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## Positive Correlation Between Experience Marketing Strategies and The Consumer Relationship with The Brands

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to confirm the relationship between the experience marketing strategies implemented by apparel brands for men and women and the strengthening the consumer's relationship with the brand. To obtain the data, a multi-factor scale questionnaire was constructed. For the "brand value" factor, the dimensions proposed by Asker (1991) we taken as a reference. To evaluate the factor "relationship with the brand", the dimensions proposed by Ahuvia, Bagozzi and Batra (2012), and Fournier (1994) were used. Finally, to evaluate the brand experience factor, the dimensions of the scale proposed by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) we adopted. The objective of this research was to establish the influence of the marketing strategies of the experience in the brand preference and in the construction of the brand image. Dimensions such as brand loyalty, perceived quality - leadership (popularity, brand concept, product perception, product acceptance), partnership - brand differentiation (personality, brand positioning, values associated with the brand) and knowledge of the brand (top of mind - preference) obtained high scores in brand that implement experience marketing strategies. It is evident that the sensorial stimulation generated by the shop windows and the experience marketing strategies make consumers stop, enter and buy in stores; besides contributing to the strengthening of consumer relations with brands.

**Keywords:** brand experience, brand value, consumer relationship, experience marketing

### INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

At a time when brands are not offering great differentiation from their competition and promotions are increasingly used to seduce consumers, experience marketing strategies are the best option for strengthening the consumer-brand relationship. These focus on designing brand strategies based on the creation of experiences that provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and social value which complement and enrich functional value (Brakus et al., 2009, Schmitt, 2000).

The notion of experience appears in the marketing literature, through several terms, such as customer experience (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007), consumer experience (Tsai, 2005), service experience (Hui and Bateson, 1991), product experience (Hoch, 2002), experience consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), shopping experience (Kerin, Jain and Howard, 1992) and brand

experience (Brakus et al., 2009). The first authors to include the concept of experience in the field of marketing were Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), who approached experience as a personal event with an important emotional meaning, based on interaction with stimuli (products and/or services consumed). Today, experience is considered an important element in the life of the consumer. Therefore, experience is added to the offer of products and services to adapt to the needs of the postmodern consumer (Schmitt, 1999; Su, 2011).

The consumption of products and services does not have exclusively objective, functional or rational characteristics, but also, contains the experiential dimension. In this sense, it is important to recognize that, although experiences are individual events, they occur in response to stimuli; and these are not spontaneous but induced, since they have reference and intentionality (Bellos and Kavadias, 2011; Schmitt, 1999). For this reason, Pine and Gilmore (1999) affirm that an experience occurs when a company uses the service as a stage, or a product as an element to involve the client and create something memorable for him and her. This memorable experience allows the consumer to explore all their senses through the characteristics of the company's offer (Schmitt, 1999). The strategic aspects of the aspects of the experience are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Strategic aspects of experience**

	EXPERIENCE	DESCRIPTION
1	SENSE	Experiences that involve sensory perceptions: sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell.
2	FEEL	Experiences that involve feelings and emotions.
3	THINK	Affective and cognitive experiences: these appeal to the intellect with the purpose of creating cognitive experiences that solve problems and attract clients creatively.
4	ACT	Experiences that involve the physical and are intended to affect bodily experiences, lifestyles and interactions.
5	RELATE	These experiences are the result of relating to a group.

Source: Alcaide Casado (2010, p. 277).

Initially, experience marketing strategies were implemented in the services category. Later, these were associated with the functional attributes of a product and subsequently brand experiences were implemented (Brakus et al., 2009). This type of strategy is based on the differentiation of non - functional aspects of the product. That is to say, today consumers take for granted the characteristics and functional advantages of products, as well as the quality (Schmitt, 2000) and thus differentiation must take another course, i.e. experience.

Experience marketing strategies directly influence the construction and/or strengthening of brand value. Thus, it is essential to review models for measurement of this aspect. In addition, the relationship between the consumer and the brand is a dimension that is included in the measurement of the value of the brand. Several authors have theorized and highlighted the relationship between the construction of the brand and the consumer. For instance, Zarantonello

and Schmitt (2010) studied the relationship between attitudes, purchase intention, attraction and the brand experience based on different dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural).

