. (2009) presented both a conceptual analysis of brand experience and a brand experience scale (Brakus et al., 2009), which was based on the conceptualization of Pine and Gilmore (1999). They identified three perspectives to address brand experience: product, shopping and service, and consumption. The researchers found that throughout the shopping journey from search to consumption, customers encounter brand-related stimuli that shape the brand's design and identity. These stimuli include attributes such as brand colors, shapes, typefaces, and design elements, they evoke subjective, internal consumer responses, generating sensations, feelings, and behavioral responses, collectively termed as "brand experience." Brand experience varies in terms of strength, intensity, and valence. Over time, they should affect experiences, memory, consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Oliver 1997; Reicheld 1996) (Brakus et al., 2009)

Novak and Hoffman (2009) were among the first studies to address the concept of digital CX. They argued that "customer experience is very important in the Internet environment, and that focusing on the nature of what is special about the Internet would likely drive much of the innovative work in this area". Hoffman and Novak (2009) reviewed the initial model of flow created in 1996 and explored the different modifications integrated by other researchers. Four consequences of flow were validated: learning, control, exploratory behavior, and positive subjective experience.

Researchers have explored the concept of CX, its definitions, and its dimensions from different perspectives and contexts, thus adding practical relevance to the theoretical work conducted in previous years.

Focus on the service sector

After an extensive focus on the retail industry, the focus shifted to the service sector. In fact, Edvardsson et al. (2010) conducted a study with three case studies in which they analyzed the test drives of services. They explain that "because emotions play an important role in service experiences, services must be designed to ensure that both the functional and affective aspects of the service experience are carefully considered (Pullman and Gross 2004); (Edvardsson et al., 2010). They formulated a definition of service experience similar to Meyer and Schwager (2007) and Johnston and Clark (2008) as a result of interactions between the customer and the service organization and its frontline staff, facilities, and technology. "The experience thus cannot be separated from the customer because they are all co-created with them." (Bolton et

al., 2018) The dimensions they base the study on are: physical artefacts, intangible artefacts, technology, customer placement, customer involvement and interaction with employees.

Customer involvement and interaction with employees were also brought up by Walter and Ostrom (2010), who criticized previous research that only focused on customers' cognitive-based perceptions of predetermined attribute dimensions that measure the outcome of service processes. In their qualitative study, Walter and Ostrom (2010) explained that within service research, CX has been treated as embedded in service quality and is measured by comparing expectations before, and perceptions after the experience, or perceptions only, through different predetermined service attributes (Walter et al., 2010) In this context, they define customer experience as "direct and indirect experience of service process, the organization, the facilities and how the customer interacts with the service firm's representatives and other customers." Based on customer narratives, they considered both favorable and unfavorable experiences, and concluded that CX is indeed multidimensional and complex. (Walter et al., 2010)

The considerable perplexity within scholarly works regarding the characterization of an experience and its distinction from a service is the problem Johnston and Kong (2011) have attempted to address. In order to highlight this difference, the authors began by explaining the different perspectives on service. Rather than opposing it to a product, they concluded that service quality should be considered from both the quality of the operation and customer service. They described different experience design approaches in their studies (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994; Carbone, 2004; Berry and Carbone, 2007). Johnston and Kong's work is based on a grounded multiple case longitudinal study over the course of four years, which led to eight broad stages of experience improvement undertaken by organizations. (R. Johnston and Kong, 2011)

Rather than exploring the concept of CX, Nigam (2012) developed his argument regarding the impact of experiential marketing on purchasing intention. According to him, unlike traditional marketing, experiential marketing deals with customer experience rather than the functional features and benefits of products. By incorporating users into the sales process and using their data to understand their expectations, consumers are immersed in marketers on a common platform. Memorable experiences that make the customer "delighted in exultant jubilation" lead to higher purchasing intentions. (Nigam, 2012)

