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Three Essays on
Online Customer Engagement Cycle

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Abstract

Three essays on Online Customer Engagement Cycle

This dissertation comprises three papers that explore different aspects of Customer Engagement (CE) in the context of luxury fashion e-commerce in the post-pandemic world. Chapter 1 introduces the need to revisit CE concepts and further investigate online CE for the contemporary context. Chapter 2 is a systematic literature review that critically examines existing CE theories and proposes a revised CE cycle model with several propositions that are applicable in the post-pandemic settings. Chapter 3 applies the revised CE cycle model from Chapter 2 in a practical way to the luxury fashion e-commerce context and identifies critical themes and sub-themes related to CE. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings of Chapter 3 on online customer experience of luxury customers and investigates factors that motivate or prevent customer experience continuation intent on luxury mobile apps. The summary of findings, along with theoretical and managerial contributions are highlighted in Chapter 5.

Keywords: customer engagement, online, e-commerce, luxury

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

This dissertation explores the phenomenon of customer engagement (CE) in the post-pandemic context. As businesses faced the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, digital transformation became crucial for survival (LaBerge et al., 2021). In this post-pandemic landscape, understanding and enhancing CE has become even more important, as customers are increasingly empowered by online platforms (Mehrolia et al., 2020) and engaging with customers beyond mere monetary transactions is an urgent and critical requirement for businesses. It is essential to revisit and update CE concepts in the light of the pandemic, as it has fundamentally transformed customer behavior and the landscape of CE, making pre-pandemic literature somewhat obsolete.

Building upon the inspiration and foundation laid by Sashi's (2012) CE cycle model, which was found to be incomplete, this dissertation systematically revisits and adapts the model to better align with the contemporary business landscape. Furthermore, the model is subjected to empirical examination within the luxury fashion industry, with a particular emphasis on one of its key themes - "experience". By delving into the intricacies of CE in the post-pandemic era and providing both conceptual and empirical insights, this dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of CE for theorists and practitioners navigating this new environment.

In recent years, CE has emerged as an attractive area of study, capturing the interest of scholars and practitioners. However, the concepts surrounding CE are often characterized by their complexity and lack of clear consensus (Hoang et al., 2023), for which deeper examination and clarification are needed. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a profound impact on various aspects of life, particularly on consumer behavior. As a widely discussed topic with a substantial body of literature (Vargo et al., 2008; Taheri et al., 2019), CE demands renewed attention, especially in this transformative period. Consequently, revisiting and addressing these concepts in order to enhance our understanding of CE in the context of contemporary knowledge becomes imperative.

This dissertation explores the realm of online CE within the post-pandemic landscape, aiming to enhance CE in this contemporary context, particularly the shift to online platforms on customer behavior and engagement. It answers how prominent CE matters in the current context can be managed, how companies can evolve from their dependence on traditional CE platforms, and how companies can manage customer's continuance intent to further engage with them. The investigation commences by reexamining established CE concepts and presenting a revisited CE cycle model that aligns better with the current era of online CE (Chapter 2). Subsequently, this model is applied in a practical manner to gain a deeper understanding of online CE within the luxury fashion industry (Chapters 3 and 4).

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive exploration of CE by conducting a systematic review spanning from 2010 to 2021. Special attention is given to online CE, considering its relevance in the post-pandemic context. The chapter consolidates the previously messy CE concepts and organizes them within a unified framework, known as the "revisited CE cycle model". This model elucidates the interrelationships among prominent CE factors – in which they are referred to as "themes" – and sheds light on how they can mutually influence or be influenced by each other. Furthermore, the chapter presents propositions for each of these significant online CE themes, offering a valuable foundation for future researchers to look further into this fruitful area of investigation.

Chapter 3 focuses on the application of the revisited CE cycle model – introduced in Chapter 2 – within the context of the luxury fashion industry. The selection of the luxury industry for investigation stems from the substantial impact of the pandemic on this sector. With the forced closure of brick-and-mortar stores during quarantine periods, luxury brands faced a formidable challenge as their primary advantage was stripped away. The prolonged period of online shopping has likely influenced customer behavior, potentially altering their preferences and expectations. Consequently, exploring how luxury fashion firms can effectively adapt to the online environment becomes especially intriguing given the industry's inherent nature. The chapter presents a framework outlining the best practices that luxury brands can employ online, drawing insights from a hybrid thematic analysis of web content. By examining this subject in depth, the chapter contributes to the understanding of how luxury fashion brands can navigate the digital realm and optimize their CE strategies.

Chapter 4 delves further into the examination of the luxury fashion industry, as the digitalization following the pandemic presents certain challenges. This chapter focuses on one specific theme derived from the revisited CE cycle model presented in Chapters 2 and 3: "Experience." More specifically, it explores the realm of luxury fashion mobile apps, recognizing the increasing importance of mobile platforms in engaging customers. The chapter employs a hybrid thematic analysis approach, incorporating both inductive and deductive themes. Through this analysis, the chapter identifies hedonic and functional factors that contribute to customer motivation and the prevention of customers' continuance intention. By exploring these intricacies, the chapter provides valuable insights into the role of customer experience within the luxury fashion mobile app context, shedding light on strategies for enhancing the CE journey.

Chapter 2 - Revisiting a model of customer engagement cycle: A systematic review for contemporary context and future research agenda

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century globalization and the fourth Industrial Revolution have increased both production and consumption and brought numerous changes to these two processes. As a consequence, customers and their opinions have become important drivers that shape how industry players interact. As customers become increasingly empowered by online platforms and their voices heard and echoed by fellow consumers, firms have had to adapt new strategies that are more appropriate for this context. The current state of technology and the prevalence of online business platforms – such as Etsy and Amazon – have enabled customers to take on not only roles other than mere consumers, but also contributors, advocates, influencers, or sometimes even critics and opponents of the firm. Highly engaged customers are more profitable (Pansari & Kumar, 2016). They spend on average 60% more with each transaction, make 90% more frequent purchases, and are four times more likely to advocate (Rosetta Consulting, 2014). It is therefore an urgent and critical requirement for businesses to develop their relationships with customers beyond the area of mere monetary transactions. This is an undertaking that can be more easily realized with the help of customer engagement (Venkatesan, 2017).

As such changes take place, the inclusion of customer engagement (CE) as part of the customer management strategy has been receiving more attention (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo et al., 2008; Taheri et al., 2019). Generally, CE is a company's attempt to establish a long-term relationship with its customers (Thakur, 2018). CE can increase competitive advantages for firms (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), and thus has become a vital organizational resource (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Pansari & Kumar, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2010). Moreover, CE has transcended the boundaries of brick-and-mortar shops to become essential (Habibi et al., 2014), especially across channels (Blackmon, 2016), an area that modern organizations have been trying to enhance both online and offline CE in recent years (Lee et al., 2020b).

However, as important and powerful a resource as it is, CE stands out as an area demanding further effort to consolidate existing research, as well as one that demands work to better reflect its role in consumer studies in response to the rapid innovation of technology (Ismail et al., 2014). Considerable groundwork regarding CE has been laid in Brodie et al. (2011a), and CE has made great strides forward during the last 10 years, especially in online platforms where customers can now perform several company-related behaviors that were not earlier available to consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010) such as blogging or reviewing. The development of CE can leave a challenging area for increasing social media engagement (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019a), since most top global brands today have an online community (Manchanda et al., 2012). Changes are underway not only in terms of behaviors, but also attitudes. Tech-savvy consumers are looking for increasingly personalized, technology-enabled online services, and they are empowered to engage more closely with firms, either by becoming co-producers or destroyers of value for businesses (van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010). This is one of the most important challenges in the years to come (Marketing Science Institute, 2016).

A conceptual model of CE that integrates a number of disparate ideas is the "customer engagement cycle" (Sashi, 2012), which includes seven key activities as foundations to better satisfy customers (see Section 2.3, Figure 1). However, this model is not fully adapted to the current online context and does not take advantage of the benefits and threats of the new technologies offered to consumers and companies alike. Since the introduction of the model, E-commerce has developed rapidly and given consumers additional roles such as "contributors", "influencers", and "critics", making it essential to revisit CE dimensions and components for the success of CE activities.

With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and daily life, the need for more fundamental consumer studies has become more apparent (Mehrolia et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021), especially as digitalization became synonymous with survival as the pandemic forced companies to accelerate digital transformation, and those digital shifts will most likely stick in the long term (LaBerge et al., 2021). With this critical role of online channels it is crucial to systematically review CE, and these changes should be reflected and updated in Sashi's model for it to remain relevant and useful. Therefore, this paper aims to consolidate research on CE, and based on that foundation, to further develop Sashi's CE cycle model and make CE become more compatible for online-commerce-dominant contexts. We update and adapt the Sashi model to better fit online consumer behavior, especially through websites and social media that can help businesses arrange their CE activities and direct them usefully in this contemporary context.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Definition of CE

Initially recognized in marketing in 2006, CE was considered to be a second source of consumer experience, which can transcend the sensual experience that stems from the "motivational force to make something happen … or not happen" (Higgins, 2006, p. 441). The concept has since constantly expanded and evolved, but a single definition has yet to be reached. Most traditionally and simply put, CE is the direct interaction between an organization and its customers (Lee et al., 2020b). Vivek et al. (2012), along with Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020), suggest that CE refers to the level of the consumer's participation and connection with a firm's offerings or activities. In early days, Kaplan (1990) believed that engagement could be achieved when a customer is actively involved in activities provided to them, similar to the idea of Gelter (2010) in which interactive experience between the company and customers can lead to CE. Patterson et al. (2006) define CE in terms of customer behaviors, both transactional and/or non-transactional, and Van Doorn et al. (2010) refer to CE as consumer behaviors focused on specific firms or brands with motives that go beyond purchasing. More recently, Sashi (2012) illustrates the mutual agreement of research that CE is not a fixed point that can be reached, but a process that evolves over the course of a relationship. The process can be generally described as a shift from transactional to long-term interaction and relationship (Thakur, 2018), or a mental process in which new customers develop loyalty and old customers maintain their loyalty to a certain brand (Bowden, 2009).

Other definitions of CE focus on the relationship between the business and customers, as it can be initiated by either one or both parties (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018). From the business point of view, CE is "the firm's deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure a customer's voluntary contribution to its marketing functions, beyond a core, economic transaction" (Harmeling et al., 2016, p. 312). On the other hand, customer-initiated CE refers to the level of a (prospective) customer's interactions and connections with a brand's or firm's offerings and/or activities (Vivek et al., 2014). Other authors, including Brodie et al. (2011a), Hollebeek (2011a), Hollebeek et al. (2014), and Vargo and Lusch (2017) define CE as a customer's motivationally driven, volitional investment of focal operant resources (including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social knowledge and skills), and operand resources (e.g., equipment) into brand interactions in service systems.

Looking at the available definitions, the three most prominent elements of CE are (1) the connection that exists between a brand and its customers, (2) the focus on interaction and value co-creation between brand, customer and other customer (Zhang et al., 2017), and (3) both customers and firm as initiators of CE. Overall, by synthesizing definitions from various authors, we believe CE can be considered as "a process initiated by both seller and customer to build a long-term, valuable, and beneficial relationship with interaction and co-creation".

2.2. Dimensions of CE

Several authors define CE as different states of individuals' activation toward the firm. This is also widely referred to in CE literature as "dimensions" (Potdar et al., 2018), and in other words, the study of dimensions is to understand how customer behavior is manifested during engagement. Scholars' perspectives in number and name of dimensions are not universally agreed upon, but the most widely accepted conceptualization in CE is that there exist three primary dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral commitment to an active relationship with the brand (Patterson et al., 2006; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2016a;

Kumar et al., 2019). Although there are alternatives for CE dimensions, most of them can be represented by and consolidated into the above-mentioned three dimensions, such as the three CE dimensions of Vivek (2009) that include enthusiasm, conscious participation, and social interaction that can be manifested in emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions respectively.

Among the three dimensions, several authors place the emphasis on the psychological perspective (cognitive and emotional) involved in CE, such as Brodie et al. (2011a, p. 260), Bowden (2009, p. 65), Mollen and Wilson (2010), and Vivek et al. (2012); while others maintain the behavioral focus (Hollebeek, 2011b; Kumar et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010). According to Bowden (2009), CE's psychological process including both cognitive and emotional aspects will lead to loyalty for both old and new customers. From the motivational psychology perspective, Brodie et al. (2011a, p. 260) defined CE as a "psychological state that occurs by interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object in focal service relationships". Vivek et al. (2012) proposed that there is a correlation between the psychological connection that enables a customer to engage with the brand, and the customer's loyalty to that brand.

Despite the multi-dimensionality experienced by users, the behavioral aspect of CE is often the most common dimension to be measured, because it is difficult to capture the customers' cognitive and emotional perception of the brand via social media (Dhaoui, 2014; Pentina et al., 2018). Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Verhoef et al. (2010, p. 247) propose that CE is a "behavioral manifestation" toward the firm that goes beyond transactions, manifested by a wide range of different agents – such as current and/or prospective customers, suppliers – and can have either positive or negative outcome for the enterprise. The behavior can be blogging, spreading word of mouth (WOM), etc. With a behavioral focus, Kunz et al. (2017) recognized that consumers carry out several company-related behaviors many of which did not exist a decade ago. This type of CE is directly related to the emergence of new media and all the new ways in which customers can interact with companies, including purchase and non-purchase behavior. Javornik and Mandelli (2012) as well as Coulter and Roggeveen (2012) also adopt a behavioral perspective of CE, arguing that the emphasis on the behavioral manifestation highlights the active role of consumers, as passive consumption no longer reflects the reality. However, even with the behavioral dimension being the most noticeable, it is important to note that sometimes customers engage in the behavioral dimension alone (e.g., just purchasing), but sometimes the affective and cognitive dimensions develop, an inconsistency that calls for empirical evidence (Dessart et al., 2015).

So far, although CE is represented in different dimensions, it would be worthwhile to look at CE dimensions as a "course of evolution", rather than three separate sets of CE manifestations. Cognition, emotion, or behavior may be more or less represented in any CE activity, but each can possess a higher involvement level in certain sets of activity. At the very beginning the customers mostly collect information to form a general brand perception, by connecting and interacting with the brand, which represents the cognitive aspect. Then, after transactions and satisfaction, the customers can be retained and/or become committed, and thus develop positive feelings or affection toward the brand, which represents the emotional aspect. This finally transforms into engagement, i.e., behavior(s) to support the brand by being an advocate. We believe that by perceiving them as a process, the seemingly fragmented manifestation of CE dimensions can be integrated and contribute to an understanding of the main paper topic: the CE cycle.

2.3. Sashi (2012) CE cycle model

Customer engagement turns customers into fans. To become fans, they need to progress through stages, including a set of activities that Sashi (2012) describes as "customer engagement cycle" (Figure 1). Since then, the model has been receiving considerable attention, and been addressed in both academic and business environments (Schiffman et al., 2013; Bruhn, 2015; Ramadan et al., 2018). However, we believe the model is still underdeveloped, and worth revisiting to increase its applicability in both academia and the business world.

We consider that the potential of Sashi's model has not been fully exploited. This model can prove its relevancy and provide intriguing lenses on the common CE dimensions theory, resulting in the possibility of appropriate online resource allocation (Hoang et al., 2022b). Also, the model can exhibit novel perspectives on the alignment of CE factors – including organizing multiple arguments on CE antecedents and consequences.

We agree with Sashi on the grounds that employing a mix of digital and nondigital technologies can facilitate transition through the stages within the cycle. However, a considerable time has passed since the introduction of the model. Sashi had provided a foundation for CE study for better satisfying customers, and although Web 2.0 tools were mentioned, the digital context has changed rapidly and dramatically, leading to more diversity in the customer-firm relationship (Steinhoff et al., 2019) and new CE models (Wirtz et al., 2019). With the unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale, customers were obligated to maintain social distance by staying at home. This led to a shift in consumer behavior, with greater customer spending through online shopping (Giurge et al., 2021).

In addition, the joint investigation between CE and Service-Dominant (S-D) logic (Brodie et al., 2011b) has better explained the nature of CE, leading to plausible candidates for the online CE model including value co-creation, motivation, relationship, multi-dimensionality, and context-dependency (Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010; Brodie et al., 2013; Bowden et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020b). These factors represent the concrete and unchangeable characteristics of CE, which can determine CE transformation and development. Therefore, it is worth revisiting this model to adjust to the current context.

