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The interplay of customer experience and commitment

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

- **Purpose** –This research examines the customer experience through the lens of customer commitment and provides a framework for future research into the intersection of these emerging streams of research.
- **Design/methodology/approach** – This research contributes to theoretical and practical perspectives on the customer experience (CE) and its measurement by integrating extant literature with customer commitment and customer satisfaction literature.
- **Findings** – The breadth of the domains that encompass the customer experience—cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social—makes simplistic metrics impossible for gauging the entirety of customers' experiences. These findings provide strong support of the need for new research into CE and customer commitment.
- **Practical implications** – Given the complexity of the CE concept, managers are unlikely to track and manage all relevant elements of CE. This research provides a framework identifying empirically the most salient attributes of the CE with particular emphasis on those elements that enhance commitment to the firm or brand. This should offer insight into service design to correspond with specific commitment and experience dimensions.
- **Originality/value** –This research is the first to examine the customer experience through the lens of customer commitment—a key factor in customer loyalty, positive word of mouth and other desired outcomes for managers and marketers. We provide a framework for future research into this emerging topic.
- **Article Type:** Conceptual paper

- **Keyword(s):** Customer Experience, Customer Commitment, Customer Satisfaction; Loyalty, Service Design

The interplay of customer experience and commitment

Customer Experience Management (CEM) is being hailed as the next competitive battleground for firms to grow market share. In fact, research by Gartner finds that by 2017, 89% of companies plan to compete primarily on the basis of the customer experience (CE) (Gartner, 2016). Moreover, a new industry of CEM professionals has recently emerged to address the rapidly growing demand by businesses for expertise in the field.

Despite this emphasis, however, there is no general consensus among managers or academics regarding what comprises the CE. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain its boundaries (e.g., how it differs from customer engagement, customer value, etc.). Consequently, there exists no consensus regarding the aspects of the CE that require assessment and metrics.

This article addresses these issues by investigating the experience construct. We do this by building on the definition of CE of De Keyser et al. (2015): "Customer experience is comprised of the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social elements that mark the customer's direct or indirect interaction with a [set of] market actor[s]" (p. 1). Specifically, we focus on customer assessment in the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social domains as they relate to CE and, where possible, describe metrics designed to measure these assessments.

Since the overriding goal of companies' efforts to enhance the CE is to engender commitment to the brand, we also propose that gauging customer commitment represents a logical, desirable complement to CE measurement. In particular, as commitment is the attitudinal component of consumer loyalty that is developed after an experience (or experiences) with a brand (Lariviere et al., 2014), we assert that CE and customer commitment would be expected to influence one another. To explore this assertion, we engage the five-component model of commitment of Keiningham et al. (2015); specifically, consumer commitment is comprised of affective, normative, forced, habitual and economic dimensions, as a framework for examining the conceptual relationship between CE and commitment (see Figure 1). Moreover, given the complexities of measuring CE that emerge from our investigation, we propose that customer satisfaction provides a useful proxy for the assessment of CE.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The Customer Experience-Commitment Feedback Loop

Whereas extant literature presumes a straightforward progression from cumulative customer experiences to customer commitment (see Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), we argue in this paper that customer commitment will not only be affected by CE but also vice versa (for repeated customer-provider interactions). Specifically, a customer's commitment to a brand biases his/her perceptions of the experience through dynamics such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), self-perception (Bem, 1967), and biased scanning (Janis and King, 1954). Therefore, we believe that attempts to gauge objectively the CE will be impacted not only by customers' perceptions of the actual experience, but also by the inherent biases which arise from the level and type of commitment customers' hold to a firm or brand. For that reason, we believe it is imperative for researchers and firms to better understand the relationship between customer commitment and the CE and its implications for service theory and practice.

We contribute to services marketing and management literature in multiple ways. First, we contribute to the emerging stream of literature on CE by synthesizing this literature and proposing/refining a conceptualization for customer experience. Second, we contribute by proposing how to disentangle the relationship between two multidimensional constructs: CE and customer commitment. Third, we contribute to service literature by offering numerous relevant and interesting avenues for further empirical research.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, as CE is composed of five domains—cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social—we begin by examining how each of these domains impacts the CE. We then explore how the five components of commitment (Keiningham et. al., 2015) would be expected to influence perceptions of the CE. We conclude with a discussion of the implications and a future research agenda.

ELEMENTS OF THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Cognitive Elements of the Customer Experience

Cognitive processes are “higher mental processes, such as perception, memory, language, problem solving, and abstract thinking” (APA, 2016). They have been studied in relation to customers’ service experiences utilizing two different perspectives and their underlying theoretical foundations: attainment of goals and (dis)confirmation of prior expectations.

The first perspective is rooted in the assumption that consumers are goal-directed in their behavior. For example, customers buy vitamins for health; they do grocery shopping for having/enjoying food. Customers set up goals either consciously or unconsciously in specific contexts and use consumption as an instrument of striving to attain them (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999). The marketing literature describes goal-directed behavior as a cognitive process and attainment of goals is the consequence of the cognitive process (e.g., Baumgartner and Pieters, 2008; Bhattacherjee et al., 2003; Chitturi et al., 2008; Voss et al., 2003). Thus, attainment of goals constitute one part of customer experience and is crucial to evaluate the cognitive element of customer experience (Novak and Hoffman, 2003).

