Reconceptualising the Concept Customer Experience in Covid 19 Era

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Abstract
Earlier customer purchase of a product, visiting store or tourist place not only focuses on the functionality but also on the experiential aspect defined as emotions. Therefore different organisation has shifted its focus from product oriented firm to personalise centric approach. But these days pandemic called covid 19 has posed a new challenge to personalisation. As new concept social distancing has emerged that focuses on new expectations of customer related to impact of interaction on their health and life while availing experiences. As Rawat and Mann (2016) stated that it is the customer personality and his/her involvement with the product that create customer experience. Therefore this paper outlines the challenges that marketer will face once the lockdown is over in delivering customer experience. Thus the paper provides safety, security and social distancing to be the most prior experiential components of customer experience in addition to product, sevicescape and brand.
Key words: customer experience, product, service, servicescape, brand, consumption, emotion, social experience

Introduction

Coronavires has emerged as a giant opponent of health care system for a nation. It has gripped many lives and has impacted ones nation economy very badly including business and tourism. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global economy is expected to shrink by over 3 per cent in 2020 – the steepest slowdown since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Moreover its impact can be seen in the form of lockdown that estimated to be loss of 9 trillion dollars to world economy. In addition to this impact of pandemic can be seen on reduction in employment ii) the increase in costs of international transactions; iii) the sharp drop in travel; and iv) the decline in demand for services that require proximity between people (Maliszewska, Mattoo and Mensbrugghe 2020).

Moreover, this covid posses a great fear to the organisation including business, manufacturers, tourism, retailing, event and entertainment industry that once the lockdown is over how to create experience so as to ensure confidence among customers. In this whole scenario marketer has to build such marketing programs, activities which not only safeguard the interest of customer but also act as survival for the prospering concept 'customer experience'.

As prior to covid 19 the word experience has made organisation to recognise the importance of interaction with the customer and motivated marketer to build experiential marketing programs. Focussing on active role played by customer who is not only interested in goal directed activities, such as, searching for information, evaluating obtainable options and making decision but is looking for the experience that goods and services provide, directed towards fantasies, feelings and fun (Frow and Payne, 2007; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Moreover identifies experience expected by customer that includes visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile aspects of the environment in which consumer interacts with the product or service (Spence, and Carvalho 2020).

Literature review
Recognizing the importance of experience the literature suggests that the experience can result from interaction with product, service scape, brand, consumption, emotion (Malhalke, 2008; Desmet and Hekkert, 2007; Hamilton and Thompson 2007, Bettencort and Gwinner,

1996; Hui and Bateson, 1991; Padgett and Allen, 1997, Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010; Valenico, 2005; Barkus et al., 2009, Keller, 2003, Holbrook et al. 1984, Havlena and Holbrook, 1986, Caru and Cova, Schifferstein and Hekkert 2007, Alvarez and Alvarez, 2003; Westbrook, 1987; Philips and Baumgartner, 1999; Richins, 1997). Moreover, emotions act as mediator that lead towards satisfaction (Cardozo, 1965 Westbrook, 1987; Oliver 1999) and loyalty (Mascarenhas et al., 2006, Chaudhari and Holbrook, 2001; Barkus et al., 2009).
Moreover Rawat and Mann (2017) suggest that while 'designing customer experience' role of consumer should be considered, as the interaction of the consumer with these experiential construct creates customer experience. In addition to this, Desmet and Hekert (2007), Sarker, Bose, Palit and Haque (2013) and McColl-Kennedy et al., (2015) opine that consumer construct (lifestyle, economic situation, occupation, age, personality types and self concept) plays an active role in creating customer experience. In addition to this, Pambo and Okello (2018) opines that in creating experience it is the involvement that involves consumer in the gathering the information about the product.

But now days the world of customer experience has changed to social distancing impacts retailing, tourisum industry, restaurant, religious places and entertainment industry. This possesses a great challenge to interaction between customer and product. As Robinette *et al*., (2001) defined customer experience as collection of points. Berry *et al*., (2002) defined customer experience as clues. Veroef *et al*., (2009) states customer experience involves customers cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical response including search, purchase, consumption and after sale phase of experience emotion. Moreover, Klaus and Maklan (2013) states customer experience involves customer's cognitive and affective assessment of all direct and indirect encounters with the firm relating to their purchasing behaviour.

Due to lockouts in the nations the marketer need to understand the change in behaviour of the customer mainly influences the demand of e-commerce business activities (Hasanat, Hoque, Shikha, Anwar, Hamid, Tat, 2020). Moreover, the need to isolate has driven the consumer behaviour towards online activities (Writer, Philpott, Director, Loughridge 2020). Resulting in decline of marketing activities oriented towards providing experience through physical evidence, in store facilities, have shown a great downfall and which is need to be addressed once the lockdown is over. As being a social animal, for long time the customer cannot restrict herself or himself to digital platform and so do the marketer has to re plan the experiences the customer expects when she or he comes out of digital marketing.

Therefore Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) have suggested when the lockdown will be raised and moreover after the pandemic, the marketer needs to understand that consumers will evaluate experience on basis of cleanliness, non touchable products screen, and spaciousness that allows social distancing. Moreover, restaurants providing experience needs to focus on disposable menus and significant space or even plastic barriers between tables. In addition to this, Ranasinghe, Damunupola, Wijesundara, Karunarathna, Nawarathna, Gamage, Ranaweera, Ali Abdulla Idroos (2020) are of the viewpoint to make customer experience memorable tourism industry need to release use the tourism resources like hotels as quarantine centres and use technology and medial advancements will be going to play important role in creating customer experience.

