

Review

Implementing Experiential Marketing in the Digital Age for a More Sustainable Customer Relationship

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Abstract: We reviewed 58 empirical articles from the last two decades on experiential marketing in the e-commerce context. This literature review seeks to shed light into the fields of experiential and digital marketing, addressing the gaps in experiential aspects that appear during an online shopping session found in the literature. Thus, the paper identifies the elements that create the optimal consumers' experience together with advantages, challenges, and strategic advice associated with the overall digital experience, an aspect that develops a more sustainable relationship between customers and e-businesses. The findings reveal that the most reported advantage of the overall digital experience is that it provides enhanced satisfaction, an aspect that is crucial for both consumers and online businesses, while some noted that frequent challenges are providing high levels of interactivity and trust. We found several other advantages and challenges of online consumer experience that led to the outlining of the strategic advice for online businesses, all being discussed in detail. The paper addresses a theoretical framework of digital marketing that is relevant for both academics and practitioners, suggestions for future research directions, and key research implications being offered.

Keywords: experiential marketing; online shopping experience; sustainable customer relationships; online consumer behavior; purchase intention



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1. Introduction

In the last few years, consumers started to look for authentic events that engage them in great staged experiences. After all, consumer experience is all about building a more positive connection between the brand and the customer, a fact that makes experience overtake price and product as the key differentiator for consumers [1]. Prior studies discovered that well-designed experience-based models involve consumer satisfaction and consumer loyalty in physical stores [2,3]. Now, due to the internet and related innovative technology, various opportunities for electronic commerce appeared as online shopping offers many benefits to modern consumers [4].

In times when products are becoming increasingly similar and customers have more places and ways to shop than ever, e-commerce companies need to distinguish themselves from others on the market. Brand experience is vital in the eyes of the consumer to enable him or her to differentiate between products. Therefore, marketers should look for innovative methods to attract new customers and to retain them by using experience in the context of internet-based marketing. Additionally, for e-businesses that want to win in the long run, it is important to follow the new digital consumer experience trends that satisfy the consumers who are looking for companies that are responsive to their needs. Some of these trends include artificial intelligence for customer service [5], augmented reality that enables consumers to interact with virtual content in a real-world setting [6], omnichannel experience [7], and other tools that provide new opportunities for delivering personalized customer experience. Extracting one of the main ideas of experiential marketing literature, a well-planned and controlled experience might be a fundamental success factor for companies, a factor that shapes the brand image in consumers' perception [8].

There are many review articles in the fields of digital marketing [9,10] that are progressively more popular, attracting great attention due to their several benefits to the consumers. In the papers, researchers focus mostly on topics such as online customer behavior [11,12] online customer experience [13,14], and online customer satisfaction [15]. Although the interactive nature of online experiences offers many advantages, only a few studies have examined the effective experiential determinants that enhance consumers' involvement in an online store. Since the cost of new customer acquisition is far more than the cost of an existing customer, attaining customer retention has an important role in achieving customer lifetime value [16].

The purpose of this literature review is to present a review of the literature on the aspects of a better online journey that can provide superior experiences followed by advantages for both consumers and e-businesses. Accordingly, the authors want to discover the common challenges and recommendations for strategic planning for online businesses that want to build sustainable long-term customer relationships.

Thus, the following research questions are addressed:

Q1. Which online characteristics addressed in the selected articles might increase the sustainable satisfaction of consumers during their online experience?

Q2. What are the reported advantages of using experiential elements in an online setting indicated in the selected articles?

Q3. What are the challenges and strategic advice for online businesses imposed by consumers' digital experiences indicated in the selected research papers?

Based on the research questions, we developed a conceptual framework for this study, as shown in Figure 1.

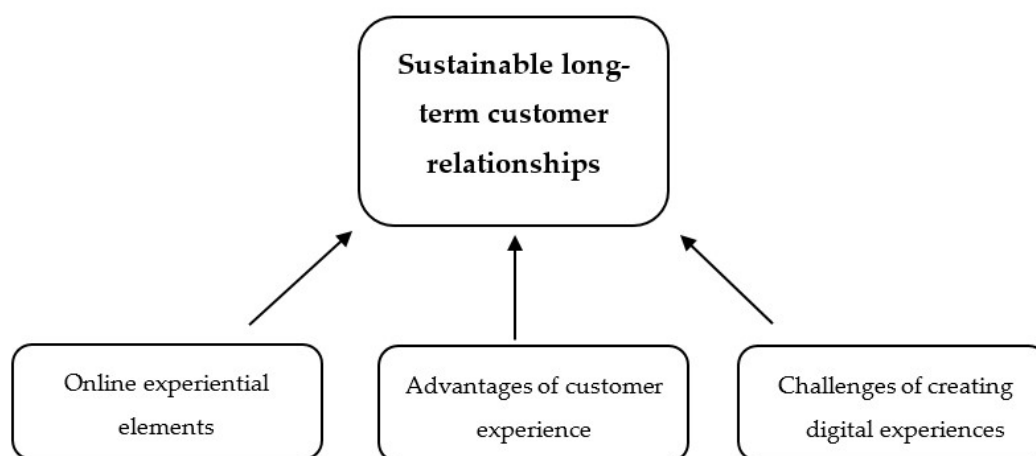


Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

The purpose of this article is to create a clearer vision in implementing the new experiential marketing strategies. Therefore, all three questions try to help online sellers to design a more useful and aesthetically appealing platform and to develop better relationships with their customers and suppliers. The answers to these questions are intended to be guidance on the use of the experience that fulfills the customers' needs because these are the elements that make a business to be more successful than its competitors. E-businesses should receive clear advice on the steps to be followed when they consider using customer experience strategies.

