



Brand Experience and Customer Brand Engagement: An Empirical Study of Online Shopping Brands

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Abstract

The importance of branding in the marketing domain is pivotal for business performance, especially in the contemporary marketing era. Thus, brand managers are increasingly focussing on enhancing the brand attractiveness and using innovative practices to satisfy the customer needs. One of the important constructs for brand attractiveness is brand experience. Brand experience consists of sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual components. Brand experience is at the focal point for both marketers and academicians over the last decade. Research has shown the importance of pleasing experiences for attaining a number of firm objectives such as satisfied customers which ultimately builds brand loyalty. And as such, experiences need to be improved and managed to indulge consumers effectively. Brand experiences for consumers can also serve as an important gateway for engaging customers. Consumption is very much related to the experience. Each brand brings it to their consumers through interaction or touch points such as through products, services, advertisement, promotions etc. Every customer contact with a brand provides experience which remains in customer's memory. All these interactions need to be managed for a better and indulging experience for their customers. These experiences should be thrilling, satisfying and enjoyable for the customers to build strong customer-brand relationship. This research study has attempts to examine the role of brand experience in influencing the customer brand engagement within the online shopping domain. The study has employed the SEM (structural equation modeling) technique for testing the hypothesized relationships. 250 respondents were targeted, and 215 functional responses were used for data analysis. The study results indicate that all four elements of the brand experience influence the customer brand engagement.

Keywords: Branding, Brand Experience, Customer Engagement, Online Shopping, Customer Brand Engagement.

JEL Classification: M31

Paper Classification: Quantitative/Causal

Introduction

Branding in contemporary times is one of most desirable and important objectives for any business. Branding not only helps customers to differentiate between products but help companies

to earn a substantial amount of revenue. Brands provide value addition to the organisations and reliable returns which are hard to emulate by other firms (Smith & Milligan, 2002). But the research in branding literature shows that businesses are increasingly making use of experiential marketing for achieving their objectives. The theory of branding in contemporary times has revolved around building consumer-brand relationships which are beneficial for businesses (Fournier, 1998). The evolution of relationship marketing has pushed branding managers to focus on novel ways to build mutually favourable relationships with their consumers (Mitchell & Orwig, 2002). Traditional approach of marketing and branding focussed on functional product attributes, but modern-day consumers' desire for hedonic experiences (Schmitt, 1999). Conventional marketing has lost its touch in the modern and dynamic business environment. Consumers are no longer attracted and drawn to traditional modes of marketing campaign. There is also an emphasis on producing distinctive consumer experiences in order to build stronger and better brands (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand experience is one of the constructs used by marketers to build customer loyalty and engage their customers. Literature has also provided ample evidence supporting the positive relationship between brand experiences and consumer behaviour (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) as experiential attributes are key elements in interpreting consumer behaviour (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). Businesses are not only aiming at delivering enjoyable customer experiences but they are actively seeking to engage customers with their brands. Despite the recent activity in brand engagement, it is an emerging domain in marketing which needs to be researched comprehensively (Beig & Nika, 2019). Research in brand experience has focussed on some of its important consequences such as brand attitude (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013), brand loyalty (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014; Amin & Nika, 2018), customer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009), brand equity (Beig & Nika, 2019; Chen, 2012; Shamim & Butt, 2013), social media (Beig & Khan, 2018) and purchase intention (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). Customer brand engagement on the other hand, has also been receiving a significant attention from marketers in contemporary times. Marketers understand the significance of brand engagement in terms of its efficiency which ultimately promotes future consumer consumption. Hence, marketers have developed various programs and provide various incentives for promoting brand engagement. The domain of customer engagement is being investigated in order to facilitate desirable customer behaviour such as loyalty and commitment (Brodie et al., 2011; Pham & Avnet, 2009). Research studies have shown that high level of interaction with an entity demonstrates higher engagement. Consumers often indulge or engage with brand in multiple ways such as advocating a brand or posting an online review. Customer engagement has been of special interest for various researchers (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Customer engagement from the perspectives of both marketing and branding has been considered as a psychological condition of a customer which forms due to the interactive and co-creative nature of brand experiences (Brodie et al., 2011). Studies have investigated the relationship between the customer engagement and other variables like trust and satisfaction (Brodie et al., 2011; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). Recent studies, for instance in the tourism sector have focussed on the association between the customer engagement and its outcomes such as consumer behaviour. Study conducted by Dessart et al. (2015) in a brand (virtual) community postulated that customer engagement comprises of three important elements or dimensions (affect, behaviour and cognition). Regardless of the latest academic interest in the domain of the customer engagement, this field of enquiry still remains under-researched. Thus, it becomes important that a lucid understanding on the customer engagement with respect to brand experience is obtained. However, a limited number of studies have been witnessed between the brand experience and the brand engagement which makes it essential to examine the relationship between these two factors.

