Understanding the impacts of brand identification and brand experience on customer engagement in the light of energy optimization

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Abstract. Building and fostering links between customers and brands is a major area of emphasis for both academia and business. Despite this interest, the function of conventional marketing strategies in the creation of such relationships has only recently been investigated. A novel framework for customer engagement from an experiential and identification viewpoint in energy optimization This article explores the intersection of customer engagement and energy optimization, highlighting how organizations can leverage energy efficiency initiatives to drive customer engagement, enhance brand identification, and contribute to a sustainable future. This research also reveals the variations in consumer development and the maintenance of customer engagement for industrial brands. Interviews were used to gather primary data, yielding 16 acceptable answers. The findings indicate that the dimensions of brand experiences have multiple effects on customer engagement in the energy optimization field.

Keywords— Brands, Brand experience, Brand Identification, Consumer Brand Relationship, Customer Engagement, Energy Efficiency, Energy Optimization, Industrial Brands.

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, customer engagement has become a critical factor for success. We should emphasize that integrating brand experience, brand identification, and customer engagement in energy optimization strategies can strengthen the relationship between energy providers and customers. A positive brand experience, coupled with strong brand identification, can lead to increased customer engagement, resulting in greater participation in energy-saving initiatives and ultimately contributing to a more sustainable energy future. This article explores the influence of brand experience and brand identification on energy optimization, highlighting how organizations can leverage these factors to enhance energy-saving behaviors, promote sustainability, and achieve long-term success.

The concepts highlighted above are considered a gun without bullets; to be more effective, this gun needs a bullet. Customer engagement (CE) brings positive outcomes for organizations, such as improved firm performance, a favorable reputation, and increased relationship quality. Likewise, it has been linked positively with customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Based on the work of Vikas Kumar and Arun K. Kaushik (2018) "Building consumer brand relationships through brand experience and brand identification", the paper published by Shumaila Chandni and Zillur (2020) "Customer engagement and employee engagement: systematic review and future directions", the research of Laura Orfanedes, Linda Dethman and Jamie Lalos (2016) "Charting the future: how to use customer engagement strategies to ensure energy saving and persistence", and after taking in consideration the authors suggestions, we decide to discover the impacts of brand identification and brand experience on components of consumer brand relationship such as customer engagement, to reduce the lack of empirical research in this field. For this, we will go with the following problematic:

   "**Understanding the impacts of brand experience and brand identification on customer engagement in the light of energy optimization**"

With the main central question: How do brand experience and brand identification impact customer engagement in energy optimization?

Against these questions, the importance of our research lies in investigating customer engagement in energy optimization through experiential and identification aspects. The value of our paper also lies in developing the literature on energy optimization and customer engagement by bringing insights from a new context. As for our managerial objectives, we will offer some experiences and the appropriate identification to engage customers in energy optimization.

1 Literature review

1.1 Conceptual framework

As we all know the conceptual framework, is a part where we define the main concepts discussed in a research. So, in our paper each concept is attached with a theory, able to make our analysis easier. For the concept brand experience, we suggest to identify four dimensions: sensory, emotional, cognitive, and social experiences. The brand identification concept will be analyzed through the social identity theory, by focusing mainly on three levels: Group membership, The construction of positive social identity, and social identity and personal

identity. The final concept was customer engagement, linked with the customer brand relationship as a general theory.
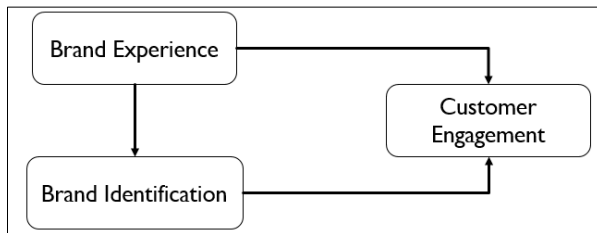

Fig. 1. The relationship between conceptual framework elements

1.1.1 Brand Experience

According to Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009), brand experience encompasses interactions with both goods and services. Therefore, understanding how customers experience brands is crucial to create effective marketing strategies and appealing brand experiences. Additionally, brand experience involves interactions across various venues, contexts, and channels, including retail stores and online shopping. It also encompasses touchpoints during the consumer's search, shopping, and consumption of a brand (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). Furthermore, as Nysveen, Pedersen, and Skard (2013) suggest, brand experience expands the lifecycle and context of experiences since both customers and non-customers have a brand experience. This comprehensive nature of brand experience and its ability to capture the experiential qualities of brands adds to its significance at a theoretical level.

