A theoretical exploration of the relationship between user experience, customer experience and brand equity

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Abstract

Recently, we can observe that new trends and changes in consumer behavior have meant that consumers are beginning to opt for products that give them positive and memorable experiences, all efforts are made to boost the value of the brand and all that is associated with it. This new mode of product interaction generates experiences. While at the same time, consumer association and loyalty to a company's brand are growingly dependent on its experience value.

This paper aims to examine the relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity in literature. This research draws belong to the field of two disciplines, including human-computer interaction and marketing. Both of these disciplines are essential to understand the relationship of user experience, customer experience and brand equity. By combining these two fields, this research provides a unique perspective on how companies can optimize their user and customer experience to strengthen their brand equity. This article aims to conduct a narrative documentary analysis on the theoretical relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand capital. It makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the impact of these concepts on a company's performance. Furthermore, the article highlights the synergies that exist between these different concepts, and the importance of considering them in a comprehensive approach to brand management.

Keywords: User experience, Customer experience, brand equity
Introduction

For several years, and due to the increased competition experienced by different sectors of the economy, many companies have been striving to retain their customers for different reasons: such as reducing the costs of acquiring new customers, improving word-of-mouth, and increasing revenue per purchase. Thus, marketing researchers have shown increased interest in analyzing the concept of brand equity through its antecedents such as association, awareness, loyalty, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1996; Pappu et al, 2005).

However, despite the various efforts made by academics and practitioners to analyze the concept of customer experience and brand equity, the latter remains a more or less complex concept (Sand and al., 2020).

Thus, in this context of fierce competition where it is more and more difficult to distinguish oneself solely by the products or services offered, many companies are beginning to understand the importance of the customer experience for differentiation.

Indeed, since the development of the experiential perspective on consumption, the traditional economic theory of consumers as logical thinkers has been revisited. Today, utility, usability, aesthetics, and the emotional aspect of the user experience are now considered equally important in the design of a technological product (Mahlke, 2008). Some academics (Hosany and Witham, 2010; Mathwick and al., 2001; Pine and Gilmore, 1998) even point out that the affective dimension of the customer experience is an essential element of the sales experience: consumers are increasingly looking for authentic, memorable, and valuable experiences. In the same vein, Pine & Gilmore (1998) emphasize the advent of a wholly experiential economy in the same way. For these authors, marketing has changed from selling products to selling services and from selling services to selling customer experiences.

In this article, we will start with a review of the literature on user experience, customer experience, and brand equity and then we will endeavor to analyze the relationship between these three concepts. This analysis is important because these three elements are closely linked and can have a significant impact on consumers’ perception of the brand (Mishra, 2014). Understanding the nature of this relationship can help companies develop more effective marketing strategies by focusing on the most relevant aspects of user experience and customer experience to strengthen their brand equity.
1. User experience

To begin with there are many definitions, of user experience. However, many researchers in that field support the generic definition of ISO 9241-210 (2009). According to the standard ISO, user experience is defined as "the perceptions and responses resulting from the use of a product, system or service". In contrast, Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006) provide what seems to be one of the most comprehensive definitions, defining user experience as a consequence of a user’s internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.), and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g. organizational/social setting, the meaningfulness of the activity, the voluntariness of use, etc.)

- Dimensions of the user experience

Functional characteristics, according to Hassenzahl's (2004) user experience model, include the criteria of usability, accessibility, and usefulness in a higher-level category called "pragmatic quality" of the system. Usefulness refers to the ability of the system to enable the individual to achieve his or her goal. Usability refers to the efficiency of the system, and the relationship between the achievement of a goal and the resources (cognitive, temporal) used to achieve that goal. According to this model, success in achieving particular goals (linked to usability and the user's prior expectations of the system) would lead to a feeling of satisfaction, as distinct from pleasure. The feeling of pleasure would rather be a positive affective response to the discovery of positive aspects of the system. The pragmatic quality of the system refers to the task-oriented properties of the system. Hassenzahl (2004) adds to this pragmatic quality a "hedonic quality", which makes it specific compared to TAM (Davis, 1989), which may be lacking in taking user effects into account.