Literature Review

Brand Experience

The concept of customer experience finds its origin from the customer's interaction with a product, organization or a part of a company which can lead to a customer reaction (Shaw & Ivens, 2005). This customer experience was personalised and evolving at emotional, sensory, physical, rational and spiritual level (Schmitt, 1999). Consumers do not consume products for their functional benefits/attributes but they desire sensory and emotional experiences (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Consumption should be memorable and pleasing which remains in customer's memory. Pine and Gilmore (1998) were the first to put forward the notion of "experience economy" which was an evolution from the "service economy" due to rapidly changing trends in the economy. Schmitt (1999) conceptualised experience marketing from customer's viewpoint as they develop recognition and buy products after experiencing by participating in activities and perceiving stimulus. The concept of experiential marketing focuses not only on goods or services but the entire experiential journey that a business makes for their customers. Addis and Holbrook (2001) made a fine distinction between two types of values from customer's perspective, i.e. utilitarian value which focuses on functional product attributes and hedonic value which revolves around the experience. The concept of "service experience" includes the personal interactions between a customer and service entity, its personnel, facilities and technology (Johnston & Clark, 2008). But, the brand experience domain was in contrast with earlier concepts in experience such as the shopping experience, the product experience, the service experience and the consumption experience. The scope and understanding of brand experience is different, bigger and broader than the previous experiential concepts. Brand experience is understood as personal, internal individualistic responses (like sensations, cognitions and feelings) and behavioural reactions that are induced by brand-associated stimuli which are related to a brand's design and identification, communication, packaging, and the environment (Brakus et al., 2009). Brand experience was conceptualised into four components or elements by Brakus et al. (2009).

Sensory Experience: The sensory aspect of brand experience includes consumer experiences by stimulating or involving all five human senses (smell, touch, vision, taste and hearing).

Affective Experience: Affective dimension of brand experience focuses on internal feelings and emotions of consumers invoked by the brand.

Behavioural Experience: Behavioural experiences include changing customer's lifestyle through creative experiences.

Intellectual Experience: Intellectual experience consists of invoking customer's through process and creativity through various brand experiences.

Engagement in Marketing

The research on customer engagement (CE) focuses on the customer and his/her needs in order to engage them. The domain of customer engagement is customer-centric which gives importance to customers and investigates the customer value according to their needs. Engagement with the customer is beyond loyalty and is achieved over a long period of time. Customer engagement is achieved by organisation when their customers feel emotionally involved and intimate with their goods, services or brands. The customer engagement is intricately linked with relationship marketing and its understanding is derived from the theory of interactive experiences (Brodie et al., 2011). The customer brand engagement has been

