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### The interplay of customer experience and commitment

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## The Interplay of Customer Experience and Commitment

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## The Interplay of Customer Experience and Commitment

Managing the customer experience, defined simply as “creating a strong customer experience” (Lemon and Verhoef 2016, p. 69), is being hailed as the next field upon which firms will compete to grow market share. Research by Gartner finds that by 2017, 89% of companies plan to compete primarily on the basis of customer experience (Gartner, 2016). Moreover, customer experience management has recently emerged as a distinct profession to address the rapidly growing demand by businesses for expertise in the field (Fatma, 2014).

Despite this emphasis, consensus among managers or academics regarding what comprises customer experience, how it is measured and how it differs from similar constructs (e.g., customer engagement, customer value, etc.) is building, but has yet to emerge. Consequently, there exists no general consensus regarding the aspects of customer experience that require assessment and metrics and the relationship between customer experience and other more established marketing constructs. We believe that grounding this nascent stream of research in relation to more established marketing constructs is an important part of understanding how customer experience fits in the larger marketing literature. This aim of this conceptual article, therefore, is to better understand customer experience and how it might be effectively measured by exploring its relationship with customer commitment.

To do so, we build upon the work of De Keyser *et al.* (2015), who define customer experience as comprising: “the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social elements that mark the customer’s direct or indirect interaction with a [set of] market actor[s]” (p. 1) and the five component model of customer commitment described by Keiningham *et al.* (2015).

Specifically, we focus on customer assessment of cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social experience as it relates to customer commitment. Moreover, since the overriding goal of companies’ efforts to enhance customer experience is to engender commitment to the brand, we

1  
2 argue that gauging customer commitment represents a logical, desirable complement to customer  
3  
4 experience measurement. In particular, as commitment is the attitudinal component of consumer  
5  
6 loyalty that is developed after an experience (or experiences) with a brand (Lariviere *et al.*,  
7  
8 2014), we would expect that the initial direction of causality to be from the customer experience  
9  
10 to customer commitment. But once customers have become committed to a firm or brand, we  
11  
12 would expect this commitment to color perceptions of their customer experiences (a form of  
13  
14 confirmation bias). Therefore, we examine the question, how do customer commitment and  
15  
16 customer experience interact.  
17  
18  
19

20  
21 To explore this question, we engage the five-component model of commitment (e.g.  
22  
23 consumer commitment is comprised of affective, normative, forced, habitual and economic  
24  
25 dimensions, see Keiningham *et al.*, 2015 for review), as a framework for examining the  
26  
27 conceptual relationship between customer experience and commitment (see Figure 1).  
28  
29

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32  
33 FIGURE 1 HERE  
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37  
38 Whereas extant literature presumes a straightforward progression from cumulative  
39  
40 customer experience to customer commitment (see Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), we argue in this  
41  
42 paper that customer commitment will not only be affected by customer experience but also vice  
43  
44 versa (for repeated customer-provider interactions). Specifically, a customer's commitment to a  
45  
46 brand biases his/her perceptions of the experience through dynamics such as cognitive  
47  
48 dissonance (Festinger, 1957), self-perception (Bem, 1967), and biased scanning (Janis and King,  
49  
50 1954). Therefore, we believe that attempts to gauge objectively customer experience will be  
51  
52 impacted not only by customers' perceptions of the actual experience, but also by the inherent  
53  
54 biases which arise from the level and type of commitment customers' hold to a brand. For that  
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1  
2 reason, we believe it is imperative for researchers and firms to better understand the relationship  
3  
4 between customer commitment and customer experience and its implications for service theory  
5  
6 and practice.  
7

8  
9 We contribute to literature in several ways. First, we contribute to the emerging stream of  
10  
11 literature on customer experience by synthesizing this literature and proposing a  
12  
13 conceptualization for customer experience. Second, we propose how to disentangle the  
14  
15 relationship between two multidimensional constructs: customer experience De Keyser *et al.*  
16  
17 (2015) and customer commitment (Keiningham *et al.*, 2015). Third, we offer recommendations  
18  
19 for future empirical research.  
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23 The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, as this model of customer  
24  
25 experience is composed of five elements, we begin by examining how each of these elements  
26  
27 impact customer experience. We then explore how the five components of commitment  
28  
29 (Keiningham *et al.*, 2015) would be expected to influence perceptions of customer experience  
30  
31 and vice versa. We conclude with a discussion of the implications and a future research agenda.  
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### 37 **ELEMENTS OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

38  
39 Understanding and improving customer experience has become a management mantra.  
40  
41 While the attractiveness of this goal for improving firm performance and customer wellbeing is  
42  
43 an area of emerging interest in marketing, the elements that comprise customer experience and  
44  
45 how these elements relate to customer assessment of their experience before during and after  
46  
47 their encounter with a brand requires further and more detailed examination. The following  
48  
49 sections describe in greater detail the five elements of customer experience described by De  
50  
51 Keyser *et al.* (2015) and how they have been conceptualized and measured in other contexts.  
52  
53  
54

#### 55 **Cognitive Elements of Customer Experience**

1  
2 Cognitive processes are “higher mental processes, such as perception, memory, language,  
3  
4 problem solving, and abstract thinking” (APA, 2016). They have been studied in relation to  
5  
6 customer experience utilizing two different perspectives: attainment of goals and  
7  
8 (dis)confirmation of prior expectations.  
9

10  
11 The first perspective is rooted in the assumption that consumers are goal-directed in their  
12  
13 behaviour. For example, customers buy vitamins for health; they do grocery shopping in order to  
14  
15 enjoy food. Customers set up goals either consciously or unconsciously in specific contexts and  
16  
17 use consumption as an instrument to attain them (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999). The marketing  
18  
19 literature describes goal-directed behaviour as a cognitive process; attainment of goals is the  
20  
21 consequence this process (e.g., Baumgartner and Pieters, 2008). Thus, attainment of goals  
22  
23 constitutes one part of customer experience and reflecting on goal attainment is crucial to  
24  
25 evaluate the cognitive element of customer experience (Novak *et al.*, 2003).  
26  
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29