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

Measuring the cognitive elements of customer experience

Both of the aforementioned streams of literature have developed instruments to measure goal achievement and expectation (dis)confirmation. In a perspective of goal attainment, some studies measure benefits by examining goal achievement (e.g., Babin et al., 1994), by evaluating the consequence of consumption (e.g., Voss et al., 2003), or by capturing post-consumption emotions (e.g. Chitturi et al., 2008). The first comprise such items as the extent to which customers accomplish goals which the latter two use adjectives (e.g., effective, helpful, stimulated, excited).

With regard to (dis)confirmation of expectations, the literature offers various approaches that mainly differ in their 1) specificity towards a particular service/product, 2) separation of measurement of expectations and experiences/performance and 3) number of items. First, some measures of CE are context specific and measure the cognitive component of the experience with e.g. the functionality, speed, availability of accessories for a particular product/service (Gentil et al., 2007); other measures try to capture the cognitive component of the experience on an abstract level that is usable by including any type of service/product, e.g. “My experience with using ___ was better than I expected” (Bhattacherjee, 2001, or similar Homburg et al., 2006; Wirtz and Bateson, 1999). Second, most research measures the fulfillment of expectations directly (e.g., Bhattacherjee, 2001; Gentil et al., 2007; Homburg et al., 2006; Wirtz and Bateson, 1999) even though literature has partly criticized the direct measurement and suggested to separate measuring expectations and experience (e.g. Brown et al., 2008). Third, most authors have utilized multiple items to measure the (dis)confirmation (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Gentil et al., 2007; Wirtz and Bateson, 1999) while others have only utilized one item to capture it (Homburg et al., 2006).

Emotional Elements of the Customer Experience

Building upon earlier work that conceptualized consumer decision making as largely rational in nature, marketing and consumer behavior scholars in the late 20^{th} highlighted the influence of emotions on consumer attitudes and responses to brands, advertising and marketing activities (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Early studies of consumer emotions built upon work in the psychology literature, where researchers acknowledged the complex nature of emotions and sought to address inherent difficulties in identifying, measuring and distinguishing between emotional states (e.g. Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980).

Several key challenges to measuring the emotional elements of consumer behavior arose out of this early research, including ambiguities regarding the structure and content of emotions and their relevance to consumer behavior (see Bagozzi et al., 1999; Laros and Steencamp, 2005).

These studies approached consumer emotions in a variety of ways. Some conceptualize them generally; in terms of positive and negative affect (see Oliver, 1997/2010). Others synthesize emotion research into comprehensive consumption-related emotion sets (see Richins, 1997; Ruth et al., 2002) or concentrate on individual emotions such as joy and surprise (Arnold et al., 2005; Finn, 2005), delight (Oliver et al., 1997), anger, rage, irritation, frustration, annoyance (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2003; Patterson et al., 2016) and regret (see Tsiros and Mittal, 2000) and their relationship to consumer outcomes like delight, satisfaction, disgust and outrage (see Parasuraman et al., 2016; Bougie, Pieters and Zeelenberg, 2003).

Measuring the emotional elements of customer experience

As one might expect, this variety of approaches regarding the content and structure of emotions leads to inconsistencies in efforts to measure the influence of emotions on customer experience. This is particularly relevant in service contexts, since customer encounters with products, brands and employees can lead to intense emotions (see Matilla and Enz, 2002) which influence key customer outcomes like word of mouth (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos, 2008) and other metrics such as loyalty, retention and share of wallet (Keiningham et al., 2007).

Richins (1997) conducted six empirical studies designed to develop an appropriate way to measure customer related emotions. In the first study, Richins collected a large list of consumer emotions in their own vocabulary, identifying 175 distinct emotion descriptors. Studies two through four narrowed the list to a Consumption Emotion Set (CES) which were tested against key emotion measures including: Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) PAD measure, Izard's (1977) DES-II measure, Havlena and Holbrook's (1986) adaptation of Plutchik's measures, Edell and Burke's (1987) measures of feelings induced by advertising and Batra and Holbrook's (1990) scales measuring affective responses to advertising.

The CES comprises “a set of descriptors that represents the range of emotions consumers most frequently experience in consumption situations” (Richins, 1997, p. 142) that capture a greater diversity of emotions than measures designed without the consumption context in mind. It is important to note, however, that the CES “is not intended to be a definitive assessment tool” but rather “the starting point for determining the proper assessment of customer emotions”. For that reason, we view the CES as a stepping off point for understanding the emotional elements of customer experience, recognizing that emotions are contextual in nature and that other scales (e.g., Brakus et al., 2009) provide useful possible frames.

Physical and Sensorial Elements of the Customer Experience

The physical environment, or ‘servicescape’ (Bitner, 1992), refers to the manmade, firm-controllable surroundings within which service experience occurs. Offline servicescapes comprise elements such as artifacts, music, lighting, layout and signage (Lam, 2001). Online servicescape considerations focus on website features, such as consumer-friendly shopping interfaces (Griffith, 2005) and design cues such as uncluttered screens and fast presentations (Rose et al., 2012). Customers’ interactions with servicescapes have been shown to influence their experiences. For example, within offline settings, impacts are observed on satisfaction, facility image perceptions, word of mouth behaviors and intentions to purchase (Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014; Ezeh and Harris, 2007; Kerin et al., 2002; Reimer and Kuehn, 2005; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996; Baker et al., 1994). In online environments, emotional and cognitive responses, such as satisfaction (Eroglu et al., 2003), purchase intentions (Harris and Goode, 2010) and loyalty (Koering, 2003) are observed. We adopt Bitner’s (1992) categorization of servicescape elements as ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols and artifacts.

