

Implicit Cognitions in the Experience Economy: Assessing travelers' implicit attitudes toward (social) travel experiences

Abstract

Tourism and travel are at the forefront of the experience economy, with consumers articulating growing interest in responsible and social experiences. However, most travel products still provide basic aesthetic experiences, such as e.g. beaches and club settings, along with traditional entertainment. This disparity between travelers' stated needs for more life-changing travel experiences and their acceptance of underwhelming travel offerings might be explained by shortcomings of the traditional survey-based methodology of assessing travelers' attitudes. Therefore, this study uses implicit attitude measurement to elicit consumers' underlying attitudes toward travel experiences. Findings show that travelers associate aesthetics more with positive and education more with negative travel experiences. Comparing escapism and entertainment motives, respondents have more positive associations with passive, absorptive entertainment than with active, immersed escapism experiences. Thus, implicit cognitions may explain observed attitude-behavior gaps in responsible tourism.

Key words: Implicit Association Test, experience economy, travel motives, experimental study

> Dr. Christiana Tercia

Universitas Prasetya Mulya, School of Business and Economic
Edutown, KavlingEdu 1 No. 1
BSD Raya Barat 1, BSD City – 15339
Tangerang – Indonesia
Tel: +62 (0)21 304 50 500
Fax: +62 (0)21 604 50 505
Email: sevi@pmbs.ac.id / sevip14@gmail.com

> Prof. Thorsten Teichert

Hamburg University, Chair of Marketing and Innovation
Von-Melle-Park 5 • D-20146 Hamburg
Tel: +49 (0)40 42838-4643
Fax: +49 (0)40 42838-5250
Email: thorsten.teichert@uni-hamburg.de

> Dini Sirad, MBA

Universitas Prasetya Mulya, School of Business and Economic
Edutown, KavlingEdu 1 No. 1
BSD Raya Barat 1, BSD City – 15339
Tangerang – Indonesia
Tel: +62 (0)21 304 50 500
Fax: +62 (0)21 604 50 505
Email: dini.sirad@pmbs.ac.id

1. Introduction

In the experience economy, consumers value the associated experiences of product offerings more than its simple functional value (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Tourism and travel are at the forefront of the experience economy, with offerings increasingly addressing 'experiences, fulfilment and rejuvenation' instead of 'places and things' (Kind, 2002). Innovative service providers design responsible travel offerings, which entice travelers to experience travel in novel ways and learn about different cultures (Hanna et al, 2018). In spite of responsible travel's media acclaim, the majority of travel offers however still focus on providing simple aesthetic experiences, such as beautiful beach and club settings and traditional entertainment offers. A possible explanation for this gap between articulated needs and realized offers might be that the experiences that travelers' truly search for are not well captured by traditional surveys. Unconscious desires as well as social desirability biases can lead to an overestimation of the importance of higher-order, politically correct travel experiences. The question then becomes whether travelers truly search for the experiences that the travel firms are offering to them. This questions can be formulated also as a trade-off questions: Which experience is more appealing for a traveler, traditional entertainment providing aesthetic experience, such as a beautiful beach and club settings, or more active experiences, such as escapist and education ones (e.g., hiking, skiing, or even cooking the traditional cuisine).

To answer these questions, previous studies have attempted to capture travelers' attitudes using traditional surveys (see: Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Manthiou et al., 2014). These traditional measurements rely on self-reported ratings, where people rate particular items, such as tourism brochures, web-based advertising using bi-dimensional judgments like 'favorable/unfavorable', 'good/bad', 'useful/useless' (Jang, 2016). This self-report measurement focuses only on capturing the respondents' explicit cognitive process (Yang, He, & Gu, 2012). A major drawback of using self-report measurement is the inability to retrieve and analyze the respondents' implicit memories.

A traveler' attitude, corrected for potential social desirability biases, can be measured indirectly. This process is known as implicit attitude measurement. Implicit attitude is a person's unconscious view toward an object, and is triggered automatically by the mere presence of objects outside its attentive oversight (Bohner & Dickel, 2011; Jang, 2016). Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998) thus introduced the implicit association test (IAT). Today IAT is one of the most widely used instruments when measuring individual's implicit cognition. However, there remains a lack of studies that use this robust tool to measure attitudes implicitly in tourism – destination research field (Lee & Kim, 2017; Kim, Chen, & Hwang, 2011; Kim & Chen, 2010). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to utilize Greenwald et al.'s (1998) Implicit Association Test to elicit travelers' true attitudes toward different types of travel experiences by incorporating Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework as a supporting framework

2. Literature

2.1. Experience Economy Framework

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework provides a well established theoretical lens to examine consumption experience via its four realms, namely, education, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics (see **Figure 1**). According to Pine and Gilmore, in the context of tourism destination, travellers are absorbed in the experience when engaging in an entertainment or an educational activity, whereas those travellers who participate in an aesthetics or and escapist activity are more likely to be immersed in the environment around them (Tercia et al, 2020).