1.1.2 Brand identification

Identification has to be distinguished from brand-self-concept congruence (Sirgy, 1982), because it is more engaging. The quality of this relationship, according to Fournier (1998), is determined as much by the consumer himself, as the brand's actions; such communication. Consumer identification with the brand can then be seen as an inimitable competitive advantage. It forms a link directly involving the individual (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). The interest of the identification process for the consumer is that it allows him to build his identity, to reinforce it and to communicate it through the products he consumes (Huffman, Ratneshwar, & Mick, 2000; Escalas, 2004). This assertion, valid for products, extends to the brands consumed (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998).

This relationship to the brand is more stable than brand awareness, which fluctuates with new associations. Brand identification is measured by the degree to which the costumer integrates the brand's attributes and values into his or her self-concept (Aron, et al. 1992; A; Escalas and Bettman, 2000).

1.1.3 Consumer brand relationship

The consumer brand relationship proponents' ambition is to identify the factors that enable the development of this relationship. If humans personify brands, then can they have charisma? And, how does this charisma influence the consumer's relationship with the brand? According to Max Blackston, (president of Ogilvy & Mather); "In an era where products all serve the same purpose, the emotional relationship is the only thing that motivates today's consumer to spend a significant amount of money on a particular brand. "(Levine, 1989). A

brand that has the power of attraction and drive motivates the consumer to buy more than a brand that has little or no charisma (Smothers, 1993). Charisma is an element of differentiation and a deeply human character. According to the same author, if objects (e.g. a flag, a wedding ring), people (e.g. politicians, movie stars) or artifacts (e.g. movie heroes) have charisma, then brands can too (Smothers, 1993).

In this perspective, Fournier (1997), proposes various categories of relationship that a consumer can have with a brand, consisting of seven elements: love and passion, attachment, interdependence, engagement, intimacy, partner quality and nostalgia. In our research, we will focus more on engagement. According to Stemberg (1986), this component is defined in a temporal perspective (long and short term). It appears that in a new relationship, the individual can decide to love but his engagement to maintain this relationship is perceived only in the long term (ex: marriage). On the other hand, it should be noted that the decision to love does not instinctively imply a desire to maintain that love in the future. Engagement is crucial for a consumer-brand relationship, as it can protect it with its rational, more reflective side.

1.1.4 Consumer engagement

Customer or user engagement refers to the act of maintaining and nurturing a relationship with a brand that goes beyond loyalty, achieved through interactions such as page visits, purchases, and social media activities like liking, commenting, or sharing content. While researchers consider engagement as a critical step in initiating repeat purchases, practitioners view it as a direct means of generating sales. However, third parties agree that there are four stages leading to conversions: capturing users' attention, gaining their approval, interacting with them, and ultimately persuading them to make a purchase. This creates a contradiction and disagreement in the words of practitioners who desire direct financial results, despite engagement's role in the conversion process. Engagement typically occurs during the interaction stage, which is the second stage of the process. For others, engagement is defined more broadly as participation in conversations, electronic word-of-mouth, and other offline actions. As a result, engagement remains an ambiguous and unclear concept for both researchers and practitioners.

1.1.5 Leveraging energy optimization

a. Transparent Sustainability Practices: Communicating energy optimization efforts and sustainability initiatives to customer's fosters transparency and demonstrates a commitment to environmental responsibility. Organizations can highlight their energy efficiency achievements, renewable energy usage, and carbon footprint reduction. This transparency enhances brand reputation and appeals to environmentally conscious customers.

b. Interactive Energy Dashboards: Providing customers with access to real-time energy data through interactive dashboards or mobile applications allows them to track and monitor their own energy usage. This engagement empowers customers to make informed decisions about energy consumption and encourages them to adopt more sustainable practices.

c. Personalized Energy Efficiency Tips: Offering personalized energy-saving tips and recommendations based on customer behavior and usage patterns demonstrates a customer-centric approach.