Regarding brand equity, several measurement models have been identified (see Table 2) that essentially answer the following questions: How valuable is your brand? How has its value evolved over time? To what extent is the brand affected by communication problems? Moreover, three approaches to brand loyalty have been identified. The first approach affirms that brand loyalty is an effective behaviour, materialized in repeat purchases of the same product, or from the same brand or supplier (Delgado, 2004; Rodríguez et al., 2002). The second approach defines brand loyalty as an attitude: a psychological commitment on the part of the consumer, which includes positive feelings towards a product, brand or organization and is based on experiences and the relationship with customer needs (Ottar, 2007). In the third approach (attitudinal / behavioral), brand loyalty includes brand commitment and repurchase behavior, and this is how loyalty transforms into the consumer's psychological commitment to the brand. This is evidenced by a positive attitude and an effective intention to repurchase (Beatty and Kahale, 1988, Bloemer and Kasper, 1993, 1995, Dick and Basu, 1994, Jacoby and Kyner, 1973, Martin and Rodríguez, 2001, Pritchard et al. al., 1999; Vázquez and Álvarez, 2007).

**Table 2: Brand value measurement systems**

SYSTEM	FACTORS
Brand Asset Valuator, developed by Young & Rubicam, Inc.	Differentiation: measure in which the brand distinguishes itself from its competitors in the market. Relevance: measures if the brand has personal relevance for the consumer. Does it mean anything? Is it appropriate? Esteem: measures how close the brand is to being perceived as the best in its category. Knowledge: the consumer's understanding of the identity of the brand and what it represents.
Equitrend, a brand value measurement system designed by Total Research	Notoriety: percentage of people who have a favourable opinion of the brand. Perceived quality: measured using 11 items on a scale ranging from "unacceptable" to "outstanding". User satisfaction: the average quality value that the brand receives from its regular users.
Interbrand System developed by Interbrand, a brand consultancy firm located in the United Kingdom that conducts international trademark studies	Financial analysis: brand product income. Market analysis: brand effect index. Brand strength analysis: market strength, market leadership, brand stability, current market prospects, brand extension possibilities, internationalization potential and adaptation to time, brand support and legal protection.
Brand Equity Ten, developed by Aaker (1999)	Loyalty Perceived quality/leadership Association/differentiation Brand conscience Market behaviour

Note: authors' elaboration (2018)

Fournier (1985) suggests the notion of the “quality of the relationship” as an alternative to the construct “brand loyalty”. She says that the quality of the brand relationship is similar in spirit to brand loyalty and proposes a six-dimensional model of brand relationship quality (BRQ) to evaluate the consumer’s relationship with the brand. The six dimensions are: love and passion, self-connection (reflecting the degree to which the brand fulfils important tasks related to the identity of the consumer, or expresses some significant aspect of the self), interdependence (involving frequent interactions with the brand, greater scope and diversity of activities related to the brand and greater intensity of individual interaction events), commitment (intention to behave in a way that supports the longevity of the relationship), intimacy (personalization of brand information, stored in the memory) and the quality of the brand partner (reflecting the evaluation of the performance of the brand by the consumer in their association role).

Thus, the battlefield of the brands is focused on the creation of experiences and the fashion market has also ventured into this field. However, according to the results obtained in our previous research, apparel brands for men and women operating in the city of Cali - Colombia, still do not implement strategies that include all dimensions of the customer experience. Currently, the strategies employed focus on the visual stimulation of the consumer through a variety of tactics, such as: visual marketing, shop window design, exhibition and seduction merchandising. Shop windows are decorated based on themes; particularly seasons and/or special dates of the year (Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Halloween, Christmas, and so on). Clothing is displayed in sets, including footwear, belts, bags and accessories (Beltrán et al., 2015). Therefore, this investigation focused on evaluating the effect of experience marketing strategies implemented by the brands under study in terms of their influence and impact on customer loyalty and the relationship of consumers with these brands. In addition, we evaluate how the consumer perceives the efforts of the brands to generate a sensory impact. Thus, this research grew out of the knowledge gap generated by previous research.

Experiential marketing is also known as sensory marketing, poly-sensory marketing and emotional marketing and is defined as the “last frontier of marketing”. It was born when marketing specialists understood that consumers do not always behave rationally and therefore the implementation of this approach implies a true internal revolution. It is necessary to excite the client and all the stimuli must project the values of the brand in a self-referential circle that involves the client. Thus, marketing and customer management activities are focused on the search for a new source of competitive advantage, based on the differentiation and emotional involvement of customers and the creation of positive experiences linked to the brand and/or establishment.

