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A review and future directions of brand experience research

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ABSTRACT

Brand experience has been gaining increased importance in marketing literature, as marketers consider it a vital strategy in building long term consumer-brand relationship. This study attempts to do a comprehensive assessment and synthesis of academic literature on brand experience. To do this, authors take up a systematic review, identifies and analyses 73 relevant articles from 38 journals. The analysis provides significant information about—empirical versus conceptual studies, industry focus, country of research, research design, data analysis techniques and nature of sampling method and respondents. This study presents methodological trend in brand experience studies with reference to Meredith, Raturi, Amoako-Gyampah, and Kaplan (1989) framework, and it has been found that majority of the studies are based on people's perception of object reality (logical positivist/empiricist paradigm based researches). A conceptual framework about brand experience antecedents and consequences is also presented. At last, we provide discussion and suggestions for future research, followed by limitations of the study.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, branding literature has emphasized the need to create better and unique consumer experience to develop stronger brands (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Morrison & Crane, 2007). This school of thought has been supported by both practitioners and academics who believed that experiences arising out of contact with brands had a substantial impact on consumer behaviour (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). The term *brand experience* was first coined by Brakus et al. (2009) in the '*Journal of Marketing*'. They explored and integrated various concepts in the fields of cognitive science, marketing, philosophy and management practices to understand the meaning of this term, and stated that consumption, products, services and shopping experiences together constitute the overall brand experience. Brand experience viewed as an important construct in branding literature that builds the consumer-brand relationship (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Schembri, 2009). Brakus et al. (2009) stated that with a better understanding of brand experience, the entire range of experiences evoked by brand-related stimuli could be understood. Although the investigation by Brakus et al. (2009) in the field of brand experience research was commendable and has gained attention of researchers. But, the direction in which brand experience research is now headed is unclear. A comprehensive study offering a deeper understanding of the brand experience concept is absent.

Despite popularity of brand experience concept among practitioners (Alloza, 2008; Coomber & Poore, 2013) and academics (Brakus et al., 2009; Chang & Chieng, 2006; Schmitt, 1999), no study has accurately determined the stage at which present brand experience research stands, nor has any study in the past indicated the direction in which brand experience research is headed. In order to have a clear idea of one's position in any area, frequent and honest reassessments are required (Cooper, 2010). The domain of brand experience is in nascent stage (Schmitt, 2009), which warrants a review to ensure that brand experience studies will move in the right direction. The particular emphasis of the study is to assess the state of methodologies used in brand experience research, and identify antecedents and consequences. Thus, the objectives of this paper are: (1) to bring general understanding about the brand experience in the fields like distribution of articles across the main journals, time period, nature of studies and type of data, industry focus and country of

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research, (2) to recognize methodologies employed in previous brand experience studies, this study explains methodological trend employing a framework suggested by Meredith et al. (1989), and (3) to provide a conceptual framework that highlights the antecedents and consequences of brand experience. To sum up, this study addresses the following questions:

- (1) What is the present state of brand experience research?
- (2) What important issues should future studies address in this area?

Moreover, this study answers the call of Schmitt (2009) and Brakus et al. (2009) by providing a conceptual framework of brand experience (Fig. 3) that comprises its antecedents and consequences. Researchers are encouraged to empirically test this framework using qualitative and quantitative approaches. This systematic review entailed a comprehensive study of 73 articles published in various peer reviewed journals on brand experience research. This systematic review of brand experience to offer academics as well as practitioners, a clear view of the position at which brand experience research stands, and suggest areas in which further research needs to be conducted.

This paper is structured as follows: First, the research methodology used in this study, and the parameters on which the literature was searched and analysed, are discussed. Second, results of the analysis were presented into following headings: empirical versus conceptual studies, industry focus, country of research, research design, data analysis techniques and nature of sampling method and respondents. Third, the state of methodological trend was presented using Meredith et al. (1989) framework. Fourth, this study presents the brand experience conceptual framework. Finally, the paper ends with the discussion and conclusions drawn from findings of the review and proposes areas for future research.

2. Literature review method

This study conducts a systematic review of brand experience literature, as it is arguably the most efficient, reliable and high-quality method for examining extensive bases of literature (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006). Systematic reviews “summarize in an explicit way, what is known and not known about a specific practice related question” (Briner, Denyer, & Rousseau, 2009, p.19). On the other hand, traditional narrative reviews generally lack thoroughness, are unable to accurately comprehend and interpret the findings of multiple studies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003), and are also limited in scope due to lack of objectivity in approach (Keränen, Piirainen, & Salminen, 2012).

This study presents a review of published research articles on brand experience in academic journals, since its inception (that is year 1991). Further, the classification of articles has been done through content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic technique used for analyzing different types of texts by coding the texts according to explicit rules (Weber, 1990). It is a “technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). This technique allows researchers to find out and explain the focal point of the study (Weber, 1990).

2.1. Search strategy and data analysis

The authors in this study used the following data bases: Scopus, Elsevier, EBSCO, Emerald and ProQuest to search for published articles on brand experience. To collect the articles, a two-step approach was followed: First, the following keywords were searched in the title or abstract of the above mentioned data bases across all experience literature so that no keyword related to brand experience was left out: Brand experience, Experience branding, Customer/consumer experience, Total experience and Experiential marketing. A review panel was formed to plan the review and resolve any dispute over the exclusion and inclusion of studies (see Tranfield et al., 2003). The review panel comprised three marketing professors and one practitioner (brand manager), all the experts in the review panel had more than five years of experience in their respective field. The relevance of the selected keywords checked by conducting discussion with review panel as well as by repeating the search process. Hence, by searching for these key words, we are confident that we have identified the most relevant articles on brand experience. The authors selected only those studies that were found relevant after a discussion with a review panel. In the second stage, references of studies were checked to make sure no study was left without review. This ensured reliability of the search process. The last search of articles was conducted in February 2015, and included all the published articles until that time. Similar to David and Han (2004), studies that were published in peer-reviewed journals were considered because they represented the highest quality of research. This process resulted in 226 studies screened in. Due to repetitions, 27 entries were removed resulting in 199 different studies. To ensure relevance, all conference papers, newspaper articles, editorials, textbooks, viewpoint and working papers were removed, and only articles published in journals were kept. Both practitioners as well as academics prefer articles published in journals for reliable information and accurate results (Ngai, Moon, Riggins, & Yi, 2008; Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Nill, 2007; Azoury and Salloum, 2013). After carrying out this process of exclusion, 120 relevant articles were selected for further study. Details of the exclusion and inclusion criteria are given in Table 1.

Table - 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Published academic journal articles	Books, conference proceedings, editorials, viewpoints, newspaper articles, working papers
Articles on which review panel showed consensus	Articles on which disagreement existed within the review panel
Full text available	Full text unavailable
	Non-English articles

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