The hedonic quality of the system is, unlike pragmatics, not task-oriented. It corresponds to the set of properties of the system related to its appearance or to the social values it conveys. According to (Hassenzahl and al., 2010), the hedonic qualities of the system can be decomposed into three sub-components. The first named "stimulation", indicates the need for novelty and challenge that the individual looks for in his interaction with an object. The second called
'identification', is more of a social need and corresponds to the capacity of the object to convey a certain identity of the person using it.

Finally, the third named 'evocation', alludes to the ability of the system to evoke memories in the user. The hedonic qualities of the system would provide pleasure and not satisfaction. The system's hedonic quality refers to the system's properties that are oriented toward the person and their needs.

As a result of three experiments, Thüring and Mahlke (2007) developed a new model of human-machine interface, continuing the perspective already initiated by Hassenzahl (2004), which is to extend the notion of interaction beyond the notion of usability. This "user experience component model" is relatively similar to Hassenzahl's. It contains Hassenzahl's pragmatic qualities in a component called "instrumental quality", and hedonic qualities in the component "non-instrumental qualities" and adds a third component which is the "emotional response" or "feeling experiences" of the user in the interaction situation.

In their experiments, Thüring and Mahlke (2007) manipulated the usability level and aesthetics of an interface and found a congruent effect of these experimental manipulations on the participants' subjective perceptions. In other words, when manipulated usability is elevated, participants have a better perception of usability. Equally, elevated manipulated aesthetics are perceived as the most aesthetic.

Regarding the third component (emotional response), the authors found a significant main effect of usability and aesthetics on the valence and activation level of emotions. Theoretically, this model considers that emotional reactions would be indirectly influenced by the interaction with the system through instrumental and non-instrumental qualities (Février and al., 2011; Thüring & Mahlke, 2007, Zarour & Alharbi, 2017)

2. Customer experience

The concept of customer experience comes from consumer research and consumer behavior. Consumers buy products not only for their performance but also for their symbolism (Levy, 1959). He suggests that consumers are not rational when deciding which products to consume, even if they are referring to criteria such as price, quality, and durability. However, as we go deeper, other more irrational criteria emerge. In this current, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), in studying consumption, postulate that consumer behavior has an experiential and multidimensional dimension. Another aspect of consumption has thus emerged: the experiential
component (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Addis and Holbrook, 2001, Gentile and al, 2007, Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) For these authors, consumption encompasses broader motivations than just the aspects set out in the context of utilitarian or functional consumption. Addis and Holbrook (2001) present the hedonic side of consumption. Hedonism motivates consumption. While utilitarianism focuses on what the product can do, hedonism focuses on the intangible aspects such as pleasure, and subjective and emotional aspects of consumption. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) conclude that products and services have both utilitarian and hedonic functions.

For several years, different definitions of the customer experience have been established by various authors and have evolved over the years with certain similarities but also certain divergences. Indeed, in the 1980s, the consumer experience referred rather to aspects related to pleasure, beauty, symbolism, creativity, and emotions. Twenty years later, consumer experience refers more to an emotional role in purchasing, using goods, and choosing brands (Holbrook and Hirshman, 1982). According to Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999), experience is unique, personal, enduring, variable from one individual to another, and unforgettable.

Customer experience is the relationship between an organization and a consumer. Indeed, an experience occurs when an organization explicitly uses services and goods as complementary, to create memorable events so that they are repeated.