First, we start to list the online characteristics that increase the shopping satisfaction for consumers, and second, we highlight the awareness of the advantages, challenges, and strategic advice for online businesses. Thus, on the way to discover the most impactful experiential elements of online customers' buying process, this literature review is organized as follows: first, the relevant literature with focus on the connection between experiential marketing and business sustainability is presented, second, the results are

illustrated, followed by a discussion of the most important identified aspects, and finally, materials and methods are provided.

2. Experiential Marketing—The Incentive of Sustainable Development

In our days and age of digital information overload and homogenous products, companies who want to successfully position their brand and win over the hearts of clients must cater to customer needs and provide distinctive brand experiences across all touch-points. Schmitt [3] described experiential marketing as the perception that consumers have about the company after they interact with the products and purchase them. Moreover, through experiential marketing, we can understand that value resides mostly in “hedonic and experiential elements surrounding the product” [17], not only from the utilitarian and functional benefits of that product. This is the main reason why some companies that successfully manage the online shopping experience achieve the “sustainability of firms’ competitive advantage” [18]. Creating a unique marketing experience that engages consumers on multiple personal levels [3] has a huge impact on consumers’ behavior that can affect their purchase intention, and eventually, making them loyal [19].

When businesses embrace opportunities from sustainable business strategies, they aim to enable themselves to have a positive impact on society and to create more value for both the firm and consumers [20,21]. This aspect will build long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with consumers, an advantage that represents the framework for sustainable customer relationships [22]. Therefore, with a focus on creating more valuable and memorable consumer experiences, experiential marketing is the field that makes the connection between what consumers and companies need, resulting in a sustainable customer relationship.

Experiential marketing for online customers has been a subject of great interest for both academic researchers and practitioners due to its novelty and complexity. This strategy has the capacity to nurture many business opportunities and to develop long-term customer loyalty. Particularly, researchers focused more on topics like online customer behavior [23], the factors influencing online shopping experience [14], the way of developing online shopping experiences [24], and the value of experiential marketing in online shopping [25]. In contrast to this, only a minority of researchers were examining experiential marketing with a focus on sustainable customer relationships. As it was already mentioned by Ballantine [26], the high research interest in this domain of online experiential marketing is not surprising, “as given the success of any electronic commerce system lies in the widespread adoption of such technologies by consumers”, any online retailer depending on the overall customer satisfaction that is a measure of how an e-business meet customer expectations. Therefore, conducting more empirical studies is fundamental for understanding the types of consumer buying behavior, their attitude, and their perception in this emerging digital setting.

Even if it still is a young discipline, experiential marketing in electronic commerce comprehensively focuses on building the most satisfying customer experience. Therefore, “traditional marketing techniques will be replaced by new methods” that will generate a sustainable business model [27]. Besides, the author Ballantine [26] suggests that with the growth and popularity of e-commerce “the question of how to create engaging online shopping experiences” together with how these actions may influence online businesses, especially through competitive advantage, are becoming critical [28]. Each of the experiential marketing elements represents a great influence on the consumer’s decision-making process, offering many advantages also when used in digital settings [29]. For instance, the key elements for a positive online experience include atmospherics, engagement, customization, interaction, and distinctiveness [30–34]. Experiential marketing’s most significant advantages in e-tail are to intensify consumer’s navigation on the website, to increase the positive reactions of the consumers, and motivate them to pursue their exploration, being more likely to commit to purchasing [35]. Moreover, in a previous study, the authors revealed that customer shopping experience, including e-service quality, “influences fu-

ture customer behavior, including repurchase intention, store revisits intention, and word of mouth” [36].

In the prior studies, some authors have also drawn attention to limitations associated with building virtual experiences. For example, the authors Bolton et al. stated that, in the future, it will be overwhelming to face the challenges of how to put the theory of personalized experiences into practice because of “the need for connectivity and congruence among the digital, physical and social realms” [37]. Precisely because of the complexity of consumers’ cognitive structures [38], it is relevant to discover the “mechanism behind consumer online purchase behavior” [16]. To reach customer satisfaction through sustainable development of an experiential strategy, a business needs to focus on consumer purchasing behavior [27]. However, the basic strategic goals of each business should include long-term growth and sustainable customer relationships [39], goals that can be reached by improving customer satisfaction and enhancing customer loyalty [40].

3. Materials and Methods

This literature review presents the results of a systematic review of 58 academic papers that study different aspects of experiential marketing in an online environment. In the process of collecting and analyzing data from the research papers, PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) were used for reducing the risk of flawed reporting and for improving the clarity and transparency in how this systematic review was conducted [41].

