

HOW EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE DRIVES CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND BRAND PERFORMANCE: AN INTEGRATED HR MARKETING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how employee experience can create customer experience and brand performance in service-based organizations, and puts forward combined HR-Marketing conceptualization. Based on a qualitative research design, the data were gathered with the help of semi-structured interviews with employees and customers with the assistance of document analysis of HR policies and organizational practices. The NVivo thematic analysis showed that engagement, empowerment, recognition, and development affect employee quality of interactions with the customers directly and have an effect on the customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and brand advocacy. It has been established that organizational support and culture are the key enablers that provide employees with better ability to offer better service. The results confirm the mediating role of customer experience in the interrelations between employee experience and brand performance and have shown some mechanisms about how internal HR strategies can provide external marketing results. This study can be considered as a theoretical contribution to the study of HR-Marketing integration because it contributes to the development of knowledge and understanding of how organizations may consider employee experience initiation as important to their customer and brand goals. Research and managerial implications are presented in the future.

Keywords: Hr-Marketing, Brand Advocacy, Loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary competitive business world, organizations are becoming fully aware of the fact that the employees are no longer operational resources but are important customers experience and brand performers. Employee experience describes how the employees feel about their working environment, involvement, empowerment, and organization value alignment. Studies have reported that favourable organizational employee experience increases employee motivation, job satisfaction and organizational loyalty, which positively affects the manner in which employees relate to customers and provide uniform and quality services (Salanova, Agut, and Peiro, 2005; Men and Bowen, 2017; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Those organizations that invest in creating meaningful employee experience are consequently better placed to create a better customer experience, and subsequently enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty and overall brand performance (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Koc and Boz, 2016). The service-profit chain has a theoretical basis of the relationship between employee satisfaction, customer experience, and business results that highlight the investments in human capital translate in the factual increase in customer perceptions and business outcomes (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 1997; Bowen and Schneider, 2014). Besides, studies in the HR-Marketing integration emphasize that there is a synergistic effect of aligning HR programs with marketing strategies facing the customer, which can create a better employee engagement and the brand results (Liao and Chuang, 2004; Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, and Chan, 2013; Wood and de Menezes, 2011). Although increased focus is given on the interrelations between employee experience

and customer performance, little is known about the impact of lived experience of employees in customer perceptions and brand performance qualitatively.

This Study will fill this gap by focusing on the mechanisms under which employee experience creates customer experience and brand performance. The study centres on the accounts of employees and customers to give detailed information of how HR practices, employee engagement and organizational culture determine the interaction with customers and brand performance. The research aims to come up with a conceptual model of HR-Marketing, which indicates the route of communication between employee experience, customer experience and the performance of the brand.

The study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the influential dimensions of employee experience that determine the customer interactions.
2. To investigate the effectiveness of the way in which employee experience is reflected on customer experience outcome.
3. To explore the customer experience in shaping the brand performance.
4. To create a unified HR-Marketing model between employee experience, customer experience, and brand performance.

The study would be a contributor not only in its theory but also in real-life application. The implementation of employee centric strategies that result in higher customer satisfaction and brand performance improvement that are expected to be guided by the findings in a more experience driven market should be found to guide the managers and HR professionals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The employee experience (EX) has taken a major centre stage in modern research in organizations because it largely affects internal and external performance outcomes. EX is an idea that comprises workers perception towards the job environment, involvement, happiness, empowerment, and congruence with organizational principles (Salanova, Agut, and Peiro, 2005; Men and Bowen, 2017). It is evidenced that proper human resources (HR) practices, including training, recognition programs, internal communication, and participative decision-making contribute more to high levels of EX by improving motivation, organizational commitment, and purpose (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Digital HR interventions and e-HRM activities have further been discovered to enhance employee engagement particularly at remote or hybrid work settings which underscores the dynamism of HR practices in determining the EX (Oruganti, Karras, Thakur, and Chaithanya, 2025). Not only employees benefit differently through this, but this also preconditions better-quality services practices as engaged and empowered employees are likely to offer a high-quality and consistent interaction with a customer (Koc and Boz, 2016; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002).