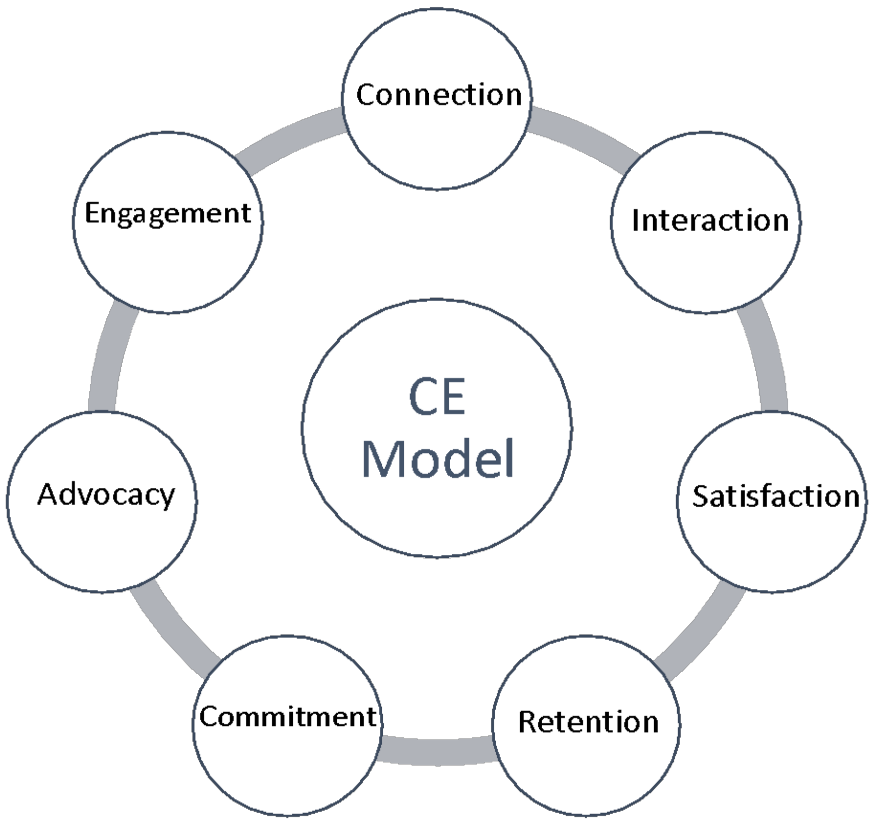

***Figure 1**: Customer engagement cycle (Sashi, 2012)*

2.4. CE antecedents and consequences

CE researchers sought to identify factors surrounding the concept and categorize them as “Antecedents and Consequences”. Do et al. (2019) proposed that the antecedents of CE include customer-based, firm-based, and context-based factors. Customer-based factors include customer involvement, participation, trust, commitment, satisfaction, rapport, personality traits, customer’s goals, and customer’s emotions. While some of these factors are not explicitly mentioned in the Sashi (2012) CE cycle, they are involved in key activities within the cycle. Besides, both firm-based factors (including self-expressive brand, engagement platforms, employee participation), and context-based factors (including macro-environmental factors and competitors) appear to influence the success of CE activities as a whole.

Regarding CE consequences, Alvarez-Milán et al., (2018) indicate two types of consequences that include customer interactional value and customer multiplier value. Customer interactional value is the transactional relationship between customers and the firm in the form of purchases, feedback, and value co-creation within the firm-customer dyad. These consequences are manifested in the Interaction, Satisfaction, and Retention stages of the CE cycle. Also, customer multiplier value – such as referral and WOM – creates momentum such as when (if) the positive image of the company goes viral within its customer communities, and these reveal themselves in the Commitment, Advocacy, Engagement, and Connection stages of the CE cycle.

The findings of many investigations, especially empirical ones, point to a variety of routes that can lead to CE, such as through loyalty, personalization, or participation, which results in CE via trust and commitment (Sleep et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2015; Cui & Wu, 2015). It can be noticed in Table 1 that many authors propose various factors that can be either an antecedent or a consequence, or both, and that they do not necessarily affect each other in any specific order. Also, the increase of one factor positively influences others, which in turn influences itself positively. For example, "satisfaction" can result in greater "customer involvement" with a brand (Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek et al., 2014), while greater "customer involvement" can also result in "satisfaction" for new customers (Wirtz et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011b). This leads to a school of thought that these "antecedents and consequences" of CE occur in a circular pattern. Our opinion for CE at this stage is that CE is a reiterative cycle, meaning that customers are encouraged to repeat purchases and continue interacting, thereby achieving satisfaction and increasing intention, commitment, and advocacy, rather than CE being a process that ends once the goal of engagement has been achieved.

Table 1. Examples of Antecedents and Consequences of CE

Author(s)	**Antecedents**	**Consequences**
Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek et al., 2014	Satisfaction	Customer involvement
Torkzadeh et al (2022)	Satisfaction	Retention
Calder et al. (2013)	Loyalty	Satisfaction
Thakur (2016)	Engagement	Loyalty
Hari et al. (2021)	Interation	Satisfaction
Wirtz et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011b	Customer involvement	Satisfaction
Islam and Rahman (2016)	Customer involvement	Trust
Hollebeek et al., 2014	Customer involvement	Connection
Vivek et al., 2012	Customer participation Connection	Trust Commitment Loyalty
Ting et al. (2021)	Customer participation	Engagement
Naumann and Bowden (2015)	Trust	Connection
Thakur (2018)	Trust	Engagement
Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro (2020)	Experience Involvement Satisfaction Trust	Loyalty Satisfaction Trust

2.5. CE and the online context

The online domain is often understood as consisting of social engagement, which takes place on social media sites such as Facebook, Weibo, LinkedIn, etc. where there is space for advertisement and transactions; and conventional engagement that occurs on the firms' own websites (Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015) or on traditional e-commerce websites that use social networking capabilities to take advantage of its power of reach and trust (e.g., Amazon) (Rosa et al., 2014). This domain is also characterized by three attributes: social media technologies presence, community interactions, and commercial activities (Liang & Turban, 2011). The presence of social media technologies has enabled the firms to become more responsive, exchanging product information and answering customers' questions before purchase. Such technologies and community interactions have also enabled and cemented the pivotal role of co-creation, especially in brand communities, whereby customers can exchange information with other customers, leave comments, ratings, and reviews about the products (Hajli, 2013).

In recent years, due to CE's interactive nature and multi-dimensionality, the notion of engagement has gained a special role in social media (Kuo & Feng, 2013; Habibi et al., 2014). On social media customers will engage with an organization even in the absence of an actual transaction or purchase (Dolan et al., 2015; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Porter et al. (2011) also described engagement as members' participation and co-operation within the brand community, while also making extra efforts to create value for both the firm and themselves. Calder et al. (2009) suggested that online CE consists of personal and social-interactive engagement. These definitions are congruent with the S-D logic in that they both consider interactions with other customers and/or the firm in the process of co-creating value to be the key element of the concept.

Additionally, as the CE concept is for customers to devote their time and attention toward the brand's website across multiple channels (Chaffey, 2007), customers shop in not only a single online store; they can search for information in one channel (e.g., social media sites) and shop in another (e.g., the company websites or a third-party e-commerce site) (Bang et al., 2013).

With the above discussions of the many perspectives on CE, it can be seen that the Internet environment has changed drastically in the past 10 years, especially with the evolution of the "game changer" known as social media, including its ability to create a responsive, interactive, and vibrant environment for customer-to-customer (C2C) activities. Also during this era, COVID-19 has elevated and accelerated the issue of CE in online transactions, creating the online dominance status and eliminating the feature of human contact for a considerable period of time. This situation obliged customers to stick to more online commerce activity, which can sabotage high-contact industries such as luxury fashion, fitness, or education, either during the pandemic or in the post-pandemic world. Thus, it is necessary to adapt CE to the online context.

Since a great many empirical CE studies on the online context have been conducted in the past decade, along with the broadened research avenue caused by the ambiguity of COVID-19 for the current era (Gentili & Cristea, 2020), we believe this to be an opportune moment to revisit CE using and speculating on the picture of CE activities in the post-pandemic scenario.

3. Method

Customers can engage with many objects of a brand, including the brand itself (e.g., the service/firm/organization), the brand community (e.g., other members), other objects (e.g., task, advertising), and with multiple entities simultaneously (e.g., brand and community) (Dessart et al., 2015). Recognizing that the CE cycle can cover these multiple features, we examine CE with multiple entities. We also focus more on CE in online domains, specifically social media platforms and conventional online platforms (websites, etc.). In addition, CE activities referred to in this paper can be initiated by either the customer or the firm, and among the many types of customers, the present paper focuses on end-users and potential consumers of products and services for wider applicability.

With the aim of consolidating the published research on CE and making recommendations on how to update the model to reflect modern information technology and its effects on customer behavior and customer engagement, we conduct a systematic literature review (SLR). This is an area of research that warrants a new review because thematic works on CE are widely available, and thus developing a framework based on CE subjects can be valuable (Lim et al., 2022a). The specific method chosen was "Theory Development Review", on the grounds that many leading business journals – such as *Academy of Management Review* – fall into this category (Paul & Criado, 2020). This method can help to develop Sashi's CE cycle model by providing testable propositions for existing and newly proposed CE themes.

This research reviews the literature related to CE published within the last decade (2010-2021), in order to represent the latest developments in the field. Articles were sourced from three comprehensive and trustworthy databases of academic research: Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Emerald. Both empirical and conceptual papers were selected from journals with impact factor greater than 1 to ensure quality. We applied several screening techniques with the following keyword strategies:

- 1st screening: CE cycle AND CE online AND CE e-commerce
- 2nd screening: CE cycle online AND CE service

- 3rd screening: CE + [theme] AND CE online + [theme] (e.g., CE connection, CE advocacy, CE online commitment).

Using the above search terms for numerous combinations and tracking the most popular references across articles on this topic, we identified 50 articles to be reviewed in the subset of 405 papers after screenings. Within the subset, through the first screening 346 papers were discarded after quick screening through the abstract, introduction, and contribution. With the second screening 9 papers were discarded as they were (1) not fully appropriate for the paper's scope, (2) contributed little to the themes of the model, or (3) have similar characteristics to the selected papers but lower impact factor and fewer citations. The remaining 50 papers are diverse in characteristics including research geography, sector, and method. These 50 selected articles were then manually screened, in which their findings were extracted and categorized to their corresponding themes in the current Sashi's CE cycle (Connection, Interaction, Satisfaction, Retention, Commitment, Advocacy, Engagement). Several recurring themes were identified including Experience, Organizational and Environmental Context, Customer Participation, Employee Participation, and Trust, and later used to further develop the original framework and better explain the key activities and influencing factors of CE. The articles are classified in reference to each theme of the revisited CE cycle, described in detail in Table 2.

Table 2. CE cycle themes with referenced articles

Themes	Coverage from notable literature	Sector	Research geography
Connection	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Dutot (2013); Chathoth et al. (2014); Chen et al. (2020), Do et al. (2019); Cabiddu et al. (2014); Maia et al. (2018); Dessart et al. (2015); Yusuf et al. (2018); Liu et al. (2021)	Tourism, cinema, hospitality, e-commerce, luxury goods	Australia, France, Hong Kong, China, Nigeria, Italy, Online Research Platforms
Interaction	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Chathoth et al. (2016); Hu and Chaudhry (2020); Lin et al. (2018); Lee et al. (2020b); Cabiddu et al. (2014); Lee et al. (2019); Liu et al. (2021); Kang et al. (2021); Sim and Plewa (2017)	E-commerce, hospitality, tourism, online retail, healthcare, retail, luxury goods, education	Australia, China, USA, Italy, Online Research Platforms
Experience	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Islam et al. (2019); Hu and Chaudhry (2020); An and Han (2020); Liang et al. (2020); Chan et al. (2016); Pandey and Chawla (2018); Garzaro (2020); Bravo et al. (2019)	E-commerce, hospitality, online retail, traditional retail, personal care, banking, clothing	Australia, India, China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, Brazil, Spain, Online Research Platforms

Themes	Coverage from notable literature	Sector	Research geography
Satisfaction	Sashi (2012); Busalim et al. (2019); Busalim et al. (2021); Thakur (2019); Chan et al. (2016); Pandey and Chawla (2018); Benjarongrat and Neal (2017); Sim and Plewa (2017)	E-commerce, traditional retail, banking	Australia, Korea, India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Online Research Platforms
Retention	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Islam et al. (2019); Zhang et al. (2017); Do et al. (2019); Cabiddu et al. (2014); Dessart et al. (2015); Shaheen et al. (2019); Busalim et al. (2019)	E-commerce, hospitality,	Australia, India, China, Italy, Online Research Platforms
Commitment	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019a); Giannakis-Bompolis and Boutsouki (2014); Hu and Chaudhry (2020); Hsu et al. (2012); Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018); Turri et al. (2013); Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019b); Wang et al. (2019); Larasati and Hananto (2012); Sim and Plewa (2017); Bravo et al. (2019);	E-commerce, retail, banking, online retail, education	Australia, Greece, China, India, USA, Spain, Online Research Platforms

Themes	Coverage from notable literature	Sector	Research geography
Advocacy	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Zhang et al. (2017); Lin et al. (2018); Simon et al. (2016); Maia et al. (2018); Dessart et al. (2015); Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018); Turri et al. (2013)	E-commerce and other multiple sector	Australia, China, multiple European countries, Online Research Platforms
Engagement	Sashi (2012); Potdar et al. (2018); Dutot (2013); Do et al. (2019); Hapsari et al. (2017); Dessart et al. (2015); Shaheen et al. (2019); Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018); Hollebeek et al. (2016b); Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019b); Priharsari et al. (2020); Chandni and Rahman (2020); Chathoth et al. (2020); Erdoğmuş and Tatar (2015); Naqvi et al. (2020)	E-commerece, Airline, Hospitality	Australia, France, Indonesia, India, Hong Kong, Macao, Pakistan, Online Research Platforms
Organizational and Environmental context	Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019a); Chathoth et al. (2014); Lee et al. (2019); Islam et al. (2019); Thakur (2019); Hu and Chaudhry (2020); Lin et al. (2018)	Hospitality, retail, online retail, e-commerce	Hong Kong, China, India, Online Research Platforms
Customer participation	Kunz et al. (2017); Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019a); Chathoth et al.	E-commerce, tourism,	China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia,

Themes	Coverage from notable literature	Sector	Research geography
	(2014); Hollebeek et al. (2016b); Busalim et al. (2019); Priharsari et al. (2020); Liang et al. (2020); Zhang et al. (2018); Sim and Plewa (2017)	personal care, education	Online Research Platforms
Employee participation	Chathoth et al. (2014); Do et al. (2019); Liang et al. (2020); Chandni and Rahman (2020); Chathoth et al. (2020); Zhang et al. (2018)	E-commerce, tourism, personal care, hospitality	Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao, Online Research Platforms
Trust	Lin et al. (2018); Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018); Banyte and Dovaliene (2014); Hsu et al. (2012); Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019a); Wang et al. (2019); Bravo et al. (2019); Shaheen et al. (2019)	E-commerce, banking	China, India, USA, Spain, Online Research Platforms

4. CE cycle framework for online context

Although the definition of CE and its components remains varied across the literature, there are common points to describe each theme. Figure 2 illustrates the CE themes from Sashi (2012) and the authors' proposed themes, in which each theme is evaluated in a more online-dominant perspective. To demonstrate, the original Sashi's themes – with Experience as the additional theme from our side – are considered as "key CE activities" that directly influence the circulation of the CE cycle. By incorporating findings from other authors, we believe the CE cycle should be viewed more comprehensively by putting four additional themes outside the cycle, as each of them can affect all of the “key CE activities”. The additional themes are synthesized from different authors that fit the idea of the model as well as being able to influence the success of CE activities as a whole.

In this section, Sashi’s perspectives on each theme from the original CE cycle model are initially given. Afterwards, each theme is discussed with opposing and supporting viewpoints from different scholars. In the end, based on the body of evidence we extend the theoretical framework by making a proposition for each component of the model.