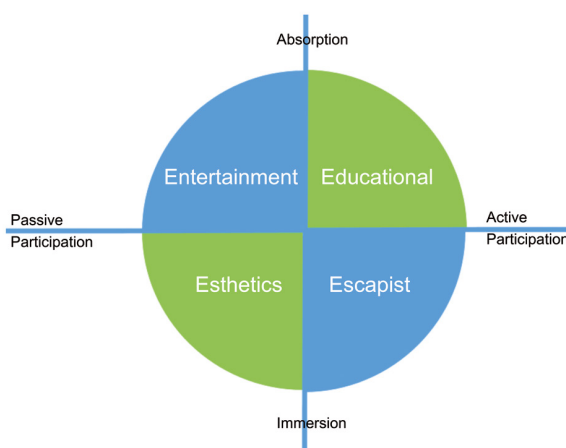


Figure 1: The four realms of an economy experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

Pine and Gilmore (1999) differentiate four realms of the experience economy as follow:

Entertainment experience is about sensing (e.g. watching a circus, enjoying music concert). Entertainment is classified as passive participation and a reflective absorption. Travellers become just observers of or listeners to an event, and they internalize the experience that they view or hear (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Hwang & Lyu, 2015).

Educational experience is the desire to learn something new (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and it is classified as active participation that enhances a traveller's knowledge. Education is characterized as an absorptive experience because travellers have to absorb the obtained input and then store it in their memory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Different tourist activities are considered as educational experience are, for instance, visiting museum, taking a local cuisine cooking course.

Esthetics experience is about being in the presence of something (e.g., laying on the beach) where the travellers immerse themselves and passively enjoy watching or are influenced by the sensory appeal of the scenery surrounding them (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007).

Escapist experience is about performing the activity at hand (e.g., trekking a rice field, horseback riding, or skiing). When having an escapism experience, a traveller actively participates and becomes immersed in these activities during a vacation (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Researchers have thus far linked Pine and Gilmore's concept with the attitude and intention to visit or revisit a location for specific travel purposes (e.g. Chang, 2018; Park, Oh & Park, 2010; Manthiou et al., 2014). Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) found that an *esthetic experience* constitutes an important aspect for travellers staying in B&B's and not so much *escapist* and *entertainment experiences*. This result is reasonable since the esthetic experience is a focal marketing strategy of the B&B industry, thereby linking guests' needs and the travel operators' investment. In contrast, Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) found that *escapism and esthetics experiences* are a driver of visitors' satisfaction in the context of music festivals, whereas *education and aesthetics* become the focal point of experience in the context of museums. In the context of the cruiser experience, Hosany and Witham (2010) confirmed that *esthetics experience* is its main motive, followed by *the entertainment experience and the educational experience*. In the context of sport tourism, Hwang and Lyu (2015) revealed that sport tourism operators should offer experiences for the three dimensions of the experience economy, namely, *education, entertainment and escapism*, in order to enhance (the perception of) well-being by (golf) sport tourists. These findings indicate that the various experiences that tourists strive for depends on the tourism activity that they will undertake during their visits to a destination.

All the previous measurement relied on traditional surveys, which cannot capture the unconscious desires or the social desirability of potential travelers. Kim, Chen and Hwang (2011) argued that questionnaires cause respondents to ignore their feelings and rationalize their thoughts either because of expected social norms or their own individual standards. Thus, obtained findings may encounter potential biases, resulting in an overestimation of the importance of higher order, politically correct travel experiences. To overcome this limitation, this study utilizes an alternative measurement approach to assess people's true attitudes. To shed light on possible hidden desire of travelers, this study combined the four experience dimensions offered by Pine and Gilmore with implicit association measurement.

2.2. Implicit Association Test

Indirect approaches of attitude measurement aim to uncover affective associations (Fazio & Olson, 2003) as well as unconscious cognitive associations (e.g., attitude, self-esteem, and self-concept) by using reaction time data (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). The Implicit Association Test (IAT) developed by Greenwald et al. (1998) is by far the most prominent, even if not undisputed measurement approach (Kurdi, 2020) which compares implicit associations with two categories. Relative response speed thereby reveals the strength of respondents' mental association between a target concept and its evaluative attribute (Sookeun, Liu & Dae-Young, 2015). This measurement paradigm is well recognized and has been adapted to different contexts (Friese, Wanke & Plessner, 2006; Maison, Greenwald & Bruin, 2004), e.g. for measuring consumers' implicit preference for specific products or services. These studies' results show that the IAT can improve the prediction of behavior as compared to relying on explicit attitude measurements.

The IAT procedure involves a computerized task where participants are exposed to a series of stimuli, which can be either pictures and/or words. Those stimuli are grouped into four different categories: (a) two contrasted target concept categories consisting of objects being evaluated (here e.g. education and entertainment) and (b) two contrasting attributed categories (e.g., pleasant and unpleasant words). On each side (left and right) of the display screen, the names of one of the target categories and one of the attribute categories are presented (e.g., “education” and “unpleasant” on the left and “entertainment” and “pleasant” on the right). Then, participants are asked to assign each of stimulus to a particular category. Participants’ responses are measured according to their reaction time of how quickly they assign the stimuli to a particular category correctly.