- **Dimensions of the customer experience**

The marketing literature reveals that customer experience is an activity that includes different dimensions on the part of the customer (Brun and al., 2017). Gentile and al. (2007) suggest the dimensions of customer experience: sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social components. Verhoef and al., (2009) define customer experience as a holistic concept consisting of cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral customer reactions. Brakus and al. (2009) consider customer experience as the experience with a brand. These authors defined experience as the subjective sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses that are activated by brand-related stimuli. In subsequent studies, it is found that a different number of dimensions are considered as dimensions of customer experience depending on the research context. For example, Hsu and Tsou (2011) formed customer experience from the dimensions specified by Schmit (1999) in their study. Rose and al. (2012) formed customer experience only from the cognitive and emotional dimensions. Keiningham and al. (2020) suggest cognitive,
behavioral, sensory, emotional, and social dimensions as dimensions of customer experience. They argue that defining customer experience using these dimensions will help companies to better understand the customer experience. The following table 1 offers an overview of the different dimensions of customer experience.

**Table N°1: Customer experience dimensions in the literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Dimensions of the customer experience</th>
<th>Empirical/ Theoretical</th>
<th>Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pine et Gilmore (1998)</td>
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<td>Schmitt (1999)</td>
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<td>Schmitt (2000)</td>
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<td>Gentile et al. (2007)</td>
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<td>Brakus et al. (2009)</td>
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<td>Verhoef et al. (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zarantonello &amp; Schmitt (2010)</td>
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<td>Iglesias et al. (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hsu &amp; Tsou (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yang &amp; He (2011)</td>
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<td>Rose et al. (2012)</td>
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<td>Nysveen et al. (2013)</td>
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<td>Nasermoudi et al. (2013)</td>
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<td>Cleff et al. (2014)</td>
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<td>Hamzah et al. (2014)</td>
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<td>Ramaseshan et Stein (2014)</td>
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<td>Chahal et al. (2015)</td>
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<td>Ding et Tseng (2015)</td>
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<td>Lin (2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schmitt et al. (2015)</td>
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<td>Başer et al. (2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lemon &amp; Verhoef (2016)</td>
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As we have discussed above, the reason for the different number of dimensions in the studies can be explained by the theme or by the context in which the customer experience takes place. These dimensions will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

### Cognitive dimension

It is about the cognitive processes of the customer (Brun and al., 2017). Literature indicates that the cognitive dimension has always been present in the definition of experience. The consumer has to use...
his ability to think, reflect, and innovate through surprise, engagement, and intrigue (Brun and al., 2017; Schmitt, B., 1999a)

➢ Emotional dimension
In the field of literature, different authors explain that the emotional dimension contributes to creating the experience (Bagozzi and al., 1999; Brun and al., 2017; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Positive emotions facilitate word-of-mouth (Yu and Dean, 2001), and encourage consumers to pay more and repeat their purchase (Barsky and Nash, 2002). However, negative emotions, produce opposite effects on the consumer’s behavior (Roos and al., 2009).

➢ The sensory dimension
The sensory dimension is related to the experience lived or acquired through the five senses (Brun and al., 2017). Interactions between a brand and a consumer operate through different modes (Keller, 2003) and activate different senses (Teichert and Schöntag, 2010), such as touch, smell, hearing, taste, and sight (Brun and al., 2017; Fornerino and al., 2005; Gentile and al., 2007).

➢ The behavioral dimension
The behavioral dimension implies that the customer experience physically affects consumers in their actions, lifestyles, or habits (Carù and Cova, 2006; Fornerino and al., 2005; Schmitt, B., 1999). These actions can be characterized by the appropriation of space (Bonnin, 2002), the amounts spent (Bakini Driss and al., 2009) and the time spent in store (Donovan, 1994).

➢ The social dimension
The social dimension is associated with the self-concept, which is the interaction with others. Thus, in the first example, the experience is lived in an individual way as it allows the consumer to reveal his or her ideal self-image (Schmitt, 1999; Carù and Cova, 2006). In other terms, the consumption of a product or service has a direct impact on the consumer's own image. Subsequently, the social experience implies a connection with others, since it’s in front of society that the consumer's identity is validated and forged. The social dimension is related to the image that the consumer wants to project about himself or herself (Lemke and al., 2011; Nasermoadeli and al., 2013).
3. Brand equity

The concept of brand equity emerged in the late 1980s and was created to refer to any management issue related to the brand (Keller, 1993). The notion of brand equity is one of the most popular marketing concepts of the brand, qualified as extremely important by the majority of researchers. Its emergence has been a positive contribution to companies that have not hesitated to integrate it into their managerial strategies since it came out.