The papers selected for the review were published between 2000 and 2020 in 32 academic journals and one conference proceeding, all written in English. These articles were selected based on a large spectrum of international sources, from databases such as Science Direct, Scopus, or Springer Link. The most accessed international journals include the Journal of Interactive Marketing, the International Journal of Information Management, the Journal of Business Research, the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, and the Journal of Consumer Research. In all databases, we used the advanced search function, where we added the search term “online consumer buying experience” that needed to appear in the title, abstract, or keywords list. In addition, we included only articles dating from 2000 and 2020, and as discipline, we chose “Business and Management”, followed by the subdiscipline “Marketing”.

After the selection of appropriate search terms in all databases, a large pool of records was identified. Screening studies on the title and abstract, 2854 articles were found as relevant to the objective of the study, already accounting for duplicates. Therefore, following the first set of inclusion and exclusion criteria that we proposed (See Table 1), 417 articles were found to be suitable for the study, all of them being saved in an electronic format. All these papers were then analyzed integrally by the researchers excluding 359 papers for reasons such as lack of information based on online interactivity between the brand and the customer, the missing evaluation of experiential elements’ effect on consumers’ satisfaction, or the prior focus being on social media use.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. It must cover customer/consumer buying experience as a primary component.	1. Editorials and reviews are excluded.
2. The article must be about the elements that generate a satisfactory online consumer buying experience and outcome for companies.	2. Articles that mention the term “customer buying experience” or “consumer experience preferences” but are actually about in-store elements.
3. It must be published between 2000 and 2020.	3. Articles that are not designed based on customer perspective or/and company outcome;

As a result, a total of 58 papers were included in the systematic review. A better view of these steps of the selection process regarding the number of records identified included and excluded and more key reasons for exclusion can be found on the PRISMA Flow Diagram (See Appendix A) [42].

The content analysis has been done manually and for outlining the focus of each research, its epistemology, and methodological assumptions, a data extraction form was used. Appendix B presents for exemplification an extract of this form.

4. Results

4.1. Q1. Which Online Characteristics Addressed in the Selected Articles Might Increase the Sustainable Satisfaction of Consumers during Their Online Experience?

A deeper level of engagement can be developed if companies would know how to stimulate their consumers using experiential marketing techniques, which lead to a more solid cognitive association retain in the memory of consumers [43]. Thus, the question is how online businesses create an intense experience for their customers. The answer can be found in all the elements that create the customer experience that engages their capacities, such as “sensory, cognitive, emotional, pragmatic, and relational” [44], elements that create value for customers through the interaction with the brand. For each online business, a sustainable development framework should be represented by attributes and features that provide a wider range of options for its consumers [27]. Therefore, we sought to identify which are the most mentioned as effective experiential characteristics that may enhance consumers’ involvement on the website, providing extra service that meets customers’ experiential needs. Based on the set of selected articles for this study, the characteristics that we discovered represent some of the ways to reach the full potential of online businesses to become more successful.

Table 2 shows the number of occurrences of the online characteristics that might have a great impact on consumers’ overall satisfaction. The number of appearances represents the number of articles that mentioned at least one time one or more of the characteristics presented below.

Table 2. Online experiential characteristics.

Online Characteristics	Number of Appearances
Interactivity	31
Design	19
Social contact	18
Atmospherics	16
Choice	12
Trust	11

Online marketers can identify and satisfy consumers’ needs effectively only by an understanding of online consumer expectations regarding the shopping experience. Therefore, from our analysis, we found that the most mentioned and discussed aspect that might influence the behavior of the online consumers is interactivity, which “is the dynamic nature of the engagement” [31], an element that appears when consumers and the brand meet on the website. An increased level of interactivity gives consumers more control during the shopping experience overall the processes [26]. For instance, the communication between consumers or accessing information from different resources by consumers may create numerous indirect opportunities for e-businesses to influence online consumers [45]. However, in order to support shopping tasks that motivate customers for purchasing, a good web design should be created based on elements such as content, aesthetics, purchase process, convenience, personalization, system availability [36], vividness, and perceived usefulness [46]. Offering a “wider alternatives for selection” [47] creates the choice that encouraging consumers to purchase, is one of the components that may influence consumer attitude. Furthermore, “the less effortful and more pleasurable and enjoyable consumers

perceive” the range of product categories, “the more confident and satisfied” [48] consumers are about having the impression of making the best choice. Web atmospherics “can be measured by the degree of stimulation and pleasure” [30] of consumers provided by the website, acting as stimuli that trigger certain emotional states in the shopper, leading either to positive or negative experiences [24]. The review findings also indicate that, in an online context, consumers showed more insecurity regarding different aspects such as payment method, product, or service quality compared with the in-store experience. Therefore, lack of trust represents one of the most common reasons why people avoid buying online in favor of face-to-face contact [49–51] trust being a factor that may determine a consumer’s attitude regarding an online brand, a fact that leads directly to sales enhancement [34]. Regarding the next experiential element, the authors Rohm and Swaminathan [52] showed that “group affiliation and communicating with others” that have the same buying needs and interests, exchanging opinions about products, might influence them in the decision-making behavior toward online shopping. Besides, the communication between the consumer and the business should be “mainly focused on establishing or maintaining social relations” [53].