Researchers have widely used the IAT in social psychology research (Greenwald & Banaji, 2000), even using it to investigate personality traits (Asendorpf, Banse & Mücke, 2002). In the context of marketing research, e.g., Maison, Greenwald and Bruin (2004) employed IAT to investigate implicit brand attitudes and their relation to explicit attitude, product usage, and product differentiation. Within the context of the tourism field, the IAT was used to measure tourists’ sub-consciousness association with international destinations (Choi, Liu & Kim, 2015) and tourists’ attitudes toward destinations (Kim & Chen, 2010). The study by Choi, Liu and Kim (2015) suggested that the IAT would enhance researchers’ understanding of the tourist perception on prominent international destinations that were particularly related to familiarity issues. Moreover, Kim and Chen (2010) revealed that explicit measures were unsuccessful in revealing the differences in travelers’ preferences toward two country destinations, whereas the IAT proved the presence of an implicit preference for England over China by American and Korean travelers, and China over England by Chinese travelers.

Despite its promising potential for the tourism domain, only a limited number of tourism researches have adopted the IAT to try and understand travelers’ behavior and its underlying psychological construct. Therefore, the current study adopted the IAT to measure tourists’ anticipation of desired travel experiences.

3. Methodology

This study applies the IAT to Pine and Gilmore’s four realms of the experience economy to reveal travellers’ implicit associations with education, entertainment, escapist and aesthetic experience. We split the IAT into two experiments that contrast the opposite dimensions of the framework: In the first IAT, educational experiences are been compared with aesthetic experiences. The second IAT then contrasts entertainment with escapist experiences. A total of 411 participants were recruited from three different universities in Indonesia. The experiment was conducted online using the research software AskYourBrain (Teichert et al, 2019), the survey link was sent via participants’ emails, and needed information was provided at the beginning before the respondents started to participate in the experiment. Both IAT are composed of five blocks, and the average response times for each block were compared (Jang, 2016). A variance-adjusted difference score (D-score) of average response times is calculated for a precise comparison.

Experiment 1 used the IAT to assess the implicit attitude toward a pair of target attitude; thus, 257 participants were involved in this experiment. The IAT consisted of five sequential blocks: (1) initial target concept discrimination; (2) evaluative attribute discrimination; (3) first combined task; (4) reversed target concept discrimination; and (5) a reversed combined task. The two target concepts of the experiment, represented by pictures were *educational experience* versus *aesthetic experience* and two evaluative attributes were “*pleasant*” versus “*unpleasant*”, represented by words (see **Table1**). A balanced set of 12 picture stimuli was chosen with six pictures representing “educational experience”(e.g., painting, cooking, visiting museum, wine review) and six pictures representing “esthetic experience” (e.g., garden, beach, mountain, village). In addition, 12 word stimuli were chosen with six words representing “pleasant”(e.g., awesome, fun, satisfying, comfortable) and six words representing “unpleasant”(e.g., bad, disgusting, pathetic, unfortunate). Manipulation checks were executed to verify the adequacy of the chosen pictures. Experts confirmed that these pictures fit well to the categories of Pine and Gilmore’s realms.

Table 1

Summary of the stimuli used for Experiment 1

Category	Stimuli Used (Pictures or Words)		
"Education"			
			
"Esthetics"			
			
"Pleasant"	Fun, Awesome, Satisfying, Comfortable, enjoyable, nice		
"Unpleasant"	Bad, Pathetic, Disgusting, Unfortunate, Annoying, Irritating		

The IAT consisted of five blocks, wherein respondents were asked to categorize a randomly selected stimulus into its underlying category. Instructions were given at the beginning of each block, describing the two experience categories, then asking participants to categorize each stimulus into one target experience, and explaining on how to respond (i.e., for the left, slide the mouse to the left; for the right, slide the mouse to the right). The image, caption, and category name labels stayed on the screen until the participant entered a response by moving the mouse. If a response was deemed to be incorrect, the image was immediately replaced by an error message for 500 millisecond (ms). There was a fixed 1000 ms. interval between the onset of a response and the onset of the next trial. The trials were also randomized, with an equal number of trials presented for each category.

The detailed procedure used for the first experiment is described in the following section and also visualized in **Table 2**. Three training blocks (blocks 1, 2 and 4) were used to train participants in the categorization tasks. In the first block, the subjects were asked to respond as quickly as possible by moving the mouse to the left when the presented pictures pertained to education and moving the mouse to the right when the image depicted an esthetic one. The location of both categories switched in block 4. In the second block, The two discrimination categories were replaced with two evaluative attributes, namely, “Unpleasant” on the left and “Pleasant” on the right. There were also 20 randomized trials, 10 for each attribute category.

Table 2

The Block Sequence for the IAT

Block	Task description	Left categories	Right categories
1	Initial target concept discrimination	Education	Esthetics
2	Evaluative attribute discrimination	Unpleasant	Pleasant
3	Initial combined task	Education OR Unpleasant	Esthetics OR Pleasant
4	Reversed target concept discrimination	Esthetics	Education
5	Reversed combined task	Esthetics OR Unpleasant	Education OR Pleasant




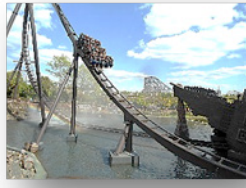



Remark: The reversed sequence started with Blocks 4-5, followed by Blocks 2-3.

