

ARTICLE REVIEW

THE EFFECT OF SENSORY BRAND EXPERIENCE AND INVOLVEMENT ON BRAND EQUITY DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY THROUGH CONSUMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT

(Author- Janne Hepola, Keikki Karjaluohto and Anni Hintikka)
Journal of Product and Brand Management, May 2017
Volume 26, Number 3, 282-293

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This article, written by a group of researchers with a shared interest in customer engagement and customer relationship management (CRM) focuses on an approach to maintaining and improving the business relationship with its current and potential customers for customer retention and branding. The paper was published in May 2017 in the Journal of Product and Brand Management, a world leading journal in branding and product management disciplines, with a high 2018 Impact Factor (2.018), Cite Score 2018 (2.59), and Cite Score Tracker 2019 (3.22). The Journal is currently indexed in Scopus, SSCI, and other internationally recognized databases in the field of business and marketing (<https://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/jpbm.htm>).

Having a common research interest in engagement, the authors aim to broaden their understanding regarding the antecedents and consequences of customer brand engagement, defined as consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, affective, and behavioral (also known as "activation" in this

article) activity, in relation to a focal consumer/brand interaction. Specifically, the purpose of this article is to examine the direct and indirect effect of sensory brand experiences and personal involvement on brand equity, through consumer brand engagement (CBE).

The primary target readers of this article are both academics and practitioners who are interested in the concepts of CBE, brand experience and brand equity. This may include academics who seek to conceptualize and understand the relationship among the three constructs. In addition, marketing practitioners including CRM managers, brand managers, and entrepreneurs, aiming to build their long-term assets through their brand's value and customer relationships could greatly benefit from the research findings presented in this article.

Data was collected through an online survey completed by 1,385 customers of a Finnish tableware brand. Among the findings, some significant ones stem from the influencing power of the sensory brand experience and CBE on brand equity. Sensory

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brand experience was found to have positive influences on all CBE dimensions. Among the three dimensions, affective engagement is found to be the most influential factor in determining customer's overall level of engagement. Moreover, sensory brand experience has both a direct effect on brand equity, and an indirect impact via CBE, thus suggesting partial mediation. Similarly, this partial mediation effect is also found for the relationship between personal involvement and brand equity via CBE. Interestingly, only affective and activation CBE positively impact brand equity, while cognitive CBE has no effect.

As readers who are both academics and practitioners, we have learned from this study in the aspects of holistic customer brand engagement and brand equity. For practitioners, given the connection between CBE and brand equity, brand managers should aim to holistically engage customers and build brand equity in order to build a sustainable consumer-brand relationship. Moreover, managers should pay more attention to increasing customer's emotional/dedication activities and activations, rather than the cognitive/attentive activities during the consumer/brand interactions. Finally, given sensory brand experience as an antecedent of CBE and brand equity, brand managers should develop marketing tactics to exploit possible combinations of the five human senses to effectively co-create powerful sensations with their customers.

As academics, this study proves the connection between sensory brand experience, CBE, and brand equity, especially when examining brand equity as a consequence of CBE. Moreover, the study also examines the nomological network of cognitive, affective and behavioral CBE. It suggests the application of multidimensional aspects of CBE in the study.

What makes this article useful and special is the inclusion of brand experience and CBE, two constructs which have received increasing attention in marketing. The majority of contemporary marketers agree

that consumers nowadays do not consider merely the physical products, but also the entire experience they gain from the brand. On top of that, the success of brands should be measured by long-term indicators, rather than short-term sales. Thus, knowing what contributes to strong brand equity, as an indicator of the long-term stature of the brands, will provide a vital competitive edge. Besides this, CBE is wisely operationalized as a mediator between brand experience and brand equity to emphasize the assumption that brand equity may not be directly constructed by immediate sensory gratification, but indirectly by a consumer's cumulative positive consumer/brand interaction. This article is one of very few research papers which include brand experience, CBE and brand equity in the same study.

Another significant feature of the article is derived from their research methodology. Data were collected from 1,385 respondents, which were well tested to ensure the absence of nonresponse and multi-group bias. The construct of CBE was well reviewed by comparing its various definitions and providing a solid explanation in choosing their operational definition. Last but not least, the authors adopted and proposed a formative approach in measuring CBE rather than a commonly used reflective measurement, in order to construct a higher-order model. This will definitely benefit researchers who would like to replicate this study in other contexts and cultures; or to apply some of these constructs, especially CBE, in another research model.

Despite all the significant contributions of this study, the findings of the article are based only upon the tableware category in Finland. It may not allow researchers to see the comparison across categories, contexts or cultures. For instance, the nature of the service industry is greatly different from tangible products, which may result in a stronger influence of the sensory brand experience as compared to commodity-based industry. In addition, Brakus et al. (2009) suggest four dimensions of brand experience, including sensory, affective, intellectual and

behavioral. Later, Nysveen et al. (2013) suggested a relational component as another dimension of brand experience. This article only depicts the influential power of the sensory brand experience, thus exempting the discussion of the other four dimensions. It would be interesting to see the effect of the other dimensions of brand experience, especially relational, on brand equity, as they both refer to the long-term nature of outcomes. Moreover, researchers who aim to study the four components of brand equity in detail will not be able to find them in this study. Finally, we agree with the authors that the measurement scales for brand experience, CBE and brand equity used in this study are somehow very similar, which may not allow us to comprehend the relationship among these constructs in a real and distinct manner. In conclusion, the study successfully highlights the necessity to manage sensory aspects of consumer-brand interactions to increase holistic CBE, covering the three facets which are cognitive, affective and activation. As the results of improving holistic CBE, the study successfully proves that brand managers can eventually build sustainable consumer-brand relationships.