4.2. Q2. What Are the Reported Advantages of Using Experiential Elements in an Online Setting Indicated in the Selected Articles?

The consumer experience is acknowledged as a fundamental driver of e-performance, bringing many advantages for both customers and online companies. Although online experiences lack a physical presence in comparison with a store, companies can still develop a virtual experience using multisensory techniques, which might bring many positive outcomes. Therefore, we identified the advantages of experiential elements that are arranged in two different categories: customer perspective and company outcomes (See Table 3).

Table 3. The advantages of experiential marketing elements.

Inductive Categories	Subcategories	f	Sample Research
Customer perspective	Enhancing satisfaction	25	[54]
	Staging unique, lasting, and pleasant memories	4	[55]
	Increases confidence in customers’ online shopping decisions	1	[33]
	Enhances enjoyment and pleasantness induced by exposure to website	15	[30]
	Encourages being part of a group affiliation	8	[52]
	Enhances sense of self explorative engagement	9	[56]
	Provides personalization in customer experience	8	[57]
	Provides information that can create value for the customers	1	[58]
Company outcomes	Positive word of mouth	4	[59]
	Increases the online competitiveness	3	[60]
	Stimulates consumers’ online purchase and repurchase intentions	14	[61]
	Generates e-loyalty and behavioral intentions	7	[31]
	Memory for the brand	4	[43]
	Affecting the attractiveness of online shopping stores	3	[62]
	Brand engagement	1	[24]
	The perceived overall quality of the products	2	[29]
	Positive effect on online shopping consumer satisfaction	11	[63]

The advantages of experiential elements that are related to customer perspectives, such as enhancing satisfaction, enjoyment, and pleasantness induced by the overall experience with the help of elements such as engagement, personalization, social contact, and more are only a few aspects that could promote positive outcomes for online businesses. The

correlation between the advantages from the customer perspective and company outcome leads to experiential strategies that encourage positive reactions, such as word of mouth, loyalty, and purchases, which are the results of the experiential strategies. However, to gain these benefits, a company should provide the best customer experience, building sustainable consumer relationships because once consumers establish a deep connection with a brand, the company has the opportunity to increase customer retention.

Experiential elements are bringing many advantages, especially in an online environment characterized by limited cues [43]. Therefore, the overall experience of online consumers may determine their future behavior, including “repurchasing intention, store revisit intention and word of mouth” [36], elements that are the most powerful tools a company can wish for. For an ideal experience that enriches a more intense connection between the consumer and the brand, the stimulation of multiple senses leads to positive outcomes, such as brand association and a positive memory for the brand. Following the idea that the pleasure which consumers experience during a shopping session has a great impact on their overall satisfaction [63], the experience is the key factor that might construct a more pleasant online activity [24]. Still focusing on the consumer, the author Värlander [53] suggests that besides the product’s functionality, “the emotive, the social, the imperative, and the meta-linguistic aspects of communication” represent crucial aspects that influence the consumers’ decision-making process. Therefore, the information provided on the websites must respond to consumers’ emotions and feelings, which in turn can lead to improving the image that consumers have for a specific brand, changing their behavioral and attitudinal loyalty [64].

4.3. Q3. What Are the Challenges and Strategic Advice for Online Businesses Imposed by Consumers’ Digital Experiences Indicated in the Selected Research Papers?

Similar to other young disciplines, online experiential marketing faces challenges imposed by consumers’ experiential preferences or technological upgradation. Some key managerial implications for e-businesses are provided as recommendations for developing a more dynamic online customer experience (See Table 4).

Table 4. Challenges and related strategic advice.

Challenges	Strategic Advice
Replicating “the sensory effects and product-trial experiences available to the consumer in a physical store setting” [52]	To create a multisensory consumer experience in an online environment using augmented reality interactive technology [56]
Providing high-levels of trust [54]	To provide honest and trustworthy content [65]
Maintaining the novelty as a response to consumers’ expectations [66]	To add the newest in audio, video, interactivity, and customization to the website [67]; To be updated with the newest technological developments [35]
Unlike a physical retail environment, “consumers have full control over the choice of websites to visit and the information they seek” [30]	To create a state of telepresence in a persuasive communication [67]
Providing personalization in customer shopping experience [63]	Digital applications must be designed for all requirements that consumers have, despite product categories, customer segmentation, or other [68]; The design of a website and the presentation of the product may be personalized according to each customer’s preferences [57]
Enhancing interactivity [69]	To understand the customer’s preferences and needs from each segment should be the first step in creating the personalized web interactivity [70]
Appealing the emotions [64]	The emotions experienced by the shopper are influenced by the level of atmospherics and pleasure felt by them during the shopping session [71]
Inducing affective feelings of pleasure [63]	To create various online virtual merchandising cues [57]

To improve performances, companies should follow these concrete strategic pieces of advice. Creating a consistent experience for consumers is a complex process, but if e-businesses follow specific steps, beginning with creating an emotional website that uses all visually appealing elements of color, font, or web design, continuing with designing different dimensions of interactivity and finishing with the personalized customer journey.