In the first combined task (Block 3), the categories for discrimination in each block trial were written as “Education or Unpleasant” in the left upper corner and “Esthetic or Pleasant” in the right upper corner. For reversed target concept discrimination, the positions of two categories for discrimination were switched, with “Education” moving to the right and “Esthetic” to the left. Thus, the correct response was different based on the stimuli that appeared on the screen. The reversed combined task block (Block 5) was similar to the first combined task block, except the categories for discrimination became Esthetic or Unpleasant on the left and “Education or Pleasant” on the right. Both the reaction time and the accuracy of each response were measured.

In the subsequent Experiment 2, the procedures were similar to Experiment 1. The two target concepts of the experiment, as represented by pictures were “Entertainment experience” versus “Escapist experience” and there were two evaluative attributes, as represented by the words “pleasant” versus “unpleasant” (see **Table 3**). There were 12 pictures stimuli with six pictures representing the “Entertainment experience” (e.g., watching a music concert, dance performance, and circus) and 6 pictures representing the “Escapist experience” e.g., tracking, skiing, and diving).

Table 3

Summary of the stimuli used for Experiment 2

Category	Stimuli Used (Pictures or Words)		
"Entertainment"			
			
"Escapist"			
			
"Pleasant"	Quiet, Fresh, Excited, Entertaining, Enjoyable, Nice		
"Unpleasant"	Noisy, Boring, Disgusting, Disturbing, Annoying, Irritating		

To control for possible sequence effects in both experiments, the respondents were randomly assigned either to the standard block sequence (the compatible condition shown first, as reported above) or to a reversed block sequence (incompatible condition shown first). Here, the positions of the two categories for discrimination were switched, with "Education"/ "Entertainment" being moved to the right and "Esthetics"/ "Escapist" being moved to the left. Thus, in contrast to the initial target-concept discrimination block, the subjects were first supposed to move the opposing category to the left-hand side, matching it in Block 3 with the positive attribute dimension and only later in Block 5 with the negative attribute dimension.

4. Results

4.1. IAT analyses

We followed the IAT scoring algorithm of Greenwald, Nosek and Banaji (2003) and treated the raw data according to the following procedure: First, we eliminated trial response latencies greater than 10,000 milliseconds. Then, we included all response latencies, whereby we could then add a latency correction to the false responses. Finally, we calculated the difference in the score between the congruent and incongruent trial block, divided by the pooled standard deviation in the response latencies across both blocks. The resulting measure resembled the IAT D-score. The D-scores are computed as the mean difference divided by the overall standard deviation (SD) (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji 2003).

The analysis of Experiment 1 compared the relative attitudes for aesthetic to educational motives for travel. The analyses showed that respondents associate esthetics more with pleasant impressions and education more with unpleasant impressions, with a significant D-score of 0.195 (std error 0.050). This second key finding is particularly interesting, given the sample population of students where a desire for learning should have been expected.

The analysis of Experiment 2 allowed us to gain further insights regarding the implicit affective associations with escapism compared to entertainment as a travel motive. When comparing the escapist and entertainment motives, the respondents associated entertainment significantly more with a positive attitude than they did escapism, as manifested by a D-score of 0.182 (std error 0.034). This finding is noticeable, given the sample population of young people who often explicitly state escape and adventure as a self-fulfillment motive (Brown 2005).

Figure 2 summarizes the findings of both IAT experiments in a symbolized figure where the size of each quadrant corresponds to the relative (dis)favouring based on the implicit associations' D-score. It shows that the four realms of the experience framework are not of equal value for travellers. The two dimensions of passive experiences outweigh their counterparts that need traveller's active participation. Findings also indicate a small favouring of immersive experiences against absorptive experiences. In sum, an imbalance of travellers' implicit attitudes towards passive and absorptive experiences has to be stated.

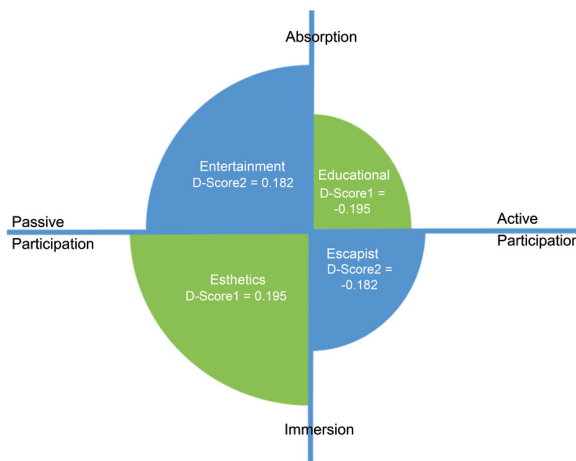


Figure 2: Implicit associations towards experience dimensions

4.2. Robustness Checks

As a robustness check of the findings, we checked for any possible sequence effects of the IAT experiment. Hereto, we analysed the differences in the estimated D-scores across the two settings of the IAT experiment, either starting with the compatible or incompatible task. The following table exhibits the calculated D-scores for the IAT experiment, comparing the educational motives to the aesthetic ones. As can be seen in Table 3, there were no sequence effects present in our study. Thus, findings were not influenced by between-block learning effects.