Organizations can use data analytics and machine learning algorithms to analyze energy usage patterns and provide targeted suggestions for energy optimization, helping customers reduce their energy consumption and save costs.

d. Rewards and Incentive Programs: Implementing rewards and incentive programs tied to energy conservation encourages customer engagement and active participation.

Organizations can offer incentives, such as discounts, loyalty points, or exclusive offers, to customers who demonstrate energy-efficient practices or actively participate in energy-saving initiatives. These programs not only motivate customers to adopt sustainable behaviors but also create a sense of community and recognition.

1.2 Theoretical framework

1.2.1 Brand experience dimensions

To gain a better understanding of the different dimensions of brand experience, this article reviews the relevant sources of experience dimensions. Dewey (1929) challenges the Kantian view of experience as knowledge and argues that people's experiences with their environment involve sensory perception, emotions, and actions. More recently, Pinker (1999) suggests that our minds consist of sets of modules that sense, think, and perform various activities in life as a means of understanding how the mind works. These modules are described as formless psychological faculties or mental modules.

Brakus et al. (2009) sought to quantify experience involvement indirectly through four general dimensions: sensory, intellectual, affective, and behavioral. It is worth mentioning that the "brand experience" measure developed by Brakus et al. (2009) coincides with the "consumer brand engagement" scale developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), since both identify cognitive (intellectual), emotional (affective), and behavioral elements of customer engagement and customer experience.

1.2.2 Social identity theory

Social identity is currently recognized as a critical term for theorizing about social processes by the majority of social psychologists and a larger audience. One explanation for this growing importance is social identification's capacity to address many levels of analysis. Individuals' self-structures as defined by categorical memberships (Reid and Deaux, 1996; Rosenberg and Cara, 1985; Stryker, 1987), the nature of intergroup relations (Taifel and Turner, 1979), or the individual's relationship to the broader social structure (Breakwell, 1993; Moscovici, 1988) can all be described by social identity.

Social Identity Theory can be summarized in those three essential processes. The search and the need to obtain a positive social identity via inter-group comparisons, an individual will manage to position himself and thus elaborate, affirm and maintain discriminations, distinctions, allowing his group to benefit from a positive social identity. In view of the situation, individuals will rely on a continuum ranging from the individual pole to the pole relating to social identity, the choice always being made on the motivational basis of obtaining or maintaining a positive social identity.
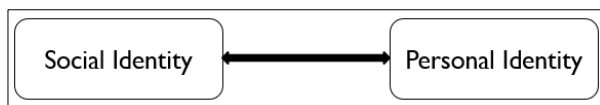

Fig. 2. The relationship between social identity and personal identity

1.2.3 Consumer-brand relationship theory

This theory used to serve us in the investigation of customer engagement, which is considered as a crucial element in the process of the consumer-brand relationship theory. So, if we hammer it out, we underline that, customers play a crucial role, and as Reichheld (1996) notes, "success is getting the right customers and keeping them." Brands serve as a tool for organizations to establish relationships with their consumers (Orth et al., 2004), and according to the American Marketing Association, a brand comprises a name, design, style or symbols, or a combination of these elements.

The ultimate aim of an organization is to achieve brand loyalty, which requires a strong relationship between consumers and the brand. Ballester and Aleman's (2001) study found that customers' repeat purchases are influenced by four dimensions: overall satisfaction, customer involvement, brand trust, and customer commitment.

Therefore, the process of building a consumer brand relationship involves: (a) Brand Identification, (b) Overall Satisfaction, (c) Brand Trust, (d) Customer Engagement, (e) Brand Loyalty.