30 The second perspective is grounded on the assumption that customers have expectations  
31  
32 prior to choosing a service. Whether the actual customer experiences (dis)confirm those prior  
33  
34 expectations has been covered by research investigating (dis)satisfaction, which is a result of this  
35  
36 (dis)confirmation (e.g., Gentil *et al.*, 2007; Homburg *et al.*, 2006). Whereas early literature  
37  
38 operationalized the evaluation of (dis)confirmation and thus (dis)satisfaction as mainly  
39  
40 cognitively driven (e.g., Oliver, 1980; Bitner, 1990), later research has shown that both cognitive  
41  
42 and affective processes influence this evaluation (e.g., Wirtz and Bateson, 1999).  
43  
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45

### 46 ***Measuring the cognitive elements of Customer Experience***

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48  
49 Both of the aforementioned streams of literature have developed instruments to assess  
50  
51 goal achievement and expectation (dis)confirmation. In a perspective of goal attainment, some  
52  
53 studies measure benefits by examining goal achievement (e.g., Babin *et al.*, 1994), by evaluating  
54  
55 the consequence of consumption (e.g., Voss *et al.*, 2003), or by capturing post-consumption  
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1 emotions (e.g. Chitturi *et al.*, 2008). The first comprise such items as the extent to which  
2 customers accomplish goals while the latter two use adjectives (e.g., effective, helpful,  
3 stimulated, excited).  
4  
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6  
7

8  
9 With regard to (dis)confirmation of expectations, the literature offers various approaches  
10 that mainly differ in their 1) specificity towards a particular product and/or service, 2) separation  
11 of measurement of expectations and experiences/performance and 3) number of items. First,  
12 some measures of customer experience are context specific and measure the cognitive  
13 component of the experience with for example, the functionality, speed, or availability of  
14 accessories for a particular product and/or service (Gentil *et al.*, 2007); other measures try to  
15 capture the cognitive component of the experience on an abstract level that is usable by including  
16 any type of product and/or service, e.g. “My experience with using \_\_\_ was better than I  
17 expected” (Bhattacharjee, 2001, or similar Homburg *et al.*, 2006; Wirtz and Bateson, 1999).  
18  
19 Second, most research measures the fulfillment of expectations directly (e.g., Bhattacharjee,  
20 2001) even though literature has partly criticized direct measurement and suggested separating  
21 measuring expectations and experience (e.g., Brown *et al.*, 2008). Third, some authors have  
22 utilized multiple items to measure the (dis)confirmation (Bhattacharjee, 2001; Gentil *et al.*,  
23 2007) while others have only utilized one item to capture it (Homburg *et al.*, 2006).  
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### 42 **Emotional Elements of Customer Experience**

43  
44 Building upon earlier work that conceptualized consumer decision making as largely  
45 rational in nature, marketing and consumer behaviour scholars in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century  
46 highlighted the influence of emotions on consumer attitudes and responses to marketing  
47 activities (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Early studies of consumer emotions built upon work  
48 in the psychology literature, where researchers acknowledged the complex nature of emotions  
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1 and sought to address inherent difficulties in identifying, measuring and distinguishing between  
2  
3  
4 emotional states (e.g., Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980).  
5

6  
7 Several key challenges to measuring the emotional elements of consumer behaviour arose  
8  
9 out of this early research, including ambiguities regarding the structure and content of emotions  
10  
11 and their relevance to consumer behaviour (see Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Laros and Steenkamp,  
12  
13 2005). These studies approached consumer emotions in a variety of ways. Some conceptualized  
14  
15 them in terms of positive and negative affect (see Oliver, 1997; 2010). Others synthesized  
16  
17 emotion research into comprehensive consumption-related emotion sets (see Richins, 1997; Ruth  
18  
19 *et al.*, 2002) or concentrated on individual emotions such as joy and surprise (Arnold *et al.*, 2005;  
20  
21 Finn, 2005), delight (Oliver *et al.*, 1997), anger, rage, irritation, frustration, annoyance (McColl-  
22  
23 Kennedy *et al.*, 2003) and regret (see Tsiros and Mittal, 2000) and their relationship to consumer  
24  
25 outcomes like delight, satisfaction, disgust and outrage (see Parasuraman *et al.*, 2016; Bougie,  
26  
27 Pieters and Zeelenberg, 2003).  
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### 32 ***Measuring the emotional elements of Customer Experience***

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34  
35 This variety of approaches regarding the content and structure of emotions leads to  
36  
37 inconsistencies in efforts to measure the influence of emotions on customer experience. This is  
38  
39 particularly relevant in service contexts, since customer encounters with products, brands and  
40  
41 employees can lead to intense emotions (see Matilla and Enz, 2002) which influence key  
42  
43 customer outcomes like word of mouth (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos, 2008) and other metrics  
44  
45 such as loyalty, retention and share of wallet (Keiningham *et al.*, 2007).  
46  
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48

49 Richins (1997) conducted six empirical studies designed to develop an appropriate way to  
50  
51 measure customer related emotions. In the first study, Richins collected a large list of consumer  
52  
53 emotions in their own vocabulary, identifying 175 distinct emotion descriptors. Studies two  
54  
55 through four narrowed the list to a Consumption Emotion Set (CES) which were tested against  
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1  
2 key emotion measures (e.g. Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Izard, 1977; Havlena and Holbrook,  
3  
4 1986; Edell and Burke, 1987; Batra and Holbrook, 1990).