IAT results differentiated by sequence of the IAT Test			
Criterion	Compatible block first	Incompatible block first	Total
Mean D-Score	0.199	0.191	0.195
Standard Deviation	0.619	0.614	0.617
# observations	84	66	150

Table 3: A Robustness Check on the Findings of the IAT tests

5. Discussion

Two experiments tested travellers' unconscious preferences toward destination. The results of Experiment 1 revealed that implicitly respondents have a stronger positive association toward esthetic experiences compared to educational experiences during their destination visit. This finding implies that Indonesian travellers' prefer to passively enjoy nature and immerse in the environment surrounding them. Therefore, compared to active involvement in a local cuisine cooking class, consuming the beautiful scenery of the mountains or lying on the beach are more favorable activities for Indonesian travellers. In Experiment 2, the results revealed that Indonesian travellers prefer entertainment experiences more than escapist experiences. Hence, marketer can offer activities that enable travellers to lay back, become passively involved in activities, or just absorb the environment around them (e.g. watching a traditional dance performance, watching the performing arts) rather than active activities like hiking, trekking or scuba diving, all of which require travellers to actively engage in activity.

These insights about travellers' implicit attitudes differed from the prima-facie expected attitudes and from the findings obtained by standard questionnaires. For example, Utomo and Noormega (2020) from the prominent research consultancy IDN Research Institute (2020) recently reported that Indonesia millennial travellers are primarily concerned about authenticity and experiential travel experiences. However, if their findings were reframed in the experience economy framework used by Pine and Gilmore, we expect that Indonesia millennial travellers prefer education experiences (i.e. visiting colonial sites and cultural sites) and escapist experience (i.e., adventure tourism). This result would then lead to a contradictory suggestion, i.e., to design activity-based travel experiences such as cultural/educational and adventure tourism, because our implicit association test suggests that Indonesian travellers prefer to have esthetic and entertainment experiences during their vacation rather than educational and escapist experiences.

This study comparison let us assume that there is an implicit/explicit dissociation for desired travel experiences. Further studies should assess the extent to which marketer reports may have overstated travelers' desire for active vacations. Since further research is needed to test which method of attitude measurement can best predict ex-post travel experiences, we recommend that market researchers apply both methods to reveal both types of attitudes, namely, travelers' explicit as well as implicit views.

This study is of exploratory nature and clearly not without its limitations. The use of a student sample is an obvious limitation, however, we deemed it acceptable due to the chosen focus on millennials as our traveler population. More importantly, there might be deep-rooted cultural issues that ask for cross-cultural comparisons. Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to cross-verify the validity of ex-ante travel expectations when forecasting ex-post satisfaction with travel experiences.

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Sustainable Digital Customer Experience: literature review in search of theoretical roots

Abstract

This conceptual paper aims to explore theoretical roots in the streams of marketing and sustainability, in particular exploring how could sustainability be included in customer experience, within a digital customer journey. This topic seems to recently receive growing attention by consumers and companies, and this could be a signal of a new trend of mass market demand. If firms do not anticipate new needs they could lose new market opportunities and weaken their competitive advantage. In this scenario, in order to identify theoretical roots and as such to help future contributions and proposal of new frameworks, a literature review has been taken. In summary, this paper is revealing findings from two scoping studies, opens the discussion towards a novel definition of Sustainable Digital Customer Experience.

Key words: Marketing, Sustainability, Customer Experience, Digital Customer Journey, scoping study.

> Paola Signori

Department of Business Administration
Polo Scientifico Didattico Studi sull'Impresa
Viale Margherita 87, 36100 Vicenza
University of Verona, Italy
mailto:paola.signori@univr.it

Introduction

This conceptual paper aims to explore some common literature roots, in the streams of marketing and sustainability, in particular exploring how could sustainability be “included” in customer experience, within a digital customer journey. Sustainability efforts are receiving growing attention by consumers and companies’ investments, and these new values are driving new mass market demand trends. Digitalization is now a big wave that is asking marketing to review distribution and supply chain strategies with omnichannel and sustainable perspectives. The omnishopper is evolving, being his journey off-online integrated, and requiring new digital seamless and sustainable experiences. If firms do not satisfy these new needs they could lose new market opportunities and weaken their competitive advantage. In rapidly changing scenarios, marketers have to innovate anticipating trends and market requests, and academic research is often able to track these changes. However, when a new conceptualization is emerging during a big change, it is useful to explore pre-scenario literature and find its theoretical roots.

Literature background

A long tradition on the importance of sustainability in corporate and marketing strategy

Many years ago, companies had included sustainable development in their strategic directions, in alignment with modernization and the emerging economic, social and environmental needs (Potacan and Mulej, 2003). Relevant external pressures have motivated firms to internalize the concept of sustainability in their strategies and activities (Grayson, 2011), so that corporate sustainability had been shaped investing in innovation (Overcash and Twomey, 2011). Sustainable innovation entered the organization, in particular requiring a change in its structure and downloading sustainable strategies at functional levels (Schneider, Wallenburg and Fabel, 2014), marketing and branding included (Nedergaard and Gyrd-Jones, 2013). Corporate sustainability strategies had been embedded into the organizational culture, and enhancing employees’ sustainable orientation permits the continuous improvement of new sustainable initiatives (Engert, and Baumgartner, 2016). Moreover, the sustainability concepts entering in principles and policies helped to ensure the alignment in marketing and communication efforts (Haugh and Talwar, 2010). Above all, marketing strategies have been driven by markets and customers. Consumers in particular, became more informed about sustainability, and their new beliefs changed their purchase behaviour, so then new retailing services were pulled by these market drivers (Naidoo and Gasparatos, 2018). In addition, in their evolution toward sustainability sensitiveness, customers’ responses are more negative when a firm is weak in relevant sustainability aspects (Choi and Ng, 2011). Furthermore, researches confirmed that sustainable practices provide economic and social values (Camilleri, 2017), and corporate sustainability significantly impacts on its economic performance (Lourenço, Branco, Curto and Eugénio, 2012). It is well demonstrated that sustainability and profit can co-exist, and these two goals can be reached in synergy (Hutchinson, Singh, and Walker, 2012).

