

# **An Assessment of Brand Experience Knowledge Literature: Using Bibliometrics to Identify Future Research Direction**

## **Abstract**

There is wide consensus that the brand experience literature (BEL) suffers from a deficit in conceptual works. This study argues that, for brand experience research to overcome its conceptual insipidity, it must reexamine the core of its intellectual structure to rediscover what ‘an experience provided by brands’ truly implies. The purpose of this paper is to reconceptualize and present a future research framework for research into the concept of brand experience, by identifying both the core and peripheral sources of knowledge of the concept and its association with brand meaning. Through a bibliometric process covering 136 articles published between 2002 and 2018, resulting in a database of 2,698 citations, this brand experience conceptual paper fills a critical research gap by providing the first full-scale bibliometric study to date of the BEL, using a combination of high citation and co-citation metrics. Based on this conceptual reorientation, a matrix for future development is presented, enabling the reader to visualize the scope and breadth of potential brand experience research horizons in areas relating to customer experience, consumer-brand relationship, online brand experience and sensory brand experience. The four approaches listed in the matrix – firm-based, social constructionist, virtuality and embodiment – provide a roadmap for future brand experience research undertakings to explore the rich potential of experience evoked by brands.

*Keywords:* Brand experience; brand experience literature; experience marketing; intellectual structure; multidimensional scaling

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## Introduction

Brands that offer the best overall experiences are now some of the most valuable assets in the world. Amazon, which made the delivery of a frictionless experience for the customer the core of its brand proposition, has now risen to the top of BrandZ's 100 most valuable global brands (Financial Times 2019). In the same way, the video streaming brand Netflix, with its ability to deliver a seamless home video experience, is now among the fastest rising brands in the annual rankings, adding 65% to its brand value between 2018 and 2019 to reach a total of \$34.3bn. The Financial Times report concluded that this trend validated the view that brands offering a total experience versus those simply selling products were now more popular with both the consumer and the investment community.

In academia, on the other hand, researchers are only now coming around to an awareness of the impact of experiences provided by brands. While the origins of the experiential approach can be traced back to the seminal study by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), for most of the past three decades, the branding factor in consumer experience has not been seriously investigated on its own merits. Most would agree that the publication of the 2009 paper by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello represents the formal conceptualization of brand experience (BE) as an independent construct. If we use MacInnis's (2011) definition of marketing constructs as 'abstract, hypothetical concepts' with dimensions that can be 'operationalised or measured' (p. 141), then Brakus *et al.*'s (2009) paper represented a research marker. It offered, for the first time, a definition of a consumer experience evoked by brands, a defined set of dimensions and, crucially, empirical evidence to differentiate the concept from other constructs such as brand attachment, brand personality or brand involvement (Andreini *et al.* 2019).

Since then, many facets of BE research have been investigated, including brand relationship experience (e.g. Merrilees 2016), innovative brand experience (e.g. Lin 2015), service brand experience (e.g. Ngo *et al.* 2016), corporate brand experience (e.g. Shamim *et al.* 2016) and

online brand experience (e.g. Jiménez Barreto *et al.* 2019). While research enthusiasm for exploring the various permutations is encouraging, there is wide consensus that the brand experience literature (BEL) at its core still suffers from a deficit in conceptual work. In a recent review summarizing BE research, Andreini *et al.* (2019) observed with much disquiet that, since the first conceptual models proposed by Schmitt (1999<sub>b</sub>) and Brakus *et al.* (2009), no studies had made a critical assessment or theoretical evaluation of the essence of the BE construct. In the decade since then, research has been primarily focused on externalizing the relationship between BE and other brand variables, and not on internalizing what ‘an experience provided by brands’ truly represents.

Based on these observations, we assert that a rigorous examination of its foundational intellectual structure to achieve a broader and deeper conceptualization of the BEL is required. This paper fills this research gap by providing the first full-scale bibliometric analysis to date of the BEL’s intellectual structure using a combination of high citation and co-citation metrics. The deployment of bibliometrics is apt at this juncture because this type of literary analysis has the attested ability to ascertain how disciplines evolve by producing a retrospective description of the ‘invisible colleges of influence’ (Price 1965) that have had a hand in shaping the BE construct. Identifying these invisible colleges of influence, and recognizing how they are captive to domain-specific traditions or intellectual dispositions (White and McCain 1998), provides us with the means to arrive at a more nuanced interpretation of the BEL’s intellectual structure.

A discerning deployment of appropriate bibliometric tools also offers researchers a quantitative basis on which to conduct an objective analysis of BE’s intellectual status quo, a useful supplement to the qualitative reviews published so far. While it is true that the BEL domain has been well served by several literature reviews (Andreini *et al.* 2019; Khan and Rahman 2015; Schmitt *et al.* 2014), so far, an analysis of the BEL’s knowledge structure from

a bibliometric perspective remains unavailable. While literature reviews provide researchers with an overview of the thematic flow of thoughts, they are limited by the inability to pinpoint with empirical certainty the suppositions and sources underlying these ideas. For instance, an earlier review by Schmitt *et al.* (2014) was more an introspective essay in which the original authors reflected on the development of the BEL since the publication of Brakus *et al.* (2009), whereas the present study takes a domain-wide perspective. Khan *et al.* (2015), adopting the Meredith *et al.* (1989) framework, provided an interesting map of methodologies and approaches drawn from an analysis of 73 BE papers. While parts of the computation were insightful, overall the resulting framework the authors offered was still an antecedent/consequence model. The most recent substantial contribution is Andreini *et al.*'s (2019) systematic review. While the paper offered an in-depth ontological and epistemological assessment of the BEL, the lack of literary support through some form of information analytics somewhat undermined the robustness of the authors' literary perspectives. De Oliveira Santini *et al.*'s (2018) meta-analysis, which had the expressed objective of investigating empirical correlations between BE and other brand constructs, provided an analysis on the impact of BE on other brand performance variables. This present review, on the other hand, looks beyond the antecedent/consequence axis to examine the underlying theoretical strata of the BEL's intellectual structure. In view of these research gaps in the BEL, the bibliometric approach offers a much-needed literary scaffolding on which further BE conceptual work can be firmly based and grounded.

Therefore, the objectives of this paper are: (1) to present an anatomy of the BEL's intellectual structure through a bibliometric analysis identifying both the core and peripheral sources of knowledge; (2) to reconceptualize the BE concept with brand meaning as a theoretical substrate; and (3) to present a future research framework outlining emergent areas of research for future research undertakings. Our bibliometric analysis makes four major

contributions to the BEL. Firstly, it provides the first systematic bibliometric analysis of the BEL using high-citation and co-citation metrics and multidimensional scaling visualizations. Secondly, it highlights the need to reconceptualize BE as an independent concept, highlighting its unique contribution to the consumption experience via a transaction involving brand symbols and brand meanings. Thirdly, it contributes to BE theory by extending the scope and relevance of BE research as it interfaces with other marketing domains, allowing us to identify emerging research themes that may not have received sufficient research attention in the BEL. Fourthly, it contributes to managerial knowledge by highlighting the important but often overlooked contributions of branding in the management of a total customer experience.

In the next section, a brief narrative tracing the evolutionary pathway of the BE idea is presented, with the goal of highlighting some of the research gaps and research concerns accrued in the BEL over the years. Then we present the method used to conduct our analysis. Following that, we describe how the citation data extracted from the BEL are used for co-citation analysis. After evaluating the BEL's knowledge structure, we offer a discussion and a matrix that identifies opportunities for future research based on our findings.

### ***Overview of brand experience***

The twinning of 'brand' and 'experience' can be traced back to the 1950s, when Gardner and Levy (1955) first offered a definition of brand image as the accrual of a variety of experiences. However, the seminal work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) is more usually regarded as the starting point (Carù and Cova 2003). Pitted against the then-popular rationally based information processing model (Schmitt 2011), Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) articulated a refreshing view on consumer behaviour, highlighting the previously disparaged hedonico-sensory aspects of consumption experiences.

In the years that followed, consumption studies continued apace with investigations into a range of experiential products, including sports, games and other leisure activities (Holbrook

*et al.* 1984). These included the high-adrenalin experience of white-water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993) and the high-risk experience of sky-diving (Celsi *et al.* 1993), and focused on understanding consumption experience from the vantage point of extraordinary activities. At this stage, the study of consumption experience was essentially product-neutral and brand-blind. The research was focused not on the stimulant side of consumption activities such as marketing mix, branding or product positioning, but on the behavioural response arising from consumption events. As a result of this research disposition, the transactional and branding aspects of the consumption experience took a back seat, while the psychological, anthropological and social observations of consumption behaviour stayed in the front. But the omission of the branding factor meant much more than simply the absence of firm-driven symbols and identifiers: it promoted a narrow and homogeneous view of market exchange based on the exchange of abstract or singular resources (Hirschman 1987). As a result of the brand-averse mindset, the categorical use of the term 'brand experience' as a marketing nomenclature remained sparse throughout this period. The only example is Ortmeyer and Huber (1991) examining the effect of brand experience in moderating the negative impact of promotion. Similarly, references were made in Kim and Sullivan's (1998) examination of how experience with a parent brand had a predictive influence on consumers' expectations. However, these early references to BE had a more generalized and generic meaning than its later usage.

The new vision of the consumer emerging in consumer behavioural studies did, however, have an important catalytic effect (Cova and Cova 2012). It provided the impetus for a managerial response to the impending challenge (Pine and Gilmore 1998, 1999; Schmitt 1999a) of considering the consumer as both rational and emotional. According to Schmitt (*ibid.* p. 22), price and product quality differentials could no longer satisfy the consumer: what seized their attention was the creation of product experiences that could appeal to their senses and

emotions. The benefits of enhancing consumption experience thus became an important selling point. This concept of experiential marketing rapidly caught on, and by the early 2000s a great deal of research interest had been generated across the marketing research spectrum. Noted researchers in the practitioner press such as Moore (2002) and Berry *et al.* (2002) were already suggesting that the conveyance of brand characteristics was best facilitated through the delivery of a brand-related experience, while academics as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), writing in the context of value co-creation, emphasized the symbiotic relationship between the brand and customer experience. In the new marketing paradigm, according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), the co-creation experience and the brand become embedded in each other. In the end, the ‘co-creation experience is the brand’ (p. 134).

