
Consumer Engagement - The Experiential Way

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Merely two decades ago marketers in India realised that to sell a product the customers needs to recognise their product and hence focus was on making the product visible (branding), then a decade ago too many players entered the market and confused the customer and hence the concept of differentiation of the brand became the sole important factor so as to give visibility to the brand. Today, almost every product comes with a differentiated offering and customer still remains confused. Marketers needed something to penetrate into the clutter of all brands surrounding the customer and hence came the concept of experiential marketing. Experiential marketing is to stimulate in active manner, to engage consumer in a personal life experience, to allow them to be receptive with the brand in a personalised environment. It is to create and add the value of life, which are to be involved in the product development process.

Experiential marketing focuses on customer experiences. It aims at gauging sensory, motional, cognitive behavioural relationship wants of the customer. This paper will focus on consumer behaviour, the impact of experiential marketing on the consumers, why a concept like this will place an effect on consumer and how will it do.

Customer-centricity is the buzzword. Positioning companies, services or products is a technique which helps in easy brand recall due to its approach of occupying separate place in customer's mind and how are marketers creating this space is through experiential marketing. Another aspect which this paper will explore is employee involvement without which the whole concept of providing a customer with a positive experience cannot be executed.

WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

The aim of experiential marketing is to make entertainment for customers, to allow them escape the reality, to educate them and give them aesthetic objects or places to see

Over the period of time company orientations towards the marketplace has evolved from production concept to product concept to selling

concept to marketing concept. Marketers realised that they could sell more products by determining the needs and wants of its target audience and deliver the desired satisfaction better than its competition. The basic premise under the marketing concept was to understand the consumer behaviour in order to understand the needs of the consumer. There are two things that need to be noted in this concept, firstly understanding consumer and secondly serving them better than the competitors. Consumer needs were identified and then these consumers were grouped into segments and target segment was identified. After all this is the next logical step was to differentiate it from others and position it in the minds of the consumer to gain customer attention, customer recall and customer recognition. This was done through branding and heavy advertising, covering every possible point where customer is exposed to. After a few decades the market became saturated with so many players who wanted to identify themselves as distinct. All the marketers had a different product, understood the consumer needs but in a cluttered market selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention came into play all the more. Here is where the marketers realised that if they need to identify themselves in the consumer minds their products should not only focus on telling how they are different but rather providing an experience that stirs their senses and lets them experience the product beforehand.

Marketing that focuses on enriching customers' sensory, emotional and customer experience when they use a product, shop for it, browse the web or engage in any other form of marketing is termed as experiential marketing.

In experiential marketing functional features and attributes, rational persuasive appeal, quality and price only tells one part of the story. It becomes experiential marketing when apart from the mentioned attributes a whole new experience is created for the customers to sense, feel, think act and relate. This wholesome combination gave rise to the new concept of experiential marketing where every consumer touch point became essential for the marketer so as to differentiate its product from the others.

Experiential marketing gives the marketers an opportunity to address and also connect with customers and potential customers in relevant and meaningful way. Its about creating the right experience for the right people .What customers want today are products, communication and marketing campaigns that dazzles their senses touch their hearts and stimulate their minds, customers want to relate to the product in such a way that matches their personality (self image and ideal self image) and lifestyles that they feel products to be an extensions of their selves rather than mere products. In short customers want an experience.

As Joseph pine James Gilmore has said “As services and goods are commoditised, experience will emerge as the next step in progression of economic value, from now onwards leading edge companies will find that there battlefield lies in staging experience.”

HOW IS THIS NEW AGE MARKETING CONCEPT ANY DIFFERENT FROM TRADITIONAL MARKETING

The focus of traditional market was the product and its feature which basically aimed at positioning there products and its functional features in the minds of the customers through information, branding and campaigns. The underlying assumption was that rational consumers weigh the features of the by comparing them and then selecting the product which provides the highest customer delivered value (CDV). Secondly the traditional marketing assumed that rational consumers follow a rational decision making process through problem solving and engage themselves in thoughtful and reasoned actions. On the other hand experiential marketing focuses on consumer experiences. Experience comprises knowledge of or skill in or observation of some thing or some event gained through involvement in or exposure to that thing or event, they provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational values that supplement functional values. Experiential marketing does not market a toothpaste, it consider grooming in the bathroom and provide an experience of look good and feel good and wonder what products fits in the consumption situations, how to design such products, make them appealing, communicate consumption experience.

The five different types of experiences give rise to five different types of approaches. First is the sense marketing that appeals through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.

Sense marketing differentiates companies and

their products through a unique sensory style and aesthetics. Marketers should aim at creating sense branding campaigns which requires keen understanding of consumer's optimal level of arousal. It requires product design, store and right kind of advertising to appeal to all the five senses. Aroma marketing is another form of marketing that can be included in sense marketing.