In business, the early questions behind the creation of the brand equity concept were raised by practitioners at the end of the 1970s. During this time, large waves of mergers and acquisitions involving very high transfer amounts (Mahajan and Srivastava, 1994) were taking place. The markets were maturing, and companies were faced with rising costs and stagnating demand (Changeur, 1999). An economic situation that led the practitioners to question themselves on how they could assess the strength of their brands, thus launching the foundations of brand equity management research in the field.

Brand equity can be studied from the point of view of the company or from the point of view of the consumer (Changeur, 1999). Therefore, and the definition of this concept depends mainly on the perspective of its evaluator.

Brand equity has several roles classified as two distinct but complementary views (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991), the company’s approach and the Consumer’s approach. These approaches both agree on the creation of value through brand ownership.

In our review, we will outline the different definitions of the concept, presenting the definitions according to the marketing approach based on the consumer's point of view. In the context of the marketing approach or the so-called "Consumer-based Brand Equity", several contributions were made. The approach emerged in the early 1990s, the beginnings of which were provided by Shoker and Weitz (1988) who drew attention to the non-functional benefits of the product. They define it as: "The part of the utility that is not explained by the valuation of the attributes, which represents the clear and distinct image that the consumer forms about the brand, beyond the simple attraction to the product". Brand equity was subsequently defined as "incremental utility" (Kamakura and Russell, 1993).

Based on the marketing approach, we can conceive brand equity as a set of components or variables that a brand benefits from and that can positively or negatively influence the value
attributed to a product or a service. Thus, value takes a central place in Aaker’s theory (1991). This author, at the origin of a model, explains how brand equity can create value, both for customers and companies. He demonstrates that to create value, brand equity must be based on the following variables such as brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand awareness.

➢ **Brand loyalty**

As far as Aaker is concerned (1991), consumer brand loyalty can be separated into five levels. At the lowest level, consumers don’t demonstrate brand loyalty, their perceptions of the brand are indistinguishable from others. The brand plays a minor role in their purchase decisions. At the second level, we have consumers who are satisfied with the brand or at least not dissatisfied with it. They can be considered regular customers. This customer segment may be vulnerable to competition if it creates visible advantages for them. However, they have no reason to look for alternatives. On the third level, there are consumers who are satisfied with the brand, which is quite expensive for them, so it is difficult to change that brand.

At the fourth level, we see consumers who prefer the brand. Their preference is based on associations such as symbols, usage experiences, or perceived quality. These consumers exhibit positive attitudes and emotions toward the brand and befriend it (Aaker, 1991).

The highest-level covers consumers who are confident in the brand. They are proud to use it. The brand is very important to them because it allows them to explain who they are. These consumers often recommend the brand to others, which creates added value for the company.

➢ **Brand awareness**

Aaker (1994) defines brand awareness as "the ability of a potential customer to recognize or remember that a brand exists and belongs to a certain product category". Awareness, therefore, implies a link between the brand and the product category. Aaker also identified several levels of awareness:

- **Zero awareness:** refers to a total absence of knowledge of the brand
- **Assisted awareness:** this corresponds to the simple knowledge by the consumer of the existence of the brand in question.
- **Spontaneous awareness:** is generally a sign of a strong brand. Indeed, it concerns brands that are always mentioned by consumers when they are asked to associate a product with a brand they know.
- Top-of-mind awareness: it corresponds to the brands that are always mentioned by all consumers and that come to mind spontaneously for a type of product.