1. Ambient conditions:

Ambient conditions comprise background environmental stimuli (Grayson and McNeil, 2009), including visual (e.g., lighting, colors and shapes (Dijkstra et al., 2008)), aesthetic cleanliness, olfactory (e.g., scent and air quality (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001)), temperature (Reimer and Kuehn, 2005), and auditory (e.g., music and noise (Garlin and Owen, 2006; Oakes and North, 2008)) elements. The perception and impact of these stimuli are dependent on the five senses: sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. Thus, forming the sensorial aspect of CE.

Sight

Prior studies have investigated sight-driven responses to packaging design, and in relation to atmospheric features within offline and online retail environments. In particular, color may influence purchasing rates, time spent in the store, store and merchandise image (Crowley, 1993), and the ability to attract consumers toward a retail display (Bellizzi et al., 1983). Similarly, lighting elements and illumination can affect both the store image and the examination and handling of product and services (Levy and Weitz, 2004; Baker et al., 1994; Areni and Kim, 1994).

Touch

Touch responses are generated through customers' physical contact with objects or people within the servicescape (Krishna, 2012). The resulting haptic feedback may be informational, such as the weight of an object (McCabe and Nowlis, 2003) enabling customers to judge attributes such as quality or durability (Hultén, 2012). Alternatively, responses to touch may be hedonic, relating to the pleasantness of the sensation and leading to behavioral outcomes such as philanthropy (Peck and Wiggins, 2003).

Smell

Examinations of customer appraisal of ambient scent within a servicescape have highlighted relationships between olfactory sensation and (1) emotional responses such as pleasure, arousal (Chebat and Michon, 2003) and relaxation (Lehrner et al., 2000), (2) cognitive responses such as product choice (Mitchell et al., 1995), perceptions of time spent in store, and appraisal of product and retail atmosphere quality (Chebat and Michon, 2003), and (3) behaviors such as purchasing and variety seeking (Turley and Mulliman, 2000).

Hearing

Customer interpretations of sound may impact customer experiences in several ways. For example, music in advertising may impact brand attitude formation (Park and Young, 1986) or evoke memories (Krishna, 2012). In-store music can have a significant impact on (1) consumer resource expenditure, both in terms of money and time spent in the store (Jacob et al., 2009; Vida et al., 2007); (2) customers' cognitive activity which, in turn, can influence attitudes toward employees and the store (Chebat et al., 2001; Dubé and Morin, 2001) and (3) customer mood and pleasure perception (Sweeney and Wyber, 2002).

Taste

While not always directly contributing to sensory interactions within the ambient element of a servicescape (unless the environment includes food or drink as an aspect of the service), taste is the most likely of the five senses to integrate with and be impacted by other sensory experiences (Litt and Shiv, 2012). For instance, Klosse et al. (2004) note that taste expectations are created from visual aspects and smell, while much of what we actually taste is registered through the olfactory system. Enjoyment of taste ultimately results in customer liking and possible repurchase (Klosse et al., 2004).

2. Spatial layout and functionality:

Spatial layout refers to the manner in which items such as equipment and furniture are arranged, their size and shape, and the space between them (Edvardsson et al., 2010). It also refers to the lesser observable elements such as comfort and accessibility (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996). Key to customer appraisals of spatial layout is functionality; that is, the facilitation by the layout of customer goal achievement (Ng, 2003). In offline and online scenarios, spatial layout and functionality considerations relate to design (Hultén, 2012). In this regard, a number of studies investigated the impact of the retail store layout, in-store and point-of-purchase displays, crowding and the use of orientation aids, with outcomes linked to customer perceptions, and behavioral responses such as propensity to purchase (Hultén, 2012), unplanned purchase behavior (Inman et al., 2009), and increased sales and willingness to spend (Fiore et al., 2000). In an online environment, Rose et al. (2012) highlighted the relationship between ease of use (site navigation, search and functionality) and cognitive perceptions of control. The self-service technology research stream (Curran and Meuter, 2005) further emphasizes the importance of functionality within servicescapes where customers need to perform the service.

3. Signs, symbols and artifacts:

In addition to their visual sensory impact, signs, symbols and artifacts are used as communication tools to stimulate more abstract customer meaning-making (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). Signs may confirm directions, convey rules of behavior, and communicate a firm’s image (Bitner, 1992). Similarly, companies use signs to adorn a servicescape with corporate brands, logos, and monikers, creating “brandscapes” (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Design considerations incorporate both internal and external areas, such as storefront, entrances, display windows, and building architecture (Cornelius et al., 2010). Symbols and artifacts such as construction material, artwork and decorative items are used to communicate less explicitly than signs. Research in this field has focused mainly on the effect on sales and quality perceptions (Patton, 1981), on value perceptions of retail outlets (Mathwick et al., 2002), customers' sense of control (Wener and Kaminoff, 1982), and mood arousal and attention grabbing (Bellizzi and Hite, 1992).