5  
6 The CES “represents the range of emotions consumers most frequently experience in  
7  
8 consumption situations” (Richins, 1997, p. 142) that capture a greater diversity of emotions than  
9  
10 measures designed without the consumption context in mind. It is important to note, however,  
11  
12 that the Richins does not deem CES to be a definitive assessment tool, rather a catalyst for  
13  
14 examining and measuring customer emotions. For that reason, we view the CES as a potential  
15  
16 route to understanding the emotional elements of customer experience, recognizing that emotions  
17  
18 are contextual in nature and that other scales (e.g., Brakus *et al.*, 2009) provide useful possible  
19  
20 frames.  
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### 25 **Physical and Sensorial Elements of Customer Experience**

26  
27 The physical environment, or ‘servicescape’ (Bitner, 1992), refers to the manmade, firm-  
28  
29 controllable surroundings within which service experience occurs. Offline servicescapes  
30  
31 comprise elements such as artifacts, music, lighting, layout and signage (Lam, 2001). Online  
32  
33 servicescape considerations focus on website features, such as consumer-friendly shopping  
34  
35 interfaces (Griffith, 2005) and design cues such as uncluttered screens and fast presentations  
36  
37 (Rose *et al.*, 2012). Customers’ interactions with servicescapes have been shown to influence  
38  
39 their experiences. For example, within offline settings, impacts are observed on satisfaction,  
40  
41 facility image perceptions, word of mouth behaviours and intentions to purchase (e.g. Reimer  
42  
43 and Kuehn, 2005; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996; Baker *et al.*, 1994). In online environments,  
44  
45 emotional and cognitive responses, such as satisfaction (Eroglu *et al.*, 2003), purchase intentions  
46  
47 (Harris and Goode, 2010) and loyalty (Koering, 2003) are observed. Given its broad acceptance  
48  
49 in existing literature, we adopt Bitner’s (1992) categorization of servicescape elements as  
50  
51 ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols and artifacts.  
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1  
2 Ambient conditions comprise background environmental stimuli (Grayson and McNeil,  
3  
4 2009), including visual (e.g., lighting, colors and shapes (Dijkstra *et al.*, 2008)), aesthetic  
5  
6 cleanliness, olfactory (e.g., scent and air quality (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001)), temperature (Reimer  
7  
8 and Kuehn, 2005), and auditory (e.g., music and noise (Garlin and Owen, 2006; Oakes and  
9  
10 North, 2008)) elements. Spatial layout refers to the manner in which items such as equipment  
11  
12 and furniture are arranged, their size and shape, and the space between them (Edvardsson *et al.*,  
13  
14 2010) and lesser observable elements such as comfort, accessibility (Wakefield and Blodgett,  
15  
16 1996 and functionality (Ng, 2003). In offline and online scenarios, spatial layout and  
17  
18 functionality considerations relate to design (Hultén, 2012) with outcomes linked to customer  
19  
20 perceptions, and behavioural responses such as unplanned purchase behaviour (Inman *et al.*,  
21  
22 2009), and increased sales and willingness to spend (Fiore *et al.*, 2000). In an online  
23  
24 environment, Rose *et al.* (2012) highlighted the relationship between ease of use (site navigation,  
25  
26 search and functionality) and cognitive perceptions of control. The self-service technology  
27  
28 research stream (Curran and Meuter, 2005) further emphasizes the importance of functionality  
29  
30 within servicescapes where customers need to perform the service. Signs symbols and artifacts  
31  
32 are used as communication tools to stimulate more abstract customer meaning-making  
33  
34 (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Thompson and Arsel, 2004).

### 35 ***Measuring the physical and sensorial elements of Customer Experience***

36  
37  
38 Within the marketing management domain, the physical and sensorial elements of  
39  
40 customer experience are typically measured using experimental methods: senses are manipulated  
41  
42 in field or lab-based experiments and customer emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses  
43  
44 are measured. While this approach to investigating physical and sensory interactions generates  
45  
46 valuable insight, the sensory experience itself is overlooked; that is, *what* the customer is sensing  
47  
48 when interacting with the physical environment and to *what extent* is not captured.  
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1  
2 Methods derived from alternative fields offer possible solutions to this limitation. For  
3  
4 instance, sounds heard by customers may be measured using a noise dose meter and the 'Decibel  
5  
6 A' scale (Liu and Tan, 2000; Hodge and Thompson, 1990). Taste may be measured using the  
7  
8 time intensity (TI) technique, whereby participants score the intensity of a specific flavor over a  
9  
10 given time period (Le Révérend *et al.*, 2008; Piggott, 2000), or by the temporal dominance of  
11  
12 sensation (TDS) technique, which captures the most dominant flavor (or indeed, sense) over time  
13  
14 (Pineau *et al.*, 2009). Alternatively, taste may be manipulated by the use of the glycoprotein  
15  
16 miraculin, which disrupts participant taste receptors (e.g., Litt and Shiv, 2012). TDS and TI  
17  
18 measures may also be applied to examinations of scent, as illustrated by Leclercq and Blancher  
19  
20 (2012), who also incorporated proton transfer mass spectrometry (PTR-MS) to measure the  
21  
22 volume of scent molecule within participants' noses. Similarly, recent developments in  
23  
24 measuring the physical elements of customer experience could be employed. In this respect, the  
25  
26 innovative physical dining environment design (IPDED) evaluation model is used, which  
27  
28 consists of a survey measuring four main dimensions: creativity, aesthetics, eco-friendliness and  
29  
30 performance (Horng *et al.*, 2013).  
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37 While these alternative approaches to physical and sensory measurement may in part  
38  
39 address the limitations of experimental techniques, they are limited by their non-naturalistic  
40  
41 nature. The advancement of technology, however, allows for a more naturalistic approach to the  
42  
43 measurement of the physical elements effects. For instance, the growing use of  
44  
45 neurophysiological methods enhances our understanding of consumer behaviour within  
46  
47 servicescapes. The use of eye tracking technology, for instance, is established in studies of shelf  
48  
49 space and layouts (Chandon *et al.*, 2009; Huneke *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, biometrics has grown  
50  
51 in popularity, capturing physiological and behavioural responses to external stimuli (Potter and  
52  
53 Bolls, 2012). Measurable physiological characteristics include fingerprints, hand geometry,  
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1 facial characteristics, iris, retina, personal scent and DNA, while behavioural characteristics  
2 include handwriting, keystroke, voice and gait (Jones *et al.*, 2007). Among the most commonly  
3 studied physiological responses within servicescape is heart rate, breathing, and skin  
4 conductance (Sheng and Joginapelly, 2012). Finally, fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance  
5 Imaging) is a noninvasive method that tracks changes in blood oxygenation during cognitive  
6 processes (Ogawa *et al.*, 1990). This method has been used to measure trust and distrust by  
7 capturing the location, timing, and level of brain activity that underlies trust and distrust in  
8 experimentally manipulated environments (Dimoka *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, techniques of  
9 spatial analysis involving diagrammatic plans have been used to identify the impact of layout  
10 upon customers' paths and behaviours within a particular physical environment (Peponis *et al.*,  
11 2004).