➢ **Perceived quality**

Perceived quality is very important in the evaluation of brands. To Milberg and Sinn (2008), "perceived quality has a significant role in determining customers' preferences for local and global brands". As far as Monroe and Krishnanare are concerned (1985), perceived quality is "the perceived ability of a product to provide satisfaction relative to available alternatives". It results from the perceptions and expectations that consumers have of a product or a brand. Parasuraman and al. (1988) define this concept as the result of the confrontation between the consumer's perception of the quality and service provided and his expectations. The last definition presents perceived quality as synonymous with satisfaction, but consumers can buy a brand without being satisfied. In reality, satisfaction is a post-purchase appreciation, whereas quality can develop without the consumption of the product.

➢ **Brand associations**

Brand association is an indissociable dimension of brand equity. It is viewed by Del Rio and al., (2001) as "a key element in the formation and management of brand equity". Seehanam and al, (2018) conceptualize brand association as “a connection to brand ties held in consumers’ memories”. Consumers can use their experiences and memory to recall positive feelings about a particular product or brand. Keller (1993) identified three types of brand associations: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Attributes refer to the characteristics of a product or service and serve to differentiate them from each other. Benefits are the advantages expected by the consumer from the product or service consumed. Finally, attitudes are "overall evaluations of a brand" (Keller, 1993).

4. **The relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity**

There is a close relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity in the literature. On the one hand, user experience refers to the way a user perceives and interacts with a product or service. Customer experience, on the other hand, describes an individual's overall interactions with a company, brand equity, finally, refers to the financial value of a
brand, which is often linked to its reputation and recognition (Sand and al., 2020). Studies show that user experience and customer experience have a direct impact on brand equity (Sheng and al., 2012). Positive experiences generally lead to increased customer loyalty and a better reputation for the brand, which in turn increases its financial value. Besides, negative experiences can lead to a loss of trust and loyalty among customers, which can harm the brand’s reputation and value. It is therefore important for companies to ensure that user and customer experiences are positive to maximize their brand equity.

Sheng and al., (2012) demonstrate that the components of the user experience have a positive and significant impact on customer experience and mobile brand equity. Sheng and Teo (2012) discovered that perceived usefulness and usability applied from the technology acceptance model (TAM) have a significant and positive effect on customer experience.

Aldunate and al. (2022) show that user experience has a positive impact on customer experience, as well as customer experience has a positive effect on brand equity.

Table n°2: Empirical and theoretical studies of the relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Empirical / Theoretical</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheng &amp; Teo, (2012)</td>
<td>Product attributes and brand equity in the mobile field: The mediating role of customer experience. International journal of information management, 32(2), 139-146.</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>The authors demonstrated that perceived utility, perceived usability, entertainment, and aesthetics have a positive and significant impact on customer experience and mobile brand equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mishra (2014).</td>
<td>Effect of experiential value on consumer-based brand equity: An interactive device perspective. Management and Labour Studies, 39(4), 396-410.</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>This study aimed to objectively demonstrate the link between user experience and brand equity. It was discovered that a product's inherent consumption value had a favorable impact on the brand association, perceived value, and brand trust. Additionally, it was found that brand association, perceived quality, and brand trust are significantly influenced by social implications as measured by extrinsic consumption value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreira and al.,(2017)</td>
<td>Influence of sensory stimuli on brand experience, brand equity, and purchase</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>The results of this study reveal that sensory stimulation positively influences brand equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beig &amp; Nika, (2019).</td>
<td>Brand Experience and Brand Equity</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>The purpose of this study is to examine how brand equity and brand experience are related to each other in literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand and al., (2020)</td>
<td>The intersection of user experience (UX), customer experience (CX), and brand experience (BX). In User Experience Is Brand Experience (pp. 71-93). Springer, Cham.</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>The authors concluded that brand positioning and product usability are directly related and that user experience, customer experience, and brand equity frequently overlap. In particular, brand experience is crucial to the user experience across the different touch points of the user journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sellier and al.(2021).</td>
<td>User, Customer and Consumer Experience: Highlighting the Heterogeneity in the Literature. In VISIGRAPP (2: HUCAPP) (pp. 229-236).</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>The aim of this study is to conduct a thorough evaluation of the literature and to improve communication between the fields of marketing and human-computer interaction. More specifically, it aims to harmonize the concepts of user experience and customer experience…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldunate Lipa &amp; Goyzueta Rivera, (2022).</td>
<td>Effect of Customer Experience on Brand Equity in Digital Banking. Revista Perspectivas, 2022, n° 49, p. 97-128</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>On the one hand, the results demonstrate that user experience (UX) with regards to the attributes of &quot;affection&quot; and &quot;user value&quot; influences customer experience (CX). On the other hand, usability&quot;, has no positive relationship with customer experience, as well as customer experience, has a positive effect on brand equity</td>
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**Source: Authors**
Conclusion

The relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity is a largely studied topic in literature. From a general point of view, user experience focuses on how users interact with a product or service, while customer experience focuses on the feelings and perceptions of customers towards a company or a brand. Brand equity, on the other hand, refers to the overall value of a brand, which is influenced by factors such as perceived quality, customer loyalty, and brand awareness.

User experience and customer experience have a direct impact on a company's brand equity. When the user experience and customer experience are positive, users and customers are more likely to recommend the company to others, which can help increase brand awareness and customer loyalty. Moreover, poor user experience or customer experience can have a negative effect on brand equity, leading to the decreased user and customer trust and satisfaction (Lee and al. 2018).

It’s, therefore, crucial for companies to ensure that the user experience and customer experience of their products or services are optimal, taking into account the needs and expectations of their target. This can be done by ensuring the quality of the user interface design, the speed, and relevance of responses to customers, or by providing consistent and memorable brand experiences. It’s also important to emphasize that these concepts cannot be addressed in isolation, but must be considered holistically (Sand and al, 2020). Therefore, companies must take a holistic approach to ensure that all aspects of user experience, customer experience, and brand equity are considered. Furthermore, user experience, customer experience, and brand equity are constantly evolving concepts. Companies must therefore be able to adapt to changes in trends, technologies, and user, customer, and consumer expectations to ensure that they remain competitive in the marketplace.

To conclude, our study aims to examine the relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity as far as literature is concerned. Our study shows that these three concepts are closely related and interdependent. User experience is a key driver of customer experience and brand equity, and companies that invest in improving user experience can expect positive outcomes such as high retention rates, customer base growth, and increased brand value. Thus, our study highlights the critical importance of user experience, customer experience, and brand equity to business success and the importance of considering these concepts in an interconnected manner.
Our article makes an important contribution to understanding the relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity. Specifically, the article highlights the significance of user experience in building brand equity and how this experience can be enhanced through better comprehension of customer needs and expectations. Additionally, the article emphasizes that customer experience goes beyond just the interaction with the product or service, but encompasses all aspects of user experience, including usefulness, usability, and emotions. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of measuring user and customer experience, as well as the methods and tools that can be utilized to evaluate and enhance these experiences. Overall, this article represents an important theoretical contribution for marketing professionals and researchers interested in the relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity.

In the Moroccan context, the article on the relationship between user experience, customer experience, and brand equity can offer a significant contribution for local businesses seeking to differentiate themselves in the market and strengthen their brand image. Morocco being a highly competitive market, it is crucial for companies to understand the importance of user experience and customer experience in building a strong and sustainable brand. The insights from this article can help Moroccan businesses improve their customer experience and user experience, retain their customers, and attract new ones. Additionally, better management of their brand equity can allow them to stand out from the competition and increase their visibility in both the national and international market. In summary, the contribution of this article can be very useful for Moroccan businesses looking to develop an effective marketing strategy and strengthen their position in the market.
Bibliographie