postulated as a multidimensional domain which is a manifestation of the psychological conditions which occur due to interaction between an organisation and/or a brand in the framework of a service relationship (Brodie et al., 2011). CE has also been characterized as the behaviours exhibited by the customers post purchase with a brand or an organisation as a focal point due to the motivational aspects (Van Doorn et al., 2010). However, customer engagement from the behavioural position has been widely studied by many researchers (Fernandes & Esteves, 2016; Javornik & Mandelli, 2012). Research on engagement demonstrates that its conceptualisation is primarily with the different categories of customer actions (Pham & Avnet, 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Literature also shows that CE includes activities of customers which are beyond the realm of economic activities but could possibly have an impact on the company's performance. The customers who are engaged are more likely to display purchase behaviour at higher prices and are also less susceptible to price changes in goods and services (Rishika et al., 2013). Businesses consider engaged customers to be more profitable in contrast to the customers who are not engaged with the firm (Rishika et al., 2013). Literature has also shown that CE is more successful in predicting important outcomes like trust and quality which are traditionally outside the realm of customer-organisation relationship (Hollebeek, 2011). Customer engagement can be defined as the emotional attachment between an organisation and its customers (Rieger & Kamins, 2006). Customer engagement revolves around the customer participation and interaction (Nambisan, 2002). Both communication technologies and information are enabling organisations to engage their customers and exchange knowledge with them (Joshi & Sharma, 2004). Customer engagement primarily focuses on the experiences delivered by companies and this experience may also happen irrespective of an exchange. Thus, both reflective and operative elements of participation are a part of customer engagement. Since, consumers are showing some resistance to traditional modes of marketing, marketers are developing innovative ways to engage customers (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Brand engagement has been described as the individual inclination to integrate essential brands into their "self concept" (Sprott et al., 2006). On the other hand, Brodie et al. (2011) has conceptualised engagement in relation to an iterative route, which helps produce important outcomes and is composed of cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects. The concept of engagement has been outlined in the marketing in the form of consumer engagement (Vivek, 2009), customer engagement (Patterson et al., 2006) and the customer brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011) amongst some other similar expressions. Customer brand engagement includes definite contacts between customers and the brands (Hollebeek, 2011). But, the research investigations concerning the theory of the customer brand engagement and its relationship with other variables is sparse (Hollebeek, 2011).

Objectives and Need for the Study

Marketers and academicians while studying the consequences of brand experience have largely ignored its influence on the customer engagement. The research investigations on the brand experience have been related to the goods only (Khan & Rahman, 2015). This brings forth the requirement to examine the brand experience while focussing on the services (Khan & Rahman, 2015), and the experiential attributes associated with a service (Berry et al., 2002). This research investigation is conducted in an Indian context which is also a valuable contribution to the literature, as the previous research enquiries on brand experience have taken place in the developed regions (Khan & Rahman, 2015) except for one recent study in India (Beig & Nika, 2019). The industry chosen for the study is online shopping because it is rapidly growing worldwide as well in India (Beig & Nika, 2019). Indian online shopping market has huge potential and its growth prospects are huge which makes it important for research perspective, especially from experience perspective (Beig & Nika, 2019). Research has also shown that there are intrinsic

incentives, emotions and experiential elements in shopping (Guiry & Lutz, 2000). Hence, this research examination will explore the influence of the brand experience on the customer brand engagement in an online shopping sector. This is important because experiences delivered by online shopping portals/brands are critical in engaging their consumers.