Measuring the physical and sensorial elements of customer experience

Within the marketing management domain, the physical and sensorial elements of CE are typically measured using experimental methods: senses are manipulated in field or lab-based experiments and customer emotional, cognitive and behavioral responses are measured. While this approach to investigating physical and sensory interactions generates valuable insight, the sensory experience itself is overlooked; that is, what the customer is sensing when interacting with the physical environment and to what extent is not captured.

Methods derived from alternative fields offer possible solutions to this limitation. For instance, sounds heard by customers may be measured using a noise dose meter and the 'Decibel A' scale (Liu and Tan, 2000; Hodge and Thompson, 1990). Taste may be measured using the time intensity (TI) technique, whereby participants score the intensity of a specific flavor over a given time period (Le Révérend et al., 2008; Piggott, 2000), or by the temporal dominance of sensation (TDS) technique, which captures the most dominant flavor (or indeed, sense) over time (Pineau et al., 2009). Alternatively, taste may be manipulated by the use of the glycoprotein miraculin, which disrupts participant taste receptors (e.g., Litt and Shiv, 2012). TDS and TI measures may also be applied to examinations of scent, as illustrated by Leclercq and Blancher (2012), who also incorporated proton transfer mass spectrometry (PTR-MS) to measure the volume of scent molecule within participants' noses. Similarly, recent developments in measuring the physical elements of the CE could be employed. In this respect, the innovative physical dining environment design (IPDED) evaluation model is used, which consists of a survey measuring four main dimensions: creativity, aesthetics, eco-friendliness and performance (Horng et al., 2013).

While these alternative approaches to physical and sensory measurement may in part address the limitations of experimental techniques, they are limited by their non-naturalistic nature. The advancement of technology, however, allows for a more naturalistic approach to the measurement of the physical elements effects. For instance, the growing use of neurophysiological methods enhances our understanding of consumer behavior within servicescapes. The use of eye tracking technology, for instance, is established in studies of shelf space and layouts (Chandon et al., 2009; Huneke et al., 2015). Similarly, biometrics have grown in popularity, capturing physiological and behavioral responses to external stimuli (Potter and Bolls, 2012). Measurable physiological characteristics include fingerprints, hand geometry, facial characteristics, iris, retina, personal scent and DNA, while behavioral characteristics include handwriting, keystroke, voice and gait (Jones et al., 2007). Among the most commonly studied physiological responses within servicescape is heart rate, breathing, and skin conductance (Sheng and Joginapelly, 2012). Finally, fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is a noninvasive method that tracks changes in blood oxygenation during cognitive processes (Ogawa et al., 1990). This method has been used to measure trust and distrust by capturing the location, timing, and level of brain activity that underlies trust and distrust in experimentally manipulated environments (Dimoka et al., 2010). Furthermore, techniques of spatial analysis involving diagrammatic plans have been used to identify the impact of layout upon customers' paths and behaviors within a particular physical environment (Peponis et al., 2004).

The Social Elements of the Customer Experience

The social aspect of CE refers to the influence of staff, other customers, and wider social network(s) on a customer's experience with a brand (Lemke et al., 2011; Verhoef et al., 2009; Archer-Brown et al., 2015). The interactions with and appearance of the service personnel, other customers, as well as customer's reference groups affect his or her experience with the brand (Verhoef et al., 2009).

Social identities are "mental representations that can become a basic part of how consumers view themselves" (Reed, 2004, p. 286). These include political and religious affiliation, as well as other lifestyle markers such as occupation, familial roles (e.g., parent/child/sibling), or visible interests and activities (e.g., athlete, musician, artist, cinefile, etc.). Individuals will typically have several social identities. Identity salience refers to a temporary state during which one (or more) of a consumer's social identities comes to the fore (Forehand et al., 2002). Congruence between salient social identities and elements such as product/service offerings and advertising are therefore expected to positively influence consumer choice.

Measuring the social elements of the customer experience

The variety and multitude of individual, group and networked influences on CE poses a challenge in terms of developing consistent and uniform measurement tools to capture the social element of customer experience. However, it is critical to capture the social experience as one of the key determinants of CE (De Keyser et al., 2015). Given the highly contextual, cultural and fluid nature of social encounters in the marketplace, a simplistic or singular approach to measurement would not be sufficient to account for the complexity of social interactions surrounding customer's engagement with the brand.

These socio-cultural elements of CE inspired the interpretive research tradition and its varied approaches (e.g., ethnography, netnography, depth interviews, case studies, semiotics, metaphor analysis, etc.) to uncover the unique social aspects of customer behavior in multiple and varied contexts (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005; 2008 for review). This stream of research underscores the importance and fluidity of the social aspect of consumer behavior.

Overall, the preceding sections underscore the importance of framing of CE as a multi-dimensional construct (Gentil et al., 2007) and highlight the complexity of practicing CEM and measuring CE within and across these multiple domains. In the following section we propose a framework for examining CE, using customer satisfaction measurement as a proxy for the assessment of customer experience and customer commitment as a proxy for customer loyalty.

COMMITMENT AND CUSTOMERS PERCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCE

Managers' interest in the customer experience results from a general belief that enhancing customers' experiences will result in greater loyalty to the firm or brand. As loyalty represents "a deeply held commitment" that results in repeat purchasing behavior (Oliver, 1999, p. 34), commitment is the customer attitude that managers are seeking to influence in the hope of engendering increased purchase behaviors. Once achieved, however, customer commitment has the potential to influence customers' perceptions of subsequent firm/brand experiences.