The question that drove this research was: How do experience marketing strategies implemented by apparel brands in their stores contribute to strengthening the relationship of consumers with brands? The specific objectives were: (i) to characterize the brand elements: image, associated values, positioning, preference of the brands under study; (ii) to determine the weight of the dimensions of the experience in each of the brands; (iii) to determine the dimensions of the quality of the consumer’s relationship with the brand. In addressing these objectives, it was possible to achieve the general objective, namely confirming the relationship between the

experience marketing strategies implemented in the stores and the bonds of the consumers with the brands in the cities of Barranquilla and Cali, Colombia.

This research confirms the positive correlation between experience marketing strategies implemented by apparel brands for men and women in their stores and the relationship of the consumer with the brand. In addition, it is evidenced that sensory stimulation, primarily in the design of shop windows, contributes to establishing an emotional bond with the brand. This link starts with liking, followed by brand preference, progressing to the consumer feeling positive emotions and love for the brand.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was of a simple transversal quantitative type, in which a representative sample of the population was surveyed, as shown in Table 3, namely: men and women of socio-economic levels 3, 4 and 5, aged between 18 and 30 years and residing in the cities of Barranquilla and Cali. In all, 11 brands of apparel for men and women were studied.

**Table 3: Distribution of the sample in the two cities**

Cities	Population size	Sample size	Error range	Confidence level
Two cities	685.000	697	3.8	95%
Barranquilla	270.000	309	5.5	95%
Cali	415.000	388	5.2	95%

Note: authors' elaboration (2018).

The estimations applied for the samples were as follows:

$$n \text{ Barranquilla} = \frac{Z^2 a \times p \times q}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot (50 \times 50)}{(5.5)^2} = 309$$

$$n \text{ Cali} = \frac{Z^2 a \times p \times q}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot (50 \times 50)}{(5.2)^2} = 388$$

In the first stage of the study, a theoretical exploration was carried out, reviewing theoretical developments in branding, the marketing of experience and the relationship of the consumer with the brand. Based on these thematic axes, a tracking of national and international research was carried out and, finally, scales were identified for the measurement of: brand, the dimensions of experience marketing and the relationship levels of the consumer with the brand.

For the collection of data, a multi-factor questionnaire was constructed in which dimensions of different scales were used. For analysis of the brand, the dimensions proposed by Asker (1991)

were taken as the reference, namely brand loyalty, perceived quality/leadership (popularity, brand concept, perception of product, product acceptance), association/differentiation (personality–brand positioning values associated with the brand), brand awareness (recall, top of mind, preference). To analyse the “relationship with the brand” factor, we used the dimensions proposed by Ahuvia, Bagozzi and Batra (2012) and by Fournier (1994), i.e. love/passion for the brand, brand loyalty, identification with the brand, emotional connection with the brand. To evaluate the brand experience factor, the scale proposed by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) was selected, comprising sensory, emotional, cognitive and behavioural action dimensions.

**Table 4: Factors and dimensions evaluated in the questionnaire**

<i>FACTOR (Dimensions)</i>	<i>Items</i>
<b>BRAND</b>	
<b>1. Brand loyalty</b>	I buy the brand frequently It's my favourite brand I will buy the brand again I am loyal to the brand** I visit the brand's store frequently** I follow the brand in social networks** I think I'm a fan of the brand**
<b>2. Perceived quality</b>	The brand has the best quality It is an innovative brand The brand has the best design The brand has a variety of lines
<b>3. Association – differentiation</b>	Values and anti-values associated with the brand Brand positioning
<b>4. Brand awareness</b>	Top of mind
<b>RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BRAND</b>	
<b>1. Emotional value</b>	Emotions, feelings, moods associated with the brand
<b>2. Emotional connection</b>	Satisfaction with the brand I love the brand* I like the brand Use of the brand makes me feel happy* I feel a strong identification with the brand* I feel proud to be a brand client* The brand is present at important moments of my life* The brand evokes memories and pleasant moments for me* The brand identifies with my lifestyle*
<b>BRAND EXPERIENCE</b>	
<b>1. General perception</b>	Perception of the experience offered by the brand
<b>2. Sensory stimulation</b>	Impact on the senses (sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch) Aesthetics of stores Design of shop windows Interior design of stores
<b>3. Affective stimulation</b>	The brand stimulates interaction with others The brand makes me feel part of a community The brand changes my mood I strongly identify with the brand*