Feel marketing appeals to customer's inner feeling and emotions. It aims to create effective experience that range from mildly positive moods linked to a brand to a brand involving strong emotions of joy and pride. For feel marketing to work a close understanding is needed of what stimuli and situations trigger certain emotions as well as willingness of the consumer to engage in the process. A marketers needs to identify at what stage of the buying process what drives, cues or stimuli to use which will make the consumer response positively strong towards the brand or the product. Learning which arises out of personal experience has the capability to make change in the individual behaviour. Here the marketer needs to understand that different people may perceive similar situations differently due to perceptual prospects within individual as well as the external environment that the individual is born and raised in. For example Cadbury dairy milk has an ad campaign saying “shubh aarambh” and “kuch meetha hai khana aj khush ahi jamana” are two taglines that associated the product to positive moods and and good start .These taglines since are well thought out hits the consumer and enables a brand to establish a strong association of events and experiences in life to the product.

Think marketing appeals to intellect with the objective of cognitive, problem solving experiences that engage customer creativity. For example Pepsi lays launched a campaign where its asked public to come up with new flavours and amongst them the best will be chosen and will be used in production. The participants will get some prize money for the same.

Successful think marketing is surprising, intriguing and at times provocative.

Act marketing enriches customer lives by either targeting their bodily experience or by showing them alternative ways of doing things; alternative lifestyles and interactions .Changes in lifestyles and behaviour are motivational in nature and works best when provided by role models. For example when Sachem Medullar says “boost is a secret my energy”, it encourages people to buy boost rather than any other brand available in the market. Another good example of a company that has used this approach is Lego. The company

sees getting children to experience the use of Lego bricks as central to its strategy. Lego has four Legoland park businesses each getting 1.5 million visitors.

Relate marketing expands beyond the individual's personal, private feelings relating the individual to his/her private sphere and linking it to the group behaviour. Reference groups play a major role in an individual's behaviour. It influences the behaviour in 3 ways. It exposes the individual to new behaviour and lifestyle, it influences the person's attitude and self concept and it creates pressure for conformity that may affect the person's actual product or brand choices. Reference groups are classified into two type's membership groups and non membership group. While the membership group comprises of friends and family, the non membership group comprises of aspirational group (group in which a person would like to belong) and dissociative group (groups whose values one reject). A marketer should always try to establish a relationship between the individual and the membership group or the individual and the aspirational group.

For example: membership of highly aspirational group such as Harley Davidson group (HOG) and Apple group. These groups maintain their exclusivity so as to maintain its status of aspirational group, only members get special privileges.

Ideally marketers should strive to create an integrated experience which would cover all the forms of marketing and give a customer a holistic experience worth stimulating their nerves. The brand experience is mostly about static design elements, the customer interface includes all the dynamic exchanges and contact points where the company interacts with a customer. This includes face-to-face in a store, in a sales visit, at a hotel check-in, or a customer event; it includes automated interactions such as e-commerce or an ATM machine; and it includes mediated human interactions such as call-centres, email, or instant messaging.

An integrated customer experience requires a step by step logical approach which comprises of analysing the experiential world of the customer which includes identifying his external as well as internal environment which includes both external stimuli(marketing stimuli comprising of the 4 p's and other stimuli comprising of the economic, technological, political and cultural factors) and internal stimuli (buyers characteristics comprising of individual's cultural, social, personal and psychological features). Since external stimuli acts on buyers characteristics and influences buying decision process it is quintessential for a

marketer to analyse the words around the customer in order to influence the customer. To substantiate how experiential marketing has been helpful here is an example where recently, TVS launched a wedding campaign promoting its bikes, to capture the maximum target audience as the wedding season swept entire Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Wedding theme based mobile vans were used to create awareness and promote the newly launched bikes, namely, StaR sports and StaR city (ES spoke variant) across 50 districts. The marketing tool was a success, generating more than 50,000 enquiries in 1000 days. This campaign created an instant buzz for TVS in Uttar Pradesh.

RESULTS OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

A research conducted by EMF says that vast majority of professionals thinks engagement is strong suit of experiential marketing. Customer engagement helps in building relationship by creating a positive real experience, building loyalty, increasing relevance creating memories, stimulating customer mind etc. the most significant result of experiential marketing is customer engagement, when a customer is engaged it enhances the learning and customer retention and recall for that particular brand is higher. It builds trust and believability, an urge to respond and voluntary brand engagement.

Famous fashion Designer Gabrielle Coco Chanel (1883-1971) stated that "luxury is a necessity that begins where necessity ends."

A universal feature of luxury fashion consumption is the desire of consumers

to transform from actual self to idealised self.

Luxury is concept related to status, ego and psychogenic needs, it is not necessary for survival. Luxury goods have always been associated with high quality, craftsmanship, uniqueness, creativity, exclusivity and innovation. Apart from these product attributes, the consumers also get the additional psychological benefits like esteem, prestige and a sense of a high status and a sense of belonging to an exclusive group. Out of all the above mentioned features a luxury product must be exclusive, unique and should be associated with high quality.