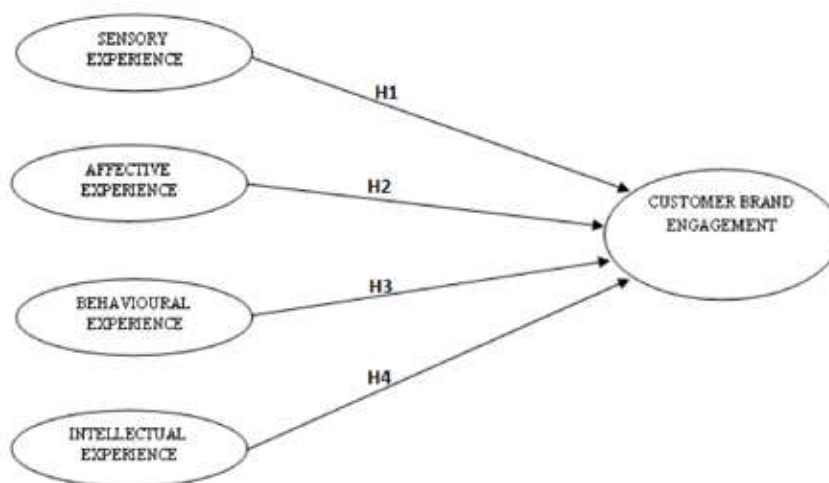
Theoretical Framework

Brand experiences can be defined as the sensory impressions, emotions, behaviours and cognitions which are stimulated or invoked by a variety of stimulus linked to a brand (Brakus et al., 2009). However, engagement is in essence a motivational state or a condition which drives or directs a person towards a particular brand (Sprott et al., 2009). Even though, these two constructs are conceptually quite different, but there is an evidence which indicates an affiliation between the brand experience and the customer-brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011). But, the relationship between these two variables is not fully understood which makes it important to study them in the joint framework. Besides, the influence of the brand experience (sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual) on the customer-brand engagement in an online shopping environment has not been explored.

Based on the above discussions and studies, the following four hypotheses are proposed for this study:

- H1:** There is a positive relationship between the sensory experiences and the customer brand engagement.
- H2:** There is a positive relationship between the affective experiences and the customer brand engagement.
- H3:** There is a positive relationship between the behavioural experiences and the customer brand engagement.
- H4:** There is a positive relationship between the intellectual experiences and the customer brand engagement.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Source: Authors own

Research Methodology

Research Design

The quantitative research design was applied for this study as the data was collected using a survey technique which was then quantified. The university students in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir were chosen as the sampling frame, as university students are representative of the online consumers and also due to their technological familiarity (Lightner, Yenisey, Ozok & Salvendy, 2002). One recent study on brand experience in the online shopping environment has also included students as the respondents based on the above justification (Beig & Nika, 2019). Both primary (questionnaire) and secondary data (journals, online databases etc.) was used for this study.

Questionnaire Design

The scale for measuring brand engagement was taken from the study by Sprott et al. (2009) and for evaluating brand experience, the instrument was taken from the research study by Brakus et al. (2009). The instrument adopted was used after sharing it with two renowned marketing experts for any recommendations (Tull & Hawkins, 1994).

Sample Size

The itemised ratio method was used for determining the sample size of 200 in this study (minimum ratio of 1:5 and maximum ratio of 1:10; Hair et al., 2014). A sample size of two-hundred (200) is considered satisfactory for applying SEM in testing a theoretical model (Hair et al., 1998; Tabanhnich & Fidell, 2013). The questionnaires were distributed to 250 respondents resulting in 215 completed responses. The sampling method adopted was judgement sampling.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis revealed that male and female respondents were 67.44% and 32.55% respectively. The percentage of the respondents that were enrolled in the post-graduation courses were 71.16% and 28.83% were pursuing graduation. 63.72% of the respondents shop online between 1 to 5 times annually, 26.97% shop online between 5 to 10 times annually, and the rest of the respondents shop online more than 10 times annually.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Using SPSS 20.0, exploratory factor analysis was performed for exploring the data structure (Hair et al., 2006). The value for KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) is 0.830 which is greater than the accepted value of 0.50. The value obtained from EFA for Bartlett's test of Sphericity is 6316.747 (at .000 significance level and 190 degrees of freedom). Based on the following criteria, items were considered for this research study:

- Values of Factor loading should at least be 0.50
- Eigen values above 1

All the values for factor loadings were above the minimum threshold of 0.40 and values for cronbach alpha were above 0.70 which confirm the scale's reliability. The results of EFA can be seen in Table1.

Table 1: EFA Results

Factor	Loadings	Alpha	V.E	KMO
SENSORY EXPERIENCE		.895	31.665	.830
Brand X makes a strong impression on my visual sense.	.882			
I find Brand X interesting in a sensory way.	.818			
Brand X does not appeal to my visual sense.	.865			
AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE		.895	43.942	.830
Brand X induces feelings and sentiments inside me.	.881			
I do not have strong emotions for Brand X.	.874			
Brand X is an emotional brand.	.836			
BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIENCE		.895	67.058	.830
I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use services of Brand X.	.761			
Brand X results in bodily experiences.	.862			
Brand X is not action oriented.	.838			
INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCE		.895	78.025	.830
I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter my Brand X.	.895			
Brand X does not make me think.	.861			
Brand X stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.	.884			
CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT		.895	55.636	.830
I have a special bond with Brand X that I like	.811			
I consider Brand X to be a part of myself	.905			
I often feel a personal connection between Brand X and me.	.862			
Part of me is defined by Brand X in my life.	.900			
I feel as if I have a close personal connection with the Brand X	.855			
I can identify with Brand X in my life.	.898			
There are links between Brand X that I prefer and how I view myself	.856			
Brand X is an important indication of who I am.	.892			