Sustainability entered business strategies becoming the main purpose for innovative sustainable business models, in order to create value for multiple stakeholders (Dembek, and Singh, 2018), in particular offering superior customer value and contributing to the sustainable development of firms and society. In trying to be successful in the long term (Norman and MacDonald, 2004), companies adopted the Triple Bottom Line approach as a way to sustain a competitive advantage (Schulz and Flanigan, 2016).

Tollin and Christensen (2017) demonstrated that marketing capabilities, together with the innovation of new products, services and business models, form a strong driver to address sustainability in marketing. Indeed, marketing departments have a propensity to lead corporate sustainability (Tollin and Christensen, 2017). Chow (2011) confirms it by discussing the usefulness of the shareholder engagement in sharing and promoting sustainable causes.

Collaborative sustainable business models suggest to welcome in the network the internal organization (top managers and employees) and all of the other actors (Arevalo et al., 2011), final consumers included (Høgevoid and Svensson, 2012). Consumers should take a participative role in helping companies in reaching higher sustainability results, and this collaboration is enabled by societal influences (Hacking and Guthrie, 2008) that are changing the sustainability sensitivity within the customer journey. On the other side, many customers denounce green washing practices and lack of sustainability, boycotting brands that are not perceived as sustainable (Hartmann and Moeller, 2014). The above described market revolution have forced companies to innovate their marketing strategies to creatively reposition their corporate identities in respect of emerging environmental and social values (Aryanasl et al., 2016), assessing sustainability in their supply chain strategies (Ahi and Searcy, 2015), and marketing strategies (Mish and Scammon, 2010) to start engaging customers in these efforts (Wilson, 2015).

Customer experience and sustainability

Marketing experts know that, on the consumer side, some experiences offered during a purchase process could help in building a unique, pleasurable and memorable brand experience (Jain, Aagja and Bagdare, 2017). With the right signals and stimuli, a brand may evoke sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural responses (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). Customer experience is crucial in creating customer loyalty, so then, updated marketing strategies are suggesting to re-designing the entire offerings system with personalized co-created experience (Jain et al, 2017). Corporate experience tactics require to pay attention to small details in every touch point.

Each consumption experience produces an emotional response, which impact on customer satisfaction and on the subsequent purchase intention, and thus, customer experiences may influence the customer's holistic perception of the corporate (Bolton et al., 2014). Customer experience tactics have then to be included in a marketing plan to correctly fulfil marketing goals. The first step should be the adoption of a customer experience framework, that begins with analysing and defining target customer's values, needs and desires, adopting a customer-centric logic (Nasution et al., 2014). To enhance brand reputation and customer loyalty, marketing managers should differentiate their strategies and develop adequate experiences that could address target needs and preferences (Foroudi et al., 2016).

The online shopping channel is increasingly growing, and firms have to provide adequate to customer online engaging activities, with interaction elements (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). Rose et al. online customer experience model suggests to focus on the following five Affective Experiential State's elements (Rose, Clark, Samouel and Hair, 2012): Ease of Use; Customization; Connectedness; Aesthetics; Perceived Benefits. Every firm interpret sustainability with different strategies and consequently has differentiated positioning and strengths. Experiential marketing fundamentals (Schmitt, 1999) could be easily adapted to actual online interactions and all of the e-touchpoints. Furthermore, stimuli that create the customer experience might be built on the principal company's vision and core values on sustainability, and should be integrated in each micro moment of truth, digital channels included. However, only if digital experiences fits into the whole customer journey, consumers will be engaged and add value to the company (Kozinets, 2014). As such, the physical and digital sides need to be well cross-channel orchestrated (Avery et al., 2012).

As we know, the literature background about marketing sustainability, customer experience and customer journey, is already well established. However, all of these concepts are explored in silos and it seems they are not yet merged to respond to our original research questions (RQ): What pillars define the Sustainable Digital Customer Experience? Which tactics should be used to enhance sustainability in the customer experience also during the entire customer journey, digital moment of truth included?

Methodology

Based on the above mentioned literature background, this manuscript aims to highlight theoretical roots and identify some further direction for researchers and practitioners.