As in Nigam (2012), exploring the link between CX and other concepts has become a trend. For example, Sirapracha and Tocquer (2012) investigated in their research the relationship between customer experience, brand image, and loyalty to telecommunication services. They

defined customer experience as the outcome of various interactions the customer has with the firm (staff, self-service technologies, environment) that impact brand image and relationships. Although their research had some limitations (inadequacy of sample size, ambiguity of the scale used, etc.), the findings of their survey demonstrated that CX had a positive relationship with both brand image and customer loyalty. (Sirapracha and Tocquer, 2012)

Chandler and Lusch (2015) discussed the concept of value proposition within service systems, emphasizing its role in creating connections that shape service experiences. They argued that these experiences occur within specific temporal and spatial contexts, with the surrounding connections contributing to an individual's psychological state or disposition. The authors highlighted that service interactions between agents and customers have a lasting impact on customer perceptions of the service organization. They differentiated between temporal connections, stemming from past experiences and influencing future ones, and relational connections, demonstrating how a single service experience can affect multiple actors in various social contexts. Overall, their framework provides insights into the dynamic nature of service experiences and the importance of understanding and managing connections to enhance customer perceptions and organizational outcomes. (Chandler and Lusch, 2015)

In an interesting approach to clarify the impact of CX on performance, rather than focusing on the customer, Klaus (2014) focused on managers and decision makers. He adopted a typology that distinguished three categories: preservers (managers who do not take strategic customer experience initiatives and only launch functional-level initiatives), transformers (who acknowledge the importance of CX, deploy different channels to shape their programs with a long-term commitment to transformation, but struggle to establish appropriate metrics for the effectiveness of their business models), and vanguards (who develop a consistent customer experience strategy across the top, cross-functional, and organizational levels). (Klaus, 2015)

Based on a consumer psychology perspective, Schmitt, Brakus, and Zarantonello (2015) studied experiences resulting from the purchase and consumption of goods and services. They provided customers with a wider perspective by suggesting that every service exchange leads to CX, regardless of its nature and form. They considered experience holistic and multidimensional: cognitive, emotional, sensory, social, and spiritual. Schmitt et al. aimed to demonstrate that experientialism is not the opposite of materialism, in contrast to Gilovich et al. 's claim. Embracing material possessions can bring pleasure, and the comparison between experiences and material purchases is not relevant, because they are not on the same continuum. Schmitt et al. suggested that any purchase (good or service) is to be regarded according to two

value-creating dimensions: materialism and experientialism. A key construct of their conceptual model is “brand experience” (Schmitt et al., 2015)

Klaus, along with Lemon and Keiningham, is also part of De Keyser et al. (2015) report of Marketing Science Institute Working Paper Series. (Keyser et al., 2015) They seek to provide an integrative framework that could serve both managers and scholars in CX. Their definition embeds the main elements of customer experience as cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social and links them to the interaction (both direct and indirect) with market actors. They claimed that although there have been numerous studies on CX, they still lack clear definitions, dimensions, and foundations. In this report, the authors explored the complexity of CX from an interdisciplinary perspective (marketing, philosophy, psychology, and sociology). From a marketing perspective, they highlight the following three foci:

- a. The examination of the experience content revealed two primary inquiry streams. The first centers on experience nature and encompasses behavioral theorists, who rationalize consumer actions, and experiential theorists, who emphasize emotions. The second stream delves into experience distinctiveness, comparing ordinary and extraordinary instances, experiential versus material purchases, and distinguishing commodities, products, and services. Contemporary scholars have underscored the holistic nature of the CX (Verhoef et al., 2009).
- b. Contextual views exhibit dichotomies. The traditional perspective is unidirectional in the customer-firm relationship, whereas the co-creative stance emphasizes active customer participation in CX shaping. Many actors, including consumer culture theorists, influence product integration. Contextual marketing tools, such as location-based apps, contribute. Network-oriented perspectives consider the influence of communities, networks, and ecosystems (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).
- c. A range of methodologies enhance CX comprehension and augmentation. Visualization techniques (e.g., personas and journey mapping) and measurement tools (e.g., CX scales by Brakus et al., 2009; Klaus and Maklan, 2012; Verleye, 2015) quantify CX. Qualitative methods and neuroscientific techniques (biometrics, EEG, and fMRI) provide comprehensive insights into the cognitive and physiological aspects of CX (Hultén et al., 2009; Mende and Bolton, 2011; Gountas et al., 2016).