In comparison with a physical store, online marketers need to deliver an effective marketing experience for their consumers. The challenge is that retailers have at their disposal only a few senses that can be awakened online for a more diverting experience, namely sight, and sound [60]. Therefore, the factors that might stimulate the consumer are based on text, images, videos, or audio content. The authors of [33] studied that e-businesses may leave a great impression through its website if “the customer engages in cognitive and affective processing of incoming sensory information”. The lack of sensory content may be a considerable constrain for consumers in the decision-making process [72].

Some authors suggest that the most essential asset of an online business is its website [73]. This is why online retailers try to design an interface that will satisfy the consumer’s preferences, besides an ideal display of their products or services. The interface of the website should also outline an atmosphere that positively influences the perceived image of the digital store while shopping [32]. Visual merchandising is another strategy that may attract consumers, facilitate purchasing [74], having a significant role in enhancing pleasure and arousal, elements that lead to “consumer satisfaction, purchase intention, and approach behavior” [57]. Although it is challenging to manage the changing customer experience across the digital touchpoints and expectations without being a digital company and having digital competencies [58]. In their study, authors [68] suggested that potential consumers enjoy more their time during the online shopping session when innovative and significant elements based on experience are provided. Moreover, it is already known that the impression of the brand is strongly affected after “consumers participate in an engaging and enjoyable online experience” [75].

5. Discussion

Nowadays, e-commerce represents “a common activity of daily life given that the Internet has a major impact on contemporary society” [76] caused by access to information. Internet together with the evolving set of technologies did play an important role in influencing how interactive is a daily online shopping session for a consumer [12]. Besides, the roles that the internet plays “as both a distribution and a communication channel” [77] designing attractive experiences with a focus on the most important touchpoints. E-shopping represents a huge potential that provides an efficient opening for companies that want to reach existing or possible consumers, a fact that convinced most of the specialists to be positive about “the future of online marketing business” [78]. Customer relations represent the way businesses engage with their consumers for improving the overall customer experience, which includes sustainable and long-term solutions generated by good practices based on experiential characteristics.

Given that the business environment is competitive and constantly changing, where customer needs are constantly growing, developing long-term customer relationships is a vital requirement for success and sustainability. This relationship development is paramount in determining clients’ behavioral intentions. Thus, organizations spend a lot every year on researching customer decisions to determine their behaviors. If managers understand these behaviors, they can build a sustainable customer relationship. The first step in creating such a long-term relationship with customers is “to identify the factors affecting customer purchasing intention” [79].

Some authors claim that the emergence of new technologies on the market creates new “elements” in the relationship of companies with customers [80]. These elements lead to developing new relationships between organizations and consumers but also to the emergence of a set of values that strengthen sustainable relationships. An element studied by Vakulenko et al. [80] in the paper is self-service technology, which is defined as a new tool for value creation, as “a source of value for both the consumer and the service provider”.

Companies need to try to satisfy the new and constantly evolving needs of today’s consumers, being discovered that the ability to respond to their concerns increases the possibility for the company to survive on the market and to improve profitability. Since

customers' tastes, preferences, or choices are varying, it requires a better understanding related to online consumer behavior [81]. If for increasing online purchasing the consumers' emotional senses (e.g., sight, hearing, touch, and possibly even smell) needs to be triggered, for designing the ideal experience fields such as information architecture, psychology, haptics, storytelling, and dramaturgy should be included. Therefore, practitioners will need to start using the latest technologies to provide innovative experiences for modern consumers [9], consumers' preference and attitude being "far less influenced by the functional attributes of products than the subconscious sensory and emotional elements derived by the total experience" [82].

A digital strategy should be tailored to create an innovative customer experience that may satisfy the needs of customers and conform to their lifestyles. As might be expected, in this digital revolution, it might be hard to attract and maintain customer attention, but through specific components of holistic brand experiences, companies can distinguish themselves from others on the market. So, the companies can specifically develop and control the relationship with the consumers across the various touchpoints.

The theoretical framework designed based on the research questions in Figure 1 was filled in with a synthesis of the answers obtained to these questions (see Figure 2).