Thus we propose that covid 19 has not raised the challenges towards personalisation bringing face to face interaction of product, services and personnel but has made marketer to rethink and reframe the delivery of and concept of customer experience. Therefore we would like to

introduce the concept of social experience expected by customer while availing experience in a mall, restaurant, visiting a tourist place or in an event. As today customer before entering into a retail store in post covid period will assess the environment from social distancing, safety measures followed by such organisations. Focussing on less to fewer crowds and ensuring of security by the personnel from the other persons visiting at the same time.

The framework has been made that closely defines social experience as new experiential construct in defining customer experience as shown in figure 1. In postcovid period the safe social experience will determine whether the experience is good or bad in words of emotions that it will elicitates while experiencing a product or service scape. These emotions in turn will determine the level of satisfaction achieved as specified in diagram but also leads to customer brand attachment.

FIGURE 1: A Framework for the Conceptualization and Measurement of the Construct Experience
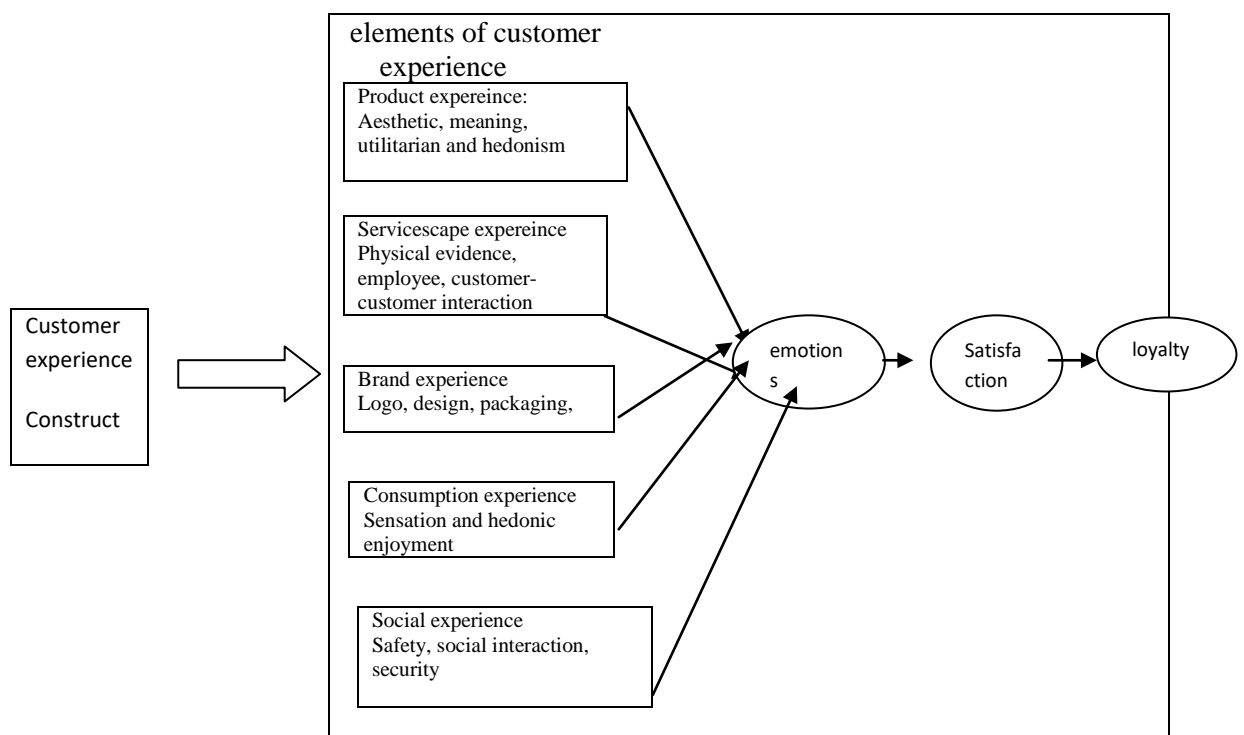
Source: Rawat and Mann (2018)

Discussion

It is the customer who plays important role in experiencing product, service, brand and consumption. Mann and Rawat (2016) has suggests that it is customer personality that involves customer in experiencing the product or brand. Moreover the overall customer experience is created when customer interacts with the experiential construct such as aesthetic and meaning level of product, social environment, music, scent, of store and those characteristics of brand that involves stimuli, design and identity that produces effect on behavioural intention. But due to lockdown the organisation interaction with its customer is losing the importance of providing experience and possesses challenge to reunite. Moreover, social distancing has taken the place of social interaction, and has make customer aware to be socially secured before visiting, to tourist place, amusement parks, religious place, restaurants, malls or even a retail shop.

Managerial implication and Conclusion

The focus of this paper is to highlight the impact of covid 19 on the concept customer experience. The various organisations such as tourism, entertainment, business, and marketing have recognised the more memorable experience they will provide the most of the customers will be satisfied and become loyal. To achieve this, the organisation were focussing on customer experiential management to build marketing programs that can create good customer experience that motivates consumer to analysis the experience generated by usage of product, service or brand from emotive aspect.

Moreover, this all depends upon the direct contact with the customer but due to covid19the marketer needs to reframe type of experiences and should perceive experience focussing on safety, social trust, social distancing and social security. Thus, the introduction social with product, service and brand, now the consumer expects will play greater role in elicitation of positive or negative emotion towards that product or service,. This in turn will act as deciding factor in determining the customer level of satisfaction and will act as a source towards influencing consumer attachment towards brand.

This could be achieved by building marketing programs involving concentration on the ways of disinfection, temperature checking, and virus scanner and building isolation rooms. Moreover creating covid team, allowing minimum persons at a time in mall, restaurants, promoting digital payments type of imitative by the marketers will not help to promote a product, service, or brand but will also help to reconnect and will create confidence in the mind of customer that experience can be delivered safely and securely.

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