### 12 **The Social Elements of Customer Experience**

13 The social aspect of customer experience refers to the influence of staff, other customers,  
14 and wider social network(s) on a customer's experience with a brand (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). The  
15 interactions with and appearance of the service personnel, other customers, as well as customer's  
16 reference groups may affect his or her experience with a brand (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009).

17 Social identities are "mental representations that can become a basic part of how  
18 consumers view themselves" (Reed, 2004, p. 286). These include political and religious  
19 affiliation, as well as other lifestyle markers such as occupation, familial roles (e.g.,  
20 parent/child/sibling), or visible interests and activities (e.g., athlete, musician, artist, etc.).  
21 Individuals will typically have several social identities. Identity salience refers to a temporary  
22 state during which one (or more) of a consumer's social identities comes to the fore (Forehand *et*  
23 *al.*, 2002). Congruence between salient social identities and other social influences and elements  
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1 such as product and/or service offerings and advertising are therefore expected to positively  
2  
3 influence consumer choice.  
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6 In their description of the determinants, dynamics and strategies for creating customer  
7 experiences, Verhoef *et al.* (2009) explore the manner in which customers act in groups and how  
8 firms might foster these interactions in person and/or online. In particular, they raise the question  
9 of whether the social environment be successfully designed and managed in a way that makes it  
10 possible to design metrics to assess its performance.  
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### 17 ***Measuring the social elements of Customer Experience*** 18

19 The variety and multitude of individual, group and networked influences on customer  
20 experience poses a challenge in terms of developing consistent and uniform measurement tools  
21 to capture the social element of customer experience. However, it is critical to capture the social  
22 experience as one of the key determinants of customer experience (De Keyser *et al.*, 2015).  
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29 Given the highly contextual, cultural and fluid nature of social encounters in the marketplace, a  
30 simplistic or singular approach to measurement would not be sufficient to account for the  
31 complexity of social interactions surrounding customer's engagement with a brand.  
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37 These socio-cultural elements of customer experience inspired the interpretive research  
38 tradition and its varied approaches (e.g., ethnography, netnography, depth interviews, case  
39 studies, semiotics, metaphor analysis, etc.) to uncover the unique social aspects of customer  
40 behaviour in multiple and varied contexts (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005; 2008 for review).  
41 This stream of research underscores the importance and fluidity of the social aspect of consumer  
42 behaviour.  
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50 Overall, the preceding sections examine customer experience as a multi-dimensional  
51 construct (Gentil *et al.*, 2007) and highlight the complexity of practicing customer experience  
52 management and measuring customer experience within and across these multiple domains. In  
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1  
2 the following section we propose a framework for examining customer experience, using  
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4 customer satisfaction measurement as a proxy for the assessment of customer experience and  
5  
6 customer commitment as a proxy for customer loyalty.  
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9

## 10 11 **COMMITMENT AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE** 12

13  
14 Managers' interest in the customer experience results from a general belief that  
15  
16 enhancing customer experience will result in greater loyalty to the firm or brand. As loyalty  
17  
18 represents "a deeply held commitment" that results in repeat purchasing behaviour (Oliver, 1999,  
19  
20 p. 34), *commitment* is the customer attitude that managers are seeking to influence in the hope of  
21  
22 engendering increased purchase behaviours. Once achieved, however, customer commitment has  
23  
24 the potential to influence customers' perceptions of subsequent experiences.  
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26

27  
28 We acknowledge that, to date, there is little research on the influence of commitment on  
29  
30 perceptions of customer experience. There is, however, a body of evidence regarding the  
31  
32 relationship between customer satisfaction and commitment. While satisfaction represents the  
33  
34 level of *fulfillment* achieved through customers' experiences with a brand (as opposed to the  
35  
36 more granular elements that *comprise* customer experience), we argue that satisfaction is an  
37  
38 appropriate surrogate for assessing the potential of different commitment dimensions to  
39  
40 influence perceptions of customer experience. The following section provides further evidence  
41  
42 for this relationship.  
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### 46 47 **Customer Satisfaction and Commitment: An Overview** 48