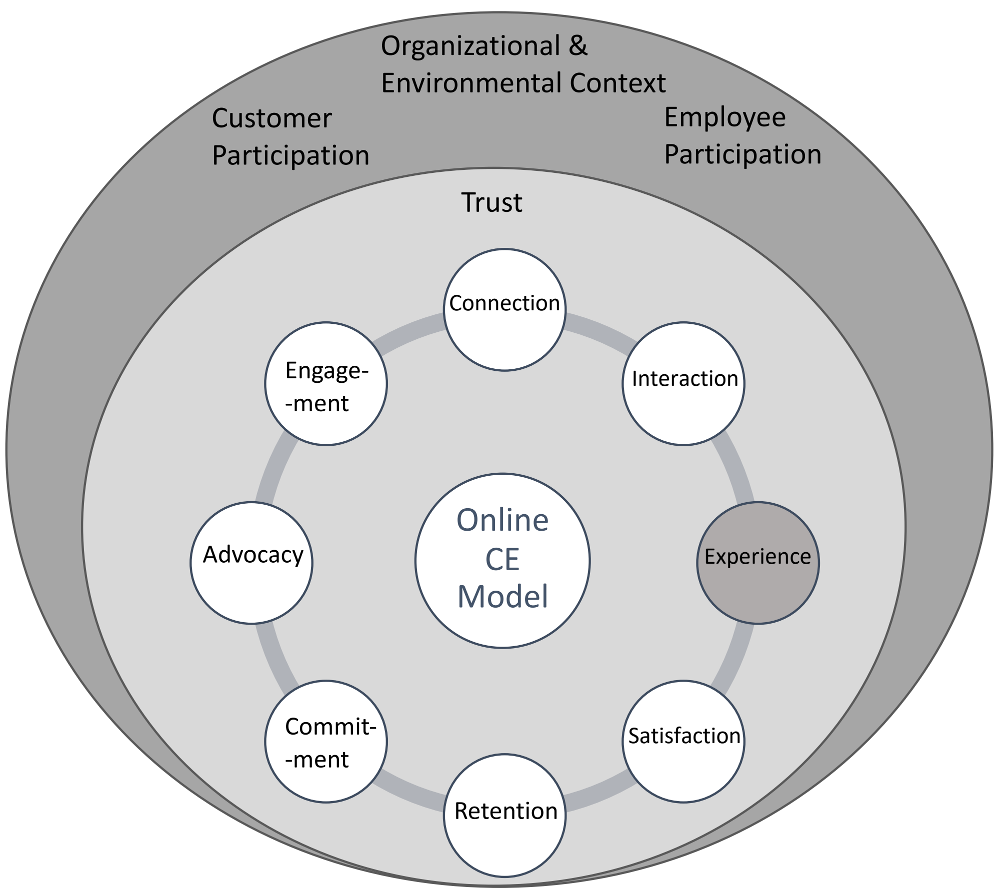

Figure 2: *A revisited model for Online Customer Engagement Cycle*

4.1. Connection

Sashi (2012) began the cycle with Connection when customers notice and start to take interest in the brand; and on that ground sellers can establish connection using both traditional offline and new digital online methods before their needs arise. In this stage, consumers expect a continuous flow of information, active dialogue, and transparent communication (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a).

First, it is crucial for businesses to develop a specific strategy for their products/product lines. Each product should be promoted on platforms that suit their target customer group, with corresponding activities. Different types of online platforms possess different networking opportunities and different groups of consumers. For example, "Facebook facilitates self-expression, Twitter seems to be used as a personal branding tool, while LinkedIn is portrayed as the platform for promoting a professional profile" (Dessart et al., 2015, p. 33). One benefit of persistent engagement with customers on online platforms is that while maintaining dialogue, "the firm can foster a deeper knowledge about the product, location, and surroundings in customers" (Cabiddu et al., 2014, p. 187); however care should be taken to ensure appropriate information reaches customers, as social media limits the firm's control of public content, resulting in visibility in every action and every guest can be a reporter" (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Any issues could lead to negative publication and affect the brand's image.

At the same time as determining customer segment and social media platform, businesses need to look at their product portfolio and determine its involvement level, as this can affect the strategy of the whole CE process. Although not applicable in every case, high-involvement products tend to be higher priced, and thus more costly if a transaction goes wrong. Also, these products are more meaningful to the customer and therefore perceived as riskier in terms of choosing incorrectly. Generally, the greater involvement of a product, the more personalized its branding and shopping experience should be. The personal, human connection between the agent and customer will foster purchase intention for such important products, while for lower-involvement products, customers can do their own research or be assisted by a chat-bot.

With modern technology, personalization is facilitated. Information relating to each customer's interests and/or shopping pattern can easily today be obtained from the sites' own tools (e.g., cookies) or via a third party. Unlike the situation with traditional media, using social media is a cost-effective solution that can help target customers through personalization. For example, ads and posts on social media are often automatically prioritized by the system to customers with the same demographic characteristics that the advertisers prefer (Chu & Kim, 2011). To optimize personalization strategy, sellers of high-involvement products should "develop differentiated communication strategies based on the profitability of the customer segments" (Liu et al., 2021, p. 824), which can be a more personalized method (such as direct phone call, VIP event invitation) for high-spending customers, and mass contact (like newsletters) for lower segments. Conventional communication should also be combined, such as handwritten letters upon purchases, etc., in order to create an air of exclusivity to the product for existing customers.

On the other hand, businesses should also focus their resources on online content on social media platforms. The role of information promotion on social media can be substantial, since businesses can gain more exposure or even increase their sales by having enough product information on social media, even without interaction such as likes or comments (Chen at al., 2020). Companies should also invest in social media entertainment activities, such as providing incentives (e.g., discounts, prizes) to non-owners, encouraging them to share the brand's content to acquaintances. In addition, trendy contents can help strengthen a brand's position and promote

CE on social media; while companies can concurrently improve conventional online channels, such as maintaining useful and accurate information on the seller's website (Yusuf et al., 2018) to encourage purchase intention, recommendation, and return (Maia et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, businesses should ensure that security measures are in place and fully functional on their platforms, as "customers with greater use of online ratings, recommendations, and forum… perceive greater security in the transaction" (Maia et al., 2018, p. 207), and this is more applicable for more high-involvement products. The high-involvement products thus are more prone to becoming targets of online fraud and security breaches.

To sum up, applying personalized content, promotional activities, and security measures can help brands augment their online position, in which product's involvement level can act as moderator. Maintaining a good impression on online platforms can also benefit non-online channels, which can form a solid foundation for a seamless engagement system.

Proposition 1: After determining a suitable social media platform based on brands' offerings and customer segment, depending on product's involvement level, building personalized online content, offering promotional activities, and ensuring security measures can increase the brand's position not only on social media but also on conventional online channels.

4.2. Interaction

Subsequent to encountering the brand or the brand's content, customers start to engage in certain interactions with the brand. To promote communication between potential and existing consumers, interactive engagement has been identified (Gillin, 2008). Sashi (2012) believes that interaction can improve understanding of customer needs, which can change over time and require modifications of a company's offerings. In this stage, interaction refers to the more specific interactive activities that help customers advance to the next engagement stage in Sashi's CE cycle, not the interactive nature of CE (Brodie et al., 2011a; Hollebeek, 2016b) that is represented in various CE components (Zhang et al., 2017).

Nowadays, social media platforms and technologies like mobile apps provide more services that facilitate personalized interactions between customers and organizations (Lee et al., 2020b), allowing customers to participate in the value adding process. Relational elements on social media can motivate customers to participate in online shopping, whereby sellers can interact with customers to express their caring and consumers should also be allowed to ask sellers for detailed purchase information (Lin et al., 2018). Recurring interactions on social media – such as leaving likes and comments – between sellers and buyers can result in improved experiential quality for customers (Lee et al., 2020b). With interactive engagement, users' experience with a product can be increased, in which they become more likely to purchase (Sudhir et al., 2014).

Regarding personalized engagement, it has been known that customers are more satisfied when sellers can target their message through accurate recommendations and relevant content (Liang et al., 2006). Personalized interaction can be beneficial, but customer willingness to interact back is equally important. During service encounters, all interactants must take initiatives, and thus enhancing customer willingness to interact can benefit CE for the long term. Opportunities for customers to take part in their social media can increase their willingness to interact, such as crowdsourced photos on social media for Karen Millen's online store (Scott, 2015). Another example is, that social media platforms today offer location-based services (e.g., live streaming, check-in) that are favorable for new CE activities such as being able to connect users to real spaces (Wang & Stefanone, 2013). Users who broadcast their own location are more likely to be socially connected (Luarn et al., 2015), and e-commerce companies can adopt innovative methods to provide a more engaging experience to the customers aho are more inclined to interact back (Friedrich, 2016).

The abovementioned points indicate that it is possible that a company's efforts to personalize interaction can enhance customers' willingness to interact. However, we believe there are additional variables in the online context that can be crucial to this relationship. Channel consistency is important, as there should be integrated interactions on all online and offline platforms to maintain a consistent experience for customers. Compared with channel-service configuration, integrated interactions exert a stronger influence on CE for high-involvement products, but vice versa for low-involvement products, because the purchase of high involvement products requires more information and consistency across channels (Lee et al., 2019).

On the other hand, online interactivity can possess uncertainty and risk (Kozlenkova et al., 2017) Responsiveness to customers' questions, personalized content, and recommendations all increase CE to a certain point, after which customers can be bored because the content becomes too specific and lacks creativity (e.g., too much responsiveness), or feel that their privacy is being threatened (e.g., too much personalization) (Kang et al., 2021). To be more specific, although users can publicly share parts of their information, they perceive such information to be shared within their "friends" circle, and firms should thus avoid overstepping boundaries or expressing that they know their customers more than what is appropriate (Cabiddu et al., 2014).

To some up, a company's personalized efforts can lead to the customer's willingness to interact, although in the online context channel consistency and privacy play a crucial role in forming this relationship. High-contact and highly customized services can help advance to the next CE cycle stages by leading to “customer satisfaction, loyalty, delight, trust, relationship longevity and high perceived service quality” (Liang et al., 2020, p. 1072).

Proposition 2: Privacy and channel consistency mediate the relationship between personalized interaction and a customer’s willingness to interact on social media.

4.3. Experience

“Experience” is a newly proposed theme in the CE cycle. Being different from “interaction”, “experience” can form perception within a customer’s mind after interaction that “involves emotions, feelings, and attitudes of a user concerning a particular product or service” (Potdar et al., 2018, p. 597). This should be an essential part of the cycle, as experience plays a fundamental role to satisfaction (Pandey & Chawla, 2018), commitment, and later advocacy (Potdar et al., 2018). To improve lifestyle quality, customers are pursuing unforgettable experiences (Oh et al., 2007), and companies intentionally provide special events to customers that lead to active customer participation (Sun & Ko, 2016).

Even though more human-like experience can be curated in e-commerce with the development of technology (Lim et al., 2022b), it has become more difficult to provide a positive experience solely through online platforms, as the online shopping environment can never be realistic while offline platforms can better impact trust and commitment (Bravo et al., 2019) in the later CE cycle stages. Therefore, it is advisable to incorporate both offline and online channels with an effort to create a seamless, satisfying shopping experience (Lee et al., 2019). According to An and Han (2020), for offline channels, increasing the amount of time customers spend in-store is a positive start. During that period the quality of customer experience can be enhanced through sensory experiences such as attractive layout and ambience, which can positively influence CE, as satisfied customers remember their pleasant in-store memories, revisit the store, and bring along other potential customers. Also, pleasurable interactions help strengthen customer attachment to brand, thus facilitating a favorable brand experience (Islam et al., 2019).

It is harder to apply the same mechanism to the online context, such as sensory experience (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). However, we believe that encouraging customers to spend more time on the brand's online platforms can still be appropriate. The innovative solutions in this era such as livestreaming, augmented reality (AR), and/or virtual reality (VR) not only attempt to simulate human senses, but also create an even more intriguing shopping environment (Blazquez, 2014). The quality online experience can also be provided by post, events, polls, and innovation, etc., making it more enjoyable for the customer. A friendly, innovative, and novel online platform design, with diversified and easy payment methods, can generate more positive customer experiences when browsing and purchasing products.

At this stage, the customer has reached the verge of the cognitive dimension. They are preparing to develop emotions for the brand, whether positive or negative, depending on their perception after the shopping experience.

Proposition 3: The realistic quality of an online shopping environment predicts the experience perceived by customers, which is moderated by the amount and perceived quality of time the customer spends on the platform.

4.4. Satisfaction

As it is the mediator between experience and loyalty (Garzaro et al., 2020), it is essential to ensure satisfaction following each transaction. Sashi (2012) emphasizes the importance of satisfaction, as this is a compulsory condition to advance to the next theme in the CE cycle and start to impact customers emotionally. However, after experiencing service, it is hard to identify if the customers are satisfied due to their distinctive internal perception (Thakur, 2019).

Scholars have provided findings regarding customer satisfaction, such as Cook (2014), Benjarongrat and Neal (2017), or Lee et al. (2019, p. 91), who believe that customers demand “seamless purchasing experiences" and “expect their needs and wants to be met in a way that is convenient, enjoyable, and valuable”. With deeper investigation to the online context, the most commonly mentioned points for satisfaction noted are: (1) Significance of control (Chan el al., 2016), leading to online encounter satisfaction and online dependency; (2) Channel integrity (Seck & Philippe, 2013) by creating a seamless online-offline channel for customers, which leads to higher levels of search intention, purchase intention, willingness to pay (Herhausen et al., 2015); and (3) Personalization on social media (personalized comments, personalized messages, and timely replies) combined with quick and responsive service delivery (Potdar et al., 2018).

On a side note, Dixon et al. (2015) believe the mechanism behind customer satisfaction is involves reducing customer effort during transaction (Dixon et al., 2015). There are two types of value perception presented in satisfaction, intrinsic and utilitarian (Thakur, 2019), in which companies can segment their customer offerings based on these attributes at this stage (Sim & Plewa, 2017). Security, accessibility, and information usefulness help enhance customers’ utilitarian shopping values; and customers’ intrinsic shopping values can be met with service speed and service receptiveness (Busalim, 2019). In turn, customers are satisfied and more likely to repurchase. At this stage, we argue that there are various routes that can lead to a customer's satisfaction online. However, if companies can provide an appropriate combination of intrinsic and utilitarian value in each route, customer effort can be considerably reduced, paving the way to complete satisfaction.

Satisfaction in a CE cycle is achieved when a company has appropriately handled the purchase transaction with their customer. It depends on the firm's engagement strategy and the customer to advance to the next stage of the relationship. In other words, a successful customer transaction is not the end, but the beginning of a process in which the customer develops an emotional attachment to the brand.

Proposition 4: Significance of control, channel integrity, and social media personalization can reduce customer effort (and boost satisfaction), when these routes are mediated by an appropriate combination of intrinsic and utilitarian value.

4.5. Retention

Retaining a customer results from achieving overall satisfaction over time, or creating highly positive emotions (Sashi, 2012). At this stage the customer starts to determine the perceived value after a transaction, in which the co-creation between customers and the company can be more noticeable (Callarisa Fiol et al., 2009). Internal and external tools should be integrated to enhance the perceived value of the transaction, thereby increasing loyalty (Chang et al., 2009).

Continuing from the previous stage, combining utilitarian and intrinsic value is still immportant for further CE efforts. Social media can be used as a means to enhance service quality (Huppertz & Otto, 2018). Separately, utilitarian/functional values (e.g., conversation, sharing) and intrinsic/hedonic values (e.g., fun, playfulness) of social media can greatly impact customers' "stickiness" to the brand; and when combined, these two values can boost retention (Zhang et al., 2017).

However, customers' decisions to remain with the brand are not up to the brand's effort solely. A notable trend in this era is that online consumers create and spread WOM in the digital marketplace (Thakur, 2018; Chang et al., 2019). Since customers choose to believe that public reviews from other customers are more reliable than information provided by the organization (Bickart & Schindler, 2001), the management of online reviews and ratings becomes one of the main retention efforts. Online retention means dealing with a large number of subscribers, and an even greater number of potential customers. Consumers have a sense of justice, so when the core service is violated, they might feel the need to post bad reviews online as a form of "public execution" (Do et al., 2019). It is increasingly easy to post and spread such negative reviews with the help of online platforms. Therefore, once customers become annoyed and leave, they can drag many transactional customers with them through herd behavior.

At this stage, it is equally helpful to manage credibility and information usefulness of reviews (Shaheen et al., 2019). Customers should be encouraged to adopt the online review system, while the firm actively seeks to build customers' trust toward e-retail websites and their social media presence to increase CE. While it is important to build and maintain a fan base within the customer pool, it is necessary to initiate engagement with all consumers to monitor unsatisfied customers, keep them loyal, and prevent them from "defecting"; and the determinant here is how quickly the company can react to negative public ratings (Dessart et al., 2015).

By managing the combination of intrinsic and utilitarian value, along with quick response to public ratings, a solid foundation can be formed to create calculative and affective commitment in the progressive stage.

Proposition 5: Along with the combination of utilitarian and intrinsic value, negative public ratings online can also result in customer retention intent, which is moderated by the response speed from the service/product provider.

4.6. Commitment

When committed, the customers have developed a re-patronage intent, and will be less likely to switch to another platform/provider by using just a few clicks (Wirtz et al., 2013). Regarding the online communities context, Kang et al. (2014, p. 148) stated that commitment could be described as the "member's willingness to continue relationship with the brand through participation in online communities". Committed users are more inclined to undertake behaviors to create content while on social networking sites, such as "posting updates, photos or changing status" (Chen et al., 2013, p. 2529).