<p><b>4. Behavioural stimulation</b> <b>5. Intellectual stimulation</b></p>	I visit the brand's stores frequently**
	I follow the brand on social networks**
	The use of the brand makes me feel happy*
	The brand evokes memories and pleasant moments for me*
	I am loyal to the brand**
	The brand identifies with my lifestyle*
	The brand is present at important moments of my life*
	The brand excites me
	I feel proud to be a brand client*
	I think I'm a fan of the brand**
	I like the brand*
	I love the brand*
	The brand generates positive emotions
	The brand motivates me to do things
	The brand makes me curious
The brand inspires me	

Note: authors' elaboration (2018)

For the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics were used, processing the data in the SPSS program (version 24).

**RESULTS**

The branding elements characterized in this investigation were brand awareness, brand loyalty, association/differentiation and perceived quality. Regarding the first dimension, it was established that brands representing higher top of mind are those that implement strategies of window designs and display merchandising with greater impact. Also, it was established that the brands obtained the highest top of mind values were also those from which most purchases were made and therefore the most visited points of sale (Table 5).

**Table 5: Elements of branding**

<b>BRAND</b>	<b>TOP OF MIND</b>	<b>VISITING SHOP AND BUYING</b>	<b>BRAND PREFERENCE</b>
<b>Z1</b>	14%	19%	22%
<b>AD1</b>	12%	23%	18%
<b>ST1</b>	7%	14%	17%

Note: Names of the brands were coded and these percentages correspond to the total of the sample (697 people).

The values associated with brands that present the highest top of mind and are preferred by consumers are authenticity, creativity, success, passion and adventure.

Positioning is the place that a brand occupies in the mind of the consumer and is a consequence of the experience with the brand and of advertising. The differential positioning of the brands with the highest top of mind and with more frequent visits to their stores and purchases is thus apparent (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Positioning elements**

<i>Positioning elements</i>	<i>ADI</i>	<i>NKI</i>	<i>STI</i>	<i>ZI</i>
<i>Innovative brand</i>	19	14.0	10.0	18.0
<i>Best quality</i>	19	14.0	8.8	16.8
<i>Best sportswear brand</i>	24.0	17.6	5.9	15.0
<i>The most chic and good price</i>	13.8	9.9	14.8	20.0
<i>Exclusive garments</i>	18.6	14.1	9.7	17.6
<i>Trend clothing and good price</i>	14.8	11.8	14.5	19.6
<i>Best located stores</i>	18.2	13.0	11.4	18.5
<i>Best garment display</i>	13.0	9.8	11.3	33.0
<i>Eye-catching window designs</i>	14.0	10.0	10.2	33.6
<i>Stores with better interior design</i>	18.0	12.5	12.2	18.7
<i>Provides different experiences</i>	18.9	14.2	9.2	16.6
<i>Small boutiques within the same store</i>	12.2	9.2	14.9	31.3

Note: The table contains the elements for the positioning of the brands with the highest top of mind and these are associated with experience marketing strategies in the stores.

In terms of the experience factor, as shown in Table 7 the dimensions evaluated were as follows: general perception of the experience, sensory stimulation, affective stimulation, cognitive stimulation and behavioural stimulation. In all, 94% of the respondents who named the brand AD1 considered the experience of the brand to be very good. The same applies to the Z1 brand (93.4%).

The sense most stimulated by all the brands under study is visual, followed by touch, the latter because the brands allow customers to touch the garments and go to the changing room to try them out. In this regard, the AD1 brand stands out (22.1%), followed by Z1 (20%) and ST1 (13%).

**Table 7: Dimensions of brand experience**

<b>BRAND</b>	<b>SENS</b>	<b>EMOT</b>	<b>COGN</b>	<b>BEHAV</b>	<b>TL. BRAND EXPER</b>
<b>AD1</b>	79.2	83.5	71.7	68.6	60.6
<b>ES1</b>	87.5	100.0	50.0	50.0	57.5
<b>LV1</b>	81.1	64.9	54.1	54.1	50.8
<b>NK1</b>	72.9	84.7	59.3	81.4	59.7
<b>SF1</b>	82.8	77.6	62.1	53.4	55.2
<b>ST1</b>	79.6	83.7	66.3	43.9	54.7
<b>Z1</b>	88.0	72.9	69.2	43.6	54.7

Note: authors' elaboration (2018).