49  
50 Research regarding the order of influence between satisfaction and commitment is not  
51  
52 resolved. In the literature, there are four competing models: 1) satisfaction influences  
53  
54 commitment, i.e., satisfaction → commitment (e.g. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler  
55  
56 2002), 2) commitment influences satisfaction, i.e., commitment → satisfaction (e.g., Bateman  
57  
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1 and Strasser 1984), 3) satisfaction and commitment have a reciprocal relationship, i.e.,  
2 satisfaction ↔ commitment (e.g. Farkas and Tetrick 1989), and 4) no causal relationship exists  
3  
4  
5  
6 between satisfaction and commitment, i.e. satisfaction ⇌ commitment (e.g. Anderson and  
7  
8 Williams 1992). Most of the research investigating the causal order of satisfaction and  
9  
10 commitment comes from the organizational behaviour literature. The following section  
11  
12 describes this relationship in support of our assertion that satisfaction is an appropriate surrogate  
13  
14 for assessing the potential for commitment dimensions to influence perceptions of customer  
15  
16 experience.  
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20  
21 The majority of researchers in this area presume that job satisfaction is an antecedent to  
22  
23 organizational commitment (e.g., Steers, 1977; Williams and Hazer, 1986). The underlying  
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25 reasoning behind the generally accepted view is articulated by Porter *et al.* (1974, p. 608):  
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28 *“a relatively greater amount of time would be required for an employee to determine his*  
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30 *level of commitment to the organization than would be the case with his level of job*  
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32 *satisfaction. This process is likely to result in a stable and enduring level of commitment.*  
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34 *On the other hand, the degree of one’s job satisfaction ... may represent a more rapidly*  
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36 *formed affective response than does commitment.”*  
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40 Therefore, the rapid formation of satisfaction when compared to the longer-term development of  
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42 commitment suggests that it is satisfaction that leads to commitment (Williams and Hazer,  
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44 1986). Despite the seeming logic of this argument, however, researchers find conflicting  
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46 evidence.  
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50 Bateman and Strasser (1984), Dosset and Suszko (1990), and Vandenberg and Lance  
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52 (1992) find that organizational commitment is an antecedent to job satisfaction. The underlying  
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54 theoretical arguments as to why this would be the case draw largely from cognitive dissonance  
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56 theory (Festinger, 1957). Specifically, cognitive dissonance theory proposes that when an  
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1 individual's voluntarily performed behaviour contradicts a previously formed attitude it causes  
2 dissonance, and as a result the individual rationalizes his/her counter-attitudinal behaviour.  
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5 Specifically, Bateman and Strasser (1984, p. 97) argue, "commitment initiates a rationalizing  
6 process through which individuals 'make sense' of their current situation by developing attitudes  
7 (satisfaction) that are consistent with their commitment."  
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13 Because models 1 and 2 (e.g., satisfaction → commitment and commitment →  
14 satisfaction) can be supported by theory, and empirical evidence can be found for both models,  
15 some researchers have suggested that the relationship between the two constructs may be  
16 reciprocal (e.g., satisfaction ↔ commitment). Farkas and Tetrick (1989) specifically advocate  
17 this model based upon the results of their investigation, suggesting that "commitment and  
18 satisfaction may be either cyclically or reciprocally related (p. 855)."  
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28 Finally, Curry *et al.* (1986) and Anderson and Williams (1992) find no temporal  
29 relationship between the two constructs. The underlying hypothesis for why this might be the  
30 case is that job satisfaction (JS) and organizational commitment (OC) are thought to be  
31 correlated due to "common causal variables...thus observed JS-OC correlations may reflect the  
32 fact that JS and OC share common antecedents, but are not causally related" (Vandenberg and  
33 Lance, 1992, p. 155).  
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42 In the marketing literature, most researchers similarly presume that satisfaction is an  
43 antecedent to commitment (e.g., Bansal *et al.*, 2004; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Hennig-  
44 Thureau *et al.*, 2002). As Brown and colleagues (2005, p. 133) note, "it is difficult to imagine a  
45 consumer developing a committed relationship ... without having experienced satisfaction from  
46 exchanges with [a firm]."  
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53 As is the case in the organizational behaviour literature, however, there is conflicting  
54 evidence regarding the direction of influence of satisfaction and commitment. For example,  
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2 Verhoef (2003) finds that affective commitment, not satisfaction, predicts retention when both  
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4 variables are included in the model. This would seem to imply that commitment is closer to  
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6 customer behaviour than is satisfaction in the commonly presumed chain of effects (e.g.,  
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8 satisfaction → commitment → retention). Gustafsson *et al.* (2005), however, find the opposite  
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10 result; that affective commitment does not predict customer retention when it is included with  
11  
12 customer satisfaction in their models, which implies the reverse order for satisfaction and  
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14 commitment (e.g., commitment → satisfaction → retention). Additionally, using a competing  
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16 models approach designed specifically to investigate the directionality between customer  
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18 satisfaction and affective commitment, Johnson *et al.* (2008) find that commitment influences  
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20 satisfaction.  
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26 As with research into organizational commitment and job satisfaction, cognitive  
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28 dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), offers a plausible explanation as to why commitment would  
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30 be an antecedent to satisfaction. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1967, 1972), and biased scanning  
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32 (Janis and King, 1954), also offer plausible explanations.  
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36 Self-perception theory proposes that when people are asked to report an attitude, they  
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38 simply infer this attitude from implications of past behaviour (e.g., if I did it, it must have been  
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40 desirable) (Albarracín and Wyer, 2000; Bem, 1967, 1972). Biased scanning proposes that “after  
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42 people have engaged in a particular behaviour they often conduct a biased search of memory for  
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44 previously acquired knowledge that confirms the legitimacy of their act ... They may then ...  
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46 form a new attitude toward the behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), and this attitude, in turn,  
47  
48 might influence both their intentions to repeat the behaviour and their actual decision to do so  
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50 when the occasion arises” (Albarracín and Wyer, 2000, p. 6). It appears logical that in addition to  
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52 attitude formation, each of these theories would extend to customers’ perceptions of satisfaction.  
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2 To date, marketing scholars have not confirmed that satisfaction and commitment are  
3 reciprocal. Similarly, there is nothing in the marketing literature to suggest that satisfaction and  
4 commitment are not causally related to one another.  
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9 As noted earlier, both satisfaction → commitment, and commitment → satisfaction are  
10 theoretically supportable. Oliver's (1999, 2010) research into the relationship between  
11 satisfaction and loyalty may offer additional insight into when we might be more likely to expect  
12 one direction of influence over the other. Specifically, Oliver observes that repeated high levels  
13 of satisfaction are necessary to engender consumer loyalty, but at some point it is possible for  
14 loyalty to become independent of satisfaction. Therefore, if customers have become loyal to a  
15 firm or brand whereby they continue to repurchase "despite situational influences and marketing  
16 efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34), cognitive  
17 dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1967, 1972) suggest that  
18 customers' behavioural loyalty would be expected to influence their perceptions of the  
19 satisfactoriness of encounters with the firm/brand.  
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35 Furthermore, as Oliver (2010) argues, loyalty attitudes and behaviours result from  
36 repeated encounters, thus it may be that the commitment-satisfaction relationship is stronger for  
37 some product/service categories than for others (e.g., repeat usage products/service categories  
38 may be more prone to the commitment → satisfaction order of influence than single usage or low  
39 repetition product/service categories).  
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46 While we acknowledge that these perspectives may raise more questions than answers  
47 regarding the relationship between the customer perception of experience (in this case, the  
48 consumer's level of fulfillment regarding the consumption experience, i.e. satisfaction) and  
49 commitment, we contend that the five-component model of customer commitment (Keiningham  
50 *et al.*, 2015) provides a useful framework for exploring these concepts. The following section  
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1 describes the relationships between satisfaction and affective, normative, forced, habitual and  
2 economic commitment.  
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### 5 **Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment and Customer Satisfaction**