1.3 Research model

Each element in this chapter, is presented to complete the next one. The conceptual framework, for example, played an important role to define the concepts. And the theoretical framework, give us an idea on the theories, used to understand and analyze the results of our research. But first we have to establish a research model, by gathering and presenting the link between these theories. Basically, in our research, we will focus on the effects of the brand experience dimensions on the customer engagement and on the social identity theory. In like manner, we should explain the impacts of this theory on customer engagement, related directly to the consumer-brand relationship theory.
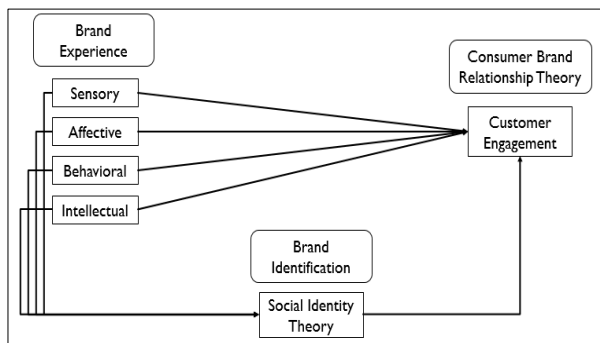
Fig. 3. The research model in our study

2 Methodology

This research adopted a deductive reasoning, on the basis of the theories mentioned in the conceptual framework. A qualitative method, is the adequate for our research, as we are looking to understand the effects of the two first concepts (BX and BI) on a third one (CE). To complete this method, we will use two semi-structured interviews, in order to investigate deeply the impacts of brand experience and brand identification on customer engagement, in energy optimization. And also, the most flexible strategy, when dealing with a complex subject.

2.1 Research methods

To analyse deeply our topic, we choose qualitative method, a naturalistic paradigm employed to gather data, which is subjectively examined and interpreted through words after analysis. This method involves interviewing individuals and provides valuable insight into their experiences and perspectives.

2.2 Contextualization study

Before presenting the strategy or the way, we will adopt to collect our results, it is important to contextualize our research. After the 20's, organizations become more interested in developing unbeatable brands, additionally they start to discover the strategies able to maintain the existent customers and attract new ones by affecting the perception of their brands. One of these companies, treated in our research is Fujikura Automotive Morocco, present in since 2009, Fujikura still implementing its brand in the wiring field and on its way to develop a good consumer-brand relationship.

Last year, the company decide to invest more in its customer service team, by recruiting 6 new analysts in the same position. We can't change the fruit without changing the root, so in like manner, the objective is to focus in each costumer independently, deliver the best brand experience and share the Fujikura Automotive Morocco identification. So, an investigation inside the company, with this team, should be done before discovering the perception of the customers.

2.3 Strategy used

The qualitative research counts approximately six research strategies: focus group, ethnographic research, case study research, process of observation, record keeping and interviews. After knowing the difference between these strategies, we opt for the interviews, as the only strategy offering the possibility to realize a one-to-one investigation with deep insights, and have a detailed description of the studied phenomena from different sides. This is the best-known method. It is based on 3 approaches: Unstructured interview, Structured interview, and Semi-structured interview. In our article, we will proceed with the last one, (semi-structured interview) this approach is the most common thanks to its flexibility and acceptance from interviewees.

3 Results

3.1 Interviews guide

The interviews for the customer service team were averaged 20–45 min, and for the customers averaged 15-30 min in length. Both studies were carried out in two stages. During the first stage, participants provided an overview that included information about their firm, their primary business, the market they operate in, and their competitors. The insights gathered during this stage provided us with a comprehensive understanding of each firm's nature.

In the second stage, participants provided specific information about their brand experience and their approach to customer engagement during product and service exchange, when it comes to energy optimization. Our objective was to gain an understanding of the concept of service experience rooted in company identification.

3.2 Techniques used

The results of our semi-structured interviews wasn't analyzed directly but, first we code the answers for each respondent in order to facilitate our analysis, and then use NVivo as an instrument to have a clear vision of the affects between the different variables in our study.