We acknowledge that, to date, there is no research on the influence of commitment on perceptions of the CE. There is, however, a body of evidence regarding the relationship between customer satisfaction and commitment. While satisfaction represents the level of fulfillment achieved through customers' experiences with a brand (as opposed to the more granular elements that comprise the customer experience), we argue that satisfaction is an appropriate surrogate for assessing the potential of different commitment dimensions to influence perceptions of the CE.

Customer Experience of Satisfaction and Commitment: An Overview

Research regarding the order of influence between satisfaction and commitment is not resolved. In the literature, there are four competing models: 1) satisfaction influences commitment (e.g., satisfaction → commitment), 2) commitment influences satisfaction (e.g., commitment → satisfaction), 3) satisfaction and commitment have a reciprocal relationship (e.g., satisfaction ↔ commitment), and 4) no causal relationship exists between satisfaction and commitment (satisfaction ⇎commitment).

Most of the research investigating the causal order of satisfaction and commitment comes from the organizational behavior literature. The majority of researchers in this area presume that job satisfaction is an antecedent to organizational commitment (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1973; Reichers, 1985; Steers, 1977; Williams and Hazer, 1986). The underlying reasoning behind the generally accepted view is articulated by Porter et al. (1974, p. 608):

> *"a* relatively greater amount of time would be required for an employee to determine his level of commitment to the organization than would be the case with his level of job satisfaction. This process is likely to result in a stable and enduring level of commitment. On the other hand, the degree of *one's* job satisfaction ... may represent a more rapidly formed affective response than does *commitment."*

Therefore, the rapid formation of satisfaction when compared to the longer-term development of commitment suggests that it is satisfaction that leads to commitment (Williams and Hazer, 1986). Despite the seeming logic of this argument, however, researchers find conflicting evidence.

Bateman and Strasser (1984), Dosset and Suszko (1990), and Vandenberg and Lance (1992) find that organizational commitment is an antecedent to job satisfaction. The underlying theoretical arguments as to why this would be the case draw largely from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Specifically, cognitive dissonance theory proposes that when an individual's voluntarily performed behavior contradicts a previously formed attitude it causes dissonance, and as a result the individual rationalizes his/her counter-attitudinal behavior. Specifically, Bateman and Strasser (1984, p. 97) argue, "commitment initiates a rationalizing process through which individuals 'make sense' of their current situation by developing attitudes (satisfaction) that are consistent with their commitment."

Because models 1 and 2 (e.g., satisfaction → commitment and commitment → satisfaction) can be supported by theory, and empirical evidence can be found for both models, some researchers have suggested that the relationship between the two constructs may be reciprocal (e.g., satisfaction ↔ commitment). Farkas and Tetrick (1989) specifically advocate this model based upon the results of their investigation, suggesting that "commitment and satisfaction may be either cyclically or reciprocally related (p. 855)."

Finally, Curry et al. (1986) and Anderson and Williams (1992) find no temporal relationship between the two constructs. The underlying hypothesis for why this might be the case is that job satisfaction (JS) and organizational commitment (OC) are thought to be correlated due to "common causal variables…thus observed JS-OC correlations may reflect the fact that JS and OC share common antecedents, but are not causally related" (Vandenberg and Lance, 1992, p. 155).

In the marketing literature, most researchers similarly presume that satisfaction is an antecedent to commitment (e.g., Bansal et al., 2004; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Hennig-

Thurau et al., 2002). As Brown and colleagues (2005, p. 133) note, “it is difficult to imagine a consumer developing a committed relationship … without having experienced satisfaction from exchanges with [a firm].” Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002, p. 237) explain the underlying reasoning as follows:

> *“A* high level of satisfaction provides the customer with a repeated positive reinforcement, thus creating commitment-inducing emotional bonds. In addition, satisfaction is related to the fulfillment of *customers'* social needs, and the repeated fulfillment of these social needs is likely to lead to bonds of an emotional kind that also constitute *commitment.”*

As is the case in the organizational behavior literature, however, there is conflicting evidence regarding the direction of influence of satisfaction and commitment. For example, Verhoef (2003) finds that affective commitment, not satisfaction, predicts retention when both variables are included in the model. This would seem to imply that commitment is closer to customer behavior than is satisfaction in the commonly presumed chain of effects (e.g., satisfaction → commitment → retention). Gustafsson et al. (2005), however, find the opposite result; that affective commitment does not predict customer retention when it is included with customer satisfaction in their models, which implies the reverse order for satisfaction and commitment (e.g., commitment → satisfaction → retention). Additionally, using a competing models approach designed specifically to investigate the directionality between customer satisfaction and affective commitment, Johnson et al. (2008) find that commitment influences satisfaction.

As with research into organizational commitment and job satisfaction, cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), offers a plausible explanation as to why commitment would be an antecedent to satisfaction. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1967, 1972), and biased scanning (Janis and King, 1954), also offer plausible explanations.