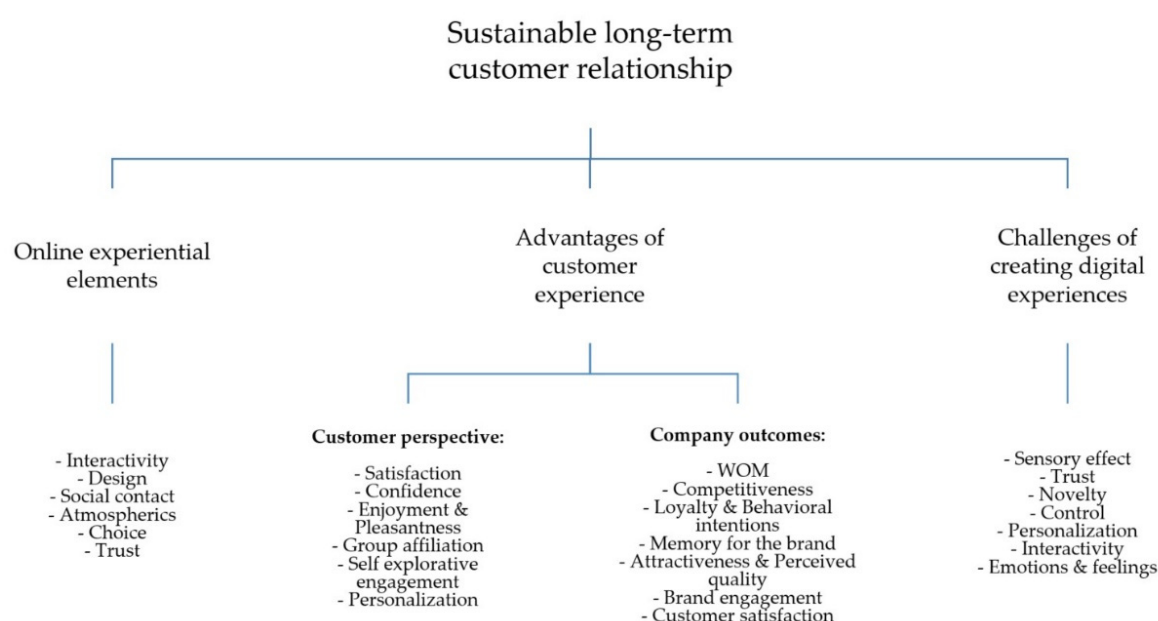


Figure 2. The synthesis of the answers to the research questions.

The above-mentioned findings related to the research questions are discussed in detail in the next subsections of the article.

5.1. Online Characteristics That Influence the Customers' Experience

Online retailers tend to attract as many customers as possible to their online shopping stores by offering experiences that would encourage customers to become loyal [83]. Another thing for them to consider is that a long-term connection with their customers on an emotional level is a very important aspect when they consider choosing a brand. Therefore, experiential elements are critical factors in sales growth, a result that is stimulated by customer satisfaction and loyalty [84]. One of the most impactful online elements, interactivity, has the power to "evoke vivid mental images of product use" [69], becoming also a valuable way of improving the communication between brands and consumers. For improving the quality of the website, the diversity of potential interactive features represents a logical and feasible step in the website design, "including product information search, purchase transaction, or service delivery" [77].

Another element that helps to increase the online store performance is the overall website design that includes the product information, the design of the interface, the navigation system, and many more [46]. Moreover, online shopping offers wider alternatives for selection compared to traditional shopping encouraging the consumer to purchase [47]. Modern customers' expectations allude to all kinds of experiential features and atmospherics, that is entertaining for them, "such as those generating feelings of fun, excitement, or pleasure" [85], that influence their attitude, increasing perception of trust [86], elements that are also crucial for the consumer decision-making process.

From the category of elements with impact on online consumers, it should also be mentioned personalization, ambient scent, enjoyment, and discounts. For meeting the customer's needs more effectively and efficiently, the website should transmit personalized "content according to the location of consumers, their type of cognitive thinking" [87], their shopping history [57], or digital footprint building an experiential relationship with the customers [88]. Even if it is hard to implement, "an interaction between consumers' type of thought process and the presence of scent was identified as influencing search motivation, attention focus, and telepresence experience" [87]. A further component with a strong influence on e-shopping continuance intentions is enjoyment, an element with a direct effect [89]. Finally, the price discounts and purchase intentions evolve together over an online shopping experience [90]. Therefore, the overall involvement that is intrinsically enjoyable enhances the experience that leads to more online buying [81], an advantage that satisfies both the consumer and the e-business.

Nowadays, customers pay close attention to the sustainability of products and services when they are shopping online. More and more companies on the online market have committed themselves to improving the sustainability perceived by customers of the products and services they offer but also to establish close relationships with their customers. Perceived sustainability can positively affect customer engagement by influencing their satisfaction in the online shopping environment. The results of Chen et al. [91], in their paper, confirm the casual chain of "perceived sustainability-satisfaction-commitment-customer engagement". If they are not delighted enough, customers get involved in relationships with companies for short periods. In order to increase customer engagement, online sellers should implement engagement strategies that focus on both rational and emotional customer involvement [91]. Such relationships can contribute to reaching the sustainable development goal aiming at ensuring responsible consumption and production.

Associating online shopping with all these experiential aspects, the relationship between consumers and different brands offers many positive outcomes [14]. Knowing the factors that might encourage consumer purchase intention should guide e-businesses on changing or implementing experiential marketing strategies with a focus on customer orientation and on improving the online shopping services.

5.2. The Advantages of Experiential Marketing Elements

The advanced technology, followed by the development of e-commerce reflects a full range of advantages for both business and consumer, that in comparison with the conventional brick-and-mortar stores, electronic commerce represents "greater flexibility, enhanced market outreach, lower cost structures, faster transactions, broader product lines, greater convenience, and customization" [31]. However, only after the specific brand has been devised and compacted into an experience strategy, companies will derive great advantage for consumers. Brands are recommended to create a customer experience of the greatest possible value, thinking beyond the mere functionalities and considering the full scope of human experience. Once the holistic brand experience is designed, nothing, therefore, promises a greater yield than positive experiences with a brand that people talk about and about which they share their enthusiasm.