There are two types of commitment, calculative and affective (Gustafsson et al., 2005; Bowden, 2009; Bergel & Brock, 2019), which are developed from utilitarian and intrinsic value respectively from prior stages. Originally, the continuance (later known as calculative) dimension of the attachment is due to a lack of alternatives or high switching (Fullerton, 2005), while the affective dimension is the emotional string between the company's offerings and customers, as an outcome of positive emotional experience (Bert'al Ellis, 2000). Sashi (2012). Giannakis-Bompolis and Boutsouki (2014) are also advocates of this opinion and believe that just one type alone cannot really lead to involvement willingness, but the development of calculative commitment will positively influence affective commitment, and the combination of both has a strong correlation with involvement willingness. If the customers possess both types of commitment, the seller and the customer(s) will then be involved in an enduring emotional exchange with strong emotional bonds.

However, for online CE efforts, we believe that channeling the firm's resource to nurture and prioritize affective commitment is more appropriate. For online contexts affective commitment is more often mentioned in the literature. Affective commitment can be influenced directly and indirectly by social and structural bonds, while the financial bonds have only an indirect effect on CE via affective commitment (Hu & Chaudhry, 2020). In other words, it is difficult to attract customers with prices alone, as competitor promotion may attract them, and affective commitment is still needed for financial bonds to reach and affect CE. The sharing and sense of belonging in online communities can also foster affective commitment, which keeps users loyal to the brand (Larasati & Hananto, 2012; Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019b). Self-connection and brand intimacy are antecedents to affective commitment, and self-connection would also be positively related to purchase loyalty (Turri et al., 2013). Also, according to Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019a), in an online context, repeat customers exhibit affective commitment; and when their commitment becomes consistent, community culture is created, which if enforced over time leads to advocacy within the customer base. To sum up, we believe involvement willingness can be stimulated with nurturing affective commitment on social media, while calculative commitment efforts can act as moderator.

When consumers are committed affectively, the brand will be less vulnerable to service failures or competition (Turri et al., 2013), while being able to devote less effort to customer retention as they are more willing to pay a premium price and become advocates to attract others to the brand (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011).

Proposition 6: The nature of social media can nurture affective commitment that results in customers' involvement willingness. This relationship can be moderated with calculative commitment whereby customers can be pushed forward to becoming brand advocates.

4.7. Advocacy

We have moved from the emotional dimension to a more behavioral-dominant stage. In this stage, the customer may choose to keep or share their pleasure. Sashi (2012) believes that with social media, customers can actively participate in business-to-customer (B2C) and C2C communities, and sellers can foster advocacy in customers by playing the advocacy role first in their relationship (e.g., customer care, efforts to please the customers). In the online domain social media should be the more dominant platform for firms to focus efforts on, because social media can transform CE activities on a larger scale (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014).

In this behavioral-dominant stage, responding to sellers' activities, WOM is the manifestation of CE (Kunz et al., 2017) that is able to result in advocacy. According to Skute (2014), with assistance from social media, marketers have switched from one-to-many engagement (B2C) to many-to-many engagement (C2C). With C2C companies can generate value from online social interaction (Stephen & Toubia, 2010), in which they have limited control over the communications taking place. The value created with C2C exerts an impact directly on customer stickiness and further influences WOM; and the sense of dependency as well as pleasure can develop within C2C interactions (Zhang et al., 2017). Consequently, interactions that are purely C2C may bring many risks if they develop out of the company's control.

It is hard to control C2C communication, but firms can attempt to reduce the risks on social media. On social media firms can encourage sharing behavior to facilitate and later encourage frequent customers' sharing actions, by actively creating brand communities, publishing trends, and offering forms of incentives (Lin et al., 2018). Within this brand community customers can develop a sense of belonging (Zhang et al., 2015), perceived value (Chan et al., 2014), and trust (Hammedi et al., 2015) that can positively influence CE. By keeping a grasp on "the devil that they know", they can react quickly to the potential public threats in the community.

Note that at the heart of advocacy are fans (Sashi, 2012), and when considered as fans, customers are privileged and proud that they belong to a community in which businesses should publicly integrate customers in brand development efforts (e.g., mentioning their name, praising them) to make customers feel proud of being an active brand advocate (Simon et al., 2016). Also, from Simon et al. (2016), quality is more important than quantity, and businesses should focus on current advocates because (1) they express their honest feelings with the brand and are willing to collaborate to resolve brand's issues; (2) fewer members (rather than a large group) can more easily solve a problem quickly and shorten product development cycle process, and (3) advocates spend more time on the brand, whereby the brand can achieve greater reach by interacting with them on the consumer network. With the efforts spent on advocates' quality, the threats from C2C communication to brands' active advocates may be potentially diminished.

Proposition 7: In an online context, focusing on current advocates and facilitating sharing behavior among the brand's community (e.g., value sharing contents, incentives) can reduce potential C2C threats.

4.8. Engagement

When delighted customers share their experiences online, the engagement foundation can be set. This was supposed to be the final stage of the CE cycle, at which customers have become fans and have developed both an emotional and relational bond with the brand (Sashi, 2012). At this stage, we can consider this as the first success, and thereafter we need to recycle the process to maintain engagement, as CE leads to new connection and interaction. Value gained from the online brand community at the engagement stage can enhance members' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, emphasizing the recycle probability of CE.

According to Shaheen et al. (2019, p. 149), "engagement in terms of monetary and utilitarian benefits evaluation, intrinsic enjoyment in the overall shopping process and social facilitation of the products has enhanced the intention of purchase among the cohort groups". After engagement, the customer will once again start with connection, getting to know other products and/or other aspects of the brand, obtaining satisfaction, and deciding to continue their commitment to the brand. On online community, engagement factors are brand trust (Bruhn, et al., 2014), and involvement or satisfaction (Hollebeek, 2011a); while on social commerce websites, technological factors such as system or information can significantly influence customer satisfaction and CE behaviors even when customers are engaged (Busalim et al., 2021). This goes on to show that engagement is not the endpoint, but rather the entire experience that the customer has with the brand.

Engaged customers display certain behaviors, including attempts to know more information and discover more possibilities for acquiring better experiences or even "adjusting personal behaviors to better orchestrate the service interactions" (Liang et al., 2020, p. 1087). Their willingness to participate more can generate positive effect on consumption intention that firms can obtain (Schindler & Bickart, 2012). In other words, after advocacy, customers will have the opportunity and intentions to engage in a new set of activities, i.e., showing their support for the brand and encouraging the same kind of support from fellow consumers. When engaged, customers form positive attitudes toward the brand, continue to repurchase, and even become brand ambassadors and co-create value with sellers (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2016b). Thus, for engaged customers, encouraging their continuous participation is a reasonable move to keep firm's presence close to them and vice versa.

When the CE cycle is iterated with a customer, encouraging more participation helps them to skip several stages to reach engagement again. This point is proven in the online brand community – where ongoing communication takes place – as engaged customers can rapidly reach commitment (Dessart et al., 2015; Naqvi et al., 2020), or they can engage again by going from connection to interaction and then advocacy (Potdar et al., 2018). CE also mediates the effects of satisfaction and loyalty, so customers who are already engaged with the brand can experience satisfaction and loyalty more quickly (Hapsari et al., 2017).

Another point that helps with CE speed is related to segmentation modification. By basing on the engaged customer's main characteristic, the firm's target customer can be narrowed, and with the experience gained from the first circulation of the CE cycle, we believe the engagement speed for firm's prospective customers can also be accelerated. In this case, rebuilding team structure based on the engaged customer can act as mediator between these relationships (Hoang et al., 2022b).

Proposition 8: Encouraging participation on social media and narrowing target customer can accelerate the engagement speed for either old or new customer. These relationships are mediated by the modification of the company's team structure based on engaged customers' characteristics.

4.9. Organizational and environmental context

We conclude "key CE activities" themes with "engagement" and turn to "CE influencing factors" with "organizational and environmental contexts" that can influence each CE activity and should be carefully managed. As widely established in the literature, CE is heavily context-dependent, which results in several CE intensity levels (Brodie et al., 2011a; van Doorn et al., 2010).

Organizational contexts refer to a firm's characteristics, its structure, strategies, and channels. Since businesses expand into different platforms nowadays, it is essential for firms to "adapt to survive" by integrating and managing the experience across omni-channel integration, as firms can eliminate customer delight if the channels are inconsistent for customers to move between them and be more likely to choose other retailers (Boudine, 2016). This is also understood as having integration across all channels in terms of "products, advertising, salesperson attentiveness and store atmospherics" (Erdoğmuş & Tatar, 2015, p. 190).

In any sector, when a business has both offline and online presence, channel integration is required to unify touchpoints across channels and deliver a personalized customer experience

(Melero et al., 2016). The quality of channel integration depends on how firms can maintain consistent purchase experience across their available channels (Sousa & Voss, 2006), and this quality consistently influences customers' evaluations of a firm or brand, subsequently bringing positive outcomes that are valuable to retailers (Emrich et al., 2015). The quality of channel integration can influence CE positively, and in turn can lead to greater repurchase intention and positive WOM once the CE cycle begins to circulate again (Lee et al., 2019).

The integration efforts with innovative solutions can create intriguers (Blazquez, 2014). We believe that these intriguers can stimulate customers and intensify the number of activities on the platform, thereby affording firms more opportunities to approach their customers. However, the route for channel integration to achieve the firm's purpose can be winding, as organizational and environment context can create barriers to the adoption of CE (Chathoth et al., 2014).

With many and diverse online interactions, it might be hard to maintain consistent service experiences in which social media engagement and experiential quality could depend on the characteristics of organization's offerings (Lee et al., 2020b). Therefore, it is necessary to match the social media engagement and the service complexity attributes to predict experiential quality. Also, from Lee et al. (2019), retailers with low-involvement offerings should provide flexibility and convenience in channel choices. Generally, in a retail environment, efforts should be made to maximize hedonic values and reinforce pleasant shopping memories, as these are factors that are positively correlated with CE. On a side note, regional and country-specific culture is often a key characteristic for systematic differences in behavior, especially regarding what is socially accepted and what is not (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019a). In terms of economic situation, emerging markets are different from other markets, such as in China, where "guanxi" is the type of relationship established on informal contracts (Lin et al., 2018), which can be seen as awkward or even risky to Europeans.

Proposition 9: Channel integration can lead to intensification of online CE activities, in which this relationship is moderated with product involvement level, region, sector, culture, and local customer characteristics.

4.10. Customer participation

According to Hollebeek et al. (2016b), the outcomes of CE are customer co-creation and customer resources contribution. In other words, the value is proposed by the firms through market offerings, but mostly continued by customers through the value co-creation process, where the customers integrate different available resources to the firm and other customers. This is also illustrated as value co-creation and interaction – the core of CE – both of which belong as parts of customer participation and are presented in various key CE activities (Zhang et al., 2017).

Many authors, such as Kristensson et al. (2008) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b), believe that value co-creation is the core of the co-creation process between a company and its customers. In the present era firms should not be focusing only on linking customer action to firm value, but should pay attention to perceived customer value; otherwise the company might suffer from loss of engagement share. Social media is an advantageous platform for the facilitation of value co-creation, since-successful CE strategies usually take place therein as it can accelerate customer expectation, knowledge, and customer awareness in a company's value chain (Dutot, 2013; Chathoth et al., 2014). On social media, the fulfillment of hedonic, functional, brand interaction, and self-concept values are directly linked to "fan page usage intensity, and fan page engagement" (Busalim et al., 2019, p. 10). In these online communities, the firm can act either as a co-creator of value with customers or as a value facilitator between customers. Chathoth et al. (2020, p. 5) describe the process and system of co-value creation, which "include[s] engagement platforms (Chathoth et al., 2016) that lead to the co-construction of customer experiences (Grönroos, 2008) through interactions with service agents (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Assiouras et al., 2019), and 'learning' from customers (Yachin, 2018)". For the firm, a well-managed co-creation process can help expand the customer base and provide new opportunities while reducing costs (Priharsari et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, company and customers' repeated interactions can be essential in order to strengthen the customers' investment in the company (emotional, psychological, and physical) (Chaffey, 2007). Through the lens of the S-D logic, value is always co-created with the customer during interactions (Chathoth et al., 2016). In online communities, repeated participation can be developed by utilizing relevant and interesting content which can motivate members to stick with the community (Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019a). It can be argued that the interactive nature of CE is used to develop customer-based outcomes, including trust, attachment, and loyalty (Islam et al., 2019). When these outcomes are reached, the firm has succeeded in differentiation, and will make a profit.

With the knowledge that CE will increase if the engagement activities exceed or meet expectations, businesses can employ big data to create and understand multi-dimensional customer profiles to adjust the marketing strategy for the respective customer group (Kunz et al., 2017). We believe that this process is the result of optimizing the CE natures – value co-creation and repeated interaction – which is facilitated by the characteristics of social media platforms.

Proposition 10: Companies can restructure their marketing strategy based on the customer's perceived co-creation value and repeated interaction data that appear at various stages in the CE cycle. The latter variables are controlled by the nature characteristics of social media platforms.

4.11. Employee participation

The co-creation of value, which is one of the core elements of CE, is the joint effort of both the customers and the company (represented by its employees) in creating, defining, and enhancing values deriving from their transactions. Thus, the crucial role of frontline employees and service personnel to engagement is undeniable, and proper training is needed for value creation in CE (Plé & Cáceres, 2010). This calls for changes in policies, systems, processes, and corporate culture so that employees become more attuned to CE behavior (van Doorn et al., 2010).

In this context, it is helpful to examine service engagement behaviors (SEBs), which are the involvement of employee and customer in service interaction, manifested in behavior (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). According to this concept, because interaction comes from both employees and customers, proactive and collaborative engagement of both these players are desired in order to create value. When SEBs are observed in both employees and customers during service interactions, discussions and information exchanges take place with high intensity, which result in service experiences and outcomes that are more fitting to individuals' needs and preferences. These eventually lead to customer delight, perceived quality, satisfaction, and relationship longevity (Liang et al., 2020).

Past research on employee participation (EP) has mainly focused on the psychological states of employees during their work at the expense of observations of their displayed behaviors during actual service settings (e.g., Barrick et al., 2015; Salanova et al., 2005). Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) consider EP as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. Other factors, including behavioral, have more recently started to feature in discussions around EP. Kumar and Pansari (2014, p.55), in examining EP from a marketing perspective, defined it as “a multidimensional construct that comprises all of the different facets of the attitudes and behaviors of employees towards the organization”. EP also has a positive impact on employees, in which notable factors can be employees’ mental competence, customer behavior intentions, service-orientation, and service productivity (Chandni & Rahman, 2020).

Behavior-wise, engaged employees are more inclined to (1) invest more effort into their work, (2) contribute more than expected, and (3) stretch themselves beyond typical responsibilities (Liang et al., 2020). As concluded from these findings, Liang et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of empowering employees, as they will exhibit customer empowerment behavior when inviting collaboration from the customer. This implies the need for businesses to develop employee’s service role involvement as well as customer orientation and empowerment behavior. In case of service failure, the role of frontline employees becomes significant, as they can reduce or escalate customer outrage (Do et al., 2019). Thus, learning to deal with customer complaints and monitor their emotions is crucial for every frontline employee in any service setting.

Proposition 11: In both online and offline contexts, frontline service personnel need proper training to deal with customer complaints, monitor customer emotions, and be empowered for extra contributions, flexibility, as well as increased loyalty.

4.12. Trust

Although not being explicitly considered as a theme in the CE cycle, trust has always been a crucial factor in relationships management, as customers are exposed to various sources of information that can potentially influence their decision making in the purchasing process, especially in the online environment (Shaheen et al., 2019). Since the early days, Gundlach and Murphy (1993) have emphasized the importance of trust due to its role as the basis for human interaction and exchange relations. Later, Gefen et al. (2003) suggested that the main reason for customers to return to online stores is the client's trust. On online platforms, the assurance that the other party will fulfill their obligations becomes less concrete, and thus the role of trust is even more important (Al-Debei et al., 2015), and it is understandable that trust has become an area of great interest. Additionally, a company's reputation is important when evaluating trust, and trust has a direct effect on the online purchase intention and risk reduction on sellers' websites, which is an elementary aspect in the adoption of social commerce (Pavlou, 2003). Thus, many scholars such as Turel et al. (2008) and Al-Debei et al. (2015) believe that trust can be an essential component to a successful relationship, especially in online environments.