Source: Authors own

Measurement Model

In order to obtain the measurement model, CFA was carried out on the five factors obtained from EFA. The results from CFA are as:

CMIN/d.f = 5.9, AGFI= 0.873, RMSEA=0.057; GFI=0.889 CFI = 0.887, RMSR=0.058 and NFI =0.881. These values obtained from the CFA are an indication of a moderate model fit.

Validity and Reliability

The scores obtained for the composite reliability (CR) for all the five variables are more than the accepted value of 0.60. The average variance extracted (AVE) scores are greater than 0.50 which signifies that the instrument has convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The values for CR, AVE and standard loadings obtained from the CFA are displayed in Table 2. It can also be seen (Table 3) that values for correlation coefficients between any two factors are lower than the values of the square root of their AVE which signifies the instrument's discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

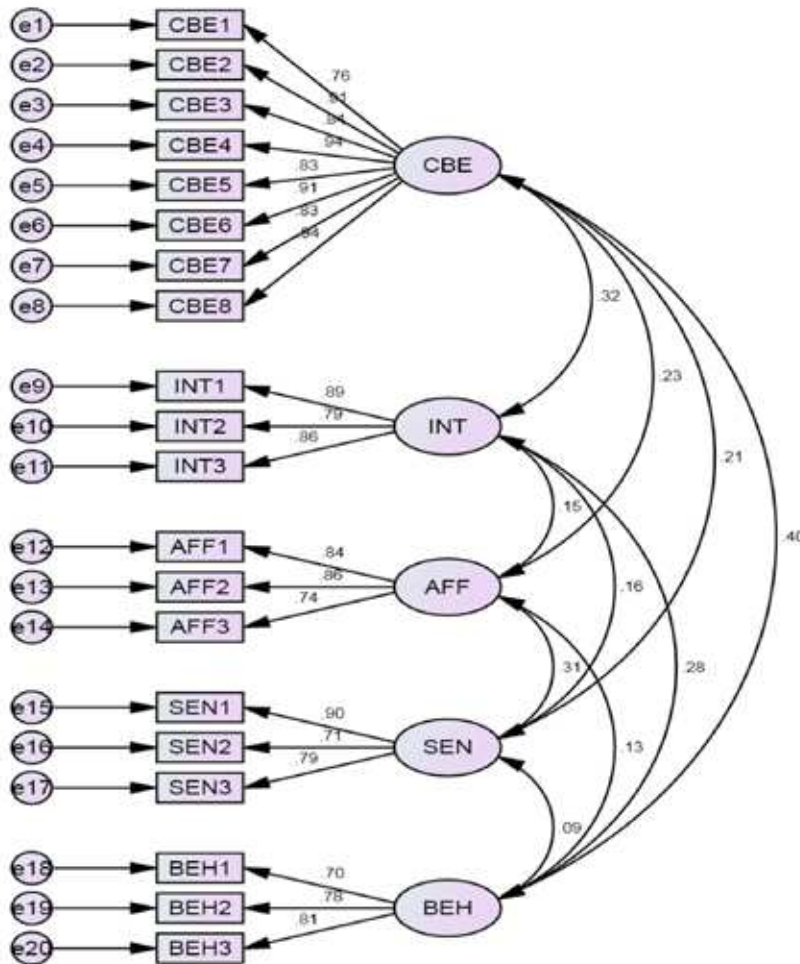
Table 2: Standard Loadings and Composite Reliability