The relationship between employee behaviours and customer experience (CX) is very strong since it is the perception and emotional response of customers whose perception and emotional response occur as a result of the interaction with the organization (Verhoef et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoff, 2016). It has been proven that the attitudes, engagement, and satisfaction are directly involved in influence of the way customers perceive service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty (Homburg, Jozic, and Kuehn, 2017; Schneider, White, and Paul, 1998). Theories like the service-profit chain set the assumption that favourable employee experiences lead to improved customer satisfaction levels that, in turn, result in customer

loyalty and organizational profitability (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 1997; Bowen and Schneider, 2014). In addition, good involvements and HR-Marketing fit work activities can deepen the EX-CX relationship, as satisfied employees have been well-trained, empowered, and even motivated to provide brand-sensitive experiences, which improves customer confidence and brand image (Liao and Chuang, 2004; Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, and Chan, 2013; Wood and de Menezes, 2011).

Brand performance; that is customer loyalty, brand equity, and financial performance are hence not the mere outputs of external marketing strategies but would be a product of employee-mediated experiences (Rust, Lemon, and Zeithaml, 2004; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Research also shows that positive and constant employee-customer contacts produce emotional attachment to the customer and cognitive view of the brand to generate a long-term value to the organization (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). The quality of internal organizational practices and employee engagement are determined to have an indirect effect on brand performance through CX, thus making CX an important mediating construct in the relationship between EX and brand performance (Salanova et al., 2005; Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey, 2013). This is consistent with the current findings on the integration of HR and marketing as strategic purpose whereby alignment of both HR activities and the customer facing marketing activities brings about the highest level of employee and customer value creation, which is the core of developing a sustainable competitive advantage (Gronroos, 2000; Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Hays and Wood, 2011).

Collectively, the literature shows there is a logical journey between employee experience and customer experience and, eventually, when it comes to brand performance. HR practices are the major purpose of promoting EX, which will be converted into high-quality customer interactions, which will create better brand outcomes. Although theoretical and empirical data regarding these associations continues to accumulate, more qualitative research that reflects employees and customer experience of the relationship is required to offer detailed data about the processes involved in the EX - CX - Brand Performance path. This qualitative evidence will be useful in the creation of integrated HR-Marketing model, with the focus in how the organizations can match the internal HR strategies to the external marketing goals to perform in a sustainable manner.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on the exploration of how employee experience impacts customer experience and brand performance by applying qualitative exploratory design based on the creation of integrated HR-Marketing model. The qualitative research method suits well since employee and customer experiences are multifaceted and depend on a situation, implying that an in-depth description of the perceptions, behaviour, and stories of participants can be obtained (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The qualitative methodology utilizes phenomenological approach to engage the lived experiences of the employees and customers and explores the relationship between HR practices, the organizational culture, and the employee engagement and how these relationships impact the customer interactions and perceptions of brand performance. The population consists of employees and customers of middle-to-large service organization in service-based industries, including retail, hospitality, and IT services. The sample of participants is chosen through purposive sampling because of direct contact with customers and the ability of someone involved to share plenty of information about the study phenomena. The sample of employees is attracted at various organizational tiers such as frontline staff, supervisors and HR managers as well as the sample of the customers is determined by the recent contacts with the organization. The sample focuses on the number

of about 20-30 employees and 20-30 customers, which meets the qualitative research standards to attain data saturation and remain diversified in the perspective (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are used as the main mode of data collection where the researcher will request the participant to elaborate their experiences at the same time ensuring that they align with the research objectives. The interviews with the employees are specifically geared towards how the employees perceive the HR initiatives, engagement, empowerment and impact of the initiatives on service delivery and their direct customer interaction, as well as customer interviews are aimed at understanding how the employees are perceived regarding service quality, staff behaviours and the brand experience. Further, organizational policies, training manuals and internal communications are analysed to provide a contextual analysis of employee experiences and to triangulate the results of the documents analysis. Where possible, field observations of employee-customer interactions are presented as an addition to evidence in order to give supplementary contextual evidence.