In general, brands are associated with emotions, feelings and positive moods. Among these, those that stand out are fun, safety, trust and sympathy for AD1 and sympathy, security and trust for Z1.

The AD1 brand (25.2%) is experienced as encouraging interaction with others and in addition the use of its products is associated with moments of encounters with others, particularly in spaces of sports activity. In general, this brand is the one that scores best for the components of feelings and

emotions associated with the brand, especially a sense of fun as an emotion exclusively related to it.

For AD1 (23.4%) and Z1 (19%), the value of the brand stands out as among the most important moments in the lives of the respondents, followed by strong identification with the brand (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Emotions and feelings associated with brands**

BRAND	TENDERNESS	SYMPATHY	SATISFACTI	JOY	ENTHUSIAS	FUN	PRIDE	SAFETY	TRUST
AD1	4	6	4	3	5	8	2	7	6
N1	6	2	8	3	5	4	8	8	8
K1	0	3	2	1	2	2	8	2	3
SF1	9	0	1	1	6		6	6	1
ST1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	2	1
Z1	2	4	7	1	8	4	9	9	9
	5	6	3	4	3	3	9	4	5
	0	7	0	8	8		1	0	0
	1	7	4	1	4	3	2	6	5
	0	1	2	9	3	6	5	2	5

Note. authors' elaboration (2018)

The relationship between the consumer and the brand was evaluated based on the following dimensions:

- Loyalty towards the brand (preference, frequency of visits to the points of sale, follower on social networks)
- Satisfaction with the brand (liking, happiness)
- Feelings, emotions towards the brand (love, pride)
- Identification (present at important moments, pleasant memories, identification with lifestyle)

Purchase intention as an expression of satisfaction with the brand is greater than 90% for all brands. The brands that led this research in terms of being top of mind, differential positioning, first brand considered for purchase and/or visiting points of sale and preferences obtained percentages superior to 70% in the evaluation.

## DISCUSSION

Previous research has demonstrated the existence of a relationship between the implementation of marketing strategies based on experience and the strengthening of brand value, but the relationship between the consumer and the brand has been included as a dimension of the brand value. Other authors have also studied the relationship between the experience marketing strategies and consumer attitudes and purchase intention. This research assumed the relationship with the brand

to comprise a multidimensional factor and adopted a six-dimensional BRQ model in which the dimensions were as follows: love and passion, self/connection, independence, commitment, intimacy and quality of the brand partner. All of these dimensions scored higher in brands with memorable marketing strategies.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In general, the dimensions of the brand value factor evaluated in this research are coherent with each other in terms of their scores; there is a close relationship between top of mind, brand preference, visiting points of sale and websites, values associated with brands and positioning. Among the dimensions of brand experience evaluated, the sensory dimension is focused on the stimulation of the sense of sight, with the stimuli of other senses not being named by the respondents. Visual stimulation is directed first by window design strategies and second by the strategies of visual merchandising implemented inside the store.

It is necessary to remember that the 11 brands under study were chosen because it was confirmed in previous research that they implemented experience marketing strategies in their points of sale in shopping centres in which they have a presence in the cities of Cali and Barranquilla, Colombia. Also, in the conclusions of a previous study, it was established that their promotional strategies are focused on sensory stimulation, specifically on the sense of sight, in addition to allowing a tactile experience for customers.

Regarding branding, it is recognized that the brand building strategies of those considered are based first on the concentration of experience at the point of sale and second on the values associated with what quality means in this category, namely fashion trends and the design of the garments. The AD1 and Z1 brands have a positioning based on the window design and visual merchandizing strategies, as well as the differential benefits provided by each of the brands: quality, exclusivity, design and specificity in its category (AD1: best sportswear). Four values associated with the brands stand out: authenticity, creativity, success and simplicity. These are associated with the benefits that brands bring to their consumers. We thus confirm the hypothesis of a positive correlation between experience marketing strategies implemented by clothing brands for men and women and the consumers' relationships with the brands.

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