Until this point, researchers had used different terms in experiential studies interchangeably, referring to brand experience, consumer experience, customer experience and consumption experience without attending to the nuances that exist between them. Carù and Cova (2003) were the first authors to address these typological ambiguities, putting forward a schema to distinguish consumption experiences from consumer experiences. What differentiates a consumption experience from a customer experience is that a customer experience is defined on the basis of a transaction in the marketplace. Throughout these changes in experiential theory and typology, branding as a factor remained inert in the backdrop, never fully exploited in the experience marketing literature on its own merit.

Another source of parallel conceptual development emerging from service marketing coalesced in the term ‘customer experience’. Using customer service encounters as the primary frame of reference, Gupta and Vajic (2000) referred to customer experience as ‘a customer’s interaction with different aspects of a context created by the service provider’ (p. 34). Later, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) defined customer experience as ‘multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to

a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey' (p. 3). While the multi-dimensionality of the construct shares commonalities with the BE concept, compared with BE, customer experience represents a higher order construct, an umbrella construct with service experience, product experience, retail experience and, of course, BE under its conceptual wing.

Again, it is noted that customer experience research, which has gained significant momentum in the past 20 years, has in large part been conceptualized brand-neutral. No major customer experience reviews to date have been able to articulate with any clarity the unique contribution of BE to the overall customer experience, nor has any significant effort been invested in the integration of BE ideas into customer experience management models (Kranzbühler *et al.* 2018; Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Verhoef *et al.* 2009).

In the early 2000s, researchers across the spectrum of experiential studies felt the need for consolidation. Carù and Cova (2003) sought to broaden the scope of enquiry from the extraordinary to ordinary experiences. Researchers in experiential marketing areas also realized there was an urgent need to attend to the task of conceptualization. The result was the publication of the paper 'Brand Experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty?' in the *Journal of Marketing* (Brakus *et al.* 2009). Writing in an editorial note published in anticipation of the publication, Schmitt (2009), one of the co-authors of Brakus *et al.* (2009), spoke of the need for experiential marketing to build a theoretical infrastructure including a 'rigorous definition of experience, a reliable and valid measurement instrument, and a conceptual network of experience antecedents and consequences' (p. 418). The author obviously saw Brakus *et al.* (2009) as the theoretical answer to experiential marketing. On this point, there is still a great deal of ambiguity. By introducing the brand factor into consumer experience, did the authors inadvertently introduce a new 'type' of experience, a category of consumer experience based on a new logic? This is known in marketing academia as branding logic (Merz *et al.* 2009).



Although no serious attempt has been made to address these conceptual issues, the launch of Brakus *et al.* (2009) nevertheless set off on a trajectory of its own and triggered a ‘renaissance’ (Andreini *et al.* 2019) of enthusiasm in BE research. Inspired by this new brand-specific approach to experiential studies, researchers set about mapping how the BE construct could be meaningfully posited within the branding modality, measuring the impact of BE on brand loyalty (e.g. Japutra *et al.* 2018), brand attitude (e.g. Dolbec and Chebat 2013), brand value (e.g. Kumar *et al.* 2013) and brand equity (e.g. Iglesias *et al.* 2019).

While huge progress has been made in understanding the relationship between BE and other brand performance variables, there is now a realization that failing to resolve the critical and theoretical issues will inevitably compromise the quality of the overall theoretical infrastructure. To address the various conceptual issues accrued over the years, ‘unpacking’ the literary sources that make up the BEL’s intellectual structure is the primary task. In the following section, the application of the bibliometric analysis will provide us with the literary analysis necessary to untangle the myriad strands of intellectual input (Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz--Navarro 2004) that make up the BEL’s intellectual structure.

## **Method**

The present bibliometric evaluation of the brand experience literature began with the identification of articles using a search protocol with ‘brand experience’ as a keyword. The Web of Science database was chosen, since it is considered a reliable source for citation data processing (Chabowski *et al.* 2018; Leonidou and Katsikeas 2010; Samiee *et al.* 2015).

This search yielded 136 articles and 2,698 citations over the 17-year period ending on 28 November 2018. By inserting an asterisk into the syntax of the keyword ‘brand experience’, articles with similar affiliations were identified. For example, homologous terms such as ‘brand experience’, ‘customer brand experience’, ‘destination brand experience’ or ‘online brand experience’ were included in the database. This approach allowed the capture of the

multifaceted nature of the brand experience topic in relation to other areas of the marketing domain.

In adherence to standard bibliometric practice, articles were tagged when the search term appeared in either the title, author-supplied keywords or abstract (Clarivate Analytics 2017). Articles with an ancillary focus on brand experience were excluded. As a rule, only published articles in journals were selected. Book reviews, biographical items, editorials and method-related articles were excluded. This use of a designated search term has established precedence in co-citation studies examining specific aspects of the literature (Schildt *et al.* 2006).

To identify the most frequently cited articles for co-citation analysis, the articles were coded for consistency in BibExcel (Persson *et al.* 2009). Using frequency counts, 28 articles were collated. Next, a co-citation matrix was developed to rationalize the raw co-citation data. Typically, to obtain a fair or good model for bibliometric analysis, the use of around 25 documents is optimal (Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz-Navarro 2004). Adhering to this industry practice, the current study incorporated 28 documents (see Table 1). Multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) was then used to determine the stress value (or goodness-of-fit). A distinguishing feature of MDS methodology is its ability to measure the stress value of the model. In line with a research-wide practice, whereby stress values that are good (less than .10) or fair (between .10 and .20) are seen as an acceptable standard (Kruskal 1964; Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz-Navarro 2004), a good goodness-of-fit stress value of .06249 was obtained in the origination period.

*Table 1. The most frequently cited brand experience publications*

Rank	Publication	Source	Total Citations <sup>a</sup>
1	Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	89
2	Holbrook and Hirschman (1982)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	36
3	Iglesias, Singh and Batista-Foguet (2011)	<i>Journal Brand Management</i>	29
4	Pine and Gilmore (1998)	<i>Harvard Business Review</i>	27
5	Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	25
6	Nysveen, Pedersen and Skard (2013)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	25
7	Keller (1993)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	25
8	Fournier (1998)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	24
9	Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (2009)	<i>Journal of Retailing</i>	23
10	Chang and Chicng (2006)	<i>Psychology Marketing</i>	22
11	Schmitt (1999a)	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	22
12	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	21
13	Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	20
14	Oliver (1999)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	20
15	Ha and Perks (2005)	<i>Journal of Consumer Behavior</i>	19
16	Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010)	<i>Journal Brand Management</i>	17
17	Aaker (1997)	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	17
18	Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007)	<i>European Management Journal</i>	16
19	Park, MacInnis, Priester <i>et al.</i> (2010)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	16
20	Muniz and O'guinn (2001)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	15
21	Yoo and Donthu (2001)	<i>Journal of Business Review</i>	14
22	Barnes, Mattsson and Sorensen (2014)	<i>Annals Tourism Research</i>	12
23	Mollen and Wilson (2010)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	12
24	Brodic, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeck (2013)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	12
25	Zeithaml (1988)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	12
26	Hultén (2011)	<i>European Business Review</i>	12
27	Ding and Tseng (2015)	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	11
28	Hirschman and Holbrook (1982)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	11

Note: Citation count measures the total number of citations used in the articles drawn for this study

In the present study, a maximum standardized distance of .25 or less to determine which research groups were explicable and lucid (Hair *et al.* 1998) was applied, and research groups and cliques were identified on the basis of this assumption. Research groups are defined as groups consisting of at least two publications, while a research clique comprises three or more influential works grouped together (Richard and Gwen 1983; Wasserman and Faust 1994). The naming of the research groups, determined by the authors, was based on the following criteria: content correlation, thematic correlation, correlation in terminology used throughout the article, correlation in investigative areas and trends, and similarities in categories and terms used to cite the papers (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1993; Kilduff and Tsai 2003).

## Results

The following sections, based on the list of the 28 most frequently cited articles in the BEL, start with a citation overview outlining the key sources of intellectual inputs in the domain, followed by a review of the co-citation metrics derived from the MDS study, which will provide quantitative fundamentals for an objective evaluation of the BEL's existing intellectual structure.

### *Citation overview*

The 28 most frequently cited articles were sourced from the core intellectual database of 136 articles. Although the primary interest of this study is the identification of key research areas, this preliminary examination of author citations gave an overview of the intellectual structure, providing researchers with early insights into the nexus of influences underlying the research domain.

Schmitt's three articles introducing the concept of experiential marketing and BE had 128 citations (Brakus *et al.* 2009; Schmitt 1999a; Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010), while two co-authored articles focusing on BE had a total of 106 (Brakus *et al.* 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010). Schmitt's intellectual contribution has been substantial and, in many senses, critical. As Schmitt highlighted in his 2011 paper 'Experience marketing concepts, frameworks and consumer insights', the BE proposition, as enumerated in Brakus *et al.*'s (2009) paper, is based on Schmitt's concept of experiential marketing (1999a). The four dimensions of BE (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural) proposed in the Brakus *et al.* 2009 paper are conceptually aligned with the five modules (sense, feel, think, act and relate) previously mentioned by Schmitt (1999a), with the exception that the latter viewed these dimensions not simply as marketing devices, but as inherent behavioural outcomes. As a consequence, any investigation into the intellectual context of the BE construct cannot be conducted

meaningfully without taking into account the intellectual contribution from experiential marketing.

Similarly, Holbrook's three articles on consumption experience had 68 citations, of which the two co-authored articles by Holbrook and Hirschman on the experiential value of consumption had 47 citations (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). The frequent references to Holbrook and Hirschman's celebrated work 'The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun' (1982) point to the wide recognition among researchers that the three decades of research into consumption experiences, subsumed under 'consumption studies', represent the intellectual precursor of BE studies.

Finally, among the most frequently cited articles focusing on brand attachment and brand attitude, two co-authored articles by Park and MacInnis had 41 citations (Park *et al.* 2010, Thomson *et al.* 2015). These intellectual inputs represent the contribution from brand relationship research, initiated by Fournier (1998). The building of a consumer-brand relationship is a key purpose of branding (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000) and therefore a key purpose of BE. A brand has two essential functions: identity and differentiation (Davies and Chun 2003). Given that the purpose of differentiation is to ensure that the customer remembers the experience provided by the brand, returns for a repeat experience and as a result engages in a relationship with the brand, the link between BE and the development of a consumer-brand relationship can be considered as foundational to the intellectual structure of the BEL.