The methodology adopted is multiple scoping studies (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Scoping studies are structure literature reviews defined by Mays, Roberts and Popay (2001, 194; in Arksey and O'Malley, 2005), as methods that aim to chart the key concepts that support a research area and the principal sources and kinds of evidence accessible. They can be set out as "stand-alone" projects in their own right, particularly if an area is complex or it has never been entirely examined before. As researchers become more familiar with literature, they will undertake "more sensitive searches of literature" (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, 22). As such, researchers will not follow strict limits on the identification of fitting studies or on the study selection. This method requires an iterative process, not a linear one; this involves researchers undertaking every step in a thoughtful way and, if it is necessary, to repeat steps, in order to assure a complete and comprehensive coverage of literature. The literature review protocol, in relation to the direction of a scoping study, consists of five stages: a) identifying the research questions; b) identifying relevant studies; c) study selection; charting the data; d) collating, summarizing and reporting the results. This paper is describing two scoping studies conducted to respond to the main research question: the first one to identify the fundamentals of the Sustainable Customer Experience concept; the second to apply these findings to the digital side of the integrated customer journey. As such, this research could help in defining what Sustainable Digital Customer Experience means according to the extant literature: its definition, fundamentals and conceptual roots.

Study 1 on Sustainable Customer Experience

Study 1 focuses its attention to highlight theoretical and managerial roots of the modern concept of the Sustainable Customer Experience. Since this concept is not discussed well yet in academia, there is a need for a deeper, multi-topics literature review, in particular pulling together Sustainability and Customer Experience scientific contributions.

Relevant studies have been searched on five different databases (as suggested by Goyal, Rahman and Kasmi, 2013): Emerald Full Text, Elsevier's Science Direct, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Springer-Verlag. This first study did not apply any temporal filter. Six keywords are used in this first study: three on sustainability at a strategic level (corporate sustainability, sustainable business model, TBL triple bottom line) and three specific on customer experience (customer experience, sustainable customer experience, online customer experience). Each keyword was used in searches within each database, with restrictions on title, abstract and keywords in the initial search. The study selection was conducted using the entire articles' contents, seeking relevance for the research questions. This resulted in 119 relevant papers, in particular: 29 on corporate sustainability, 21 on sustainable business model, 17 on triple bottom line, 30 on customer experience, 2 on sustainable customer experience, and 20 on online customer experience. Then, the full content of selected articles has been analysed and main findings helped in responding to the first study goal and to move to the next research phase. In particular, limitations in study 1 suggested to explore the theme upon a broader view of online customer experience, well developed within the Integrated Customer Journey concept, in scientific and managerial contributions. So then, study 2 was built to fulfil those limitations.

Study 2 on Digital Customer Experience

This second scoping study aims to explore the Digital Customer Experience, following the same research protocol, but being more oriented to explore academic and managerial sources within a specific time range, pre covid (2000-2019). The main keywords used in this second search were: customer journey, customer journey touchpoint, customer journey mapping. This search was run on scientific papers and on industry reports. Keywords are searched on abstracts and keywords of the academic articles, and the focalization on digital customer experience has been then stressed within the content analysis of full text of selected papers. This process led to 68 relevant articles selected.

Industry reports and companies reports, available online, have been captured within a Google engine search, and directly on important consulting and market research institutes website. The managerial section of the scoping study leads to select 49 industry reports. Initial results are confirming that there is a full range of content about digital customer and user experience, while limited discussion are about sustainable digitalization, but very little is specific on sustainable digital experience.

Results

Sustainable Customer Experience: literature review results

Study 1 data charting revealed some interesting results, useful for understanding conceptual origins in terms of countries and time periods of the analysed articles. The articles found were published in 71 journals, some appearing more frequently than others, in particular: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management (frequency 8); Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Cleaner Production (7); Journal of Brand Management, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science Procedia-Social and Behavioural Science (5); Corporate Governance, Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice (3); and ten journals (including, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Business Research, International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management) with 2 articles each, and all of the others with one article each. So then, this literature review found widespread sustainability contributions in multiple journals.

The international authorship of sustainability articles is shown in descriptive statistics as the bigger cluster, with research teams of different nationalities collectively spanning the world. On customer experience topics, American authors are the most frequent.

About the general trend timeline: 101 articles (84,9%) were published in a 9-year range (2009-2018), with a slight variance in customer experience topics, that have some peaks in 2004-2007-2014-2017. This is an interesting finding, considering that the keywords search did not have any temporal filter.

The content analysis of the 119 selected publications revealed a literature gap in relation to the concept of Sustainable Customer Experience. Very few articles found with the keyword "Sustainable Customer Experience", however only one precisely refer to this concept. Therefore, according to the literature study, it is possible to affirm that there is a theoretical gap within the business literature in relation to this topic, and this is a call for theory building in further research.

Digital Customer Journey: literature review results

Study 2, collecting 68 relevant academic articles, shows the increased interest of researcher on Customer Journey research topic, with the following time range descriptive statistics: 8 studies are published before the year 2000, 13 between 2000 and 2009, 47 between 2010 and 2019. The most used keywords are: Omnichannel customer behaviour (12), Customer journey mobile (9), Augmented reality customer (7), Customer journey omnichannel (6), Customer showrooming

(4), Customer journey (3), Machine learning marketing (3) and all of selected papers are connected to omnichannel. The fragmentation of sources, which the selected paper belong to, is evident, expect for some main academic journal, such as: Journal of Business Research (5), Psychology & Marketing (4), Journal of retailing (4), Journal of marketing (3).