Notably, De Keyser et al. 's (2015) study contributes significantly to the understanding of CX by identifying key components that define the concept. These components encompass: (1) the interaction, whether real or imaginary, between customers and various market actors, including

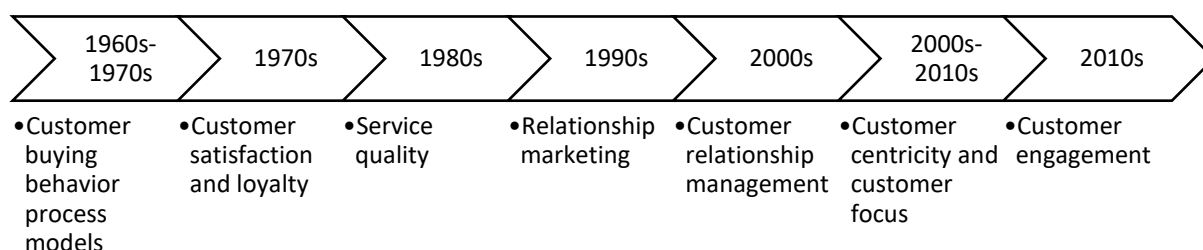
both human and non-human entities (e.g., self-service technologies); (2) the level of uniqueness associated with the experience, spanning from ordinary to extraordinary; and (3) the multidimensional nature of customer experience, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social elements.

Alongside Keyser et al. (2015) and Schmitt et al. (2015) papers with a rather holistic view of CX research, one of the most cited papers is that of Lemon and Verhoef (2016). Although some researchers believe that marketing science has not been an early adopter of customer experience, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) explained that researchers have extensively studied this topic. It is rather the explosion in potential customer touch points and the reduced control of the experience, which requires firms to integrate multiple business functions (information technology, service operations, logistics, marketing, human resources, and even external partners), in creating and delivering positive customer experiences; that has made it increasingly complex for firms to create, manage, and attempt to control the experience and journey of each customer (e.g., Edelman and Singer 2015; Rawson, Duncan, and Jones 2013.(Lemon and Verhoef, 2016b)

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) criticize the exploratory attempts made by previous researchers to conceptualize and measure CX, and the fact that they lack empirical work. Their study suggests contextualization of the concept of customer experience, both historically and in the marketing field. They conclude that customer experience is a multidimensional construct that involves cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the entire purchase journey.

To position CX regarding other concepts, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) traced the roots of customer experience, as shown in Figure N° 1.

Figure N° 1: Important developments and contributions to customer experience research according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016)



Source: Authors.

They explain that designing, understanding, and managing CX has been facilitated by the recent shift towards customer centricity. One of the managerial tools they list is customer personas,

which are market research-based fictional representations of the ideal customer.(Lemon and Verhoef, 2016b)

They also explored different theoretical underpinnings and classified them into three major research areas, according to their focus, as summarized in Table N°1.

Table N° 1: Summary of main research areas around customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

Research area	Focus	Researchers	Main arguments
Process, behavior, and resulting value	The early consumer buying behavior process models CRM Customer engagement	Pucinelli et al. 2009 Verhoef et al. 2009 Edelman and Singer 2015 Rawson, Duncan, and Jones 2013	- the importance of different touch points in the customer journey - increasing complexity of managing the customer experience across all these touch points - customers can also be cocreators of their CX
Process outcomes	Satisfaction Service quality Relationship marketing	Bolton 1998 Lemon, and Verhoef 2004 Verhoef 2003	-link of CX with behavioral outcomes: customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, word of mouth, customer profitability, and CLV
Customer-centricity	Internal organizational aspects of CX	Homburg, Jozic, and Kuehnl 2015	how firms can manage the CX both internally and externally with other stakeholders

Source: Authors.

An important argument of Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) study is the distinction between CX and adjacent concepts, such as satisfaction, service quality, relationship marketing, trust, and customer engagement. The latter, in particular, is considered by the authors as an emerging component of the customer experience.