### ***Co-citation analysis***

The MDS study used the proximity of the co-citation groups to map the relationship between the 28 most-cited works. Greater proximity indicates higher co-citation characteristics and hence greater commonalities of knowledge, whereas lesser proximity means lower co-citation frequencies and hence lesser commonalities. Using a maximum standardized distance of 0.25,

the results, as shown in Figure 1, produced the following: seven research groups comprising three unconnected groups of two publications each (Groups 1, 5 and 6); two interrelated research groups comprising two publications each (Groups 2 and 3); and two interconnected groups (Groups 4 and 7), which are cliques. Together, these research groups provide an overview of the BEL's knowledge structure.

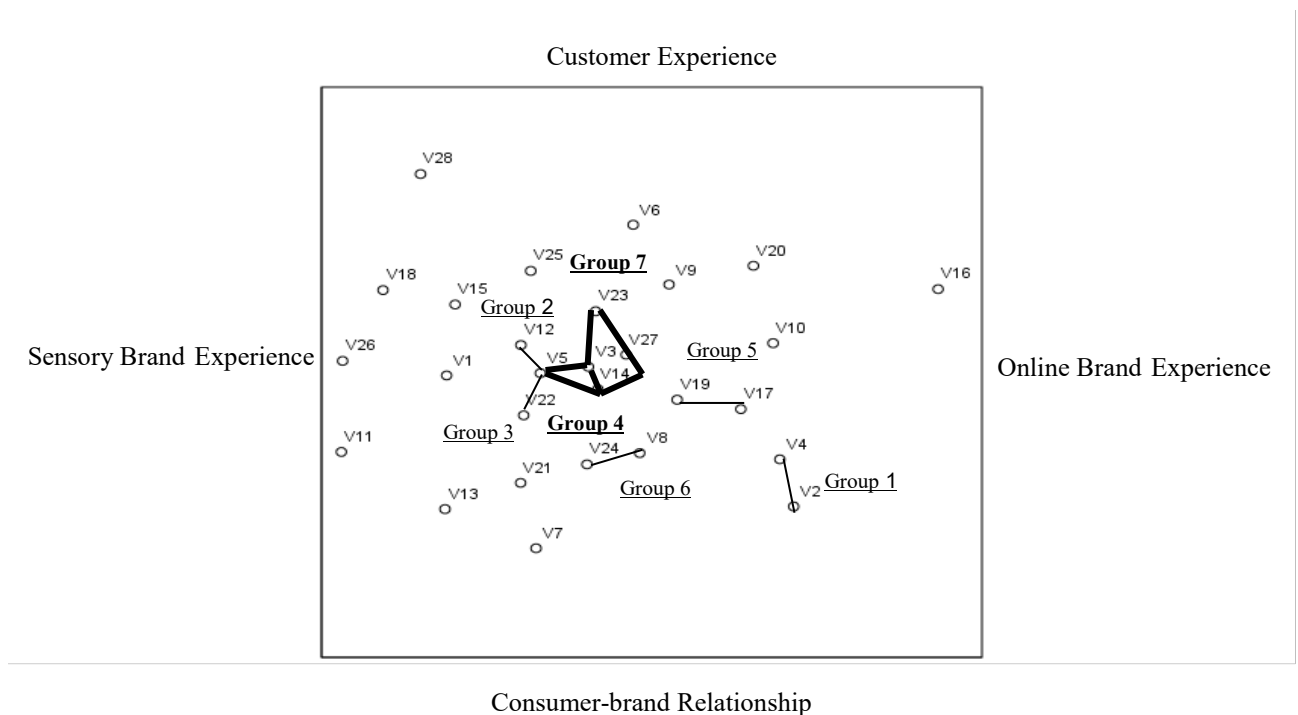


Figure 1. Brand experience knowledge structure and thematic distribution (stress value: 0.06249; standardized distance used: 0.25; research cliques are shown below in bold)

V1 = Aaker 1997; V2 = Barnes *et al.* 2014; V3 = Brakus *et al.* 2009; V4 = Brodie *et al.* 2013; V5 = Chang and Chieng 2006; V6 = Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; V7 = Ding and Tseng 2015; V8 = Fournier 1998; V9 = Gentile *et al.* 2007; V10 = Ha and Perk 2005, V11 = Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; V12 = Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; V13 = Hultén 2011; V14 = Iglesias *et al.* 2011; V15 = Keller 1993; V16 = Mollen and Wilson 2010; V17 = Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou 2013; V18 = Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; V19 = Nysveen *et al.* 2013; V20 = Oliver 1999; V21 = Park *et al.* 2010; V22 = Pine and Gilmore 1998; V23 = Schmitt 1999a; V24 = Thomson *et al.* 2005 ; V25 = Verhoef *et al.* 2009; V26 = Yoo and Donthu 2001; V27 = Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010; V28 = Zeithaml 1988.

Group 1 (V2 and V4): Customer engagement; Group 2 (V12 and V5): Consumption experience; Group 3 (V22 and V5) Experience economy; **Group 4** (V3, V5 and V14): **Brand experience operationalization**; Group 5 (V19 and V17): Relational dimension; Group 6 (V8 and V24) Brand relationship marketing; **Group 7** (V3, V27, V14 and V23): **Brand experience conceptualization**.

Based on the composition of the research groups and the pattern of distribution visualized on the MDS map, we identified the research groups that belong to the core and those that are instrumental to the research domain. The core research groups comprise those with content focused on consumption experience (Group 2), brand experience operationalization (Group 4) and brand experience conceptualization (Group 7). These research groups possess frequently cited articles that focus specifically on BE issues.

The Brakus-Schmitt-Zarantonello collaboration (Group 7), incorporating both the conceptual work of Brakus *et al.* (2009) and Schmitt's 'experiential marketing' (1999a), represents the intellectual axis of the BEL. While they are not the first claimants to the BE proposition, they were the first to formalize BE as an independent construct, setting it apart from related constructs like brand attachment, brand engagement and brand personality. Brand experience operationalization (Group 4) comprises three papers operationalizing the BE concept within the context of brand relationship variables such as affective commitment (Iglesias *et al.* 2011), consumer brand relationship (Chang and Chieng 2006), brand personality and satisfaction (Brakus *et al.* 2009). Representing the early attempts to operationalize the BE concept, their work provided a fundamental framework on which later researchers depended in order to map out the relationship between BE and the other important nodes of the branding modality. Consumption experience (Group 2) provides a link from the core to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), widely acknowledged as the conceptual source of an experiential view of consumption behaviour. Besides the clustering of core research groups in the centre of the MDS map, another interrelated group, Group 3 (Chang and Chieng 2006; Pine and Gilmore 1998), provides a link to the experience economy concept.

There are three unconnected groups situated distal from the core: Groups 6, 5 and 1. These research groups, although not centrally located on the MDS map, are deemed instrumental to the intellectual development of the BEL. Firstly, Group 1 (customer engagement) examines the

role of engagement from both a direct and a mediated perspective (Barnes *et al.* 2014; Brodie *et al.* 2013). Group 5 examines the relational dimension of BE in offline (Nysveen *et al.* 2013) and online environments (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou 2013). Taken together, these two sets of analysis can be conceived as comparative studies of BE dimensions online and offline, with a particular emphasis on the shift of context from direct to virtual. Secondly, brand relationship marketing (Group 6), situated below the core, shows consumer-brand relationship studies as an instrumental source of influence. Since the publication of the seminal work by Fournier (1998), many different offshoots of brand relationship research have emerged: chief among them is research on brand emotional attachment (Thomson *et al.* 2005), a co-citation event in Group 6.

Furthermore, at the periphery, the distribution of ungrouped articles surrounding the core provides us with some very interesting insights into the scope of emerging BE research themes. Articles clustered at the top of the vertical axis are all pivoted around the customer experience concept (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Gentile *et al.* 2007; Oliver 1999; Verhoef *et al.* 2009; Zeithaml 1988). Articles populating the bottom of the vertical axis, on the other hand, share a focus on the consumer-brand relationship, including the events in Group 6 (Fournier 1998; Thomson *et al.* 2005) and a cluster of ungrouped events (Aaker 1997; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Park *et al.* 2010) spread out as a radial from the core. Ungrouped articles congregated to the right share a focus on research based on the digital environment (Brodie *et al.* 2013; Ha and Perks 2005; Mollen and Wilson 2010; Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou 2013). Ungrouped articles congregated on the left share a focus on multisensory experience research (Ding and Tseng 2015; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Hultén 2011). The implications of this distribution pattern will be discussed in the next section.



## Discussion

Guided by the results of the MDS study, this section focuses on the theoretical implications of the literary data and its implications for the BE concept. The starting point for our discussion is to address the theoretical issues at the core of the intellectual structure, with a special emphasis on restoring brand centrality to the BE concept. Then we examine the four emerging knowledge fields deduced from the MDS map, representing the four facets of BE studies instrumental to the development of a brand-centric BE.

### *The core of brand experience intellectual structure*

From the analysis we note the sterile representation of branding literature in the core of the BEL intellectual structure as consumption experience (Group 2), brand experience operationalization (Group 4) and brand experience conceptualization (Group 7). Except for the ubiquitous citing of Brakus *et al.* (2009), the absence of a diversity of branding ideas exposes the reliance of BE researchers on a single source of conceptual input, a point already flagged up by Andreini *et al.* (2019) in their BE review. While Chang and Chieng's (2006) model is based on Schmitt's (1999a) experiential marketing theory, and that of Iglesias *et al.* (2011) is based on the Brakus *et al.* (2009) BE model, both theories can be traced back to Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) experiential view of consumption behaviour. We can conclude that these three groups (2, 4 and 7) share the same experiential-centric knowledge structure.

The birth of disciplines and sub-disciplines is usually marked by a period of ambiguity, during which researchers engage in open or rhetorical negotiation to determine a construct's ontological boundaries (Abbott 2001). The active contest of conceptual boundaries energizes these areas of inquiry by negotiating what falls within and outside one's field, a trait crucial to the fostering of a coherent intellectual discourse (Newell and Green 1982).