In addition to this search on academic sources, the second study included also other selected 49 managerial sources; about their time range: 10 reports were published before the year 2005, 11 between 2005 and 2017 and then 27 in the last two years (2018-2019). Comparing academic and industry sources it seems that the customer journey conceptualization has grown in parallel, with a similar trend line. Companies reports belong to the following firms: Google Inc. (14), Accenture (4), BGC (4), Forbes (4), SEMrush (3), PWC (2), Salesforce.com (2). The Study 2 on managerial reports contains the following keywords - as the most frequent words related to customer journey: omnichannel, customer journey seamless experience, digital customer behaviour, service blueprinting, customer journey map, moment of truth, showrooming, customer journey measurement, survey and web analysis tool, buyer personas, CRM analysis, analyse market trends, marketing automation, machine learning, augmented reality, voice assistant marketing. This list is a first evidence of industry reports contents, that are pointing out the need of more analysis, measurement and technology tools, to help in assisting the creation of an effective integrated customer journey. However, also in this second study, there is a lack of interest in digitally sustainable experiences.

Discussion

What pillars define the Sustainable Digital Customer Experience?

Based on the content of the first literature review, we can highlight seven relevant elements that could lead to the formulation of the Sustainable Customer Experience pillars:

- customers need products, services and activities that are oriented to economic, social and environmental sustainability;
- sustainability can be improved through innovation and specific business functions;
- the adoption of a sustainable strategy by a company leads to a competitive advantage and to a great economic profit;
- firms are increasingly internalizing sustainability following Sustainable Business Models;
- managers need to follow customers' needs, beliefs and values;
- marketers need to engage customers building customer experiences that are created following their needs, beliefs and values;
- customer experience is one of the most important drivers in the creation of customer loyalty.

These elements could represent the base on which sustainable customer experiences might be developed, in digital environment as well. Sustainable customer experience is an evolution of the traditional customer experience concept, updated to the modern requests of customers, that have needs, beliefs and values that are changing and moving towards sustainability (Smith and Melissen, 2018). So than, Sustainable Customer Experience is defined as "A process that creates holistic value thanks to the customer's engagement derived by sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviours evoked by sustainable stimuli, based on economic, social and environmental sustainability" (Signori et al., 2019). This conceptualization is broadening to other network members, and stakeholders in general, toward a new definition of Sustainable Stakeholder Experience framework (Signori, Cantele, and Gozzo, 2019). However, all of these new theoretical hints, could not refine the digital side of the interaction and this limitation is bridged with the second study.

The customer journey literature review suggests to consider all of the customer experiences of the customer journey, that is composed by three phase: before-during-after the purchase (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). As such, omnichannel strategies (Google Inc report, 2018 October) should assist customers in every moment of truth and in every touchpoint (Bettucci et al., 2016), providing unique experiences, complete, fluid and without channel barriers (Juaneda-Ayensa, Monquera, and Sierra Murillo, 2016). In a seamless experience (that means without interruptions), consumers seek for simple and intuitive supports for their customer decision journey. This decision process is composed by four stages and it is circular (McKinsey report, Court, Elxinga, Mulder and Vetvik (2009), so then more attention is to give to end-to-end customer experience (Maechler, Neher and Park, 2016).

For practitioners, experience is everything in the digital world (PWC report, Clarke and Kinghorn, 2018). The Marketing Science Institute says that customer experience is the next challenge for research, that could help to optimize marketing performance in every critical touchpoint during the customer journey. This statement is confirming the need for attention to details, that emerged in the first study. Even before the pandemia, action plans to influence positive digital experience responses were set as the short-term future key points by marketing practitioner (Accenture report, 2018 September).

Conclusions

Despite the growing interest on digital experience tactics (Broekhuizen et al. 2021; Pencarelli, 2020), and at the same time the importance of sustainable values (Urdea et al., 2021), very little effort was made to merge the two sides, digital and sustainability, in customer experiences. This research method, aiming to find conceptual roots throughout a structured literature review integrating different topics, reveals some cues to build a new conceptualization, where digital and physical touchpoints are orchestrated to offer valuable and sustainable customer experiences, but have found an evident literature gap in theoretical roots.

In summary, this conceptual paper is contributing to open the discussion for a novel definition of Sustainable Digital Customer Experience, in the meantime offering some descriptive results on time range and key words to highlight literature gaps and pillars merging sustainability and digital in customer experience. These two studies identify some gaps in the evidence base, as well as highlight some initial findings. In particular, future research should explore how digital customer experience can be enhanced by sustainability values and stimuli, and its role on educating or co-educating customers and managers to become more sustainable. To be clear, a sustainable customer experience in the digital world is different from sustainable digital communication, and digital sustainability does not refer to communicate sustainability digitally only. In conclusion, the Sustainable Digital Customer Experience theories and practice need to be developed, and their roots consists in an integrated process that creates holistic value thanks to the digital customer's engagement derived by sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviours evoked by sustainable stimuli, based on economic, social and environmental sustainability. This article, with all of its limitations, solicit further research and publications in order to enable more sustainability entering in digital/integrated customer experiences, in multiple touchpoints and with different stimuli.

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Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Polo Scientifico Didattico Studi sull'Impresa of the University of Verona and Fondazione Studi Universitari di Vicenza for the financial support to the research "Business Innovation and Digital transformation" of which this contribution is extracted. In addition, a particular thank is to recognize to two junior research scholars, Irene Gozzo and Salvatore Barbato, that collaborated with their work and discussions to the initial phases of this study.