3.2.1 Descriptive coding

In like manner, we use manual method, through descriptive coding. Tesch (1990) emphasizes the significance of codes in qualitative data analysis, which typically condense the basic topic of a passage into a word or short phrase, usually a noun. It is important to note that these codes should identify the topic rather than abbreviate the content, as the topic refers to what is being discussed or written about, while the content pertains to the substance of the message

Table 1. Example of manual method for the answer of customer service team

Answer	Descriptive Code
O. E., the responsible of logistics and production control in Fujikura Kénitra Since January 2019.	Logistics responsible
I'm the responsible of the customer service and I know all the customers but I don't have a direct contact with them, I do just when it's needed or when there is a problem. In our portfolio 28 clients, between them we find 3 ungagged customers. So, we have 89% engaged ones, because we are doing our best as a team to satisfy the customers, not just with the product quality but also with the service. And as You can see, I said this in every meeting with the team, because apparently, we are asked to satisfy our customers in term of service the product is a responsibility of the production and quality departments.	89% engaged customers Customer Satisfaction

3.2.2 NVIVO

Fig. 4. Word frequency result of our study

In the study, 16 semi-structured interviews, 6 with employees and 10 with Fujikura customers, were undertaken. The authors used three stages of NVivo data analysis. In phase

one, coding focused on identifying the broad marketing configurations identifiable within the data. The results of phase one led to phase two coding, seeking to identify hierarchical structures and breaking down the categories into subcategories to better understand the meanings embedded therein (the Brand Experience, Brand Identification, and Customer Engagement).
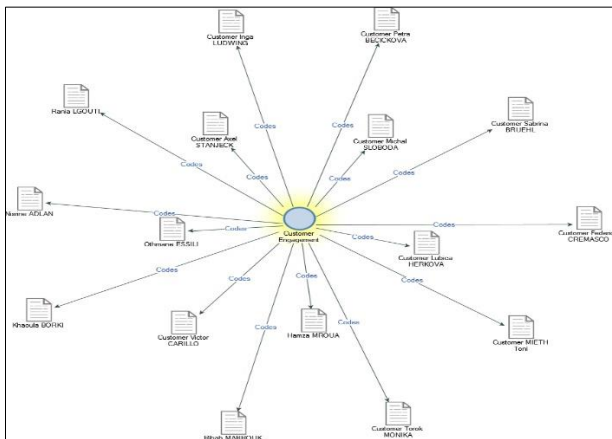
3.3 Analysis

3.3.1 Customer service team

Fig. 5. Explore diagram for Customer Engagement (NVivo)

The team was very responsive, and showed a good implication with our questions, because they signaled the importance of our study, as N. A., customer service analyst asserted: "*First, I would to congratulate you for your choice of the subject, because as a team we are asked just to satisfy the customer by our service and the products ... we forget to deliver our identity and to develop our brand experience each time we have an operation with them*". We can notice, and as majority of the team, brand identification or brand experience were unknown concepts. So, it was very obvious to start our interviews first, by providing some explications about the fundamental concept, based on the existing literature. The customer service team, was very conscious with the value of the impact of brand experience and brand identification on the customer engagement. The employees demonstrate a positive perception to develop this relationship, and this was what the team leader (O. E.) argued: "*Okay, these concepts are related as you can conclude from our discussion. So, I suppose that we focus more in the collaboration with our customers and develop our brand identity to perform good experiences for our customers and create a solid relation with them and can't be other than engagement*". So, after a long run with the whole customer service team, we conclude that satisfaction and engagement is the main key of developing and maintaining a huge relationship.
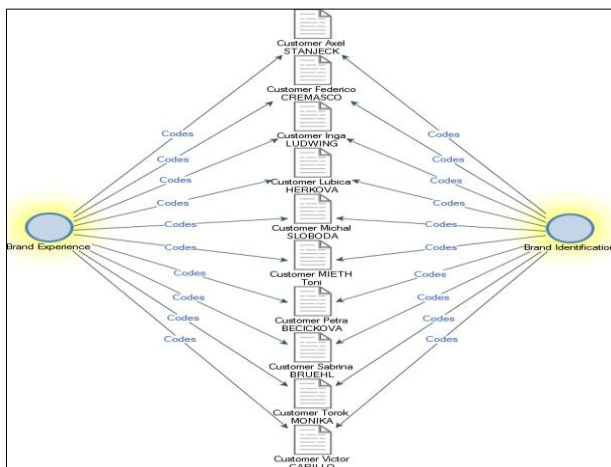
3.3.2 Customers