Variable	Questionnaire Item	Standardized Loadings	AVE	Composite Reliability
Sensory Experience	SEN1	.901	0.643	0.843
	SEN2	.706		
	SEN3	.787		
Affective Experience	AFF1	.838	0.663	0.855
	AFF2	.861		
	AFF3	.739		
Behavioural Experience	BEH1	.698	0.582	0.806
	BEH2	.776		
	BEH3	.811		
Intellectual Experience	INT1	.889	0.722	0.718
	INT2	.793		
	INT3	.858		
Customer Brand Engagement	CBE1	.760	0.826	0.934
	CBE 2	.910		
	CBE 3	.835		
	CBE4	.941	0.778	0.761
	CBE5	.829		
	CBE6	.914		
	CBE7	.833		
	CBE8	.941		

Note: AVE = average variance extracted.

Source: Authors own

Figure 2: Measurement Model



Source: Authors own

Table 3: Discriminant validity

	MSV	SEN	CBE	INT	AFF	BEH
SEN	0.097	0.802				
CBE	0.157	0.212	0.873			
INT	0.103	0.164	0.321	0.848		
AFF	0.097	0.311	0.229	0.153	0.814	
BEH	0.157	0.091	0.396	0.278	0.134	0.763

Note1: The values in the diagonal of the above matrix are square root of the AVE.

Note2: BEH- Behavioural, INT-Intellectual, SEN-Sensory, AFF-Affective, CBE- Customer Brand Engagement,

MSV = Maximum shared variance.

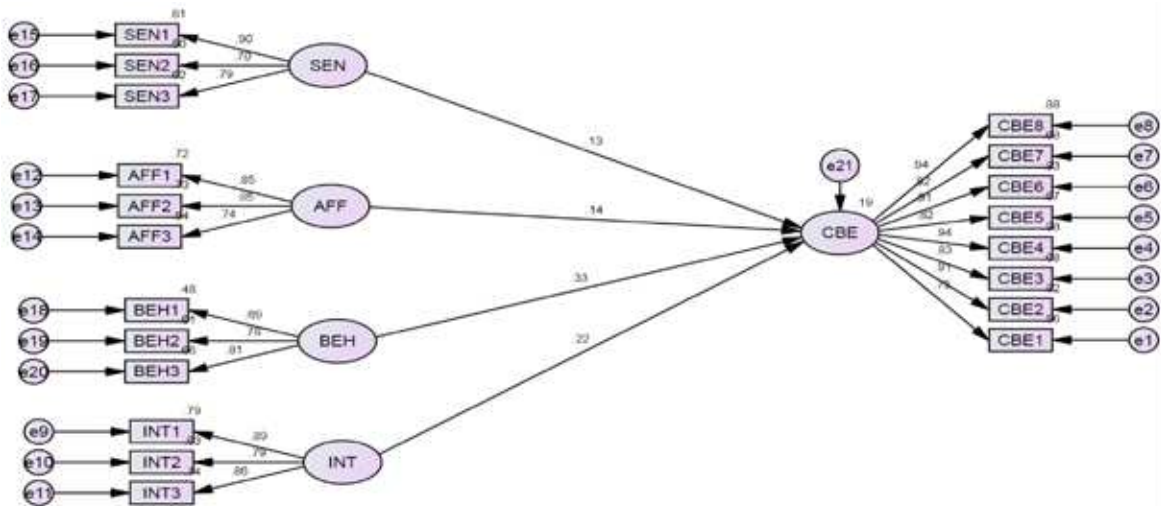
Source: Authors own

Structural Model

The path analysis (structural model) helps to determine the relationship between exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) variables used in the study. The following values for the model fit were obtained after running the structural model in AMOSS 23:

χ^2/df (degrees of freedom) =5.219, RMSR=0.56, CFI=.894, GFI=.901 and RMSEA=.059. These values of structural model indices signify a good model fit. The results obtained in the structural equation modeling are given in Table 4.