In their conceptualization of customer experience, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) consider it as “a journey with a firm over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touch points” (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016b) It starts from search, in the prepurchase phase and evolves to purchase and post-purchase in a dynamic and iterative way.

One main contribution of Lemon and Verhoef (2016) is the summarization of different scales developed by scholars to allow for the measurement of customer experience, which we reproduce in Table 2.

Table N° 2: Summarization of different customer experience scales by Lemon and Verhoef (2016)

Scale	Author	Dimensions
Brand experience scale	Brakus et al. (2009)	Measure sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral
Customer experience quality	Maklan and Klaus (2011, 2012)	Peace of mind, Moments of truth, Outcome focus, Product experience
Service quality dimensions	Klaus and Maklan (2012, 2013)	Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, responsiveness

Source: Authors.

To summarize the factors of customer experience, Sharma et al. (2016) established the impact of positive CX on customer satisfaction. To them, all customers seek respect, responsiveness, meeting their desires, and continuously having good experiences every time they interact with the service. They join the idea of Brakus et al. (2011, 2012) about brand experience claiming that “customer experience should be reflection of everything that makes up your brand, not just the products and services, but its attitudes, values and key differentiation.” (Sharma et al., 2016a). Building on Schmitt’s and Gentile conceptualization of customer experience, Sharma et al. consider it a complex set which does not only include customer care, but also covers customer interaction with the four Ps of the marketing mix. The study of Sharma et al. bridged the gap of not defining the concept holistically, their main focus on managing touch points. Thus, they suggested using the Total Interpretive Structural Modeling (TISM) approach to establish the hierarchy and relationships between the different factors affecting CX. This allowed them to distinguish customer interaction as a highly significant factor and customer satisfaction as the outcome (Sharma et al., 2016a)

Voorhees et al. (2017), in addition to other authors such as Bolton et al. (2014), also highlighted the importance of studying CX across all touchpoints. They considered that service researchers and managers did not examine the holistic aspect of experience in depth. “By taking a holistic view of the customer experience (pre-core-post), firms may be able to strengthen relationships with their most valuable customers and, in turn, increase customer retention, positive word-of-mouth and profitability” (Voorhees et al., 2017) They adopt the recent definition of Lemon and

Verhoef (2016) who conceptualized CX as a journey across multiple touchpoints (online platforms, physical environments or catalogues). This definition and the cumulative aspect of customer impressions and satisfaction allow them to distinguish three periods of the consumption process: the pre-core, core (the encounter of the customer with the service), and post-core. The definition they suggest to service experience highlights the continuity aspect their work revolves around: “service experience as the period during which all service encounters relevant to a core service offering may occur.” (Voorhees et al., 2017) The argument that service encounters are different from service experiences, because of the discreet nature of the first, brings a new perspective to service experience which takes into account providing “moments of truth” that influence customer outcomes. Homburg et al. (2017) further emphasized the firm-wide managerial implications of customer experience management through changes in cultural mindsets, strategic directions and the development of firm capabilities. (Bolton et al., 2018)

Customers undergo experiences each time they ‘touch’ any part of a product, service, brand or organization across multiple channels and at various points in time (Rajaobelina et al., 2018).

Key Findings and Insights

Main Findings

The literature review reveals how the concept of customer experience has evolved over the years. It went from a new concept that was only looked at by a few researchers in the 80s to one of the topics of interest in recent years. However, it is important to note that much of this interest comes from the business. In fact, practitioners such as Carbone and Haeckel (1994), and Pine and Gilmore (1998) made considerable contributions and paved the way for researchers to further explore this topic. Some researchers even specialized in this concept, with multiple studies building the core knowledge of this topic. Holbrook, Schmitt, Berry, Edvardsson, Lemon, and Verhoef are considered references, and no studies on CX can overlook their research.

In 2011, Johnston and Kong (2011) argued that the literature covered three major themes: the significance of CX, definition of customer experience, and strategies for enhancing customer experience design (Johnston & Kong, 2011). Since then, studies have also focused on the relationship between CX and other topics (loyalty and brand image) and in different settings (technology, among others).