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7 It is important to note that satisfaction → commitment relationship is typically presumed  
8 for affective commitment only. Research measuring commitment as a unidimensional construct,  
9 which represents the overwhelming majority of commitment-related research in marketing,  
10 typically conceptualizes the commitment construct as a positive affect-based commitment (see  
11 Keiningham *et al.*, 2015). Very little research has been conducted regarding the direction of  
12 influence between satisfaction and other forms of commitment (the notable exception being  
13 Cramer (1996), discussed later).  
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25 The theoretical arguments regarding why affective commitment would influence  
26 satisfaction (i.e., cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), self-perception theory (Bem,  
27 1967), and biased scanning (Janis and King, 1954)), however, appear equally valid for why  
28 normative commitment (i.e. a bond based upon an obligation/duty) would be expected to  
29 influence satisfaction. Furthermore, research shows that moral obligation “has independent  
30 effects on behavioural intentions ... [and] may affect attitudes themselves” (Sparks and Shepherd  
31 2002, p. 299). Here too, it appears logical that this would extend to perceptions of satisfaction.  
32 In fact, we witness this frequently with regard to ideological commitments. For example,  
33 research finds that political party affiliation influences perceptions (Kaplan *et al.*, 2007). In some  
34 cases, this results in a suspicion of the motives of opposing party members regarding behaviours  
35 that are not deemed suspicious of in-party members. Clearly, such motivated suspicion towards  
36 out-group individuals and presumed acceptableness towards in-group individuals would  
37 influence satisfaction levels regarding the same behaviours performed by members of these two  
38 groups.  
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## Continuance Commitment and Customer Satisfaction

Continuance commitment as conceptualized in the literature comprises three components: forced commitment, habitual commitment, and economic commitment. Unlike previous commitment models that reflect three components, Keiningham *et al.* (2015) find that these three components are distinct commitment constructs, and result in different consumer outcomes. With regard to the relationship between continuance commitment and satisfaction, to date no researcher has explicitly offered theoretical arguments as to why one construct would be expected to influence the other. Thus far it appears that only Cramer (1996) has sought to explicitly examine the direction of influence, specifically examining the relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment. Cramer found no temporal relationship between the constructs. Whether or not this reflects the actual or typical relationship between satisfaction and continuance commitment cannot be assessed by this study alone. It does, however, reflect a need to examine more closely the relationship between the three components of continuance commitment (e.g., forced, habitual, and economic) and satisfaction. Specifically, we propose that these commitment dimensions would be expected to influence satisfaction, not the other way around.

### *Forced Commitment and Customer Satisfaction*

With regard to forced commitment, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where an individual's level of satisfaction would influence his/her general belief that he/she had few alternatives. It is, however, very easy to imagine scenarios where commitment based upon a lack of alternatives would influence satisfaction (and perceptions of customer experience). Research in psychology and marketing supports the need for self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985), and that a lack of freedom of choice leads to negative psychological outcomes (Averill, 1973; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Langer and Rodin, 1976; Wortman, 1975). In fact, in a clear indication of

1 the influence of constraint-based commitment and satisfaction, the marketing literature  
2 frequently refers to customers who perceive no viable alternatives with variations on the word  
3 captive: e.g., “trapped” (Fournier *et al.*, 1998), “hostages” (Jones and Sasser, 1995) and  
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9 “prisoners” (Curasi and Kennedy, 2002).

### 10 ***Habitual Commitment and Customer Satisfaction***

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12 With regard to habitual commitment, research indicates that it is not guided by consumer  
13 attitudes or intentions (Ji and Wood, 2007; Liu-Thompkins and Tam, 2010). Therefore, once  
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With regard to habitual commitment, research indicates that it is not guided by consumer attitudes or intentions (Ji and Wood, 2007; Liu-Thompkins and Tam, 2010). Therefore, once behaviour has become a habit, satisfaction would not be expected to materially alter the behaviour. For example, Neal *et al.* (2009; Wood and Neal, 2009) showed that habitual popcorn eaters ate the same amount of popcorn at a movie theater regardless of whether or not the popcorn was fresh or stale. As would be expected, however, consumers of the stale popcorn reported being much less satisfied with the popcorn.

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Researchers in psychology find that habitual behaviour causes individuals to infer attitudes from implications of their behaviour as per self-perception theory (Bem 1967). Specifically, Wood and Neal (2009, p. 584) argue, “Because people have limited introspective access to the implicit cognitive associations that guide their habits (e.g., Beilock and Carr, 2001; Foerde *et al.*, 2006), they are forced to infer the relevant internal states from external behaviours and the contexts in which the behaviours occur (Bem, 1972).” As a result, inferring from self-perception theory, habitual commitment would be expected to influence satisfaction perceptions.