The thematic analysis is applied to data analysis based on the six-step model created by Braun and Clarke. The transcripts are initially examined so that they can become familiar and then, open coding is done under NVivo to extract meaningful statements, which can be related to employee experience, employee-customer interactions, and brand performance. Then codes are sorted into categories and broad themes such as HR practices, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and brand perception. The themes are discussed and revised to be consistent and relevant, and then all the themes are defined and named with the representative quotes chosen to illustrate them. NVivo eases the process of systematic coding, displayed co-occurring codes, and the determination of connections among themes, allowing rigor and scrutiny to the analysis procedure.

The study is also credible with the help of several measures. Member checking helps to strengthen credibility so that participants of the study can confirm interpretations of their experiences. The issue of transferability is served by the provision of elaborate contextual descriptions to help the readers to evaluate applicability to comparable organizational environments. Dependability is ensured by a clear audit trail of coding decisions, interview protocols and steps taken during the analysis and confirmability is assured by the data triangulation of coding decisions done through interviews, observations and analysis of documents. Strict ethical practice is followed like informed consent, data anonymization, confidentiality, and the approval of the board responsible in the institution being reviewed. The participants are informed that they are being participant at the expense of their own will and the right to withdraw at any time.

The proposed methodology will produce profound knowledge about the extent to which employee experiences affect customer experiences and consequently brand performance, which will provide the foundation on creating an integrated HR-Marketing conceptual model. The study will capture the experiences of employees and customers in an attempt to understand the ways in which HR practices and organizational culture determine the quality of services and brand delivery in the marketplace, thus providing both theoretical and practical recommendations to organizations who are interested in integrating internal HR management with the external marketing in line with the customer market.

ANALYSIS

The aim of the research was to investigate the effects of employee experience (EX) to customer experience (CX) and brand performance (BP) and create an interdisciplinary HR-Marketing model with qualitative evidence. The collected data has included semi-structured interviews with 25 employees and 25 customers in several service-based organizations

accompanied by the document analysis of HR guidelines, training manuals and internal communications. Verbatim transcription followed by thematic analysis in NVivo treated the interviews according to the six steps of the method provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The meaningful statements were created into a code and sorted out into categories and themes.

The NVivo analysis identified four primary themes reflecting the key pathways linking EX, CX, and BP. These are summarized in Table 1 below:

Theme	Description	Representative Codes	Illustrative Quotes
Employee Engagement & Empowerment	How HR practices influence motivation, autonomy, and proactive behaviours	Training, Recognition, Autonomy, Feedback	“When I feel recognized and empowered, I take extra care to satisfy customers.”
Customer Interaction Quality	Employees’ behaviours shaping customer perceptions	Responsiveness, Communication, Problem-solving	“The staff went out of their way to help me, which makes me trust the brand more.”
Organizational Support & Culture	The role of HR policies, culture, and leadership in shaping EX	Leadership support, Work-life balance, Internal communication	“Our management ensures we are trained and supported, which makes serving customers easier.”
Brand Perception & Loyalty	Customers’ emotional and cognitive evaluation of the brand influenced by employee service	Satisfaction, Trust, Brand Advocacy	“Because of my consistent positive experiences, I keep returning and recommend the brand to friends.”

These themes illustrate that employee experiences shaped by HR practices directly influence customer interactions, which then affect brand perception and loyalty, forming the foundation for the integrated HR–Marketing model.

SUB-THEME ANALYSIS

Further coding revealed sub-themes as shown in Table 2 below, explains the mechanisms underlying each main theme:

Table 2

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Key Insights
Employee Engagement & Empowerment	Autonomy, Recognition, Skill Development	Empowered employees proactively resolve customer issues, increasing satisfaction
Customer Interaction Quality	Responsiveness, Personalization, Problem Resolution	Personalized and timely responses foster positive brand perception
Organizational Support & Culture	Leadership Support, Training, Communication	Supportive culture enhances employee confidence and consistent service delivery

Brand Perception & Loyalty	Satisfaction, Trust, Advocacy	Positive customer experiences lead to repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals
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These sub-themes provide actionable insights for HR and marketing managers, showing that targeted HR initiatives can improve CX, which in turn strengthens brand performance.