If all authors agree that CX is a multidimensional concept, the authors assign different dimensions to customer experience. Nonetheless, the dimensions of Schmitt (cognitive,

emotional, physical, sensorial, social) remained core to many of the studies. Some research chose to focus on one or the other, for example Edvardsson et al. (2005) studied emotions, while Holbrook (2006) dug into the social dimension. Because of the novelty of this topic, some researchers have sought to develop scales to measure experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Chahal and Dutta, 2015). In table N°3 we provide a summary of the main studies and the dimensions of the CX they used, and/or new concepts they presented.

Table N° 3: Summary of the main concepts and dimensions of CX

Authors	Year	Dimensions (D) OR new concepts (C)
Holbrook and Hirschman	1982	D: Environmental inputs, Consumer inputs, Intervening responses, Output consequences, Criteria, Learning effect
Babin et al.	1994	D: Hedonic, Utilitarian
Carbone and Haeckel	1994	C: Experience engineering D: Mechanics clues, Humanics clues
Pine and Gilmore	1998	C: Experience economy D: Visual, Aural, Olfactory, Tactile
Schmitt	1999	D: Sensory, Affective, Creative cognitive, Physical, Social identity
Addis and Holbrook	2001	C: Hedonic consumption D: Customer value, Functional value, social value, Emotional value, Epistemic value
Berry et al.	2002	C: Total customer experience, Experience audit D: Functionality clues, Emotions clues, Environment clues
Schmitt	2003	D: experiential environments, experience platforms, desired experiences for the brand, customer interaction interfaces, continuous innovation
LaSalle and Britton	2003	D: Physical environment, social interactions, Emotional responses
Haeckel et al.	2003	C: Managing customer experiences D: Functional clues, Mechanic clues, Humanic clues
Vargo and Lush	2004	C: Co-creation of experience
Prahalad and Ramaswamy	2004	C: Co-creation of experience D: Personalized interactions (Dialog, access, Risk-benefits, transparency)

McCarthy and Wright	2004	C: technology as experience D: Sensory, Affective, Compositional, spatiotemporal
Johnston and Clark	2005	C: Service management D: Tangible outputs, Value, Emotions, Judgments, Intentions
Edvardsson et al.	2005	Emotions
Berry et al.	2006	D: Service providers technical quality, Employees behavior
Holbrook	2006	D: Social dimension
Berry and Carbone	2007	C: experience design
Carbone and Seltman	2007	D: Mechanics first, Humanics and functional
Meyer and Schwager	2007	C: Cumulative customer experience
Gentile et al.	2007	C: customer experience touchpoints D: Sensation, Cognition, Affect, Actions, System of values, Beliefs, relationships
Frow and Payne	2007	C: perfect customer experience D: Cognitive goal-directed activities, cognition, affect, behavior, Subconscious experiential views, emotions, contextual aspects, symbolic aspects
Verhoef et al.	2009	C: total experience (antecedents, search, purchase, consumption, after sale, across multiple channels) D: Cognitive, Affective, Emotional, Social physical
Puccinelli et al.	2009	C: consumer decision making stages D: Goals, schemas and information, processing, Memory, Involvement, Attitudes, Affect, Atmospherics, Consumer attributions and choices
Grewal et al.	2009	D: Retail mix (price experience, promotion experience, etc.)
Brakus et al.	2009	C: Brand experience scale D: Product experience, Shopping and service experience, Consumption experience
Johnston and Clark	2010	C: exceptional service experiences

		D: Service encounter (Cognitive, emotional, Behavioral responses, Lasting memory/mental mark)
Edvardsson et al.	2010	D: physical artefacts, Intangible artefacts, Technology, Customer placement, Customer involvement, Interaction with employees
Walter and Ostrom	2010	C: Service (The organization, facilities, how the customer interacts with representatives and other customers), D: Direct and indirect experience
Johnston and Kong	2011	Experience improvement roadmap Experience vs service
Nigam	2012	C: Memorable experiences- purchasing intention
Sirapracha and Tocquer	2012	C: CX and brand image/ customer loyalty

Source: Authors.