### 46 ***Economic Commitment and Customer Satisfaction***

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With regard to economic commitment (e.g. customers cognitive appraisals of his or her investment in the brand/provider (Keiningham, *et al.*, 2015)), here too we would expect the primary direction of influence to be from commitment to satisfaction. The underlying reason for

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2 this is intuitive; economic utility clearly influences satisfaction with an encounter and with the  
3  
4 entire firm-customer relationship, not the other way around (Turley and Fugate, 1993).  
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7 Taken together, these findings have important implications regarding the direction of  
8  
9 influence of satisfaction and commitment. Theory appears to support the idea that continuance  
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11 commitment should influence satisfaction. Also, there appears to be strong theoretical support  
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13 that the same direction of influence should hold for normative commitment.  
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16 With regard to affective commitment, theory and logic indicate that commitment would  
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18 lead to satisfaction for new customers. But for repeat usage products/services by experienced  
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20 customers, there appears to be strong theoretical support that the primary direction of influence is  
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22 from commitment to satisfaction.  
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25 As satisfaction is reflection of customers' fulfillment resulting from their experiences, by  
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27 logical extension there is strong theoretical support that customers' perceptions of their  
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29 experiences will be influenced by their level and type of commitment to a firm or brand. This  
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31 implies that measuring customer experience without a clear understanding of the type and level  
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33 of commitment held by the customer will be difficult for managers to interpret. For example,  
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35 objectively similar experiences involving two different firms—one to whom the customer has a  
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37 strong affective commitment, the other to which she feels a forced commitment—are likely to be  
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39 perceived very differently by the customer.  
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45 This reflects the intrinsic difficulty in measuring and managing customer experience  
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47 discussed earlier. Indeed, customer experience is “inherently personal and unique to the  
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49 individual customer” (De Keyser *et al.*, 2015, p. 15).  
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## 51 52 **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

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54 There exists no general consensus among researchers or practitioners regarding the  
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56 aspects of customer experience that require assessment and metrics and the relationship between  
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1 customer experience and other more established marketing constructs. This article explores the  
2 relationship between customer experience and commitment in order to better understand the  
3 customer experience concept.  
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8 Managers have demonstrated a propensity to gravitate to flawed but simple metrics when  
9 confronted with complexity (Little, 1970; 2004). Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a scenario  
10 where C-level managers (e.g., chief executive officers, chief marketing officers, chief operations  
11 officers, etc.) are regularly monitoring their firms' performance on all relevant elements of  
12 customer experience.  
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20 The ultimate goal of improving customer experience—to foster customer commitment to  
21 the brand—impacts how customers perceive their experiences. This has very important  
22 implications for managers. As each commitment dimension tends to correspond to a particular  
23 firm strategy, managers need to recognize that the type of commitment fostered will impact the  
24 lens through which customers view the experience. For example, many service firms seek to  
25 enhance economic commitment through the use of loyalty rewards programs. Economically  
26 committed customers, however, may be less sensitive to softer, more affective enhancing  
27 elements of customer experience.  
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39 These findings provide strong support of the need for new research into customer  
40 experience and customer commitment. Several areas of research into these concepts are of  
41 critical importance. First, researchers need to identify empirically the most salient attributes of  
42 customer experience with particular emphasis on those elements that enhance commitment to the  
43 firm or brand. Second, research needs to be conducted that specifically examines the differing  
44 impact of the five dimensions of commitment on customers' perceptions of their experiences  
45 (including, but not limited to the CE of satisfaction explored here). These findings should offer  
46 insight into service design to correspond with specific commitment and experience dimensions.  
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Additionally, we note three customer experience-specific issues worthy of further consideration. First, each of the five senses has empirically highlighted relationships with emotional and cognitive responses. Relatedly, Bitner (1992) recognized that, despite the firm-controlled nature of servicescapes, customers are also affected by social and natural stimuli within the service environment. Consequently, it seems there is a contribution from the sensorial and the physical to the emotional, cognitive and social elements of the customer experience. From a measurement perspective, it may therefore be more parsimonious to measure at the emotional, cognitive, physical and social level, applying specific sensory measures only in the event that a detailed diagnostic is required. The research of Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) could bring some clarity into this complex area. Their classification of services as consumption-centric, social-centric, and experience-centric categories may offer guidelines as to which physical and sensorial aspects are likely to be impactful in a particular service setting. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011), for instance, propose that a customer using a consumption-centric service, such as a self-service technology, may react more strongly to physical dimensions, while a customer within an experience-centric context, such as a theatre, may respond more strongly to the setting's social, socially symbolic, and natural dimensions.

Second, although measures assess the effect of individual or multiple sensorial and physical dimensions, it is the overall and holistic assessment of the physical environment and the related sensorial experiences that dictates customers' response to it (Mari and Poggesi, 2013). Sensory perception itself is dynamic and not a single event (Piggott, 2000). Consequently, accurate and informative measurement of the sensory elements of customer experience requires a continuous, real-time functionality. Additionally, in generating information for the customer, the five senses rarely function in isolation. Rather, customer experiences are typically multi-sensory