From the results of the MDS study, it is obvious that this 'negotiation' is markedly absent. In fact, the opposite is true. Researchers have expended little effort to further analyse, dissect

or expand the functions, roles and dimensions of the BE concept. The bulk of the co-citation events are papers externalizing the relationship between BE and other brand variables. For example, Iglesias *et al.*'s (2011) paper is a study of the impact of BE on brand loyalty; Zarantonello and Schmitt's (2010) paper uses BE to profile customers and predict the impact on brand attitude and brand loyalty; and Chang and Chieng's (2006) paper is a study of individual and shared brand experiences on brand relationship.

If the defining feature of BE is 'an experience provided by brands' (Brakus *et al.* 2009, p. 53), this distinctive has never been fully explored in the BEL. We argue that the intransigence is a result of the limitations of Brakus *et al.*'s (2009) BE model, where the conceptualization is stationed at a level of abstraction representing BE as a static, monolithic construct, devoid of branding context. The influence of a definition cannot be overstated (Gundlach 2007). Standing alone, 'a definition defines the scope and content of that which is defined' (p. 24), delimitating its boundaries and setting the research agenda. The limitation of the existing BE conceptualization is most evident in the following areas.

Firstly, brand meaning, according to McCracken (1986) is never static but is 'constantly in transit'. In a firm-based context, meaning flows from the meaning maker to the consumer. Through the process of co-creation, meaning flows back to the producer via the culturally connected world. BE conceptualization must reflect the dynamic and mobile nature of brand meaning. Secondly, BE as a compound construct comprises diverse knowledge traditions within its intellectual structure. Its multidimensionality implies it is never monolithic, at once heuristic, at once hedonic and at once symbolic. Therefore, a generic operationalizing of BE into sensory, affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions strips the construct of its symbolic, hedonic, embodied and socialized qualities. The existing BE definition, while sufficiently neutered for a positivist interrogation between variables, is nevertheless ill-equipped to describe, with sufficient nuance and finesse, the dynamic and multidimensional

character of the BE construct. Thirdly, it would seem that citers enamoured of the collegial and historical relationship between BE and experiential marketing saw experiential marketing theory as the focal source of input for BE theoretical architecture. This notion is misplaced. Experiential marketing, whilst proficient at articulating the experiential narrative (what is experience?), is not equipped to articulate the branding narrative (what is branding?). BE conceptualization must be realigned from an experiential-centric modality to a brand-centric modality.

Chang and Chieng's (2006) paper alludes to an intellectual source that offers a plausible solution. Their model utilized construals borrowed from customer-based brand equity theory where brand meaning (used synonymously with brand knowledge), brand association, brand awareness, brand personality and brand image are deployed as theoretical metrics for analysis. Represented as an ungrouped event, Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity theory conceptualizes the branding process as a transduction of brand knowledge via a process of brand associations. Batra (2019) sees the eventual cohering of these brand associations into brand meanings. We concur. Brand meaning emerges when objective brand knowledge is subjectively *claimed* by the consumer (McCracken 1988). Since meaning is always in transit, moving 'ceaselessly' between locations ((Batra 2019), an experience provided by brand, we argue, BE can be conceived as a response to the transfer of brand meaning from the brand to consumer.

Based on the arguments presented above, we assert that at this critical juncture of renewed academic interest in the BE concept, characterized by Andreini *et al.* (2019) as a 'renaissance', there is an imperative to revisit existing definitions and theories to reconceptualize the BE construal. A new framework, we advocate, has to be constructed, one that must be sufficiently multi-faceted to accommodate the complexities of a dynamic and multi-dimensional BE phenomenon where brand meanings from diverse locations impinge on our experience of the

brand. We therefore reconceptualize BE as an experiential response to a transfer of brand meanings, via meaning-encoded entities, resulting in a multi-dimensional representation of the brand in the consumer's mind. Based on this overarching definition, a breakdown of its constituent dimensions and componential parts will be discussed in the following section.

### ***Facets of the brand-centric brand experience concept***

This reconceptualization of the core, from an experiential-centric to a brand-centric meta-theoretical infrastructure, also means realignment of what is considered instrumental to BE intellectual structure. Taking a universal perspective of the MDS map (Zhao and Strotzman 2015), where ‘locations of individual objectives within groups and on the entire map may also be meaningful’ (p. 51), we realign our interpretation of the map, encompassing both grouped (co-citation frequencies) and ungrouped events (high citation frequencies) to identify four emergent knowledge fields with intellectual inputs deemed instrumental to the development of a brand-centric BE concept: customer experience, consumer-brand relationship, sensory brand experience and online brand experience.

To further enhance the study’s validity, a supplementary list of recent frequently cited articles in the BEL was compiled and examined. Utilizing the same procedure and key items used to identify the BE publications, and taking 2009 as the starting point, articles with an average annual citation frequency of 4.50 were identified. This supplementary procedure provided a durability perspective on the articles in the research domain (Burrell 2003). A total of 18 articles was selected, as shown in Table 2. Four articles appear in both Table 1 and Table 2: Barnes *et al.* (2014), Brakus *et al.* (2009), Ding and Tseng (2015) and Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013).

Table 2. Recent frequently cited brand experience research

Rank	Publication	Source	Average citations per year	Aim / Objective	Key constructs	Key theories	Methodologies / Analysis	Implications
1	Brakus et al. (2009) <sup>b</sup>	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	75.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To define and conceptualize the brand experience construct</li> <li>- To develop a scale for measuring brand experience</li> <li>- To identify the underlying dimensions of brand experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand experience</li> <li>- Brand personality</li> <li>- Satisfaction</li> <li>- Loyalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experience marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptual</li> <li>- Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defines and conceptualizes the brand experience construct</li> <li>- Develops the brand experience scale</li> <li>- Determines four dimensions of brand experience</li> </ul>
2	Schmitt (2012)	<i>Journal of Consumer Psychology</i>	15.29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To identify key brand constructs related to consumer psychology</li> <li>- To integrate brand construct and consumer psychology into a comprehensive model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying</li> <li>- Connecting</li> <li>- Signifying</li> <li>- Experiencing</li> <li>- Integrating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumer psychology</li> <li>- Brand extension</li> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical</li> <li>- Content analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrates empirical findings into a consumer-psychology model of brands</li> <li>- Proposed five psychological brand process</li> </ul>
3	Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) <sup>b</sup>	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	13.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To combine theoretical insights from marketing and information system research to arrive at a model of the online brand experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perceived ease of use</li> <li>- Perceived usefulness</li> <li>- Trust</li> <li>- Brand reputation</li> <li>- Online brand experience</li> <li>- Behavioural intentions</li> <li>- Satisfaction</li> <li>- Online brand relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationship theory</li> <li>- Technology acceptance</li> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: online survey</li> <li>- Confirmatory factor analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies brand reputation to be an important moderator of perceived ease of use and trust</li> <li>- Combines insight from marketing and information system literature</li> <li>- Extends the notion of experiencing the brand such as brand relationship</li> <li>- Identifies brand relationships as an important outcome of online brand experience</li> <li>- Gives attention to the subject aspect of brand experience and the emotive outcomes of these experiences</li> </ul>
4	Kumar et al. (2013)	<i>Marketing Science</i>	11.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To develop a framework to measure the monetary impact of word-of-mouth and test the methodology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Word-of-mouth</li> <li>- Customer influence effect</li> <li>- Customer influence value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flow theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical</li> <li>- Simulation investigation for empirical network analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implements a methodology measure social media return on investment and word-of-mouth value</li> <li>- First to create a metric to measure the net influence wielded by a user in a social network</li> </ul>
5	Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016)	<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	10.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To create an integrative framework of brand value co-creation with theoretical underpinnings in joint agential experiential creation of brand value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand value co-creation</li> <li>- Brand engagement platforms</li> <li>- Brand experience domains</li> <li>- Joint agency of co-creational enterprises</li> <li>- Brand capability ecosystem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service-dominant logic: value co-creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: case study</li> <li>- Content analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assesses the logic of joint agential experiential creation of brand value</li> <li>- Conceptualizes engagement through intensive actions of joint agency of experiential co-creators</li> </ul>
6	Dolbec and Chebat (2013)	<i>Journal of Retailing</i>	8.67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To study how flagships and brand stores can contribute to building brands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand experience</li> <li>- Store type</li> <li>- Store image</li> <li>- Brand attitude</li> <li>- Brand attachment</li> <li>- Brand equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: quasi-experimental</li> <li>- Structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies that flagships brand experience have a strong impact on brand attachment, brand attitude, brand equity</li> <li>- Proposed how retail marketers to increase consumer's in-store brand experience</li> </ul>
7	Phillips and McQuarrie (2010)	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	8.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore how grotesque imagery can produce narrative transportation for consumers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Narrative transportation</li> <li>- Grotesque imagery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aesthetic theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: In-depth interview</li> <li>- Content analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduces the ideal of aesthetic properties of ads call forth different modes of engagement</li> <li>- Explored grotesque imagery can lead to either narrative transportation or immersion</li> </ul>