Fig. 6. Comparison diagram between Brand Experience and Brand Identification (NVivo)

To frame our subject, it was very obvious to have a deep look on the company's customers. We ask them about three main concepts over the theoretical framework. The common point between all customers, they are all direct and indirect suppliers of Volkswagen. With that being said, they share the same vision about the identity and engagement delivered by the company.

The interviewees insist that the brand experience and brand identification are the first reason to create a huge relationship. Majority of them, state that the company (F.) is striving to maintain their clients, and affirm receiving some good feelings: as loyalty, satisfaction, and engagement. Moreover, when we asked the customers about engagement, we got the same sentence: "*we are engaged and you are engaged, so we can take it as the adequate relationship between us*". Thus, engagement wouldn't be possible, without previous experiences, where your company demonstrated how highly it is engaged. Because of, all customers have showed an adequation with the sayings of T. M., procurement team responsible: "*A relationship means an exchange between two parties, so when I said engagement is from the company to the clients and the opposite. We are engaged, if we not, so we should*" the identity plays an important role to reach this goal. As a result, we can say that; brand identification impacts the customer engagement indirectly.

4 Discussion

In this section, we will present the link between all the elements of theoretical framework and how this impact is argued in the real world. The study's findings indicate that sensory is considered as a predictor of customer engagement, which supports the findings of Nysveen et al.'s (2013) research to some extent.

The underlying mechanisms required for successful consumer-brand engagement can be aided by brand identification, which serves as a source of self-verification for consumers. According to the research, brand identification enhances the possibility of consumers and brands forming strong and beneficial relationships or engagement. This finding is consistent with prior research by Elbedweihy et al. (2016) and Tukej et al. (2013).

The results indicate that brand identification partially mediates all relationships between brand experience dimensions and customer engagement, except for intellectual and emotional aspects. This implies that consumers who identify with a brand have a vested

interest in the brand's activities, and are more likely to create and sustain a strong relationship with the brand, regardless of their experiences with it (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

4.1 Implications

The study implications suggest that brands should be an integral part of consumers daily lives, and marketers should take utmost care to facilitate customer engagement. Specifically, our paper suggests that marketers should focus on various touchpoints between customers and brands that generate consumer experiences. By doing so, they can leverage several benefits, such as fostering future communication and emotional bonds with the brand.

Our research reveals as well, that brand experience dimensions vary in their contribution to build consumer brand relationships across different customer segments. For example, affective dimension reveal as the most significant, to impact customer engagement.

Brand identification is crucial in influencing customer engagement, but its intensity varies. Brand identification can strongly influence the relationship and satisfaction between consumers and brands. Thus, customer service teams should develop various strategies, such as satisfaction, to improve brand identification. Marketers should also focus on creating emotionally charged encounters. Because brand experience has a big impact on brand identification, positive encounters can lead to a higher sense of identification among customers with a brand.

In energy optimization, engaging customers can foster a sense of shared responsibility and create a positive impact on the community. For example, organizations can launch energy-saving challenges or campaigns where customers compete to achieve the highest energy savings. These initiatives not only encourage energy-conscious behavior but also build brand identification and promote positive brand image.

Furthermore, the findings imply that brand identification serves as a bridge between various aspects of brand experiences and customer engagement. In circumstances where producing vivid and distinctive experiences appears difficult, marketers might build techniques that foster identification.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on this research, the first objective of the customer service team is to deliver, captivating brand experiences to consumers, prioritizing their satisfaction, interaction, and active involvement with the brand's offerings and marketing initiatives. By increasing the number of touchpoints between the brand and consumers, opportunities for engagement multiply, resulting in a stronger connection between customers and the brand. It is crucial, however, to ensure that satisfaction is consistently seamless and perceived as such to enhance the consumer's identification with and overall experience of the brand. To effectively compete for consumers' attention, marketers should emphasize delivering comprehensive brand experiences that encompass both rational and emotional aspects to engage consumers at a deeper level.