Self-perception theory proposes that when people are asked to report an attitude, they simply infer this attitude from implications of past behavior (e.g., if I did it, it must have been desirable) (Albarracín and Wyer, 2000; Bem, 1967, 1972). Biased scanning proposes that "after people have engaged in a particular behavior they often conduct a biased search of memory for previously acquired knowledge that confirms the legitimacy of their act … They may then … form a new attitude toward the behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), and this attitude, in turn, might influence both their intentions to repeat the behavior and their actual decision to do so when the occasion arises" (Albarracín and Wyer, 2000, p. 6). It appears logical that in addition to attitude formation, each of these theories would extend to customers' perceptions of satisfaction. For a review of cognitive dissonance theory, biased scanning, and self-perception theory, we direct the reader to Olson and Stone (2005)

To date, marketing scholars have not confirmed that satisfaction and commitment are reciprocal. Similarly, there is nothing in the marketing literature to suggest that satisfaction and commitment are not causally related to one another.

As noted earlier, both satisfaction → commitment, and commitment → satisfaction are theoretically supportable. Oliver's (1999, 2010) research into the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty may offer additional insight into when we might be more likely to expect one direction of influence over the other. Specifically, Oliver observes that repeated high levels of satisfaction are necessary to engender consumer loyalty, but at some point it is possible for loyalty to become independent of satisfaction. Therefore, if customers have become loyal to a firm or brand whereby they continue to repurchase "despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver 1999, p. 34), cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1967, 1972) suggest that customers' behavioral loyalty would be expected to influence their perceptions of the satisfactoriness of encounters with the firm/brand.

Furthermore, as Oliver (2010) argues, loyalty attitudes and behaviors result from repeated encounters, thus it may be that the commitment-satisfaction relationship is stronger for some product/service categories than for others (e.g., repeat usage products/service categories may be more prone to the commitment → satisfaction order of influence than single usage or low repetition product/service categories).

While we acknowledge that these perspectives may raise more questions than answers regarding the relationship between the customer perception of experience (in this case, satisfaction) and commitment, we contend that the five-component model of customer commitment (Keiningham et al., 2015) provides a useful framework for exploring these concepts. The following section describes the relationships between CE of satisfaction and affective, normative, forced, habitual and economic commitment.

Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment and Customer Experience of Satisfaction

It is important to note that satisfaction → commitment relationship is typically presumed for affective commitment only. Research measuring commitment as a unidimensional construct, which represents the overwhelming majority of commitment-related research in marketing, typically conceptualizes the commitment construct as a positive affect-based commitment (see Keiningham et al., 2015). Very little research has been conducted regarding the direction of influence between satisfaction and other forms of commitment (the notable exception being Cramer (1996), discussed later).

The theoretical arguments regarding why affective commitment would influence satisfaction (i.e., cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), self-perception theory (Bem, 1967), and biased scanning (Janis and King, 1954)), however, appear equally valid for why normative commitment (i.e. a bond based upon an obligation/duty) would be expected to influence satisfaction. Furthermore, research shows that moral obligation "has independent effects on behavioral intentions … [and] may affect attitudes themselves" (Sparks and Shepherd 2002, p. 299). Here too, it appears logical that this would extend to perceptions of satisfaction. In fact, we witness this frequently with regard to ideological commitments. For example, research finds that political party affiliation influences perceptions (Kaplan et al., 2007). In some cases, this results in a suspicion of the motives of opposing party members regarding behaviors that are not deemed suspicious of in-party members. Clearly, such motivated suspicion towards out-group individuals and presumed acceptableness towards in-group individuals would influence satisfaction levels regarding the same behaviors performed by members of these two groups.

Continuance Commitment and Customer Experience of Satisfaction

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

Forced Commitment and Customer Experience of Satisfaction

With regard to forced commitment, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where an individual's level of satisfaction would influence his/her general belief that he/she had few alternatives. It is, however, very easy to imagine scenarios where commitment based upon a lack of alternatives would influence satisfaction (and perceptions of the CE). Research in psychology and marketing supports the need for self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985), and that a lack of freedom of choice leads to negative psychological outcomes (Averill, 1973; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Langer and Rodin, 1976; Wortman, 1975). In fact, in a clear indication of the influence of constraint-based commitment and satisfaction, the marketing literature frequently refers to customers who perceive no viable alternatives with variations on the word captive: e.g., "trapped" (Fournier et al., 1998), "hostages" (Jones and Sasser, 1995) and "prisoners" (Curasi and Kennedy, 2002).

Habitual Commitment and Customer Experience of Satisfaction

With regard to habitual commitment, research indicates that it is not guided by consumer attitudes or intentions (Ji and Wood, 2007; Liu-Thompkins and Tam, 2010). Therefore, once a behavior has become a habit, satisfaction would not be expected to materially alter the behavior.

For example, Neal et al. (2009; Wood and Neal, 2009) showed that habitual popcorn eaters ate the same amount of popcorn at a movie theater regardless of whether or not the popcorn was fresh or stale. As would be expected, however, consumers of the stale popcorn reported being much less satisfied with the popcorn.