Now, the question arises is how is a luxury product different from normal product and how effective of a role experiential marketing will play in case of a luxury product.

The consumer makes an evaluation of the product according to his beliefs or to his feelings. This is what is called an attitude. The weight the

consumer gives either to his belief or to his feelings in the evaluation of the product is called the hierarchy of effects. Then, the evaluation of the product will lead to an intention regarding the product and this is what we call the behaviour. When the consumer has strong beliefs about the product and doesn't take into account his feelings, he has a standard hierarchy of effect leading to a cognitive attitude, which means a rational evaluation of the product. However, when the consumer listens to his feelings and is open to emotions, he has an experiential hierarchy of effects which means an affective evaluation of the product. Therefore, emotions and experiences have a role in determining the customers' evaluation of the product by influencing his hierarchy of effects, which then influences their attitude and then their preference and intention to purchase.

Indeed, not all the products trigger emotions. There are aesthetic objects that create emotions themselves and are different from current consumption objects. For example, Art. Sometimes, masterpiece creates feelings and emotions, it makes the consumer travel. Therefore, even if this piece is not the best investment, the person will buy this piece because it touches him. Indeed, more than utilitarian functions, the aesthetic product stimulates rich emotional experiences into the consumer. This product consumption is motivated by the pleasure it brings through the wake up of many positive emotions.

Cognitive and affective process act in interaction, but the level depends on people. Some consumers are more willing to have cognitive evaluation of the product and some other consumers are more willing to evaluate with their feelings. In other words, some give priority to their cognitive resources and other to their affective resources.

The consumer decision making process has five main steps. Firstly, there is the —problem recognition » in which consumer perceives a need and becomes motivated to solve a problem. Secondly, there is the —information search, in which consumer searches for information to make a purchase decision. Thirdly there is the alternative evaluation where consumer compares various brands and products and evaluates the products. Finally there is the —purchase decision » in which consumer decides which brand to purchase. The most relevant stage in this process is the alternate evaluation process, this stage is associated with attitude formation where the brand image and the brand belief give rise to purchase intent.

Attitudes comprise both cognitive and affective elements - that is both what you think and how you feel about something and this will lead to evaluation of the product

An attitude has three components: affect behaviour and cognition. Affect refers to the way a consumer feels about an attitude object. Behaviour involves the person's intentions to do something regarding to an attitude object. Cognition refers to the beliefs a consumer has about a product. Now we see how these two concepts are relevant and how it helps to understand the importance of experiential marketing for luxury products

The standard learning hierarchy

Here the consumer approaches the product decision as a problem-solving process. First, he accumulates knowledge regarding attributes of the product and form beliefs. He searches lots of information. Secondly, the consumer evaluates these beliefs and forms a feeling about the product (affect). Finally, according to this evaluation, the consumer engages in behaviour, like buying the product. The standard hierarchy assumes that the consumer is highly involved in making a purchase decision.

The experiential hierarchy

According to the experiential hierarchy of effects, consumers act on basis of their emotional reactions. This perspective highlights the idea that attitudes can be strongly influenced by intangible product attribute such as package design, and by consumers' reactions to stimuli such as advertising and even the brand name. Resulting attitudes will be affected by consumers' hedonic motivations, such as how the product makes them feel or the fun its use will provide.

Hence it is essential for the retailers to redefine themselves as provider of memories and as an experience stager.

The point of sale is the best way to interact with the customer and to stimulate his senses his emotions thanks to this way to communicate interactively and in an entertainment way the marketer should settle the right environment in order to enable the desired experience the customer wants.

But a marketer must remember that it goes from experiences that are constructed by consumers to experiences that are co-constructed by companies and customers, to experiences that are constructed by companies. So, the role of the company is different in each stage of the continuum. It is different if its perspective is to sell traditional products or goods, if it is a service

marketing approach or if it adopts the experiential marketing point of view passing through the co-creation stage in which the company gives all the means to the customer to construct his own, unique experience.

An example where experiential marketing is used for luxury products is at the recent launch of Gucci luxury shoe sale where the luxe Italian brand partnered with retro-inspired music producer Mark Ronson to create an exclusive line of tennis shoes. Then it built a unique venue, the Gucci Icon–Temporary Flash Sneaker Store.

The novelty: A Gucci bricks-and-mortar store sets up shop for two weeks in key cities to sell the shoes, and then it moves on. (It launched in New York, and then hit Miami. After that, it was on to London, Berlin, Paris, Hong Kong and Tokyo.)

And to get the shoes online, Gucci provided two options: Gucci's iPhone or iPad apps.

They expected at least a few iPad early adopters hit "Buy" for limited-edition Mark Ronson shoes.

CONCLUSION

“Experiential marketing provides a place where people can directly sample a company's offerings, so there can be no disconnect between what a company says about its offerings and what customers encounter. An understanding of consumer behaviour helps in understanding that a mere display of products and functional features is not enough to get consumer recognition and brand recall and definitely not sufficient to maintain consumer loyalty.

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