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2 (Cornil and Chandon, 2015) with associations between sensory features. Consequently, measures  
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4 of the sensory elements of customer will need to reflect this multi-sensory integration.  
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7 Third, customer responses to physical and associated sensory stimuli are moderated by  
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9 various individual characteristics. For instance, responses to visual cues within a physical  
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11 environment are impacted by customer involvement and atmospheric responsiveness (Eroglu *et*  
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13 *al.*, 2003) while individuals vary in their ‘need for touch’ (Peck and Childers, 2003).  
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15 Furthermore, studies show that reactions to music vary with age (Gulas and Schewe, 1994) and  
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17 gender (Raajpoot *et al.*, 2008; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1993). While this is by no means an  
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19 exhaustive list of possible moderating factors, it further highlights the multi-dimensional nature  
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21 of CE and the requirement to capture individual customer characteristics when measuring its  
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23 cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial and social elements.  
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28 In summary, understanding the relationship between customer experience and customer  
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30 commitment is critical to achieving what Peter Drucker described as the goal of every business:  
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32 “To create a customer” (Drucker, 1974, p. 61). The complexity of the experience and its  
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34 relationship to commitment, however, helps explain why firms often fail to deliver exceptional  
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36 experiences for their customers. Nonetheless, by continually advancing our understanding,  
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38 service researchers can provide managers with important insights into not only the challenges but  
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40 also potential solutions for holistically managing customer experience. We are hopeful that this  
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42 research will catalyze further examination of these questions in a variety of service contexts.  
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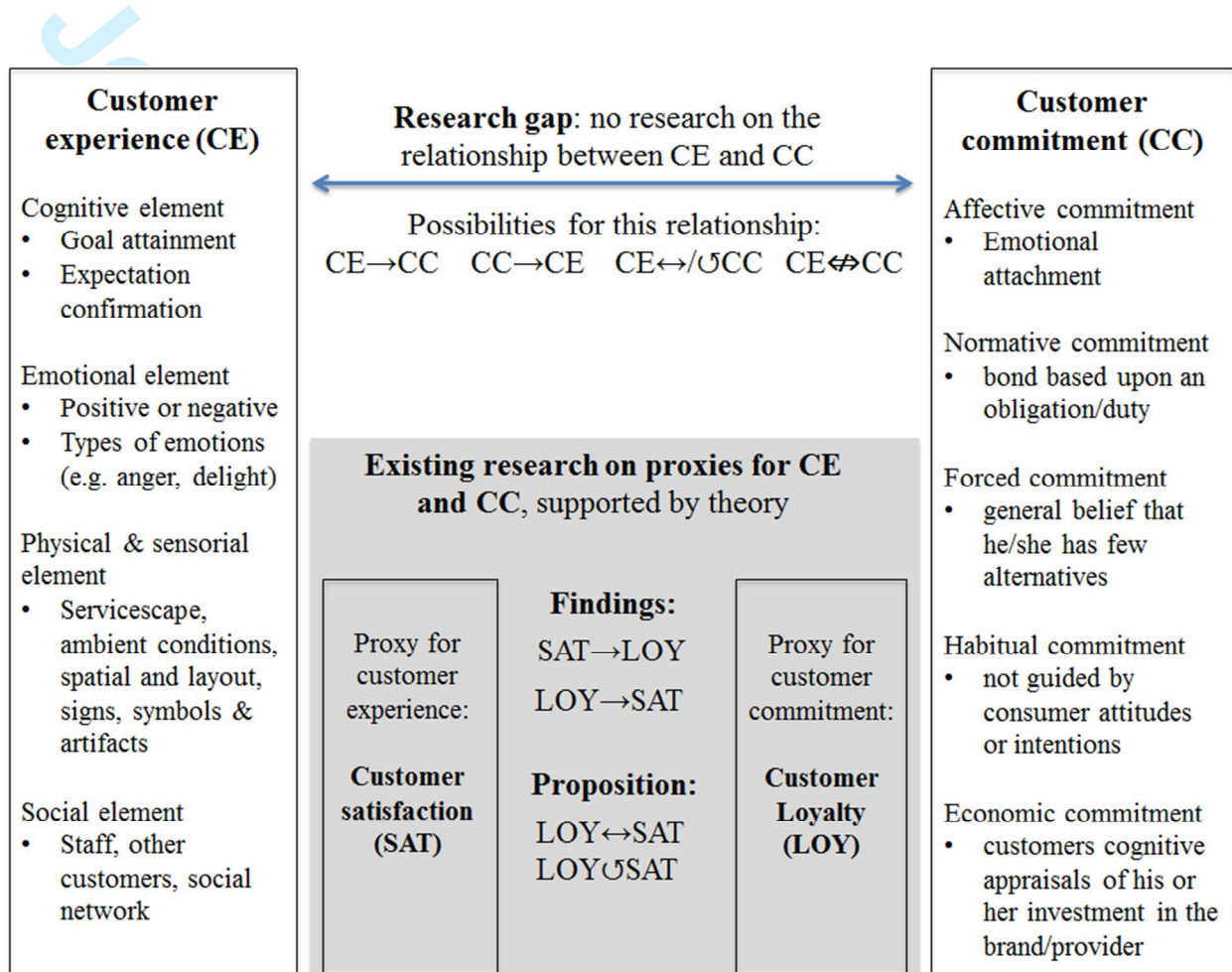
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FIGURE 1

Framework for Examining the Relationship Between Customer Experience and Customer Commitment



# Customer experience (CE)

- Cognitive element
  - Goal attainment
  - Expectation confirmation
- Emotional element
  - Positive or negative
  - Types of emotions (e.g. anger, delight)
- Physical & sensorial element
  - Servicescape, ambient conditions, spatial and layout, signs, symbols & artifacts
- Social element
  - Staff, other customers, social network

**Research gap:** no research on the relationship between CE and CC



Possibilities for this relationship:  
CE→CC   CC→CE   CE↔/∪CC   CE↔≠CC

# Customer commitment (CC)

- Affective commitment
  - Emotional attachment
- Normative commitment
  - bond based upon an obligation/duty
- Forced commitment
  - general belief that he/she has few alternatives
- Habitual commitment
  - not guided by consumer attitudes or intentions
- Economic commitment
  - customers cognitive appraisals of his or her investment in the brand/provider

## Existing research on proxies for CE and CC, supported by theory

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Proxy for customer experience:<br><br><b>Customer satisfaction (SAT)</b> | <b>Findings:</b><br>SAT→LOY<br>LOY→SAT<br><br><b>Proposition:</b><br>LOY↔SAT<br>LOY∪SAT | Proxy for customer commitment:<br><br><b>Customer Loyalty (LOY)</b> |
|--|---|---|