Additionally, it is advisable to evaluate each marketing action's outcomes to understand its impact on consumers and their perceptions of the brand. This analysis provides valuable insights into the consumer's decision-making stage and enables the utilization of consumer behavior knowledge in customer service efforts. By consistently delivering positive brand experiences that foster positive attitudes and brand identification, companies can build a loyal customer base. It is worth noting that brand loyalty and customer satisfaction play pivotal roles in long-term customer retention, making engaging marketing practices a primary focus for any company.

In our context, we encourage managers to measure and communicate regularly the impact of energy optimization efforts, that seems essential to reinforce customer engagement. Organizations can share energy savings achieved, carbon emission reductions, and other environmental benefits resulting from their energy optimization initiatives.

4.3 Limitations

Like all studies, regardless of their effectiveness in producing results, there are limitations that constrain their findings. In this particular study, two notable areas of concern can be identified. Firstly, the limitation is evident from the title itself, as the concepts of brand experience and brand identification are relatively new and still in the process of developing an intellectual framework.

The data collection was carried out using a qualitative method, specifically the convenience sampling technique. Consequently, there is a higher likelihood of selecting a specific subset of the population. This study only considered customers from a single company, within a particular brand category, focusing solely on a specific product brand. As a result, the scope of the findings is limited and can only be generalized to consumers who have prior experiences with diverse brand categories. Additionally, while interviews were employed as a data collection technique to understand the directional relationships among constructs, it is important to note that causal inferences cannot be made.

However, it is worth mentioning that this study aimed to compare the disparities in brand experiences and brand identification's influence on customer engagement, specifically for a product brand. It is possible that customers may have been influenced by service brands or other differences between product brands, which could have confounded the results.

4.4 Future Research

Regarding future research suggestions, it would be highly intriguing to explore the stronger connection between engaging brand experiences, brand loyalty, and purchasing behavior. This would provide valuable insights into the level of customer engagement.

Furthermore, we should underline that the four components of an engaging brand experience examined in this study do not represent the sole definition of such an experience. For future investigations, it would be beneficial to explore additional factors that contribute to engaging brand experiences, offering practitioners a broader range of insights on how to effectively engage customers with their brands.

Additionally, studying the practical implementation of these engaging brand experiences would greatly assist marketers in designing effective customer service campaigns and maximizing return on investment. Understanding how to deliver these experiences in practice would provide valuable guidance for marketers looking to create impactful strategies.

Benchmarking between a lot of brands can also be an interesting point to take into consideration when the researcher starts gathering the results.

Future research can also focus on the factors influencing the adoption and acceptance of energy-efficient technologies, such as smart meters, home automation systems, and energy management apps. And explore how user experience, interface design, and usability impact customer engagement and long-term usage of these technologies.

5 Conclusion

This paper fills a gap in the existing literature by offering a comprehensive review that explores the conceptual and empirical dimensions of brand experience and brand

identification. Through examining the impact of these aspects on customer engagement, it contributes valuable insights to these fields. The motivation behind conducting this study stems from the recognition that fostering healthy and constructive relationships between employees, specifically customer service analysts, and customers is crucial for the effective functioning of any organization.

In fact, brand identification was observed to be influenced by brand experience or previous operations with the company. Numerous constructs have been examined in relation to brand experience and brand identification; however, variations exist in how these constructs are operationalized. In light of this, the objective of this study was to identify the areas where these concepts intersect to foster strong customer engagement.

Engaged customers are more loyal, provide valuable feedback, and actively promote brands to their networks. Simultaneously, organizations across industries are recognizing the significance of energy optimization, not only to reduce costs but also to meet sustainability goals and enhance their environmental stewardship. Thus, this study aimed to uncover how the literature on brand experience and brand identification can contribute to advancing the field of customer engagement in energy optimization.

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