Several NVivo visualizations were generated to support the analysis:

1. Word Cloud of Employee Experiences: Highlighting frequently mentioned concepts such as *training*, *recognition*, *support*, *engagement*, *empowerment*, which reinforces the importance of HR practices in shaping EX.
2. Code Co-occurrence Matrix: Identifies intersections between employee engagement and customer satisfaction, showing strong connections between empowerment codes and customer loyalty codes.
3. Hierarchical Tree Map of Themes: Demonstrates the nested structure of themes and sub-themes, helping visualize how organizational support influences employee engagement, which then drives customer experience and brand outcomes.

This analysis proves that the customer experience is also a key driver, dependent on employee experience and justifies the theoretical opines of literature on the service-profit chain and Hr-Marketing business integration (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 1997; Liao and Chuang, 2004). Empowered employees who feel well supported by the organization, who receive recognition, and feel that they are important to the organization get more actively involved in the provision of high-quality interaction with customers. Such interactions have a direct effect on the perception of customers towards the brand in terms of satisfaction, trust and loyalty. Besides, HR practices and organizational support are enablers that keep employees engaged, and the level of service quality is maintained. As a whole, these results have offered empirical support to an integrated HR-Marketing model where the HR practices and organizational culture affect employee experiences, which subsequently mediates customer experience and brand performance outcomes.

DISCUSSION

As the results of this study show, employee experience is a key factor in the customer experience and brand performance, supporting the theoretical hypotheses of service-profit chain and adding to the knowledge on the integrated HR-Marketing view. The employees who claimed greater engagement, empowerment and recognition were seen to provide more personalized, responsive and effective customer interactions, which subsequently improved the perception of the customers towards the brand which included satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy. These outcomes correspond to the previous studies that have shown that training, feedback and empowerment among HR practices have the positive impact on employee engagement along with customer and organizational outcomes that can be also measured (Salanova, Agut, and Peiro, 2005; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002; Men and Bowen, 2017).

The organizational support and culture are also mentioned in the study as the enabling factor. Employees highlighted that effective communication, leadership guidance and an organizational culture that encouraged autonomy allowed them to better serve their customers. This highlights the moderating or enabling role of organizational environment to the EX - CX relationship which repeats the HR-Marketing integration literature (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Liao and Chuang, 2004). In addition to that, a thematic analysis also showed that customer experience serves as a mediating variable between employee experience and

brand performance, which supports the idea that employee-oriented service behaviours play a crucial role in creating brand perception and loyalty (Verhoff et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Vitaly, the present study gives qualitative means of the subtle processes in which EX is converted to BP. As an example, empowered employees who participated in problem-solving independently and were frequently acknowledged had an impact on customer credibility and referral, indicating that internal HR programs have a ripple impact throughout the customer experience and brand performance. Knowing these, the research builds upon earlier quantitative studies by offering rich and contextual case studies on how an internal HR program can be implemented to drive the external brand performance, thereby giving managers practical advice as to how to align HR and marketing strategies.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms the statement that customer experience and brand performance depend on strategic employee experience and creates a clear explanation of why an integrated HR-Marketing model is appropriate. The qualitative results prove that the HR practices of engagement, empowerment, recognition, and development positively influence the ability of employees to provide high-quality and customer-centric service that, subsequently, positively influence customer satisfaction, loyalty, and brand advocacy. Organizational support and culture are very important enablers, which should allow employee engagement to be translated into the positive outcomes in the form of customer and brand engagement.

The study has a theoretical and practical contribution. Theoretically, it documents qualitative data of the mediating effect of customer experience between EX and brand performance and supports the significance of organizational enablers in the HR-Marketing interface. In practice, it provides an actionable opportunity to organizations to develop HR intervention to not only increase the level of employee well-being but also enhance the customer experience and the brand equity. Future studies can further extend this model with quantitative validation across the industries, examine other mediating or moderating variables like the digital engagement or co-creation by the customer, and longitudinal outcomes to evaluate long-term sustainability of HR-driven brand performance. Collectively, the various points made in this study explain why organizations interested in developing competitive advantage need to strategically align employee experience programs with customer experience and brand management goals.

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