Figure 3: Structural model: Impact of Brand Experience Dimensions on Brand Equity Dimensions



Source: Authors own

Table 4: Structural Model Standard Estimates: Relationship between Brand Experience and Brand Equity

Hypotheses	From	To	Standardized Coefficient(β)	Result
H1 _a	Sensory Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.125	Supported
H1 _b	Affective Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.137	Supported
H1 _c	Behavioural Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.327	Supported
H1 _d	Intellectual Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.222	Supported

Source: Authors own

Table 5: Structural Model Un-standard Estimates

From	To	Un-Standardized Coefficient(β)	S.E.	C.R.	P-Value
Sensory Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.116	.050	2.295	.022
Affective Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.132	.053	2.501	.012
Behavioural Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.378	.071	5.315	***
Intellectual Experience	Customer Brand Engagement	.207	.051	4.031	***

Source: Authors own

Brand Experience and Brand Engagement

The structural model results suggest that all the four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3 and H4) are supported (significant at p-value less than 0.05) which indicates that the sensory experiences positively influence the brand engagement ($\beta=.125$), affective experiences positively influence the brand engagement ($\beta=.132$), behavioural experiences positively influence brand engagement ($\beta=.327$) and the intellectual experiences positively influence the brand engagement ($\beta=.222$).

Discussions

Today's marketing managers are looking at innovative ways to engage customers for achieving a number of business objectives. Certainly, brand engagement is one such concept which has attracted both marketers and academicians alike. The research findings revealed that all four components of the brand experience (sensory experiences, affective experiences, behavioural experiences and intellectual experiences) positively influence the brand engagement. Hence, the marketers need to actively concentrate on improving all four types of experiences in order to engage their customers. Online shopping industry needs to put its efforts on delivering pleasing sensory experiences which indulges customer senses. They can improve their portal interface by making them more attractive aesthetically. All the customer-brand contact and interactions need to be improved for better sensory experiences. For improving the emotional or affective experiences, all aspect of interaction between firm and customers need to be taken into account. The customer-brand relationship should be an emotional one and full of trust for effective customer engagement. The study revealed that behavioural experience has the highest influence on brand engagement. As such, marketers need to pay special attention to such experiences which are usually experienced by customers during the actually purchase process and consumption. And lastly, the intellectual experience offered by the brand also influences brand engagement. Hence, the brand should truly stimulate and invigorate the customer's mind across all contact points for effectively engaging their customers.

Conclusion

The study findings has made a vital contribution to the branding and marketing literature by proving that brand experience acts as an important precursor to customer brand engagement in online shopping domain. Thus, delivering enjoyable and memorable sensory, behavioural, affective, and intellectual experiences are essential to enhance customer engagement towards online shopping brands. The experiential marketing approach which focuses on producing and delivering enjoyable customer experiences can be quite an innovative approach to consistently engage their consumers. This research study has complemented the researchers with effective use of structural equation modelling technique in determining the relationship between two variables under study. This study has demonstrated the manner in which different types of customer experiences predict or influence the customer brand engagement in an online buying framework.

Practical Implications

The study findings obtained from this empirical study provide important directions to the marketers for devising strategies to provide pleasing experience to online shoppers for evoking customer engagement. The online shopping experiences with a focus on all four levels need to be pleasing and arousing consumer interests ((Beig & Nika, 2019) so that they feel more connected to the brand. Online marketers need to focus on providing pleasing and unique sensory experiences for indulging the consumers. They need to provide experiences which arouse the consumer

emotions to engage them. Experience provided by online shopping portals need to increase the consumption through discounts and more product choices so they feel closely associated with brands. Lastly, marketing communications should be intriguing to influence customers through process and cognition. Consumers who feel more involved and attached to the brand will also affect their future behaviour depicted by their intention to be loyal and purchase re-intentions.

Study Limitations and Directions for Future Researchers

This study targeted online shoppers for collecting data and thus, future researchers can target respondents from other industry as well. Further, the respondents selected were only university students, leaving other demographic groups. Future researchers can target other groups for their studies. This study is confined only to the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir which means there is a need to carry this study in bigger regions of the country. Bigger regions or metropolitan cities with diverse population can be included in future studies. Also, larger sample size needs to be incorporated by future researchers to make this study more generalizable.

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