8	Maslowska et al. (2016)	<i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>	7.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To develop a conceptual model of customer engagement ecosystem that encompasses brand actions, other actors, customer brand experience, shopping behaviours, brand consumption and brand-dialogue behaviours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customer engagement ecosystem</li> <li>- Customer brand experience</li> <li>- Shopping behaviours</li> <li>- Brand consumption</li> <li>- Brand-dialogue behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customer experience</li> <li>- Customer engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides a conceptual framework of customer engagement ecosystem</li> </ul>
9	Barnes et al. (2014) <sup>b</sup>	<i>Annals of Tourism Research</i>	5.60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To conceptualize destination brand experience</li> <li>- To examine the direct and mediated role of destination brand experience components in determining revisit intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destination brand experience</li> <li>- Intention to revisit</li> <li>- Satisfaction</li> <li>- Intention to recommend</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptual</li> <li>- Psychometric analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, partial least squares (PLS) path modeling analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptualizes destination brand experience in the tourism context</li> </ul>
10	Nysveen and Pedersen (2014)	<i>International Journal of Market Research</i>	5.40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To study the influence of customer co-creation participation on customers' brand experience, satisfaction and loyalty with the brand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-creation</li> <li>- Brand engagement</li> <li>- Brand experience</li> <li>- Brand satisfaction</li> <li>- Brand loyalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Service-dominant logic: value co-creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptual: online panel survey</li> <li>- Confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adds relational experience to brand experience dimensions</li> </ul>
11	Kinard and Hartman (2013)	<i>Journal of Advertising</i>	5.33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To assess responses to advergames that vary in brand-game integration as a function of brand experience</li> <li>- To examine the correlations between attitude toward advergames and behavioural intentions toward the parent brand</li> <li>- To determine whether advergames are better studied for use as informative or reminder promotional tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand-game integration</li> <li>- Advergames</li> <li>- Prior BE</li> <li>- Brand attitude</li> <li>- Brand behavioural intentions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Categorization theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: online experiment (a completely randomized between-subjects design)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The advergames within the entertainment brand context</li> <li>- The effect of brand-game integration as a function of brand experience</li> </ul>
12	Schembri (2009)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	5.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To investigate the experiential meaning of Harley-Davidson for Australian consumers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand experience</li> <li>- Co-construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> <li>- Consumption experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical</li> <li>- Ethnographic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finds that brand consumption embeds consumers into a fabric of relationships, thus co-constructing the brand experience</li> <li>- Reinforces the theory of consumption as play</li> </ul>
13	Dennis et al. (2014)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	5.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To investigate the role of digital signage as experience provider in retail spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Digital signage</li> <li>- Intellectual experience</li> <li>- Affective experience</li> <li>- Attitude towards to ad</li> <li>- Approach to advertiser</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: survey</li> <li>- Latent path structural equation modeling (SEM)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finds that digital signage works by evoked experience</li> <li>- Finds the important role of aesthetics in marketing by retailers.</li> <li>- Finds that digital signals can be used to evoke Customers' sensory aesthetics experience</li> <li>- Finds that digital signal ads can increase the intended time spend and intention to visit/revisit a store</li> </ul>
14	Van Reijmersdal et al. (2010)	<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	5.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine the effects of (1) interactive brand placement in (2) an online role-playing game (3) targeted at children on (4) cognitive, affective and conative responses.</li> <li>-To examine the role of age moderating effect on brand use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top of mind awareness</li> <li>- Brand image</li> <li>- Behavioural intention</li> <li>- Brand placement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: online quasi experiment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First to examine the effects of interactive brand placements in games on all three types of children's brand responses.</li> <li>- First to show that prior brand use is an important moderator of the effects of interactive brand placement in games</li> <li>- Finds that younger children are relatively more vulnerable to persuasion from brands in online games</li> </ul>

15	Kim <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<i>Journal of Interaction Marketing</i>	4.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To investigate whether adopters' spending levels will change after they use a brand's app</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand's app</li> <li>- Adopter's spending levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Human-computer interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: field experiment, before and after experimental design</li> <li>- two-stage-least-squares (2SLS), sensitivity analyses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expands the concept of interactivity and stickiness to a mobile context</li> </ul>
16	Tafesse (2016)	<i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i>	4.67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To propose an experiential model of consumer engagement focusing on Facebook brand pages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affordance for perceptual experience</li> <li>- Affordance for social experience</li> <li>- Affordance for epistemic experience</li> <li>- Affordance for embodied experience</li> <li>- Consumer engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gratification theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical</li> <li>- Systematic content analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposes an experiential model of customer engagement in the context of Facebook brand pages</li> <li>- Offers actionable managerial insights for brands seeking to implement an experiential model of consumer engagement on their fan pages</li> </ul>
17	Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013)	<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	4.67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To understand the impact of events from a broader branding perspective</li> <li>- To investigate whether event marketing contributes to brand equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand experience</li> <li>- Brand attitude</li> <li>- Pre-event brand equity</li> <li>- Post-event brand equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiential marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: Surveys, field experiment, one-group pre-test/post-test quasi experimental design</li> <li>- Exploratory factor analysis, Confirmatory factor analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shows that understanding event marketing works from a branding perspective and contributes to the development of brand equity</li> <li>- Demonstrates the importance of considering elements towards a brand or event attended</li> <li>- Defines the notion of brand experience</li> <li>- Provides several criteria for event practitioners: rich in sensorial stimulation; trigger positive emotions; stimulate consumers' intellect; brand-consumer interaction; bodily experiences</li> </ul>
18	Ding and Tseng (2015) <sup>b</sup>	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	4.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine the mediation mechanism to account for the influence of brand experience on brand loyalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brand equity</li> <li>- Brand awareness/association</li> <li>- Brand experience</li> <li>- Hedonic emotions</li> <li>- Brand loyalty</li> <li>- Perceived price</li> <li>- Perceived ad. spending</li> <li>- Perceived quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appraisal theory of emotion</li> <li>- Experimental marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empirical: onsite interview survey</li> <li>- Confirmatory factor analysis</li> <li>- Structural equation modeling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adds hedonic emotions as a moderator on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty</li> <li>- Provides strategies for experiential marketing</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>Research published since 2009 with an average of 4.50 or more citation(s) per year since publication in the articles drawn for this study.

<sup>b</sup>Article also appears as a most frequently cited brand experience publication in Table 1.

### *Customer experience*

The findings of the MDS analysis highlight an emergent knowledge field of the BE concept visualized through the experience economy (Group 3) in conjunction with the congregation of ungrouped events on the northern periphery of the core (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Gentile *et al.* 2007; Oliver 1999; Verhoef *et al.* 2009; Zeithaml 1988). This clustering envisions the development of a brand-centric BE concept in the context of customer experience.

At root, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) concluded, customer experience is a response to ‘a firm’s offerings during the customer’s entire purchase journey’ (p. 70). Conceptualizing in this context grounds the BE construct in the arena of a ‘purchasing cycle’ in which two key actants, the firm and the customer, are engaged in a fundamental process of economic exchange. A firm must actively fashion its offering to differentiate itself from competitors in the marketplace. The meanings derived from this offering, at the most basic level, must also make economic sense to the customer. At the other end of the axis, the customer, as a participant in the marketplace, is actively ‘canvassing’ the marketplace (McCracken 1988) for brands with offerings that match their wants and needs. This offering must also match their desired price and value with a level of service quality they can trust and rely upon.

Pine and Gilmore’s model (1998), represented as Group 3, offers a macro perspective on the increasing emphasis on the experiential component of a firm’s offering. The cluster of ungrouped events in the northern periphery elaborates the essential components of a brand’s offering. Zeithaml’s (1988) examination of the tripartite relationship between perceived quality, perceived value and perceived price can be conceived as the interplay of brand meanings that add up to a brand’s value proposition. Articulating this as a chain of effects, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) showed how the transfer of meanings from brand trust and brand affect potentiates a positive experience of the brand, observed to have a predictive influence on brand performance and brand loyalty. Oliver’s (1999) expectations-



disconfirmation model can be perceived as a brand-relationship pyramid (Van Durme *et al.* 2003), where the making of a brand promise (expectations) and the keeping of a brand promise (disconfirmation) leads to an experience of brand satisfaction, a construct regarded by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) as a key component of the customer experience concept. From a retailing perspective, Verhoef *et al.*'s (2009) compendium of factors deemed instrumental to the fashioning of a customer-centric offering includes social environment, service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price, alternative channels and retail brand. Gentile *et al.*'s (2007) customer experience model incorporates the hedonic elements from experiential marketing by suggesting that what contributes to the creation of experiential value is not so much offering experiential products such as amusement parks or zoos, but the embedding of hedonic devices in the transactional environment, delighting and stimulating the customer's senses at different stages of the customer journey.

Consummation of the exchange is not automatic: it is a 'journey', it requires effort on the part of the firm and also effort on the part of the customer. It is a journey fraught with complexities and uncertainties, where the intentions and expectations of the firm and the customer negotiate ceaselessly to find common ground. The transfer of brand meanings within this economic relationship between the firm and the customer, we argue, represents the fundamental stratum of a brand-centric BE concept.

#### *Consumer-brand relationship*

Another emergent knowledge field of the BE intellectual structure is consumer-brand relationship theory, represented by an emphasis on brand relationship marketing (Group 6). In conjunction with the cluster of ungrouped events on the southern periphery of the core (Aaker 1997; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Park *et al.* 2010), we envision the development of the brand-centric BE concept in the context of branding's social ecology.

In contrast to customer experience, where the focus is on the individual embedded in the marketplace, the focus in this cluster is on the creation of meanings developed in conjunction with others (Rochat *et al.* 2009). Expressed as a dyadic interpersonal relationship between the individual consumer and the brand (Fournier 1998; Thomson *et al.* 2005), this anthropomorphic representation of the brand as the ‘significant other’ (Lin and Sung 2014), transforms BE from a uni-directional producer/consumer exchange of meaning to a reciprocal social exchange in which brand meanings are shared, negotiated and co-created.

Interpersonal sociality is instantiated when meanings derived from transfer of cultural symbols evoke connections with the self (Ligas and Cotte 1999), arousing important identity or self-extension concerns (Belk 1988, 2013) bringing to consciousness some emotive aspects of self. Once engaged, the consumer progresses from mere imitation and mirroring of brand meaning to active reciprocation (Rochat and Passos-Ferreira 2008), no longer a passive recipient of brand meanings but an active negotiator and a co-creator. By embracing the brand as part of the self, a consumer develops a sense of oneness with the brand, by co-sharing a meaning with the brand. In Fournier’s (1998) six-faceted brand relationship quality construct, self-connection is considered a basic stratum. Park *et al.* (2010) also suggest that a critical aspect of attachment involves the cognitive and emotional connection between the brand and the self, defined here and elsewhere as brand–self connection (Chaplin and John 2005; Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003). Similarly, Aaker (1997) demonstrates how a consumer’s ascription of personality traits to brands is also a transfer of shared meaning linking the brand personality to aspects of the consumer’s self-image.

However, this interpersonal view of BE’s sociality belies the presence of a wider socio-cultural milieu where intersubjective activities stimulate a triadic connection between the self, the brand and the culturally constituted world (McCracken 1986). The intrusion of cultural entities, intended or unintended by the firm, has the ability to contaminate the transfer of brand

meaning, resulting in a BE where collective meanings external to the firm exert a palpable influence.