According to Hashim and Tan (2015, p. 146), "trust has a key role to play in shaping reliable behavior in situations where acceptable workable rules were lacking, as is the case with online communities". At the same time, "trust" exerts positive effects on all dimensions of CE (Kosiba et al., 2018). With its important role in online customer behavior, trust is mentioned by scholars in each activity of the CE cycle and acts as mediator for each activity to advance to the next stage. To affirm this mediating role, Li and Chang (2016) claim that customers prefer to connect to the connections they trust; trust can be increased during social interaction (Maia et al., 2018); and trust and satisfaction when positioned side by side can enhance the strength of relationship and reach commitment (Banyte & Dovaliene, 2014). If customers' hedonic values are satisfied, their enthusiasm increases, further enhancing trust and retention (Zhang et al., 2017). It is a larger gap between retention and commitment, and trust can moderate this relationship, as its role is significant in leading to better commitment (Hollebeek, 2011a). Furthermore, when customers become advocates for the brand, their positive influence can create trust within their social media community for better CE (Hammedi et al., 2015), in which community members can be in psychological states of confidence and "other members have the ability to deliver what has been promised and put their interests first" (Hsu et al., 2012, p. 77). Other antecedents to trust include engagement (Islam & Rahman, 2016), community identification as a result of interactions within the community boundaries, and a sense of confidence as a result of mutual exchange of information when one participates in an online community. These factors all support the idea that trust can play a considerable role throughout the transition of CE cycle activities.

Proposition 12: In an online context, Trust becomes an essential part of online CE and plays a moderator role between Retention and Commitment, while retaining its important mediating role between other key CE activities.

5. Contributions

We selected Sashi's model to revisit CE and assess the current situation mainly because Sashi presented an interesting framework and because it can be further exploited. One of the things that was not mentioned in the earlier framework is that the model helps to align confusing concepts about CE antecedents and consequences – something about which scholars have not found a common voice. Also, these concepts can be arranged in such a way (circularly) to show an overview of the general flow of CE activities.

Sashi's model can also demonstrate three dimensions of CE theory in which these dimensions can be represented in three different periods of the CE cycle, from the first to the last stage, and then repeat the cycle. To be more specific, we can see the Cognitive dimension in Connection and Interaction and Experience; Emotional dimension in Satisfaction and Retention and Commitment; and Behavioral dimension in Advocacy and Engagement. This is one of the contributions to our knowledge of the dimension component of CE and how it can be aligned in the whole CE journey.

The major difference between this paper and Sashi's (2012) study is the 10-year gap of technology, whereby today's traditional marketing concepts are challenged by groundbreaking platforms and tools such as TikTok, AR, and VR; as well as the fact that smartphones have become more modern and able to multitask. Also, Generation Z customers are now growing older and can be vital to several industries due to the idiosyncrasy of their behavior.

The present study can have a great impact within the CE research field, as it is investigating a popular topic, online CE, at a time when customer behavior toward online shopping was forced to accelerate during the pandemic. In that regard it also helps to address the ambiguity of the post-pandemic era – such as the massive shift toward the online channel following the long period of social distancing, the level of reliance on e-commerce, and how demands on security and personalization have increased. The present work also provides a set of propositions to broaden the CE research avenue for future scholars. Table 3 compares the main features between this literature review and earlier works in the same field. All of the above highlight the significance of this paper, especially since Sashi's older themes are not applicable to the current online context.

This article demonstrates that when Sashi's model is revisited, it can represent all CE activities of a business in any industry. However, the paper still requires empirical data to prove its effectiveness. We hope that the propositions advanced in the article will help to open research directions for scholars interested in this topic, as well as help to clarify the ambiguity of the post-pandemic scenario.

6. Limitations

Over the course of the research, we found that studies on CE, whether theoretical or empirical, have investigated only the frontmost activities of businesses, i.e., interactions between the business and its customers, and among customers themselves. No backstage activities, including the supply chain, intermediaries, and delivery management, are mentioned in detail. In other words, CE is still seen only under the marketing lens, and its relationship with other areas of business have not been explored. We believe that more investigation into these synergies can help optimize all business processes to maximize the effects of CE. This research has also focused on end-users of products and services, which means no business-to-business (B2B) activities were explored in this paper, even though B2B activities account for a large proportion of the economy and represent major parts of the supply chain. In addition, even though we have examined a sufficient number of research articles for the systematic literature review method according to Paul and Criado (2020), it is possible that many qualified articles from various prestigious journals were overlooked. Finally, specific geographical differences were not mentioned and explored in detail, as the scope of research was not extensive enough, and the only language used during the research for this paper was English. There was thus not enough diversity in the findings to result in region-specific propositions.

Table 3. Main features of this literature review compared with earlier works on CE.

Author/s and Year	Aim of the review	Adoption of SLR methodology	Number of journals	Number of articles	Interval time	Classification variables	Thematic focus	Limitation of the SLR
Chandni and Rahman (2020)	To present the current state of research in the domains of CE and employee engagement and to identify a common ground for future research in these areas.	No	39	74	2008-2018	- Year of publication - Research design	Employee Engagement	- Does not consider the post-pandemic context - Contribution is limited to a synopsis of CE without new propositions - No propositions were given - Limited potential for application to other industries - Does not consider the online commerce context
Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro (2020)	To systematically review and critically analyze the research about customer engagement and address what marketing research has	No	Not reported	144	2005-2018	- Research contribution - Year of publication - Theoretical foundation - Research design	Customer Engagement	- Does not consider the post-pandemic context - Identified some research gaps but no propositions were provided - Does not consider the online commerce context

Author/s and Year	Aim of the review	Adoption of SLR methodology	Number of journals	Number of articles	Interval time	Classification variables	Thematic focus	Limitation of the SLR
	been conducted on CE							
Trunfio and Rossi (2021)	To systematically contribute to social media engagement by analysing, discussing, and synthesising social media engagement literature in the perspective of social media metrics.	Yes (bibliometric)	34	41	2013-2020	- Research contribution - Research methodology - Tools, techniques, methodolo-gies used - Year of publication - Theoretical foundation - Research design - Data collection method - Theoretical perspectives	Social Media Engagement	- Does not consider the post-pandemic context, and encourage other researchers to investigate this topic - Bibliometric systematic literature review method is considered to be "not useful", "simple", and not preferred by journal editors (Paul & Criado, 2020). This is a less robust methodology, which doesn't allow new propositions to be made - Uncertain about contribution's ability to be applied in different industries. - Limited time period & number of articles

Author/s and Year	**Aim of the review**	**Adoption of SLR methodology**	**Number of journals**	**Number of articles**	**Interval time**	**Classification variables**	**Thematic focus**	**Limitation of the SLR**
								- Niche focus on social media
Lim and Rasul (2022)	To contribute to a deeper understanding of CE from a social media perspective, thereby advancing marketing theory and practice in this area	Yes (bibliometric)	27	34	2012-2020	- Research contribution - Research methodology - Tools, techniques, methodologies used - Year of publication - Theoretical foundation - Research design Data collection method	Social Media Engagement	- Does not consider the post-pandemic context - Bibliometric systematic literature review method is considered to be "not useful", "simple", and not preferred by journal editors (Paul & Criado, 2020). This is a less robust methodology, which doesn't allow new propositions to be made - Limited time period & number of articles - Niche focus on social media
This review	**To consolidate published research on CE, and on that ground, to further develop a set**	Yes **(Theory Development Review)**	**33**	**50**	**2010-2021**	- Research contribution - Research methodology - Tools, techniques,	Online Commerce	

Author/s and Year	**Aim of the review**	**Adoption of SLR methodology**	**Number of journals**	**Number of articles**	**Interval time**	**Classification variables**	**Thematic focus**	**Limitation of the SLR**
	of integrated CE elements that fit the online context, based on Sashi's (2012) CE cycle model					methodologo-gies used - Year of publication - Theoretical foundation - Research design - Data collection method - Theoretical perspectives - **Theory develop-ment** - **Contempo-rary context** - **Applied Paul & Criado's research variables** - **Research Proposi-tions**		

Note: differences between this review and the previous ones are highlighted in bold

7. Future research agenda

Having reviewed the literature, we believe that firms can make better efforts to understand and utilize CE as a customer management tool. The main contribution of this paper is the improvement of the existing CE cycle model (originally developed by Sashi (2012)) with twelve propositions that can make CE activities become more straightforward for businesses in the online environment. We do not focus on just any specific aspect of the online environment such as social media or website, but instead investigate each theme from the model to form a comprehensive online workflow which businesses can apply depending on their resources. This online context can be more appropriate in the post-pandemic era since customer behavior shifted toward more online shopping activities during mandatory social distancing at home. We argue that CE should not be viewed solely as a process with sequential steps, where each step is independent and preceded by "antecedents" and followed by "consequences", but rather as a set of elements that influence each other, all of which are based on two foundational elements, co-creation and interaction. Also, personalization in certain CE cycle activities should receive more empirical investigation, since it plays a key role in improving the overall customer experience, and information for personalization comes not only from the demographic segmentation of the customer, but also from their relationship with the organization itself, i.e., how engaged they are with the brand.

For each proposition, future research can aim to test one or more themes for CE empirically, while attempting to develop coherence between one proposition of each theme to another. Scholars who are interested in studying the CE cycle should address some of this paper's limitations in terms of industry diversity and geographical differences. We found that there are not many papers on CE pertaining to the Southeast Asia region, even though this area is an emerging, rapidly developing market in E-commerce (Kumar et al., 2021), and greater knowledge about it would be valuable. We also call for other researchers to examine the impact of cultural and geographical differences on customer behaviors in relation to CE, and how different characteristics specific to each industry influence the decision-making process and the way customers engage with businesses in that industry. The model proposed in this paper, while developed with e-commerce businesses in mind, was based on literature from a wide range of service-based industries (including e-commerce, hospitality, banking, etc.) and may be further developed to fit the context of other industries.

8. Conclusion

CE has always been an attractive area of research, and even more so in recent years. When engaged, customers can offer the firm relentless support and be a valuable source of insights. With the advent of digitalization, customers' shopping patterns have changed drastically and even more dramatically with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is necessary to upgrade the model to reflect how customers interact with the online shopping platforms, and how businesses can help customers obtain the best shopping experience. This paper has contributed by consolidating the existing literature and aligning the scattered concepts to present a comprehensive view of CE. Based on the CE cycle model proposed by Sashi (2012), we added Experience as a key CE activity and introduced factors influencing the success of these activities, including Organizational and Environmental Context, Customer Participation, Employee Participation, and Trust. We affirm that this research has aligned the scattered concepts around CE and provide some insights into CE on online platforms. This research can help provide direction and foundation for further research on CE in other industries, geographical regions, and cultural contexts, and with more diverse relationships (e.g., B2B). With a comprehensive CE model, companies around the world can better understand the way customers interact and help provide a better experience that allows consumers to easily connect and engage with their brand.

Chapter 3 - Online customer engagement in the post-pandemic scenario: a hybrid thematic analysis of the luxury fashion industry

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1. Introduction

The introduction of the Internet has brought tremendous changes in market production and consumption and has empowered customers in unprecedented ways. As such, understanding customer behavior before, during, and after product consumption is vital for the existence of any business. As a consequence, Customer Engagement (CE) has been receiving considerable attention from many scholars, especially as companies can acquire both monetary benefits and more than mere customer transactions (Venkatesan, 2017). With the development of electronic commerce in recent years, the need for managing online CE activities has become more urgent.

However, the rising wave of digitalization does not seem to have transformed the luxury fashion industry to any great extent. As an unspoken rule, the Internet and the luxury industry have never been considered a good match: (1) while the Internet provides mass access and price transparency, luxury firms have traditionally competed on exclusivity, scarcity, and class; and (2) the personalized human interactions and attention and in-store service, which are at the core of a luxury experience, are considered impossible to replicate in an online environment (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). Therefore, with few exceptions luxury firms (Arrigo, 2014), have been mostly reluctant in undertaking their operations online. This has put the industry in a more vulnerable position, especially in its reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The luxury sector was the most impacted by the pandemic, with customers having little or completely no access to physical stores. In the early period of the pandemic, high-end brands suffered as much as 93% profit loss (McKinsey, 2021), many of them arriving on the verge of bankruptcy, or considered “almost dead” (Amed & Berg, 2021). At the same time, the pandemic created new marketing opportunities and accelerated the digital transformation process for many businesses. Brands that switched to or enhanced their online sales activities in a timely manner witnessed a certain level of success. For example, much LVMH revenue came from online channels during the pandemic in 2021 (LVMH, 2021), which reinforces the good start of 2022 (LVMH, 2022). This indicates the potential for the revival and transformation of the luxury fashion industry into an online or more hybrid one.

While online channels and online sales revenue have become a must for survival, not all luxury firms are willing to or know how to embrace this change, as online and luxury have been considered to be incompatible with each other (Baker et al., 2018). However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic propelled online CE into an essential business activity, as digitalization became an indispensable part of survival, and triggering a global shift with lasting impact on consumer behavior (LaBerge et al., 2021). The luxury industry needs to adapt quickly to this new reality to ensure future success, and move beyond a limited, transactional view of the internet toward one that takes advantage of the internet’s full range of abilities to increase CE. This paper seeks to answer the research question: “what are the determinants of online luxury CE activities and how can luxury firms effectively handle the flow of their online engagement activities in the post-pandemic scenario?” To answer the question, we analyze web content by using YouTube videos that contain experts’ perspectives on luxury fashion topics relating to the pandemic, following a hybrid thematic analysis to identify subthemes and their relevancy.

This article focuses on the luxury fashion industry, and builds upon the CE cycle model (Sashi, 2012), with revisions for the online business environment and post-pandemic context. With this proposed revised CE model, the paper provides a guide for the luxury fashion industry to harness the strengths of the Internet to enhance CE, manage their clientele, and pave the way for post-pandemic success. We argue that rapid incorporation of innovative solutions, skillful adaptation of buyers' characteristics from this era, and systematic resource allocation are ideal solutions for the luxury fashion firms in the post-pandemic scenario.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The current state of luxury fashion industry

Based on the hierarchy of fashion (Sorger & Udale, 2017) we narrow the scope of luxury fashion to the middle tier known as "ready-to-wear" designer brands such as Gucci or Prada, as they are making several digitalization efforts despite going against their conventional marketing strategies. Hereinafter we refer to them as luxury fashion.

Considered as one of the oldest businesses with a trillion-dollar market worth (Kapferer, 2015), the luxury fashion industry has never found itself in a bizarre situation like COVID-19. Within the pandemic period, while not going bankrupt as did some iconic fashion firms (e.g., Brooks Brothers and Century 21), many luxury fashion firms witnessed tremendous losses in revenue (e.g., Burberry and Salvatore Ferragamo sales fell for 48.4–46.6 percent respectively in the first half of 2020) (Ilchi, 2020). This was to be expected as the entire industry was frozen during the strict quarantine period, which prevented in-store shopping. Online sales emerged as the mandatory channel for survival, but for luxury products there are many opposing opinions on this matter.

Many scholars believe that luxury products and online sales are mutually exclusive, as the role of physical stores is tremendous, including their ability to provide distinctive experiences with both external and internal layouts and the exceptional personalized in-store service (Moore & Birtwistle, 2004). Additionally, Okonkwo (2009) believes that the uniqueness of luxury products cannot be made available to the mass community, and Hennigs et al. (2012) state that collections presented online easily create opportunities for fakes. Consumers prefer to buy luxury fashion goods in brick-and-mortar stores due to the superior shopping experience provided (Euromonitor, 2018). Additionally, in metropolitan cities, 63% of customers prefer to touch and feel the product rather than buy it online (Ferreira et al., 2015). There are also many other issues with Internet presence, including scarcity and desirability erosion (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), security concerns (Liu et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2013), and luxury brands providing access to unnecessary information that can diminish perceptions of brand exclusivity (Seringhaus, 2005), while also introducing democratization that some consumers resent by putting both loyal and non-loyal customers at the same level.

Nevertheless, there are several scholars and practitioners who condemn those pessimistic schools of thought. Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, luxury fashion firms acknowledged the imperativeness and inevitability of developing an online presence (Arrigo, 2014; Beuckels & Hudders, 2016). For example, luxury brands like Burberry and Chanel have been digitizing for better audience connection (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Moreover, online sales of luxury goods has reached 8 per cent of total luxury sales, and is even predicted to rise to 25 per cent by 2025 (D'Arpizio & Levato, 2017). As online sales are growing steadily, even luxury firms cannot ignore this fruitful platform, and the best practice is to mix different communication policies (The Boston Consulting Group, 2019).

COVID-19 may have brought dire consequences, but it opened paths for new marketing opportunities and channels (Manthiou, 2020). With all the aforementioned arguments, shopping generally shifts to digital and accelerates along with the evolution of the pandemic, in which luxury fashion brands have had few options but to develop and represent themselves differently on the Internet. Kering is an example of a firm that quickly adapted its website to accommodate online transactions (BOF Team, 2021). Although the image of these brands was negatively affected at the beginning of this transformation, subsequent figures demonstrate rejuvenation in different aspects, such as Kering returning to their pre-pandemic sales figures by early 2021 (Kering, 2021). This shows a potential not only for industry survival, but also a chance for further development.