The most consistent reason consumers have for preferring physical stores is the ability to explore the products, a fact that explains why still 99% of consumers shopped in a traditional shop in the past 12 months, according to a study [92]. Incorporating experiential

elements, companies have the opportunity to enhance customer lifetime value, an aspect that might ensure every business's long-term success.

Highlighting more the importance of experiential marketing in the online context in the achievement of both customer and business satisfaction, the author of [93] discovered that "positive customer experience of a certain environment affects the attractiveness of online shopping stores". Thus, the consumer experience plays a significant role in habit-forming, overall customer satisfaction [94], and attitudes on repeat purchase intentions [95]. Experiencing a multisensory online journey, a consumer develops a more intense attitude and attachment toward the products and the brand. Moreover, the experiential intensity enhances consumers' navigation on the website, increases their positive reactions, develops a commitment to the website [35], and improves brand familiarity, satisfaction, and trust [84]. On the other side, customer satisfaction provides great advantages to companies, such as positive word of mouth [59], repeat purchase intentions [95], e-loyalty [96], and memory for the brand [29], aspects that lead to sales growth. However, only when a brand impresses the consumer, stands out from the competition, enthralls, captivates and surprises, the consumer is prepared to buy, changes supplier, or tries something new. Finally, the use of advanced technologies and innovative marketing strategies can lead to sustainable economic growth.

5.3. Challenges and Related Strategic Advice

The experiential marketing elements used in a digital setting offer unique advantages, but, as with all technology-based features, there are some challenges that retailers must face when selling online, including replicating the sensory effect and product-trial experiences [52], providing high-levels of trust [54], and personalized content [63], and maintaining the novelty [66]. However, these experiential elements are relatively minor and they all can be overcome. For instance, the multisensory experience will likely be resolved by the new technological developments, such as virtual and augmented reality interactive technology, that represent a new way for consumers to interact with the brand, offering multiple ways to companies "to raise awareness, promote features, and inspire a desire for their suites of goods" [97].

The content of the website might add value to consumers, influencing their buying behavior. Thus, to attract more and more consumers, e-businesses need to provide satisfying content "without overloading and compromising their perceptual processing patterns" [48], with a focus on the website interface design "with regards to the ease of navigation and user-friendliness features" [93]. Besides, online businesses should concentrate on the development of the brand image through the consumers' eyes [98]. A good customer service based on experience for today's consumers might not be that easy, but for sure, once it gets successful, it shapes the online consumer's behavior during each online shopping session [11]. Companies should take advantage of their website to create a personalized marketing experience for each customer, creating effective marketing programs [99]. This achievement will make the customers feel valued and they will have the feeling that the content from the website is relevant to their specific interests. Customer satisfaction and loyalty are perceived as an element for a sustainable business model and as an indicator that contributes to corporate sustainability. In this regard, the impact is mediated by customer satisfaction and the company's image [100]. Sustainability reporting and sustainability management practices have recently been adopted, raising questions about the relationship between external disclosure and internal corporate sustainability practice [101].

In a world where the distinction between online and offline is becoming vaguer and vaguer, online retailers should focus on the desires and demands of the consumer, paying more attention to the positive feeling that consumers have while navigating on the website instead of focusing on the functions of the products [102]. Understanding the different types of emancipated human personality, character, and lifestyle, a company can effectively create the most impactful experiences [82]. It should also be noted that some simple rules may have a huge impact on the online journey, such as easy and consistent navigation

on the website, online features that are user-friendly, dynamic and pleasant animations, eye-catching pictures, without disturbing advertisement, to be visually impressive, to appeal to the emotions, to be secure, to evoke curiosity, to be informative and educating, and the information to be valuable and to stimulate thinking [64].

5.4. Research Implication and Future Research Directions

All of these experiences together are referred to as experiential marketing, which might be considered a new currency in our digital age. After all, the number of possible touchpoints between the customers and online businesses has increased since the advent of digital media. Therefore, online commerce development has created multiple opportunities, advantages, but also challenges and new behaviors that transformed the customer into one that is “more careful and selective in terms of the examination, comparison, purchase and pay for products on the Internet” [76]. The purpose of this literature review was to discover the most effective experiential elements while shopping online and the advantages, challenges, and strategic advice that come together with the impact of overall experience through consumer buying behavior. We came across multiple fields on online experiential marketing, such as online consumer experience, online consumer buying behavior, online purchase, online shopping, and brand experience to identify different aspects of the online shopping experience, work that resulted in a framework that highlights the modern consumer expectations while shopping online. This paper required much attention due to the complexity of fields that are included in designing the ideal online customer experience. Virtual and augmented reality, brand strategy, information architecture, design, and psychology being online some of the fields that emerge into a significant brand experience.