Different approaches have been used in relation to the concept of CX. While more authors addressed the topic from a customer's perspective, the review revealed authors like Berry et al. (2002) and Haeckel et al. (2003) who addressed the firm's point of view, with concepts such as experience economy, experience engineering or experience management. The co-creation of value is also present in different researchers work (Vargo and Lush, 2004; Gentile et al., 2007; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Kayser et al., 2015).

Regarding the customer journey, some researchers have studied the antecedents and outcomes (Johnston and Clark, 2005; Sirapracha and Tocquer, 2012) of CX, while others have focused on the total experience (Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Verhoef et al., 2009).

Some researchers adopted a horizontal perspective of CX, which describes its characteristics at a specific contact between the customer and firm (Schmitt, 2003), while others explored the vertical perspective (cumulative experiences) point versus vertical studies that focused on the impact of past experiences (Puccinelli et al. 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009)

The evaluation of CX is a redundant theme among researchers, Berry et al. (2002) evoked experience audit, Frow and Payne (2007) studied the perfect CX, Brakus et al. (2009) exceptional service experiences, Johnston and Kong (2011) memorable experiences

Building on previous research, different concepts were linked to CX: Puccinelli et al. (2009) based their work on the consumer's decision-making stages, and Grewal et al. (2009) used the retail mix to build their argument.

Adjacent concepts

The concepts of customer experience and value are heavily intertwined and it is difficult, or even impossible, to fully separate them. According to Helkkula and Kelleher (2010), customer-perceived value influences cumulative customer service experience and vice versa. Value is realized through the experience gained when the customer activates and uses the service provider's offering and resources (Heinonen et al., 2013), i.e., it is constructed on the experience that is gained from the service (Komulainen and Saraniemi, 2019)

This literature review reveals the distinction between CX and some adjacent concepts such as service quality and satisfaction. Although some terms are used interchangeably to represent the customer experience, the authors highlighted the difference between the two.

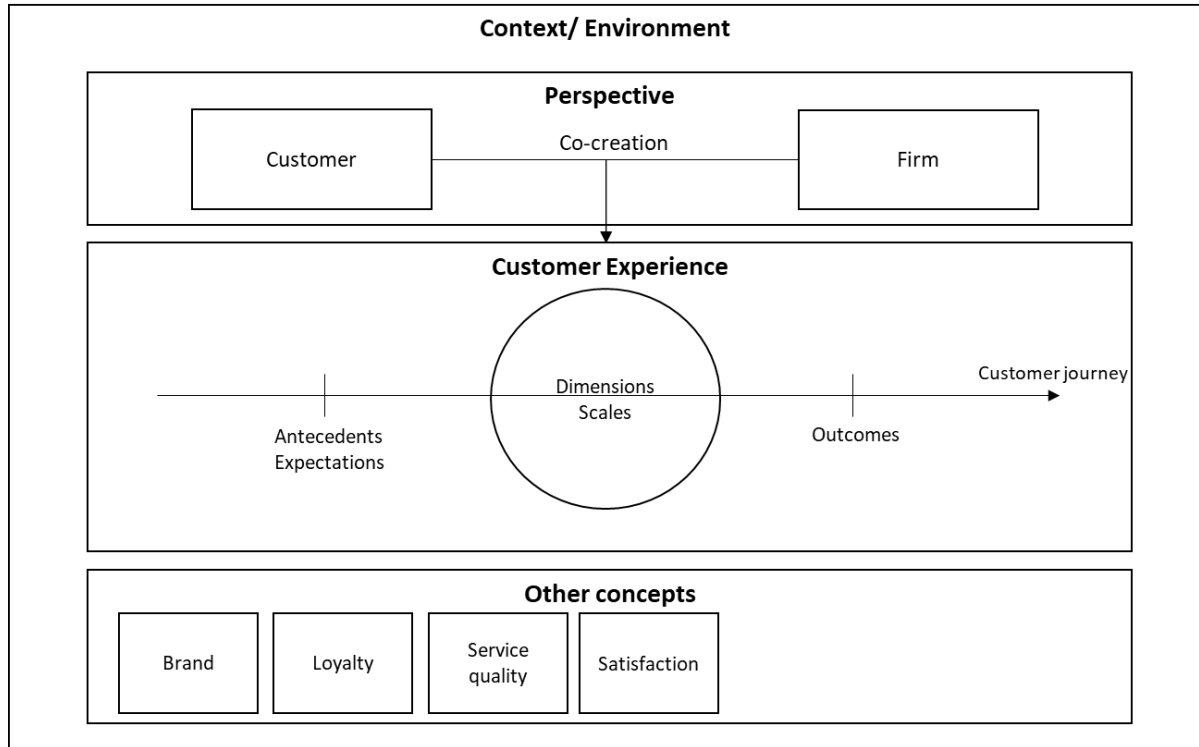
Service quality and CX differ primarily in terms of the aspects emphasized. While service quality focuses on the customer's cognitive assessment and ignores the emotional role of customers; the latter is the main implication of CX (Jung and Chung, 2020). Lemon and Verhoef argued that service quality can be considered an antecedent to CX. Their research explicitly identified five key dimensions in this context: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, which can be used to measure customer experience.