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

Economic Commitment and Customer Experience of Satisfaction

With regard to economic commitment (e.g. customers cognitive appraisals of his or her investment in the brand/provider, Keiningham, et al., 2015), here too we would expect the primary direction of influence to be from commitment to satisfaction. The underlying reason for this is intuitive; economic utility clearly influences satisfaction with an encounter and with the entire firm-customer relationship, not the other way around (Turley and Fugate, 1993). In fact, it is Gossen's Second Law (Gossen, 1854; in Blaug, 1996, p. 309):

> *"A* person maximizes his utility when he distributes his available money among the various goods so that he obtains the same amount of satisfaction from the last unit of money spent upon each *commodity."*

Taken together, these findings have important implications regarding the direction of influence of satisfaction and commitment. Theory appears to support the idea that continuance commitment (e.g., forced, habitual and economic commitment) should influence satisfaction. Also, there appears to be strong theoretical support that the same direction of influence should hold for normative commitment.

With regard to affective commitment, theory and logic indicate that commitment would lead to satisfaction for new customers. But for repeat usage products/services by experienced customers, there appears to be strong theoretical support that the primary direction of influence is from commitment to satisfaction.

As satisfaction is reflection of customers' fulfillment resulting from their experiences, by logical extension there is strong theoretical support that customers' perceptions of their CEs will be influenced by their level and type of commitment to a firm or brand. This implies that measuring the CE without a clear understanding of the type and level of commitment held by the customer will be difficult for managers to interpret. For example, objectively similar experiences involving two different firms—one to whom the customer has a strong affective commitment, the other to which she feels a forced commitment—are likely to be perceived very differently by the customer.

This reflects the intrinsic difficulty in measuring and managing the CE discussed earlier. Indeed, CE is "inherently personal and unique to the individual customer" (De Keyser et al., 2015, p. 15).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Improving the CE has become a management mantra. While the attractiveness of this goal is self-evident, our investigation points to the difficulty of achieving these aims in practice.

The breadth of the domains that encompass the customer experience—cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social—makes simplistic metrics impossible for gauging the entirety of customers' experiences.

Managers have demonstrated a propensity to gravitate to flawed but simple metrics when confronted with complexity (Little, 1970; 2004). Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a scenario where C-level managers are regularly monitoring their firms' performance on all relevant elements of the CE.

The ultimate goal of improving the CE—to foster customer commitment to the brand—impacts how customers perceive their experiences. This has very important implications for managers. As each commitment dimension tends to correspond to a particular firm strategy, managers need to recognize that the type of commitment fostered will impact the lens through which customers view the experience. For example, many service firms seek to enhance economic commitment through the use of loyalty rewards programs. Economically committed customers, however, may be less sensitive to softer, more affective enhancing elements of the CE.

These findings provide strong support of the need for new research into CE and customer commitment. Several areas of research into these concepts are of critical importance. First, as managers are unlikely to track and manage all relevant elements of CE, researchers need to identify empirically the most salient attributes of the CE with particular emphasis on those elements that enhance commitment to the firm or brand. Second, research needs to be conducted that specifically examines the differing impact of the five dimensions of commitment on customers' perceptions of their experiences (including, but not limited to the CE of satisfaction explored here). These findings should offer insight into service design to correspond with specific commitment and experience dimensions.

Additionally, we note three CE-specific issues worthy of further consideration. First, each of the five senses has empirically highlighted relationships with emotional and cognitive responses. Relatedly, Bitner (1992) recognized that, despite the firm-controlled nature of servicescapes, customers are also affected by social and natural stimuli within the service environment. Consequently, it seems there is a contribution from the sensorial and the physical to the emotional, cognitive and social elements of the customer experience. From a measurement perspective, it may therefore be more parsimonious to measure at the emotional, cognitive, physical and social level, applying specific sensory measures only in the event that a detailed diagnostic is required. The research of Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) could bring some clarity into this complex area. Their classification of services as consumption-centric, social-centric, and experience-centric categories may offer guidelines as to which physical and sensorial aspects are likely to be impactful in a particular service setting. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011), for instance, propose that a customer using a consumption-centric service, such as a self-service technology, may react more strongly to physical dimensions, while a customer within an experience-centric context, such as a theatre, may respond more strongly to the setting's social, socially symbolic, and natural dimensions.

Second, although measures assess the effect of individual or multiple sensorial and physical dimensions, it is the overall and holistic assessment of the physical environment and the related sensorial experiences that dictates customers' response to it (Mari and Poggesi, 2013). Sensory perception itself is dynamic and not a single event (Piggott, 2000). Consequently, accurate and informative measurement of the sensory elements of CE requires a continuous, realtime functionality. Additionally, in generating information for the customer, the five senses rarely function in isolation. Rather, customer experiences are typically multi-sensory (Cornil and Chandon, 2015) with associations between sensory features. Consequently, measures of the sensory elements of CE will need to reflect this multi-sensory integration.

Third, customer responses to physical and associated sensory stimuli are moderated by various individual characteristics. For instance, responses to visual cues within a physical environment are impacted by customer involvement and atmospheric responsiveness (Eroglu et al., 2003) while individuals vary in their ‘need for touch’ (Peck and Childers, 2003). Furthermore, studies show that reactions to music vary with age (Gulas and Schewe, 1994) and gender (Raajpoot et al., 2008; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1993). While this is by no means an exhaustive list of possible moderating factors, it further highlights the multi-dimensional nature of CE and the requirement to capture individual customer characteristics when measuring its cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial and social elements.