There is now growing recognition that brands can be regarded as ‘socially-constructed phenomena’ (Andreini *et al.* 2019). although this has yet to be captured in the citation largess of the present analysis. In the past three decades, consumer cultural theory has illuminated the symbolic, embodied and experiential aspects of acquisition behaviors and the sociocultural complexities of exchange behaviors and relationships (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The scarcity of consumer culture theory representation in Tables 1 and 2 is symptomatic of the superficial interface between the BEL and consumer culture theory. This fragile interface means that many of the valuable resources accrued through consumer culture theory remain largely untapped in the core BEL.

#### *Sensory brand experience*

Although papers with somatosensory focus are not represented as research groups in the MDS results, they are represented in Table 1 as highly cited papers (Ding and Tseng 2015; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Hultén 2011). Noting that the strategic clustering of these three ungrouped events is gathered in a radial formation towards the left side of the MDS map, we envision the development of a brand-centric BE in the context of sensory brand experience.

A great limitation of existing BE approaches is the failure to account for the somatosensory characteristics of a BE phenomenon. In this respect, Hirschman and Holbrook’s (1982) exposition of hedonic consumption represents a very important intellectual input into this knowledge field in the BEL. The authors articulate two sets of processes that are activated in a somatosensory experience, i.e. an exteroceptive process whereby stimuli in the external environment evoke sensations, and an interoceptive body-mind events resulting in ‘multisensory images, fantasies and emotional arousal’ (p. 93) and feeling states. These internalized processes are essentially autonomic and pre-conscious, and have a greater impact

on our consumption patterns and behaviour than most of us are aware of (Holbrook 2018). On the exteroceptive process, Hultén (2011) defined the external environment as a ‘setting’ encoded with brand meanings by the firm, with the aim of ‘communicating sensations and sensory expressions that reinforce the multi-sensory brand experience for the customer’ (p. 264). Ding and Tseng (2015) observed how sensory brand experiences (exteroceptive) provoking hedonic emotions (interoceptive) had a transformative effect on brand equity.

The impact of these somatosensory processes on consumer preference and motivation is now slowly being recognized. Hultén’s (2011) paper, one of the first proponents of the term ‘multisensory brand experience’, examines how the five modalities (visual, auditory, olfactory, taste and haptic) act in concert to convey embodied brand meanings in a service marketing context. As shown in Table 2, Dolbec and Chebat (2013) demonstrate how embodied brand meanings exemplified by flagship stores contribute to brand equity via sensorially enhanced BE. As an elaboration of embodied response, Phillips and McQuarrie (2010) explore how the transfer of brand meaning emerging from grotesque imagery provokes a somatosensory response, leading to immersive psychological states the authors call ‘narrative transportation’. Dennis *et al.* (2014) examine digital signage as an aesthetic embodiment of the brand environment, evoking a BE that is observed to influence the increased amount of time spent in shopping malls.

It is noteworthy that in spite of the enormous possibilities for BE research in this area, the somatosensory aspect of BE remains one of the least explored. This absence is confounding, to say the least, considering the fact that many important studies over the years have attested empirically to the importance that consumers attach to sensorial judgements. In a wide-ranging survey across several experiential brands, Gentile *et al.*’s (2007) study shows that customers consistently list the sensory dimension as the most important aspect of their brand experience. Barnes *et al.* (2014) also concluded, in their wide-ranging study on destination marketing, that

visitor outcomes were primarily driven by sensory experiences. In fact, contrary to expectation, they went so far as to state that sensory experiences appeared to have a bigger impact than affective experiences on visitors.

### *Online brand experience*

Customer engagement (Group 1), relational dimension (Group 5) and a clustering of ungrouped events congregating to the right share a focus on research based on understanding BE in a computer-mediated environment (Ha and Perks 2005; Mollen and Wilson 2010). From this clustering, we envision the development of a brand-centric BE in the context of online BE.

Whereas the previous clusters capture the movements of meaning from the firm, social milieu and brand environment, this cluster alludes to the movement of brand meanings emerging from customers' interaction with technological entities such as websites, apps or social media networks. An analysis of this cluster shows that the focus within online BE research thus far, has been on the impact of new meanings derived from digital interactions with online BE and the subsequent effect on other brand performance variables. From this perspective, Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) combined new meanings from the digital environment, such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, with brand reputation and trust, in order to study the impact on online BE and demonstrate how the consistent delivery of positive BE online resulted in satisfaction and behavioural intentions, which can have a long-term effect on online brand relationships. Ha and Perks (2005) articulate that online BE, as a response defined by immersion in positive navigations and vivid perceptions, had a positive influence on satisfaction, brand trust and brand familiarity. Mollen and Wilson (2010) characterize online BE as a tiered perceptual spectrum, progressing from interactivity (co-creation) to telepresence (immersion) and to brand engagement. Brodie *et al.*'s (2013) paper, understood in conjunction with Barnes *et al.* (2014), demonstrates that BE mediated through technological devices can evoke the same level of sensory engagement as one located in an

offline environment. There is no doubt that research interest in this area is growing. Compared with Table 1, Table 2 captures more research contributions from untraditional sources, and notably from journals specializing in digital environments like *Computers in Human Behaviour* (Van Reijmersdal *et al.* 2010). Examples in Table 2 include Kumar *et al.*'s (2013) study on how a social media marketing strategy creates both tangible and intangible results for the marketer, and Ramaswamy and Ozcan's (2016) work on brand value co-creation reconceptualized in a digitalized world.

However, it is noted that, whereas the study of online BE and its relationship with brand variables is growing, theorization of the conceptual aspects of human interaction with technological entities remains sparse and limited.

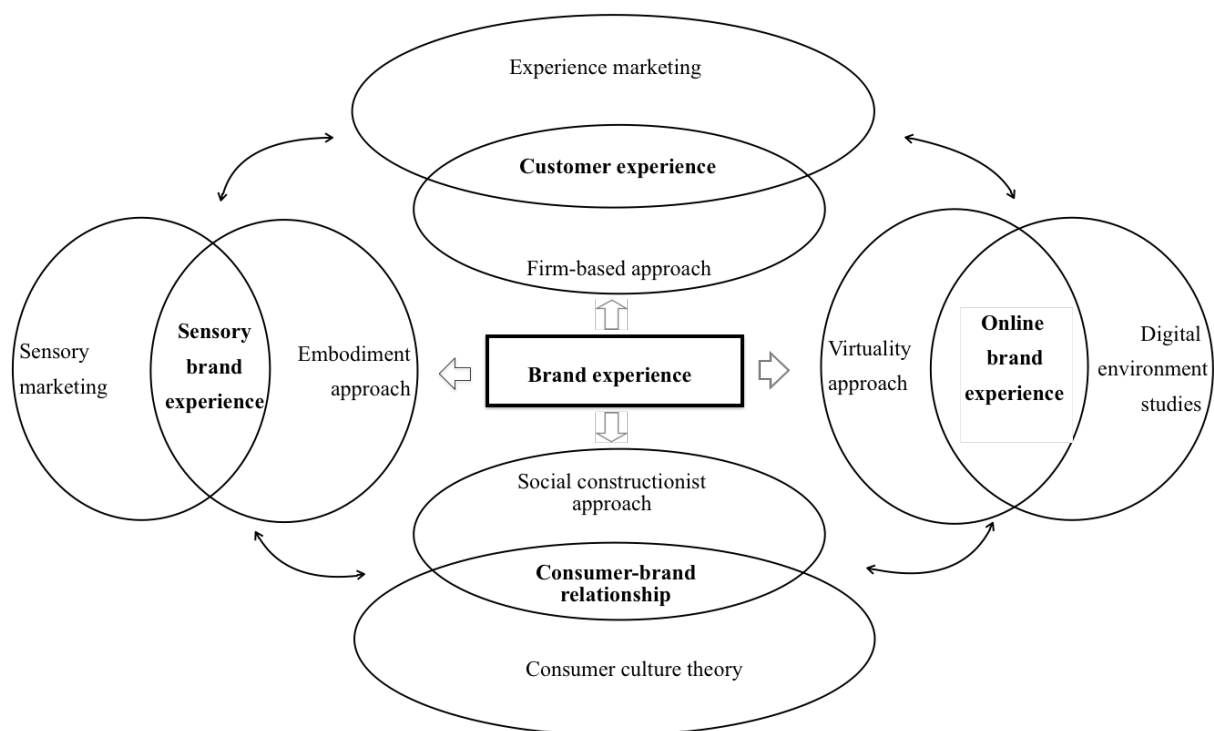
### **Future research agenda**

By reconceptualizing BE as a multifaceted construct within a brand-centric paradigm, the four facets identified in the MDS map (customer experience, consumer-brand relationship, sensory brand experience and online brand experience) also represent four emerging areas of BE research for future research undertaking. As these frontiers of BE research intersect with other domains and other disciplines – BE with experience marketing, BE with consumer culture theory, BE with sensory marketing and BE with digital environment studies – we can anticipate the emergence of new insights, expanding and extending our understanding and knowledge of the BE concept.

To understand the relationship between the four emerging research fields, we propose a '2 x 2' research matrix, framing the four facets (customer experience, consumer-brand relationship, sensory brand experience and online brand experience) of an expanded BE concept on the intersection of two axis for future research. As shown in Figure 2, the vertical axis represents a continuum with the subject experiencing the brand as an individual customer at one end and the subject experiencing the brand as a consumer embedded within a wider socio-cultural

milieu at the other. The horizontal axis represents a continuum with the subject experiencing the brand from an embodied perspective at one end and the subject experiencing the brand from virtualized perspective at the other. These research areas are not mutually exclusive but represent different contextual positions within the BE ecology. A BE may potentially encompass one or multiple forms of such experience.

In this matrix, the arrows pointing upwards, downwards, to the right and to the left represent four epistemological orientations and research approaches. The four approaches suggested in the matrix – firm-based, social constructionist, embodiment and virtuality – are based on the belief that to respond adequately to the challenges ahead, BE researchers need to adopt a plurality of epistemological orientations. Table 3 summarizes the proposed future research agenda, definitions, context, key features and drivers, suggested theories to examine, and key references underlying the four approaches. For each approach we list two research questions framed around the suggestions for future research undertakings, which are elaborated in the text.