Many luxury fashion brands have chosen to digitize along with their traditional boutiques. However, the remaining concerns here can be how luxury brands should react if online channels become more dominant or the online presence sabotages a product's scarcity; and thereafter, what marketing strategy should they stick to in the post-pandemic era when customer behaviors are heavily affected for a long period of online shopping. Regarding ideal activities that luxury brands can perform in this pandemic era, we found that the relationship between social media communication and consumers' brand perceptions has been underestimated (Simon & Tossan, 2018) as scholars and practitioners have not had a clear understanding of this matter (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). Therefore, maintaining and improving CE is quintessential within this digitalized era.

2.2. The online CE cycle model

The process of acquiring new customers and turning them into fans is extremely complicated and relates to not one but many aspects of a business. Multiple routes have been proposed by researchers to reach CE, including satisfaction (Rajah et al., 2008) and interaction (Gelter, 2010). Prior studies – such as Alvarez-Milán et al., (2018) or Sleep et al., 2014 – seek to make sense of CE routes using the concepts "antecedents" and "consequences". However, many researchers agree that multiple factors can lead to CE, and by looking at several prior findings, these factors can be mutually influential. For example, a considerable factor like "commitment" can lead to "engagement" (Sashi, 2012) and vice versa (Vivek et al., 2012). We argue that several notable factors leading to CE can be put on a circulation, which aligns with Sashi's model (2012).

Sashi (2012) synthesized various routes to engagement and turned CE into a sequence of steps known as the "CE cycle". Sashi's contribution to CE study is remarkable but cannot be totally updated with the current modern context, especially since the rapid digitalization movement of the COVID-19 pandemic. The model was revised to fit the online-dominant context (Hoang et al., 2022a), and this revision serves as the basis for this paper's conceptual model. Details of the framework are further explained in the "Findings and Interpretation" section.

In this paper the online CE model acts as a means to re-create and adapt the online presence of luxury fashion brands to the new context. In other words, the proposed model can guide luxury brands to direct their resources to fit their engagement purpose and the targeted theme in the cycle. For example, improving the website's user interface and user experience can benefit the customer experience, or improving engagement of customer community on social media can help the brand manage its advocates. Through the lens of the online CE model this paper employs and structures insights generated from qualitative analysis, following the conceptual framework for online CE in the luxury fashion industry.

3. Method

There have been several quantitative studies on CE that addressed how the pandemic can affect CE (Jung et al., 2019; Calderón-Monge & Ramírez-Hurtado, 2021). However, we are looking at the ambiguity of the post-pandemic scenario that requires an investigation of potential issues for which "questions about experience, meaning and perspective" from a human standpoint should be addressed (Hammarberg et al., 2016, p. 499). We therefore decided to conduct qualitative research. A qualitative approach can explore a vast and natural context of online luxury management whereby real-world problems can be explored (Moser, 2017), helping researchers in "understanding the meaning people assign to social phenomena" (Weinreich, 1996, p. 53) such as online shopping behaviors. Since our purpose is to look for answers to the ambiguous CE behaviors in the post-pandemic world, we gathered well-qualified perspectives from luxury fashion experts as the most important insights.

3.1. Data collection

The issue of the behavior of luxury fashion customers has raised a substantial number of debates around the globe, leading to numerous materials on the Internet. Therefore, we use web content as qualitative research data derived through YouTube. Web content research has been recognized as the method of studying information recorded in non-academic articles, which can be widely applied in management studies under the form of forum messages (Muñiz & Schau, 2005) or customer reviews (Rishi & Joshi, 2016). This method helps researchers to concentrate on a specific timeline, while at the same time being able to provide better input and avoid biases (Miller & Dickson, 2001). YouTube also contains a large amount of relevant web content and comments. Since serving academic purposes can be considered as a "fair use" (YouTube, 2017), YouTube can be considered as a valuable source of qualitative data (Patterson, 2018).

The global situation caused by COVID-19 was very ambiguous during the pandemic, and many YouTube videos containing seminars, lectures, talk shows, interviews, etc. about the future of luxury fashion have been posted. These videos help us to access professionals in the field, with decent content quality that allows us to gain valuable insights through content exploration. After applying several filters, which are "include videos from the last 2 years" when COVID started, and "minimum video length is 20 minutes", 400 videos were found under general keywords such as "luxury e-commerce" and "luxury covid". We applied several inclusion and exclusion criteria and finalized the sample with 71 videos that we believe are the most relevant to the scope of the study. Details of the filtering process along with inclusion and exclusion criteria are in Figure 3.

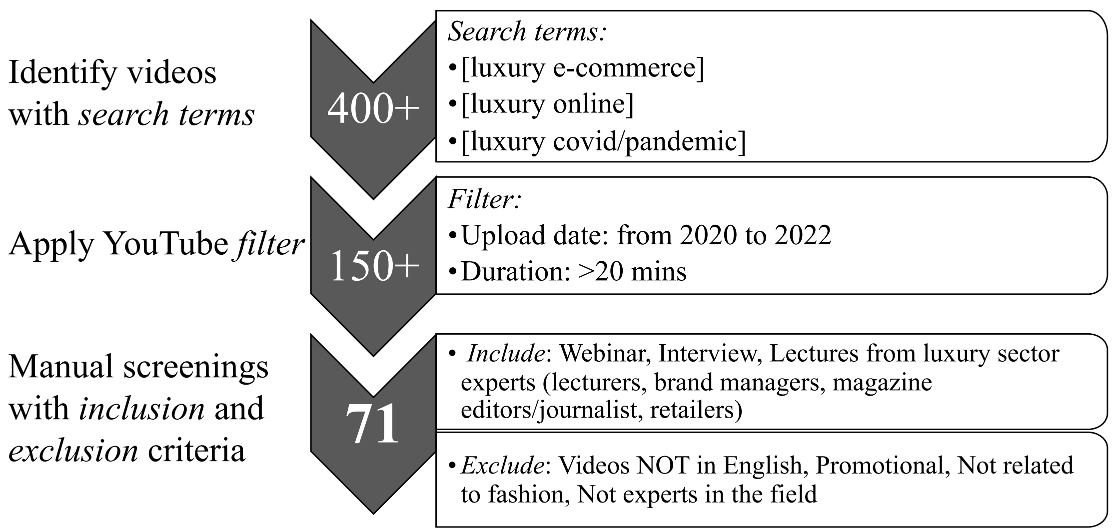

***Figure 3**: Video selection process with inclusion and exclusion criteria*

To gain multi-dimensional perspectives in the post-pandemic context, the research subjects chosen are well-qualified professionals who have years of experience in the luxury fashion industry (whom we refer to as "luxury experts"). The data set is comprised of insights from 96 luxury experts within 71 videos, including 35 experts from luxury fashion firms, 21 from luxury fashion retailers, 18 from luxury magazines, 12 from third party solution providers, and 10 are luxury fashion lecturers. In these 71 videos, to maintain participants' anonymity, the experts are coded in the order of video analyzed, and the order of appearance within each video. For example, if there are two experts in the first video, depending on the order of appearance, their code would be 1A and 1B respectively. Selected quotes and videos are depicted in the Results section, and the sample characteristics of selected videos are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample characteristics

Code	**Gender**	**Career position**	**Business type**	**Video length**	**Upload date**	**Content type**
6A	Male	Marketing consultant	Third party solution provider	30:01	5th December, 2021	Interview
10A	Female	Digital Merchandizing manager	Luxury fashion retailer	1:02:25	15th September, 2020	Conference round table discussion
14A	Male	Finance editor	Fashion magazine	1:32:21	20th August, 2020	Webinar
20A	Male	Executive vice president	Luxury fashion retailer	29:30	12th November, 2020	Interview
21B	Female	Chief Executive Officer	Luxury fashion firm	1:02:20	28th January, 2021	Webinar
21D	Male	Chief client and digital officer	Luxury fashion firm	1:02:20	28th January, 2021	Webinar
23A	Female	Buying director	Luxury fashion firm	43:35	1st September, 2021	Webinar

Code	Gender	Career position	Business type	Video length	Upload date	Content type
26A	Female	Global director of customer service	Luxury fashion retailer	29:35	27th July, 2021	Interview
28A	Female	Executive America Editor	Fashion magazine	39:37	12th July, 2021	Conference round table discussion
28B	Male	Chief Operating Officer	Luxury fashion retailer	39:37	12th July, 2021	Conference round table discussion
29B	Male	Business developer	Third party solution provider	1:20:58	11th June, 2021	Conference round table discussion
30A	Female	Account director	Third party solution provider	41:21	15th July, 2020	Interview
31A	Female	Master Unit Leader	Luxury fashion retailer	1:04:40	21st January, 2021	Interview
32A	Male	Vice president	Luxury fashion retailer	49:26	14th April, 2022	Webinar

Code	Gender	Career position	Business type	Video length	Upload date	Content type
33A	Male	Retail director	Third party solution provider	59:28	1st November 2021	Conference round table discussion
33B	Male	Assistant Professor of Marketing	University lecturer in luxury	59:28	1st November 2021	Conference round table discussion
33C	Male	Brand manager	Third party solution provider	59:28	1st November 2021	Conference round table discussion
35B	Male	Business & Financial expert	Fashion magazine	29:20	3rd September, 2021	Interview
39A	Female	Head of luxury	Third party solution provider	1:17:26	27th May, 2020	Webinar
40A	Female	Founder	Luxury fashion retailer	29:46	30th July, 2021	Interview
43A	Female	Head of digital strategy	Luxury fashion retailer	23:03	22nd June, 2020	Interview

Code	Gender	Career position	Business type	Video length	Upload date	Content type
43B	Male	Chief marketing officer	Third party solution provider	23:03	22nd June, 2020	Interview
44C	Female	Senior Vice President	Luxury fashion firm	58:30	20th May, 2022	Webinar
44D	Male	Co-founder	Third party solution provider	58:30	20th May, 2022	Webinar
45A	Male	Senior director	Luxury fashion retailer	50:15	18th July, 2022	Webinar
45D	Male	Online account manager	Luxury fashion retailer	50:15	18th July, 2022	Focus group
47B	Female	Partner	Luxury fashion retailer	56:10	21st April, 2022	Focus group
51B	Female	Global Vice President	Luxury fashion retailer	34:22	24th September, 2022	Interview
52A	Male	Chief Engagement Officer	Third party solution provider	59:36	25th August, 2021	Webinar
53A	Male	Chairman	Luxury fashion retailer	1:57:21	15th May, 2020	Focus group

3.2. Hybrid thematic analysis

By containing both deductive and inductive reasoning, "hybrid thematic analysis" (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) was selected as an appropriate analytical method that is commonly used in management studies (Serrano et al., 2019; San-Martín & Jiménez, 2021). The deductive method can be appropriate when having predetermined categories through a comprehensive overview of relevant literature (Mehmetoglu, 2004), while being useful for findings consolidation obtained from a foundational model (Hyde, 2000). The deductive thematic analysis allows scholars to look for reasonable explanations that are supported by empirical data (Marques et al., 2022). At the same time, inductive thematic analysis can benefit scholars in confirming the constructs and generate significant sub-themes (Garg et al., 2015). Therefore, this type of analysis allows us to perform deductive thematic analysis on the existing themes of the revisited Sashi's model (2012), and thereafter combine it with inductive coding of emerged sub-themes from luxury fashion experts.

Since a systematic quantification of qualitative data raises credibility of the study (Vaismoradi et al., 2016), we have also conducted a content analysis to measure the occurrences of themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis process.

One notable pattern was when the 50th video was reached, the opinions of different luxury fashion experts tended to show saturation as they began to share similar thoughts on certain aspects in luxury. With this insight, the predetermined themes are consolidated along with deductive thematic analysis and the sub-themes are constituted with inductive approach after transcribing video contents. All the themes, sub-themes, and the content analysis are illustrated in Figure 4 - the CE cycle conceptual model.

4. Results

This research explores how luxury brands manage their online CE activities. Each sub-section contained in this section represents each theme from the predetermined framework, in which respective sub-themes are indicated along with the percentage of occurrences determined from the content analysis. Figure 4 presents findings through the lens of Sashi's (2012) CE cycle conceptual model, after iterating thematic codes and grouping similar concepts.

4.1. Theme: Connection (29%)

The model begins with "connection", a simple and cost-effective method to help businesses reach CE (Elsharnouby & Mahrous, 2015). Conventionally, a positive first impression is better ensured if both online and offline platforms are attractive, whether its original purpose is to increase sales or branding. However, the flow of building awareness is different online. By preparing certain essential initial touchpoints, businesses can help customers go seamlessly to the next CE stage throughout the cycle.

Sub-theme: era adaptation (41%)

One of the key risks for a luxury brand is to become mainstream, and luxury brands are therefore averse to being approachable by a mass audience. However, many experts believe the opposite in luxury online presence.

> Scarcity is important, but the new generation is so much online now, so embrace them, optimize the brand everywhere you go. (29B, Business developer, Third party solution provider)

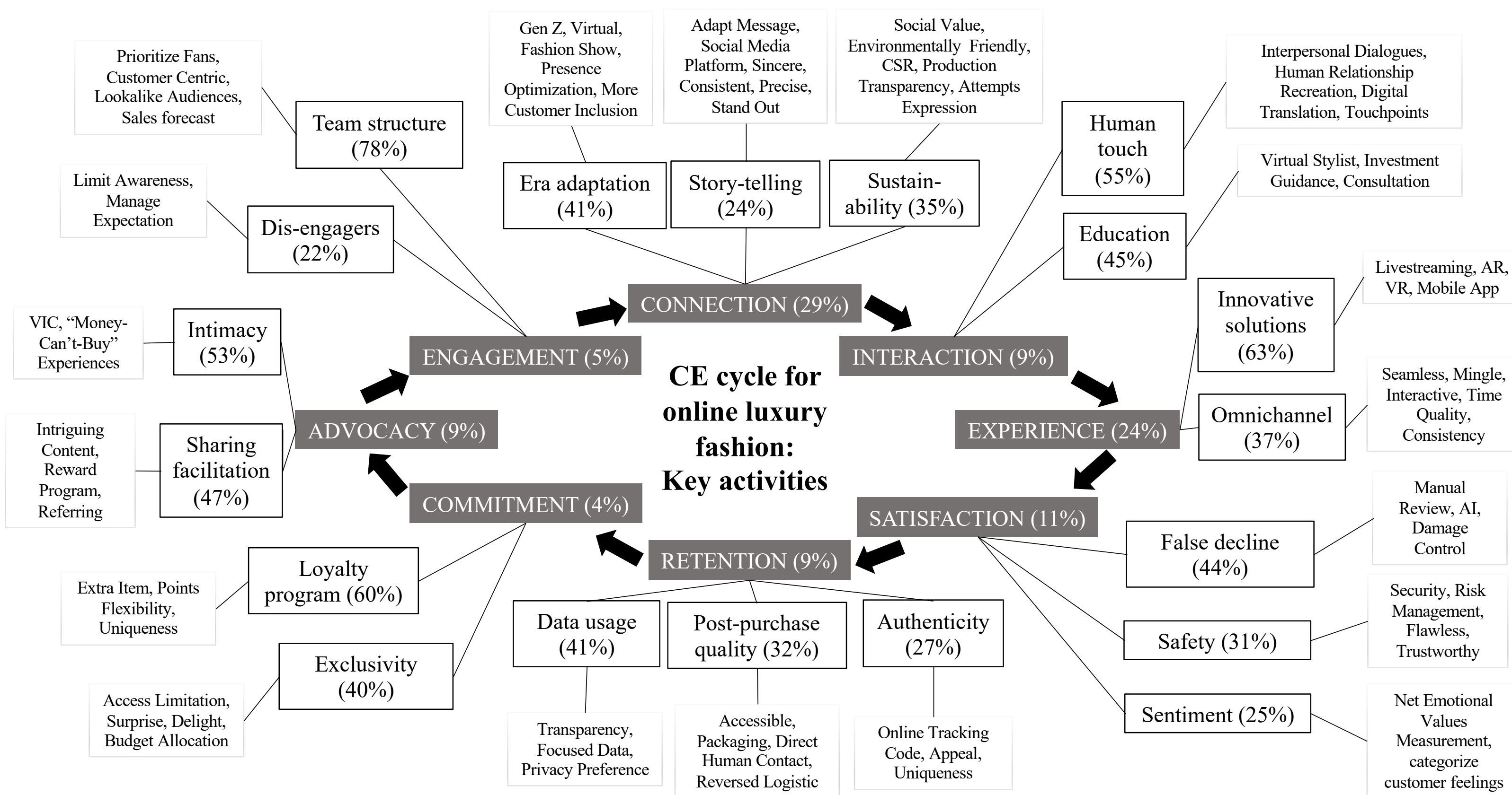

Figure 4*: The CE cycle conceptual model of online luxury fashion*

Others, such as 31A, add that now is not the time to worry about more online presence, as it is no longer the era of excluding people.