What we discovered is that for a genuine experience the spirit of the business must be captured and transmitted through all touchpoints; however, the following inquiry appears: “Should experience be viewed through the traditional lens of offline retailing or through a new lens that needs to be developed for an online scenario [103]?” Yet, there is potential for other technological innovations that create a new online shopping environment. Actually, innovation is considered an incentive for sustainable economic development [104]. Given the complex and dynamic character of the virtual marketplace on one side and identifying the overnight changes in consumer preferences on another side, new strategies based on technological advancements are developed. The variety of online experience components require much attention when building a sustainable e-commerce business, the reason why they should be extended based on consumers’ predilection. Moreover, for a better relationship with the customer, each company should understand all their needs. This is a process that requires efficient customer relationship management operations in all areas such as marketing, sales, and services [105].

The results analyzed in the reviewed literature converge to the conclusion that experiential marketing helps to develop strong long-term relationships with customers. Such relationships could further contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (especially the objective regarding to responsible consumption and production and the objective regarding the decent work and economic growth).

Further, for expanding the theory, additional research could be undertaken first by putting into practice the given strategic advice related to each challenge that practitioners might face when creating the experiential journey for online consumers. A different perspective when reviewing the elements of experiential marketing might include the elaborative work on designing experiences depending on different customer segments based on psychographic profiles, geographical location, income, age, gender, or profession. Moreover, to understand to what extent each experiential element affects customers’ decision-making behavior toward online shopping, new experiments should be designed for the most impactful online components. In the end, exploring the dynamic of technology innovations, the way to keep up to date with the latest digital developments is to receive consumer feedback through different types of consumer research that will help marketers to discover and then implement the newest digital trends.

6. Limitation

This study has limitations, which allow for further discussions. Even if we tried to capture every study in the literature that has a significant impact on the domain of online consumer experience, it is likely that not all relevant articles have been identified. Even though the results are based on the most reported characteristics, advantages, or challenges indicated in the selected articles, there may be other studies based exclusively on primary data, whose statistics would address specific models based on demographic characteristics of a consumer, such as gender, age, education, income, or other factors that might influence the needs of consumers. In addition, the keywords that we chose could include or exclude some possible search terms that emphasize online experiential marketing topics. Furthermore, one of the challenges that every marketer needs to face is constantly changing the mindset of customers towards the communication channel between them and the company. Future studies should adopt also other perspectives from a consumer's point of view when reviewing experiential marketing in online setting studies. Despite the limitations outlined above, our study provides insights into the complex domain of online consumer buying behavior and might serve as a start point towards integrating experiential marketing in an online setting.

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Appendix A

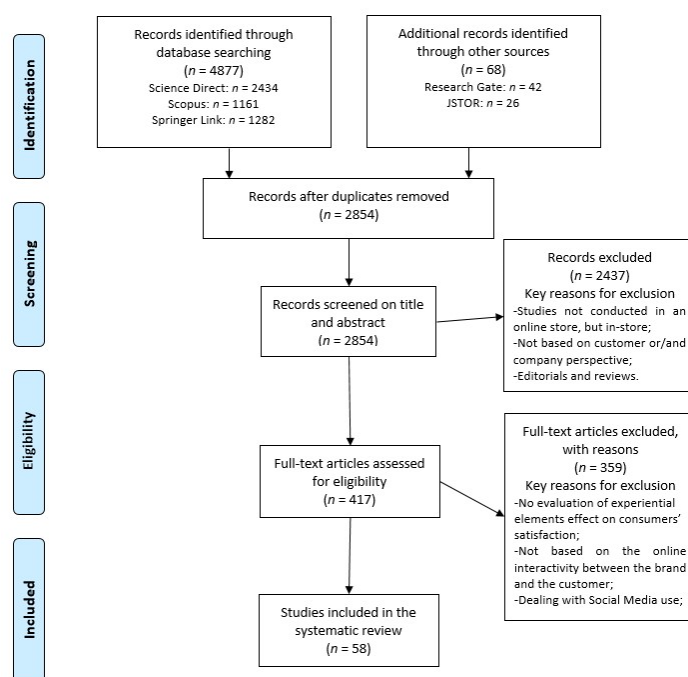


Figure A1. PRISMA flow diagram.

Appendix B

Table A1. Data extraction form.

Author Date	Focus of the Paper	Journal	Methodology	Experiential Elements	Advantages	Challenges
Luo, Chen, Ching, and Liu	Effects of virtual experiential marketing on online customer intentions and loyalty	The service industries journal	Empirical. Survey questionnaire of 976 responses of students recruited over the Internet	Community relationship, senses, interaction	Competitive advantage through customer loyalty; Affective responses from consumers	Designing the atmospherics of the website; Trigger an emotional attachment supportive of customer purchasing behavior
Abrar, Zaman, and Satti	Online Store atmosphere, customized information and customer satisfaction on repurchase intention	Global Management Journal for Academic & Corporate Studies	Empirical. Survey questionnaire of 207 responses of respondents through convenient sampling technique	Online store atmosphere, customized information and customer satisfaction	A more exciting and memorable purchase experience; Intention of repurchase in the future; Competitive advantage	Creating the online store atmosphere through informativeness, website navigation, entertainment and website design

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