*Figure 2. Brand experience future framework matrix (developed by the authors)*



Table 3: Brand experience research agenda

Research approach	Definition	Context	Features	Drivers	Future research questions	Suggested theories to examine
Firm-based	Examines BE as a response to the transfer of intended brand meaning from the firm to the customer, via the firm's economic propositions, resulting in a differentiated representation of the brand in the consumer's mind	Envisages the subject as a customer embedded in the marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering</li> <li>• Value proposition</li> <li>• Service proposition</li> </ul>	<i>Intention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the fashioning of a firm's offering, value proposition and service proposition evoke a BE at the pre-consumption, core consumption and post-consumption stages?</li> <li>• How does mental accounting moderate the favourability of an experience provided by a brand?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer experience (See Lemon and Verhoef 2016 for a review)</li> <li>• Resource-based theory (Kozlenkova <i>et al.</i> 2014)</li> <li>• Mental accounting (Thaler 2008)</li> </ul>
Social constructionist	Examines BE as a response to the transfer of shared meaning via the sociality between consumer, brand and socio-cultural milieu, resulting in an intersubjective representation of the brand in the consumer's mind	Envisages the subject as a consumer embedded in a socio-cultural milieu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared meaning</li> <li>• Collective meaning</li> <li>• Sociality of brands</li> </ul>	<i>Intersubjectivity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the types of shared meanings evocative of a relational experience with a brand?</li> <li>• How do collective brand meanings enhance or impair the experience of a brand?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social constructionist theory (Berger and Luckmann 1966)</li> <li>• Meaning transfer theory (Batra 2019; McCracken 1989)</li> </ul>
Embodiment	Examines BE as a response to the transfer of embodied brand meaning via exteroceptive and interoceptive processes, evoking a multisensory characterization of the brand in the consumer's mind	Envisages the subject as an organism embedded in a brand environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embodied brand meanings</li> <li>• Somatosensory processes</li> <li>• Multisensory representation</li> </ul>	<i>Immersion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can somatosensory response in a sensory brand experience be measured and calibrated?</li> <li>• How does an infusion of a body of sensory cues (vs single cue) in the brand environment contribute to the characterization of the brand?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neuromarketing (Ariely and Berns 2010; See Cherubino <i>et al.</i> 2019 for a review)</li> <li>• Sensory marketing (Krishna 2012)</li> <li>• Hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982)</li> </ul>

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Virtuality	Examines BE as a response to the transfer of brand meaning mediated by digital technology, resulting in the virtualized representation of the brand in the consumer's mind	Envisages the subject as a digital consumer embedded in a computer-mediated environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Algorithmic entities</li> <li>• Digitally intuitive brands</li> <li>• Virtual networks and collective meanings</li> </ul>	<i>Innovation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does algorithmic character influence the experience of a brand?</li> <li>• How does the digital intuitiveness of brands shape the nature of our experiences with brands online?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real virtuality theory (Chalmers and Zányi 2009)</li> <li>• Virtual affordance theory (Grabarczyk and Pokropski 2016)</li> <li>• Algorithm studies (MacCormick 2012)</li> </ul>
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### *The firm-based approach*

A firm-based approach examines BE as a response to the transfer of intended brand meaning from the firm to the customer via the firm's economic propositions, resulting in a differentiated representation of the brand in the consumer's mind. This theoretical underpinning of this approach, represented visually by the arrow pointing upwards in the BE research matrix, is based on the customer experience concept outlined in the bibliometric analysis.

A firm-based approach recognizes the firm as the locus of intended brand meaning (the object). According to Alderson (1957), every firm must first and foremost locate its differential advantage or its brand within the economic realities of the competitive marketplace. Drawing on resource-based theory's definition of market-based capabilities (Kozlenkova *et al.* 2014), this paper argues that a firm secures differential advantage for its brand when it is capable of proposing an offering, value proposition and service proposition perceived by the customer to be economically more attractive than those of competitors (Barney and Clark 2007; Peteraf and Barney 2003).

Based on a brand-centric perspective, we advocate that BE research should focus on examining offering-evoked BE, i.e. that which is instantiated when the differentiated meaning of the firm's offering matches the customer's need (e.g. 'This is what I am looking for!'). An offering is a compound of tangible products and intangibles such as services, warranties, packaging, advertising, financing and many other features (Kotler 1973). When an offering using this combination of tangibles and intangibles makes economic sense to the customer, it evokes a response (White 2004). Examples of offering-based brand stimuli include supersize offers (e.g. Chandon and Ordabayeva 2009), goods return policies that allow customers to defer their purchasing decision until they are completely satisfied with the offering (e.g. Alderson 1957), product trials (e.g. Samson 2010), savouring (e.g. Maciel and Wallendorf 2017) and money-back guarantees (e.g. Suwelack *et al.* 2011).

Next we advocate that BE researchers should examine value-evoked BE, i.e. that which is instantiated when the differentiated meaning of the firm's value proposition matches the customer's sense of fair/desired value (e.g. 'This is what I am willing to pay for!'). When a buyer perceives that the benefit derived from a product far exceeds the cost, it evokes a customer response. Kenning and Plassmann (2008) have demonstrated convincingly that medial orbit frontal cortex brain activity is influenced not only by aesthetics but also by straightforward stimuli such as 'reduced price' signage. Examples of economic devices in this instance include the use of price endings (e.g. Wieseke *et al.* 2016), the effects of promotion types (e.g. Hardesty and Bearden 2003), store rebates (e.g. Ailawadi *et al.* 2014), and premiums and price cuts (e.g. Foubert *et al.* 2018). An important knowledge field yet to be fully exploited in the BEL is mental accounting, which refers to the way in which consumers psychologically organize, budget and assess their finances (Cheng and Cryder 2018). Customers have been observed to use mental accounting to derive pleasure from transactions (Thaler 1985, 2008), resulting in a form of value-evoked BE that extracts psychological pleasure from gains and psychological pain from losses (Garnefeld *et al.* 2019; Shafir and Thaler 2006; Thaler 1999).

Finally, we advocate that BE research should examine service-evoked BE, i.e. that which is instantiated when the differentiated meaning derived from the service proposition delights and surpasses the customer's expectation of the brand value (e.g. 'I never expected the firm to do this on my behalf!'). Increasingly, it is the service aspect of a brand that is catalytic of a memorable BE (Bolton *et al.* 2014). Many companies excel in individual interactions with customers but fail to be empathetic and proactive in the enablement of the customer before, during and after purchase (Rawson *et al.* 2013). Examples of service devices instrumental to the stimulation of BE include hospitality culture (e.g. Pizam 2018), servicescape (e.g. Chang 2016), online assistance in product search protocols (e.g. Pauwels *et al.* 2011), and after-sales service and networked arrangements (e.g. Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2018).

The economic aspects of products and brands have already been extensively studied in the existing marketing literature. In the past three decades, contributions from economic psychology have also yielded some very exciting insights into the psychological dimensions of economic behaviour. Evaluation of the extant BE suggests that there is still insufficient integration between the economic attributes of a brand and the BE construal. The onus, therefore, falls on BE researchers to comb through these valuable pools of knowledge and integrate intellectual inputs relevant to the construction of a firm-based BE model.

#### *The social constructionist approach*

A social constructionist approach examines BE as a response to the transfer of shared meaning via the sociality between a consumer, a brand and the socio-cultural milieu, resulting in an intersubjective representation of the brand in the consumer's mind. This theoretical underpinning to this approach, represented visually by the arrow pointing downwards in the BE research matrix, is based on the customer-brand relationship paradigm outlined in the bibliometric analysis.

The social construction approach is based on the doctrine that meanings come into being via interaction rather than from solely within the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Meanings emerge from the intertwining of minds, in the river of a shared consciousness or what McCracken (1986) called a 'culturally constituted world'. Shared meaning is the product of a dyadic relationship between the consumer and the brand, where brand meanings are interpersonal and deeply connected to the self. Shared meanings can also be the product of an extra-individual set of shared symbols, norms, rituals and collective practises. A social constructionist approach examines interactivity at both the interpersonal and collective levels.

Whereas much BE research has gone into understanding the interpersonal dimensions of brand sociality, the field needs a reorientation towards examining BE as a culturally entangled entity reflecting the cultural movement of meanings (Conejo and Wooliscroft 2014) and

carrying the influences of collective thoughts and behaviour. Batra (2019) observes with some disquiet how research into the sociality of brands has been overshadowed by the trend towards anthropomorphic representations of brand relationships, promoting only a dyadic interpersonal model of meaning transfer. The study of social and symbolic levels of brand meaning, on the other hand, has never really gained traction with BE researchers. We agree. Brand symbolism becomes efficacious only when it has aggregated sufficient consensus of meaning. As Holt (2002, 2003) explains, symbols acquire potency as cultural entities when their meanings are intersubjectively shared at the local, communal or regional level.

A social constructionist approach invites BE researchers to examine how collective meanings derived from the wider social and cultural landscape intrude into the experiencing of a brand, and have a direct or corollary influence on the development of BE, brand attachment, brand love or other brand relationship variables. Exogenous cultural entities can be in the form of country-of-origin stereotypes (e.g. D'Antone and Merunka 2015), shared brand symbols (e.g. Schembri 2009), shared myth (e.g. Hirschman 2010), shared brand rituals (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), shared ethnocentric biases (e.g. Jin *et al.* 2015), place associations (e.g. Foroudi *et al.* 2016) and product categories (e.g. Batra 2019). For BE research going forward, it is essential to identifying a methodology to flesh out external contaminants (that is, factors exogenous to the firm) in order to locate and differentiate the different types of collective brand meanings. As such we propose the following question: how do these interpersonal and cultural entities enhance or impair the experience of a brand?

#### *The embodiment approach*

An embodiment approach examines BE as a transfer of embodied brand meaning via exteroceptive and interoceptive processes, evoking a multisensory characterization of the brand in the consumer's mind. The theoretical underpinning of this approach, represented visually by

the arrow pointing left in the BE research matrix, is based on the sensory brand experience concept outlined in the bibliometric analysis.