Satisfaction is one of the concepts encountered repeatedly when researching CX. The authors agree with the relationship between the two concepts. According to Chahal and Dutta (2015), one of the reasons why customer experience has not been extensively researched is that it is considered a part of satisfaction. Nonetheless, "despite scarce empirical evidence, marketing scholars seem to be in agreement with a conceptual distinction between customer experience and satisfaction" (Chahal & Dutta, 2015), and satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is thus regarded as an outcome or a predictor (Chen et al., 2008) of customer experience.

In fact, the main distinction between the two is that customer experience is process-oriented while satisfaction is outcome-oriented (Schmitt, 2003; (Puccinelli et al., 2009)). According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), the accumulation of a series of customer experiences and the difference between good and bad ones results in satisfaction. Other authors have explained that favorable experiences lead to high satisfaction. There is a notion of time in understanding customer satisfaction as it reflects the sum of previous and present encounters with the product or brand (Frow and Payne, 2007) In fact, satisfaction only occurs when the gap between customers' expectations and their subsequent experiences has been closed (C. Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

Figure 2 represents a conceptual framework of our understanding of customer experience.

Figure N° 2: Representation of the main study orientations in relation to customer experience



Source: Authors.

Conclusion

The main takeaway of this literature review is providing a comprehensive overview of the research on customer experience since its emergence as a relatively new notion in the 1980s to 2018. In the first section, researchers review the established definitions of customer experience, considering its historical development in the field of marketing. By examining articles in chronological order, they aimed to track the evolution of ideas and identify key contributions while also identifying areas that were presented but not further explored. The major concepts stemming from this literature review are experience engineering, experience economy, experience management, and total customer experience. The dimensions of customer experience are often split into mechanics and humanics, and different authors have suggested multiple dimensions. Schmitt's (2005) five dimensions constitute a foundation built upon by several authors.

By summarizing the main findings of this chronological state-of-the-art review, the authors note that customer experience is a multidimensional and complex concept that has been explored under different lenses (customer vs. firm standpoint, exploring dimensions vs. antecedents or outcomes, and using quantitative vs. qualitative methodology). It is important to highlight the major constructs that have been involved in previous research and explore adjacent concepts, such as service quality and satisfaction, by highlighting the similarities and differences between them and customer experience.

One of the main limitations of this work is the neglect of contemporary relevance due to the lack of recent studies (2018-2023). The authors also recognize that chronological review may entail some repetition since similar ideas and findings can be found across different time periods. Nonetheless, efforts have been made to critically analyze the literature rather than to produce a descriptive review. In addition, given the increasing interest in customer experience has started to gain, it is worthwhile to examine the literature in relation to a specific field (e.g., customer experience in banking or hospitality). This study lays the foundation for more in-depth studies in the customer experience field.

Future work on customer experience can be undertaken from the different perspectives presented previously. One of the main research streams we have identified that lacks attention relates to customer experience in digital environments, which is often confused with user experience, a different concept of human–computer interaction.

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