> It becomes reasonable for luxury brands to exit the ivory tower and blend in the society for certain occasions – not too many times, but it is effective to build relationships and get impact since doing something here is better than doing nothing. (31A, Master unit leader, Luxury fashion retailer)

31A's statement aligned with Kim et al. (2015) when providing even a fractional addition of accessing luxury information can significantly motivate online luxury shopping. To reinforce this, 33A also believe in the compatibility between online luxury and the young customers of this era.

> The Gen Z customers focus too much on their phone in store, even ignoring the warm smile of the sale associate. Digitalization is inevitable. (33A, Retail director, Third party solution provider)

Sub-theme: storytelling (24%)

Many respondents agree that the amount of online information can be overwhelming, and storytelling is the key to standing out. Let customer see the overall picture and create a good first impression.

> Storytelling signifies how luxury has evolved by becoming digital. It is more powerful than fact, faster to connect to the soul of customers. (33B, Assistant professor of Marketing, University lecturer in luxury)

Others believe online storytelling needs to be carefully conducted, especially when things are deviating from conventional norms.

> I agree that storytelling can be effective, but [there are] many made up stories now, luxury buyers may dig up the roots of the story. Never try to be what you are not. (33C, Brand Manager, Third party solution provider)

Sub-theme: sustainability (35%)

Sustainability is one of the trends that luxury fashion firms are following, such as focusing on less product and aiming for circular economy. This movement mainly arises from brands' goodwill, yet their attempts can make brands become more appealing for customers from this era in the cognitive buying stage.

> It matters to them, this generation. Allow them to see that they can shop [for] sustainability more transparently. (23A, Buying director, Luxury fashion firm)

By expressing the sustainability attempts such as showing customers exactly the sustainability aspects on websites (sustainability certificates or animal-testing free product guarantee), it can allow customers to know what they are spending on, and how their shopping activities can contribute to social wellbeing. Luxury brands' expression of their social and environmental contributions has become beneficial for them to gain more support from their clients, according to 39A.

> High income customers buy from brands [that] provide social values. LVHM rise 20% [in] revenue when they promise to help fight COVID. (39A, Head of luxury, Third party solution provider)

4.2. Theme: Interaction (9%)

"Interaction" represents the direct activities with customers with the purpose of improving the understanding of customer needs, which subsequently informs necessary changes (Sashi, 2012). In the luxury sector, human interaction during this stage, whether face-to-face or online/digital, remains the crucial element that sets the industry apart (BOF Team, 2021). Therefore, human touch is a major sub-theme in this stage.

Sub-theme: human touch (55%)

Luxury buyers always prefer to have human-assisted service and it is imperative to translate those human-based activities online.

> True value of luxury is still human relationship, recreate it and move it online. There will be many more touchpoints to be mindful of, as we are moving from pure transactional brick-and-mortar stores to a much more relational and brand caring space. (30A, Account director, Third party solution provider)

By foreseeing this need, even before the pandemic, reputable brands such as Burberry have provided virtual stores or fitting rooms, and interestingly, young buyers are comfortable with those online interactions (Lee et al., 2020a).

Sub-theme: education (45%)

Whether it is an offline or online store, once a customer spends significantly on a product, her/his concerns surrounding the product itself are inevitable. 51B comments on this matter as follows:

> Some luxury customers would not buy anything without consulting. (51B, Global vice president, Luxury fashion retailer)

Personalization is also expressed when the sales personnel spend time serving one of their customers and do more than just close a transaction. As 40A says here, we take the side of our customers and convince them that buying a luxury product will create lasting value for them.

> Educate customers, tell them to be mindful, treat their money as investment in clothes. Don't just try to make a sale. (40A, Founder, Luxury fashion retailer)

Educating customers also emphasizes the brand's identity, attracts customers who share the same values when shopping for the brand, and creates a set of customers that are attracted to the orientation of the brand itself.

4.3. Theme: Experience (24%)

The original CE cycle model developed by Sashi (2012) does not include "Experience" as an explicit theme, but the model introduced in this paper places Experience in a separate stage due to its important role in the online context, as any form of prior experience with the brand can increase the chance of online purchase (Straker & Wrigley, 2016). Generally, many luxury experts believe luxury is a shift from material possession to luxury experiences when younger generations want instant access to luxury items and experiences rather than just owning them.

Sub-theme: innovative solution (63%)

As online customer experience can never be as realistic as offline, managing experience for luxury goods becomes the hardest part in the online CE cycle, especially since the critical experiences – including touch, feel, and smell – are eliminated (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). However, online experiences could be improved with modern equipment, such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), livestream commerce, electronic wallets, or virtual fitting room, which can stimulate senses and display a shopping atmosphere online (Blazquez, 2014). 23A believes the intriguing experiences generated from modern technology provide a direct impact on customers' satisfaction.

> The innovation was built to make shopping from home convenient, connecting this feeling to the self-satisfaction of buying it immediately. (23A, Buying director, Luxury fashion firm)

On the other hand, 6A's perspective on modern technologies is aligned with Islam et al. (2019), as innovative solutions could help customers spend more quality time online, which can strengthen customer attachment and set the initial foundation for a desirable customer experience.

> The app is super interactive, we can try different items with AR, or customize our own sneakers. It's really fun, customers spend more time, and somehow solve the issue. (6A, Marketing consultant, Third party solution provider)

Sub-theme: omnichannel (37%)

It is a long-term strategy for brands to create seamless experience, whereby customers can mingle between online and offline sales. 26A expresses her thoughts on this matter as follows:

> You can try at store, go home, think again, wanna try again but don't want to commute, you open the app, get the identical experience. (26A, Global director of customer service, Luxury fashion retailer)

Additionally, 14A believes the amount of time spent online also benefits omnichannel efforts, when it can balance the transition between online and offline channels, as well as being able to create better effects on customer experiences.

> As customers often spend much time in "brick and mortar" stores, the key here again is to create intriguing experiences for them to spend also much time with brands' online interface. (14A, Finance editor, Fashion magazine)

By providing both functional and hedonic values while having unified experiences across different brands' platforms (Bilgilhan et al., 2016), customers' emotions are triggered in this stage, allowing them to proceed to the next stage of the model.

4.4. Theme: Satisfaction (11%)

Customers' "satisfaction" can be acquired when their experiences with the brand are processed in a way that allows them to successfully conduct a transaction. To fulfill this objective in the luxury industry, personalization for quick and responsive online service delivery is needed, while consistency and efficiency need to be maintained across channels (Lee et al., 2019). The major concerns are presented in the following sub-themes.

Sub-theme: false decline (44%)

One of the most prominent issues that gets major attention is false decline, when an unusual-looking transaction is denied. While the deny is not related to any online technical issues and even makes online transactions more secure, it leaves customers feeling hesitant and insecure. As 20A states, this denial can substantially sabotage luxury fashion firms.

> Even when some transactions look weird, they might be good. Although you try to settle things right, the damage remains. Chances for customer[s] to continue with online purchase, or even coming back are not good. (20A, Executive vice president, Luxury fashion retailer)

As also mentioned in the "safety" sub-theme, there are not many online transactions for luxury. Therefore, a manual review is necessary for any transaction, to bring about current and future productivity.

> After any decline, we should conduct manual review, and update with AI learning for not making the same mistake again. (32A, Vice president, Luxury fashion retailer)

Sub-theme: safety (31%)

The online environment might be different from the traditional one, yet the key to satisfying customers is always "reducing customer effort and risk" during transactions (Seck & Philippe, 2013).

> Customers rely on us to be their watchdogs. As they feel more insecure online, ensure they are not at risk. (28A, Executive America Editor, Fashion magazine)

Following from the previous statement, 10A also stated that a little uncertainty during the closing transaction process will ruin all previous efforts, especially when customers are trying to assess if buying online is worth more than their conventional service personnel.

> A minor mistake on the user interface will stop the purchase immediately and destroy all the earlier cognitive building efforts. (10A, Digital Merchandizing manager, Luxury fashion retailer)

This has been a transparent challenge for fashion brands when they must really try to please every single customer in this situation, especially when online luxury transactions are so few.

Sub-theme: sentiment (25%)

Hedonic features tend to be better than utilitarian in driving customer buying (Bilgilhan et al., 2014), especially for highly sentimental products like luxury goods.

> Luxury is all about emotions. It plays in the functional part, making it so unique. (33A, Retail director, Third party solution provider)

As luxury products can better meet the emotional needs of customers to ensure subsequent customer retention, brands can emphasize hedonic features on their online presences, such as service speed or receptiveness (Busalim, 2019). 26A aligns with this thought that it is more appropriate to channel resources to more emotional features.

> It gets emotional when customer[s] decide to finalize a transaction. Have some kind of sentiment analysis here, to come up [with] strategies depending on what [the] customer really feel[s] […] [about a] certain category. (26A, Global director of customer service, Luxury fashion retailer)

Another noteworthy point that can be useful for future field research is that hedonic features are suitable for shaping the attitude toward the ready-to-wear luxury segment (Kim & Jang, 2014), leading us to the retention stage.

4.5. Theme: Retention (9%)

After customers have finished their transaction and start to evaluate their after-sales experiences in order to offer their loyalty to the brand or not, it is crucial to actively seek to establish a relationship with them, which is referred to as "Retention" (Payne & Frow, 2014). Retention value can be boosted when hedonic and functional values are combined (Zhang et al., 2017). With the hedonic features emphasized in the previous stage, respondents describe functional features in Retention as the initial post-purchase effort.

Sub-theme: data usage (41%)

Luxury fashion customers not only buy the product but also have expectations about how they will be treated. Using published data as well as data from online transactions will greatly benefit current and prospective customers. According to 21B, customers expect transparency when their data are utilized by the luxury brands.

> If using data here can help serving [the] customer better, don't hesitate to do so. Customers are willing to conform if they understand. Don't be afraid that this can harm our relationship. (21B, CEO, Luxury fashion firm)

Sub-theme: post-purchase quality (32%)

The number of customers from ready-to-wear luxury fashion is not as great as other affordable fashion segments, yet the quality from this ready-to-wear luxury segment is compelling. Performing well until finalizing the transaction is the first success but making customers happy after the purchase will make a bigger impact for their lifetime value. 21D expressed his opinion on how to channel resources at this period.

> We make [a] trade-off here. Less conversion, but more personalized and direct company resources digitally to current customers …. Dedicate a sales associate team that [the] customer can freely contact directly. It's more convenient and makes customers feel more important. (21D, Chief client and digital officer, Luxury fashion firm)

The fact that customers continue their purchase causes their expectations to grow. 33C believes:

> When they buy luxury again, they expect not just the story, but also the service. Be extremely careful online. (33C, Brand manager, Third party solution provider)

Sub-theme: authenticity (27%)

A considerable influence on a customer's purchase decision for a certain luxury product is its authenticity, and thus expressing authenticity publicly also helps with the initial retention effort. 28B remarks about the immediate action upon concluding a transaction as follows.

> With authentication code, customer can track the life of the product on the Internet. Giving them information after purchase is the way to link with customer online. (28B, Chief operating officer, Luxury fashion firm)

35B emphasizes the role of authenticity by further asserting that maintaining authenticity creates trust for customers, while at the same time expressing authenticity constantly and publicly will always benefit both parties in the long run.

> Authenticity build[s] trust, help[s] fight against available counterfeits and benefit[s] after sale. Make it appealing. (35B, Business & Financial expert, Fashion magazine)

Proper channeling of hedonic and functional values will upgrade those values, and over time customers who choose to stay will stick with the brand at a higher level, known as called commitment, which is discussed in the next stage.

4.6. Theme: Commitment (4%)

As functional and hedonic values increase with the firm's efforts, they can be transformed into calculative and affective "commitment", respectively. In the luxury industry customers are more likely to pursue hedonic values (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Therefore, focused efforts to create and increase affective commitment at this stage can help strengthen customer behaviors toward advocacy (Fullerton, 2009). There are several methods mentioned by luxury experts to benefit customer commitment, as follows.

Sub-theme: loyalty program (60%)

Many luxury buyers will not wish to commit to just one brand, because they want to express multiple identities (Parrott et al., 2015). Therefore, the differences in designing loyalty programs can make the brand more attractive than others in the same segment.

> It's not just about the points in the loyalty program. It's how you show some creativity, like allowing [the] customer to exercise some good deeds such as donating their points to help fight COVID. (43A, Head of Digital Strategy, Luxury fashion retailer)

Conventional ways such as points accumulation or giving extra items based on customer volume always work, but a little creativity will make the benefits to customers much more interesting. As 43A mentioned above, the company creates conditions for customers to use the extra benefits received to help society, giving customers the feeling of being able to act for something greater. This also aligns with the sustainable trend that the customers from this era are much more focused on than earlier generations.

Sub-theme: exclusivity (40%)

For some very-important-clients (VIC), it would be exciting to give them something that not all customers receive, even if that exclusivity comes from very little things.

> The exclusive access to contents only several customers have, can show customers that brands have special connection with them. (43B, Chief marketing officer, Third party solution provider)

However, not all customers will receive the same incentives, and with online transactions and transaction histories, brands can take advantage of this with modern technology to design an exclusivity distribution strategy accordingly.

> With technology, we can measure the level of customer commitment with us statistically and give them the exclusivity they deserve, in either monetary or hedonic forms. (6A, Marketing consultant, Third party solution provider)

Making good use of available resources with a reasonable affective commitment allocation strategy will be the premise to create brand advocates – those who are paramount to the survival and development of luxury brands.

4.7. Theme: Advocacy (9%)

Interactions with the brand after a successful online experience is what nourishes "advocacy" in customers (Bilgilhan et al., 2016). Once committed, customers are willing to take certain actions for the brand, thereby activating their tied motivation (Eelen et al., 2017). In this process they take a leap from the emotional-dominant stage to the behavioral one, in other words becoming advocates. In the online domain social media is more dominant (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014) compared to before, when customer commitment was strengthened through communities (Schau et al., 2009). Now social media have empowered customers in their advocacy role. This platform is more suitable for the development of C2C activities and allowing brands to exert only limited control over their communities.

Sub-theme: intimacy (53%)

It is noteworthy that customers can advocate multiple brands (Parrott et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important for a luxury brand to remain attractive and allow their current active advocates to be involved in intimate events in which they can have greater opportunity to perform their active role. 48A emphasizes the effectiveness of intimacy as follows:

> Treat advocates like a member of a family. Invite them to eat in fancy restaurants or concerts. They have high amount of followers, and they can show off their private experience. (48A, Head of PR, Fashion magazine)

In addition, luxury brands can leverage on the characteristics of advocates' followers to devise appropriate outreach strategies. It is not that having a lot of followers is a good thing, but as 50A said here, it is also based on other factors.

> Be intimate with micro-influencer and non-influencer communities – low number of follower[s] but loyal ones – for better conversion. They lead people to be brand advocates. (50A, Southeast Asia VP, Luxury fashion firm)

Sub-theme: sharing facilitation (47%)

As we draw customers closer to intimate relationships, we expect them to share more about us in online communities. However, in luxury, there are passive advocates who choose to stay behind and observe, while there are active advocates who tend to publicly promote their favorite brands and express their opinion (Arrigo, 2018). Brands should invest in the latter type. Interestingly, 47B said that at this point, young active advocates' engagement with technology is considerable.

> Affluent customers – those sons and daughters of millionaires or those [who] manage to earn money at a very young age – in this era tend to be more engaged to media and technology. This can influence marketing. They want to be first mover. (47B, Partner, Luxury fashion retailer)

As this generation spends a vast amount of time online, what brands need to do at this stage is just reap the rewards after offering exclusivity and intimacy.

> People love to be involved in the marketing process of the brand they cherish. Give them intriguing content to encourage their sharing behavior. (44D, Co-founder, Third party solution provider)

In addition, as stated in previous stages, what luxury brands need to do at this point is not acquisition, but rather focus on retaining existing customers, especially their most important VICs. Not only do they provide substantial benefits throughout their consumption lifecycle, but they also offer additional value, as 45A said below.

> Your VIC may not be the highest spender but refers a lot. That person hold[s] extended lifetime value. (45A, Senior director, Luxury fashion retailer)

4.8. Theme: Engagement (5%)

Once the customers have developed both an emotional and relational affiliation with the brand, they have reached the "Engagement" stage. While this is traditionally viewed as the "final goal" of CE activities, the proposed model cycle suggests that this Engagement is the first success, and companies should prepare for new connections when the CE cycle reiterates.

Sub-theme: team structure (78%)

One of the things that experts talk about the most is the adjustment of the team structure within the enterprise. This customer-centric adjustment is based on the customers who have actually engaged, because of the huge benefits they bring along with the tremendous level of personalization they deserve. 44C refers to this as follows:

> Restructure the team to prioritize fans, from traditionally organized e-commerce team to building out a matrix team that's organized by fan type. (44C, Senior vice president, Luxury fashion firm)

The reason for this is based on engaged customers to prepare for new CE cycles, as the new rotation of CE to new customers will be better prepared with a narrower target customer in line with the business' direction.