In summary, understanding the relationship between CE and customer commitment is critical to achieving what Peter Drucker described as the goal of every business: “To create a customer” (Drucker, 1974, p. 61). The complexity of the experience and its relationship to commitment, however, helps explain why firms often fail to deliver exceptional experiences for their customers. Nonetheless, by continually advancing our understanding, service researchers can provide managers with important insights into not only the challenges but also potential solutions for holistically managing CE. We are hopeful that this research will catalyze further examination of these questions in a variety of service contexts.

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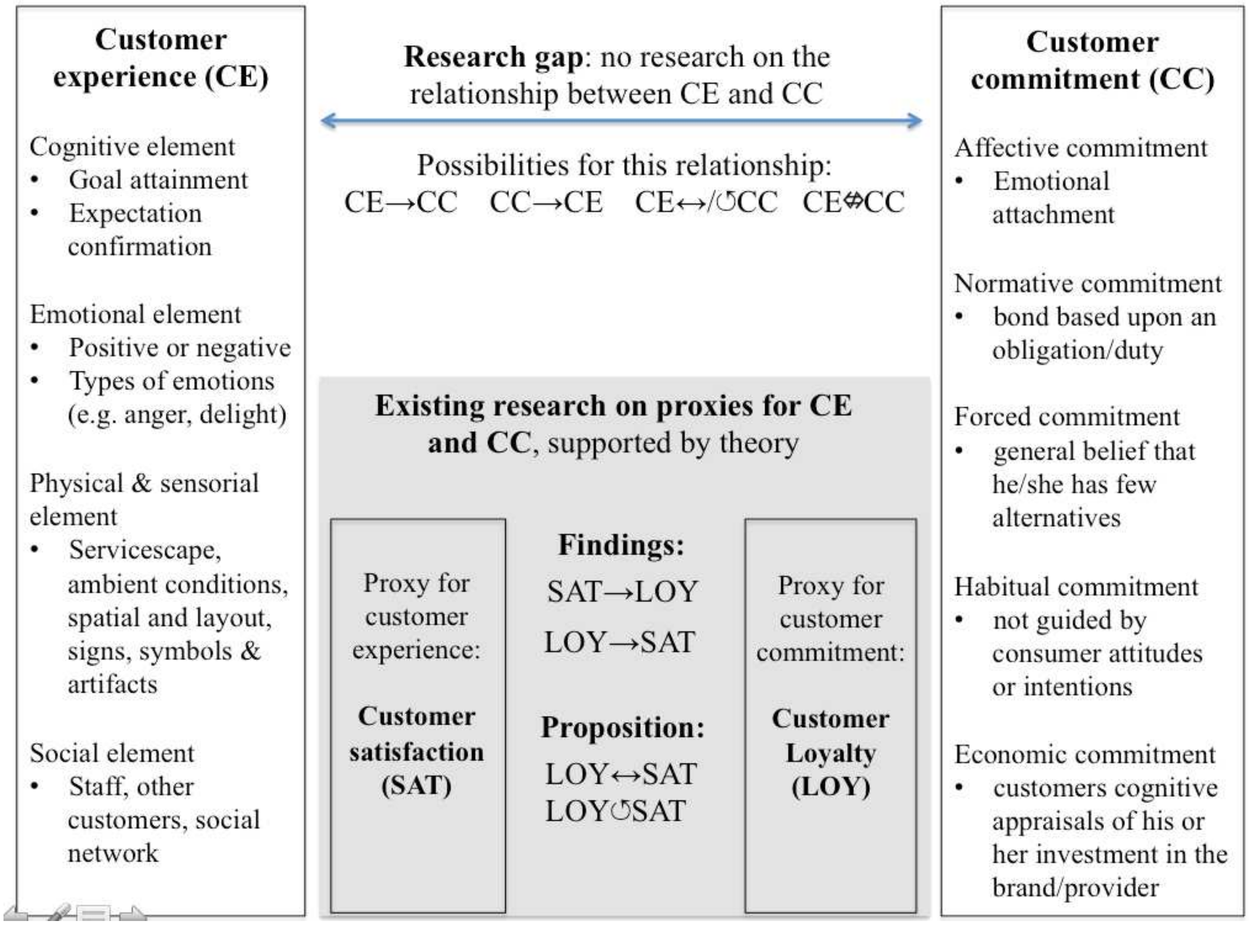
FIGURE 1


Customer experience (CE)
Cognitive element
• Goal attainment
• Expectation confirmation
Emotional element
• Positive or negative
• Types of emotions (e.g. anger, delight)
Physical & sensorial element
• Servicescape, ambient conditions, spatial and layout, signs, symbols & artifacts
Social element
• Staff, other customers, social network
Research gap: no research on the relationship between CE and CC
Possibilities for this relationship:
CE→CC CC→CE CE↔/↺CC CE⇎CC
Existing research on proxies for CE and CC, supported by theory
Proxy for customer experience:
Customer satisfaction (SAT)
Findings:
SAT→LOY
LOY→SAT
Proposition:
LOY↔SAT
LOY↺SAT
Proxy for customer commitment:
Customer Loyalty (LOY)
Customer commitment (CC)
Affective commitment
• Emotional attachment
Normative commitment
• bond based upon an obligation/duty
Forced commitment
• general belief that he/she has few alternatives
Habitual commitment
• not guided by consumer attitudes or intentions
Economic commitment
• customers cognitive appraisals of his or her investment in the brand/provider