Whereas previous studies have focused on the affective and cognitive dimensions of BE, there is increasing awareness that the physical perturbations arising from environment-organism interactivity have a formative role in the constitution of BE (e.g. Chen and Lin 2018; Helmfalk and Hultén 2017; Helmfalk and Berndt 2018). The nature of these autonomic, body-mind processes – triggered by stimuli in the environment, and articulated as System 1 in Kahneman’s (2011) two-track processing systems – has remained largely unexplored in the existing BEL. The focus of BE research, which thus far has been largely based on a System 2 view of the brain, assumes that consumers always have access to their mental states, and that they can accurately describe their needs and wants (Cherubino *et al.* 2019). The result of this one-sided research focus means that, as a whole, the impact of these lower-order pre-conscious processes has remained largely unaccounted for in existing BE research.

For future undertakings, we advocate a closer examination of the exteroceptive process, focusing on understanding how brand settings (including physical or virtual) enable the transfer of embodied brand meanings via a range of sensory cues. An embodied representation exponentially increases the scope, depth and vividness of a brand (Krishna 2012). For example, a virtual representation of Coca-Cola in the media is no longer depicted as only a taste. It is an array of multisensory reenactments of sensations captured in-situ, including the auditory sensations triggered by hearing a can of Coca-Cola ‘pop’, the sizzling sensation when one senses a can of coke descending on ice, or the haptic sensations experienced when consumers run their hands across the signature grooves on the bottle. Embodied meanings derived from sensorial agencies are increasingly recognized as critical attributes of the BE, and deserve closer academic scrutiny (Dolbec and Chebat 2013; Joy and Sherry 2003). This facet of BE research benefits from the interface with sensory marketing, where much research has gone

into understanding the perception-altering qualities of an exteroceptive sensory experience (for a taxonomic review, see Krishna 2012). From a brand-centric perspective, BE researchers should work towards mapping out the exteroceptive and interoceptive pathways in which a brand setting, encoded with brand meaning, contribute to the eventual characterization of the brand.

Recognizing the importance of embodied brand meaning, future BE research undertakings should also focus on understanding the interoceptive process whereby somatic or ‘bodily excitement’ states have been observed to have the capacity to disrupt and supersede normative processing mechanisms (Zurawicki 2010). Previous conceptualizations of BE have assumed a linear and mechanistic approach, conceiving BE as a stable psychological entity underpinned by a single continuous process with predictive influence over other brand performance variables. An embodiment approach views BE as a soft assembly of interaction-dominant processes, non-linear, dynamic and unstable (Deppe *et al.* 2005). Initial neural excitement has the potential to trigger a cascade of emergent somatosensory processes to either inform or disinform memory (Simmons and Barsalou 2003), bias and alter judgement of a brand (Schwarz and Clore 1983, 2007) and initiate pre-conscious automatic behaviour (Bargh and Chartrand 1999).

In this respect, the measurement of physiologically based emotions via cerebral variables represents an important interface for future BE development (Morin 2011; Plassmann *et al.* 2007). The three types of tools used in neuromarketing research – analysis of metabolic activity, analysis of electrical activity in the brain, and analysis without measuring electrical activity in the brain (Bercea 2013; Calvert *et al.* 2004) – compensate for limitations in the existing data-collecting methods, which are based primarily on cognitive tools such as interviews and focus groups. To achieve a deeper and more accurate analysis, we advocate that future BE research undertakings in this area work within an inter-disciplinary framework. For



example, by using brain imaging techniques, it is possible to detect unconscious and implicit responses to stimuli, substantiating or supplementing data gathered via verbal or written declarations (Kenning and Plassmann 2008).

### *The virtuality approach*

A virtuality approach examines BE as a response to the transfer of brand meaning mediated by digital technology, resulting in the virtualized representation of a brand in a consumer's mind. The theoretical underpinning to this approach, represented visually by the arrow pointing towards the right in the BE research matrix, is based on the online brand experience concept as outlined in the bibliometric analysis.

According to Belk (2013), the symbiosis of user and technology is not new (e.g. talking via a mobile phone). What is truly innovative in this digital era (MacCormick 2012) is the ability to encode algorithmic entities with persistent capabilities (Cheney-Lippold 2011). These digital entities, sequenced to be mindful of the requirements of the firm and the customer, can interact persistently and consistently with multiple users with minimum human intervention (Grabarczyk and Pokropski 2016). Much experience with brands is already algorithmic-based, even if consumers are unaware of it. Online purchases, searches, payments or services like booking a cab are based on interactions with algorithmic entities that have been created to make virtual representations on the firm's behalf. The functionality, flow, interactivity or 'immersiveness' of a digital device are underwritten by its algorithmic character. At root, innovation at the algorithmic level is the driver of virtualized brand experience. As is evident from the bibliometric findings, present BE research is more preoccupied with the manifestation of an algorithmic character (flow, telepresence, interactivity *etc.*), while research on algorithms as an object of study in themselves is only just emerging (Beer 2017; Cheney-Lippold 2011; Ziewitz 2016). Going forward, research into the transfer of meanings from different

algorithmic locations and the implications for online BE will represent a major challenge for the advancement of BE theory.

For future online BE research undertakings, the integration of algorithmic entities and virtual reality technology also represents a major research front. A major concern about online marketing has always been the limited application of the five sensory modalities – visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic and gustative – since the digital interface in its initial phase is mostly visual. Virtual reality (VR) technology in recent years has advanced to the point where a fully multimodal experience is possible, incorporating visual elements (e.g. a head-mounted display), tactile gloves, and auditory and proprioceptive elements including tracking of bodily posture and movement (Grabarczyk and Pokropski 2016). Chalmers *et al.* (2009), investigating real virtuality environments (also known as there-reality™), observe that in immersive, high-fidelity virtual environments, a participant's somatic and perceptual responses largely correspond to a sensory experience offline. Increasingly, consumers' interaction with these algorithmic entities has become multimodal, as they are programmed to react to human touch (haptic), voices (voice activation technology), movement (motion detection technology) and facial expressions (facial recognition technology). The ability to generate and detect 'virtual' sensory data reembodies the brand and instigates the transfer of new virtual sensory, affective and cognitive brand meanings. This development has huge implications for redefining consumer experience with brands online (Dobrowolski *et al.* 2015).

We suggest that future research undertakings should examine the integration of algorithmic entities with big data, a phenomenon resulting in the creation of digitally intuitive brand personalities. With the onset of artificial intelligence and big data, brands may acquire a new sensibility and increasingly a new sensitivity. By collecting digital phenotypic profiles (Onnela and Rauch 2016), brands intuitively know a customer's needs, preferences, habits, likes and dislikes, not only responding to what consumers desire, but predicting these needs and wants.

Prior studies (Dave *et al.* 2003; Hou and Jiao 2019; Smith *et al.* 2017) have shown that personalized algorithmic experiences often result in the development of a relationship with the brand. Within academia, there is already a great deal of interest in the study of online-brand relationships, as is evident from the findings of the bibliometric analysis (Mollen and Wilson 2010). In this respect, understanding how algorithmic personalities shape our experiences of a brand will add a new dimension to the sociality of brands online, and will also ensure that BE research stays in step with the speed of development in the symbiosis between the consumer and algorithmic entities.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this paper, we set out three research objectives that have guided the development of the thesis. The first relates to investigating the BEL's intellectual structure to identify key knowledge sources of intellectual input. In fulfilling this objective, the bibliometric analysis has provided us with literary data from which we have constructed a map of the BEL's anatomy, identifying core and peripheral sources of knowledge. The analysis has been corroborated by many of the observations made in our literary review of the BEL. Foremost among them is a structural flaw at the core, where an emphasis on experiential centrality has inadvertently blighted the development of a more holistic and brand-centric model.

The second objective relates to the reconceptualization of the BE concept. At the end of the discussion, we proposed a reconceptualized framework of the BE construct. Taking into account the dynamic nature and multi-dimensionality of the construct, we have defined BE as an experiential response to the transfer of brand meaning. By adopting brand meaning as a theoretical substrate, we are able to augment the ontological perimeters of the BE concept into a wider, more diversified perspective, with interpretations exemplified by the four facets of the construct.

The third stated objective relates to the future research framework and research agenda. Informed by the findings of the analysis, we have introduced a future research framework consisting of four approaches with four epistemological orientations. This new framework provides a set of interpretive lenses through which researchers can observe with greater precision the intricate movement of meanings emanating from often subtle and invisible research areas. This new framework also promotes epistemological plurality, which enhances cross-paradigmatic engagement and enrichment (Arnould and Thompson 2005). As the frontiers of BE interface with other domains such as customer experience research, semiotics, consumer culture theory, sensory marketing, digital environment studies and neuromarketing, the resulting synthesis of ideas adds new insights into the understanding of the multi-dimensional BE concept.

The interface with sensory marketing and neuromarketing restores a sense of physicality and bodily excitement to the understanding of BE. The interface with consumer culture theory grounds BE research in the social reality of the connected world, one that impinges on the consumer psyche with ever-increasing intensity. The interface with customer experience restores a vital link to the economic relationship between the customer, the firm and the marketplace. In a sense, virtuality does not replace the economic, socialized and embodied qualities of BE. Through innovation and technology, virtuality offers digital reenactments and, in many instances, enhanced simulations of these psychological states. The power of virtuality is its ubiquity, replicability and ability to transcend physical, geographical and cultural barriers at amazing speed. Given the rate of innovation and technological change, integrating the role of technology into the core of BE research is no longer an option (Schmitt *et al.* 2014), but will increasingly become a *staple* of future undertakings in BE research.

## **Limitations**

Every study, no matter how comprehensive, is constrained by research limitations. In the present study, two areas of concern can be highlighted. Firstly, the BEL is comparatively young, with an intellectual structure that is still nascent and evolving. As such, the application of bibliometric procedures, a process which usually requires amplitude of scope and time, is hindered by the relatively small base of material from which to work. A narrow base leaves analysis open to distortions in quantitative procedures, with the risk of computational anomalies. While the complement of additional computational instruments like cluster analysis would be helpful, again because of technical constraints arising from the narrow base of material, the present study simply conducts the bibliometric study using the MDS as the primary instrument of analysis. Secondly, as a result of this shortcoming, this bibliometric study had to be supplemented by an inordinate amount of inputs from qualitative sources. While the utmost caution has been exercised to ensure the quantitative analysis derived from the MDS study remains the core of the analysis, some readers may find the larger-than-usual level of qualitative inputs slightly disconcerting for a bibliometric presentation.

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