> The team worked with current engaged customer[s to] identify patterns and create lookalike audience, which can increase conversion and save cost per acquisition in the future. (45D, Online account manager, Luxury fashion retailer)

In addition to the determination of keeping engaged customers continuing to engage, remodeling the team structure will help prospective acquisition activity, which is something businesses can focus on more at this stage.

Sub-theme: dis-engagers (22%)

The adverse consequences from luxury brands' advocates can be remarkable, as when their expectations are seriously violated, they can perform anti-brand activities (So et al., 2014). With the knowledge they gained from the brand they used to cherish, the consequences can be substantial if they choose to deliberately sabotage the brand. 52A expresses his thought on this issue as follows:

> The worst kind of customer is the one who used to be your fan. They have more than enough resources to sabotage you. (52A, Chief engagement officer, Third party solution provider)

However, 53A believes the situation is different now with more tolerance from the customer's side. Therefore, it is essential to carry what has been provided in the previous stages of the CE cycle, while continuing to listen to the voice of the highly engaged customer.

> They got more tolerant after the pandemic and on a new interface. Be sincere and don't violate their core values. (53A, Chairman, Luxury fashion retailer)

5. **Discussion**

5.1. Summary of the analysis

This research asked the question "what are the determinants of online luxury CE activities and how can luxury firms effectively handle the flow of their online engagement activities in the post-pandemic scenario?". By exploring the perspectives and opinions of well-qualified luxury fashion experts we managed to obtain valuable insights.

First, brands can start with "Connection" to build awareness, yet the concept of awareness is different online. A notable sub-theme generated in this stage is "Era adaptation", in which luxury brands can consider increasing their online presence, since anything can be online today, and the current generation also spends a large amount of time on the Internet. In this context, a good and honest "Storytelling" is effective to reach the heart of the audience. Additionally, "Sustainability" attempts can be publicly stated to communicate with potential buyers, which is a matter of importance to this generation.

The on-stage activities with customers known as "Interaction" remain crucial, especially for the luxury industry. When going online the "Human Touch" aspect of interaction must be preserved in various online touchpoints, where "Education" can be provided if customers need consultation in any form.

Knowing what customers want during interaction, brands can ensure that the engagement process is solid when they can effectively handle the "Experience" of customers. In this stage, "Innovative Solutions" appears as a life-saving approach in which brands can provide an intriguing new way of online shopping. Under the new technology, "Omnichannel" experiences need to be ensured when customers can comfortably switch between offline and online channels.

Customer's "Satisfaction" will emerge when their experiences meet their expectations. However, with online platforms, "Safety" has to be guaranteed as the online environment is riskier than offline; but when preventing potential fraud, luxury brands also have to be mindful about "False Decline" to avoid damaging past and future efforts. As customers are becoming more emotional up to this stage, certain "Sentiment" analyses could benefit luxury firms in the long run.

A completed transaction calls for an immediate "Retention" effort. At this stage, transparency in "Data Usage" can benefit both firms and customers. At the same time, the "post-purchase quality" needs to meet and exceed customers' expectations, especially for current customers. Also, "Authenticity" can increase customer's trust and willingness, allowing them to comfortably repurchase.

When customer purchases repeatedly meet both their functional and hedonic expectations, their "Commitment" to the brand becomes more transparent. Some creativity in "Loyalty Program" can makes customers from the young generation be happy, such as being included in firms' sustainability efforts. In addition, some "Exclusivity" to certain VICs can facilitate their willingness to act on behalf of the brand.

The committed customers who decide to take action on behalf of brands can evolve to play the "Advocacy" role. Developing "Intimacy" with them has the potential of bringing tremendous future benefit, while "Sharing Facilitation" for active advocates in this young generation can attract a considerable number of potential buyers who align with brands' orientation.

Luxury brands' first success is when their advocates reach the "Engagement" stage after actively performing their advocacy role. At this stage, brands can consider remodeling their internal "Team Structure" to fit their engagers, while attracting a look-a-like audience when the CE cycle recirculates. However, luxury brands must always be aware of the "Dis-engagers", as they can sabotage the brand drastically with the power they hold.

5.2. Theoretical contributions

By building on the model of Sashi (2012), we have revisited and gathered opinions from many luxury experts to obtain important insights for the industry. The impact of COVID-19 raised numerous concerns from society, resulting in a considerable amount of video content from reputable experts who publicly shared their opinions regarding luxury fashion CE during the pandemic and thereafter. The method of this study is thematic analysis based on content exploration. Note that the sources of our data volunteer their opinions, are not guided in their opinions, are exempt from sample selection bias, are diverse, and represent many different geographical regions in the luxury fashion industry. They all express their perspectives on the post-pandemic scenario of the industry, and when transcribed and broken down to smaller elements, we can see them fit conveniently into the aspects from the predetermined model.

Additionally, when synthesized, a remarkable point of this study is how it aligns with prior studies about the three dimensions of CE – Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioral – by many prestigious CE authors, such as Patterson et al., 2006; Wirtz et al., 2013, and Kumar et al., 2019. More specifically, at the cognitive stage there are “Connection”, “Interaction”, and “Experience”; at the emotional stage there are “Satisfaction”, “Retention”, and “Commitment”; and at the behavioral stage there are “Advocacy” and “Engagement”. Moreover, the flow of sub-themes generated from luxury fashion experts in each main theme of the CE cycle also reflect the components from prior CE dimensions studies. This confirms the relevance of the CE cycle model, how it can provide valuable input to academia, and leads to another important aspect that will be discussed in the managerial contributions section.

5.3. Managerial contributions

The combined insights from luxury fashion experts have provided the flow for better CE management online in the post-pandemic context, in which fashion firms can have a glimpse of what to expect in the upcoming era. The least important takeaway has to do with "intimacy", in which the online environment cannot fully possess the similar intimate effects as face-to-face encounter. There are three top priorities including the reaffirmed role of innovative technology solutions, along with the highlighted special buying characteristics of this generation (e.g., long daily screentime, valuing online experience, inclination for sustainability). These priorities are depicted as follows.

Among the sub-themes, there are some that play more significant roles than the others. One important sub-theme can be "innovative solution", which exists in numerous aspects of online CE and can be a lifeline for all online activities after the emergence of COVID-19. From the luxury experts' perspectives, generally in this era customers tend to spend a lot of time on their phone and even more with the arrival of COVID, making innovative solutions a savior during that difficult time. Innovative technology solutions have sketched out a direction that modern luxury businesses need to pursue in the post-pandemic era if they do not wish to be left behind. Businesses also need to create a sense of security for customers in every single online touchpoint, such as providing truly supportive personnel when needed or assign an easy-to-track serial number for every product by which customers can check its authenticity at any time; while at the same time being able to optimize customer data to ensure after sale quality.

Another point worth mentioning is the special characteristics of the young generation that calls for "era adaptation". The young buyers, also known as Generation Z, were born at a time when the internet was just becoming popular and grew up with modern technology invading every aspect of life. These young and wealthy clients are not as secretive as their parents, and more receptive to social media. Thus, with this generation luxury is not only about buying an expensive product, but also about the accompanying “experience” provided by the luxury firm. This becomes more important as Generation Z respects experience, and brick-and-mortar stores are no longer considered as the prerequisite for this generation. Based on the content from the videos, this generation’s perspective on experience comes down to certain concerns, including whether the technologies are enjoyable to interact with; buying in store or at home activities are seamless and manageable; how personal the experience can be; and for the brand, what actions are customers willing to publicly perform online. Additionally, for this generation, luxury marketing is no longer about just showing nobility and superiority. It also expresses the social and environmental responsibility of the luxury brand in front of a group of young, rich, tech-savvy, and ready-to-act customers.

On a final note, this paper managed to sketch a path that determines online CE resource allocation, based on the alignment of our conceptual framework and previous reputable CE studies on the three dimensions of CE (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral). Thus, luxury businesses can allocate their resources appropriately, such as in putting sentiment values into the emotional stage like “Satisfaction” or providing intriguing content to share in the behavioral stage like “Advocacy”. An important point noted by many luxury experts is that luxury brands should remain focused more on retention than acquisition, unless at the final stage of the CE cycle, when they can pursue acquisition more when developing a customer centric strategy.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

One noticeable limitation of this study is the wide geographical scope of the data set, in which videos from India, China and North America are included. We agree that investigating a single geographical area can help us gain a deeper understanding of the local market and consumer behavior, but explorable public contents can be insufficient when narrowing the research scope. Currently, this study has demonstrated a big picture of how online CE behavior has changed for the luxury fashion industry after COVID-19, and this demands further investigation in a more specific region.

Furthermore, as the pandemic has shaken the world, causing consumer behavior to change rapidly, traditional concepts should also be revisited. The content exploration from luxury experts has opened new perspectives, thus challenging the concrete assessments of the luxury industry from prior scholars in the pre-pandemic era. For example, recent luxury experts believe that "preserving scarcity and accessibility" should be deprioritized, and it would be better if luxury firms can adopt a more accessible attitude towards consumers. In addition, based on customer memory, the sequence of product arrangement can affect luxury buyers' experience (Offergeld et al., 2020), which can be meaningful when transitioned into an online context. Thus, a fruitful area of research is opened where scholars can focus on revisiting these phenomena.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a framework that outlines the best practices that a luxury brand can undertake online – a sector that has been neglected by the luxury industry until recently and only really obtained attention when the pandemic hit. The pandemic presents a new era in which luxury brands can no longer benefit as much from advantages offered by physical stores, and when customers have adapted to online shopping and developed new and unpredictable behavior patterns. However, this pandemic can be seen as an opportunity for luxury brands rather than a threat, as businesses can now accelerate and improve the online CE process, thus revealing new market segments and opportunities. As the world moves toward digital transformation, it is imperative for the luxury brands to prepare themselves for a new way to conduct their business, by increasing their online presence and improving the appeal of their online platforms through good management of online CE activities. By combining a theoretical framework with empirical data, we have established a new path for the luxury sector to improve the CE process for high-end luxury fashion firms and prepare them to seize post-pandemic opportunities. In conclusion, we hope our contribution is accurate in these uncertain times, and also hope that this study can open up other research opportunities for future researchers.

Chapter 4 - Enhancing Online Customer Experience in the Luxury Fashion Industry: An Exploration of Functional and Hedonic Factors through Mobile Apps

A version of this chapter will be submitted to a journal in the near future.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a topic of conversation in recent years, and its impact on consumer behavior has been immense. Although the situation has improved since 2022, when the mask mandate has been removed (Ledsom, 2022; Yoon & Hida, 2023), the impact of COVID-19 on consumer behavior is expected to be long-lasting (Pang et al., 2021; Sorrentino et al., 2021). One of the most noticeable changes in consumer behavior has been the shift toward online shopping, which during the height of the pandemic was very nearly an obligation due to lockdowns and restrictions. However, even though the situation is normalized now, this behavior persists among many customers (Truong & Truong, 2022). One of the industries most heavily affected in this regard is the luxury industry.

The luxury industry is known for its physical boutiques, which provide an exclusive and personalized experience to customers (Moore & Birtwistle, 2004). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the luxury industry, as lockdowns and social distancing measures forced many stores to close or operate at limited capacity, causing tremendous damages to luxury brands (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). As a result, luxury brands have had to adapt to the changing landscape, but it is not clear how they can engage effectively with their customers online, especially when the exclusivity and personalized experience at physical boutiques are eliminated.

Our analysis is based on the customer engagement (CE) cycle model developed by Hoang et al. (2023), who updated Sashi's model (2012) for better fit with the contemporary context. Although Sashi's original CE cycle model (2012) can effectively portray the successive stages that a new customer undergoes in their journey toward full engagement, the model was not fully exploited theoretically, was outdated due to the rapid development of technology, and holds potential for additional stages. Therefore, Hoang et al. (2023) have introduced the revisited CE cycle model (Figure 2) and applied it to address the broad context of post-pandemic specifically on the luxury industry (Hoang et al., 2022b). One of the essential stages that emerged from the revisited CE cycle model is "experience", which serves as a vital bridge between the cognitive and emotional dimensions of CE. Experience refers to the perception formed in a customer's mind after interaction, and it plays a fundamental role in determining satisfaction (Potdar et al., 2018; Pandey & Chawla, 2018).

In this study we aim to examine the efficacy of online luxury experiences, to see if its level of efficiency is able to drive customers to the "satisfaction" stage. We choose to investigate customer experience on luxury fashion mobile apps – an area that has not been extensively explored by scholars. More specifically, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence customer experience continuation intent (CECI) toward luxury mobile apps, as this platform can offer unique advantages and opportunities for businesses to engage with customers in a more personalized and immersive manner (Parise et al., 2016).

To achieve this, we focus on the millennial generation, a group that is a unique blend of individuals who are both financially independent and receptive to new technologies (Hur et al., 2017; Thusi & Maduku, 2020). Millennials, known for their strong interest in luxury brands and products, value experiences and self-expression, viewing luxury goods as a means to reflect their personal identity and social status (Batat, 2019; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). Through a qualitative content analysis of interviews with luxury mobile app users and experts, this study explores the themes and sub-themes that emerge in the context of the CECI. The results of this study, which explore the hedonic and functional features of luxury mobile app customer experience, provide valuable insights and implications for luxury brand practitioners and scholars seeking to understand and enhance the customer experience in this digital context.

2. Literature review

2.1. The underpinning model

The underpinning model in this research is based on Hoang et al. (2022b) and Hoang et al. (2023), which build upon Sashi's Customer Engagement (CE) cycle model (2012) and emphasize the significance of customer experience in CE studies. The model (Hoang et al., 2022b), which is based on the revisited CE cycle model and tailored for the luxury industry, explores the subthemes within each main theme to comprehensively address the relevant factors that align with the post-pandemic context (Figure 4).

As part of this research, we choose to further investigate one specific theme – Experience, in which Customer Experience Continuation Intent (CECI) is the focus. It is noteworthy that other themes of the CE cycle model – such as Satisfaction or Retention – encompass multiple variables related to CE.

2.2. The current landscape of the online luxury fashion industry

Following the fashion hierarchy framework proposed by Sorger and Udale (2017), we focus our investigation on the middle tier of luxury fashion, specifically the "ready-to-wear" designer brands such as Gucci and Prada. These brands have deviated from their traditional marketing strategies and been actively embracing digitalization in order to cope with the contemporary situation. Hereinafter we refer to this segmentation as "luxury fashion".

The COVID-19 pandemic brought profound changes to the luxury fashion industry, especially in the way luxury fashion brands connect and engage with their customers. Several luxury fashion brands suffered substantial financial losses during the first half of 2020 (Ilchi, 2020). Since in-store shopping was prohibited during the strict quarantine period, it was not surprising that the entire industry faced a freeze; and consequently, online sales became the only means for survival. With the increase in online shopping, luxury fashion brands have had to adapt to the changing market conditions to ensure that they maintain their customer base and drive CE. Adaptation demanded some effort – including website optimization, mobile application development, and/or integration of immersive technologies (Javornik et al., 2021), and there remains a need for further investigation into the effectiveness and impact of these online CE initiatives.

Despite the growing importance of online platforms in luxury fashion, addressing the customer experience with the online platforms of luxury fashion brands is still underexplored. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the need for research in this area, as luxury fashion brands have had to rely more heavily on online platforms to reach and engage with their customers. While there has been some research on the impact of the pandemic on the luxury fashion industry, such as Cvik and Pelikánová (2021) and Xie and Youn (2020), there is still much to be learned regarding the role of customer experience on online platforms. Managers of luxury fashion brands must understand the unique challenges and opportunities that the online environment presents in order to create a meaningful customer experience and drive CE.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward online platforms in the luxury fashion industry and luxury fashion brands must respond to that shift, take part in it, and adapt to the altered market conditions. By addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of the online environment, luxury fashion brands can create a meaningful customer experience that drives CE and continuance intention on their online platforms.

2.3. Customer experience and the luxury fashion industry

2.3.1. Experience as a crucial factor of CE

Although many scholars consider that experience cannot be an independent dimension to help explain a customer's journey to engagement (Bowden, 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2010), this factor has proved to be influential in driving CE, especially in the online environment (Potdar et al., 2018). The customer experience is multidimensional and includes factors such as product quality, price, customer service, brand reputation, and the overall shopping environment (Rose et al., 2011). According to Jones (2016), customer experience can be defined as the sum of all interactions a customer has with a company and its products or services, which shapes the customer's perception of the brand. In addition, after interacting with the brand, experience can form perception that "involves emotions, feelings, and attitudes of a user concerning a particular product or service" (Potdar et al., 2018, p. 597).

In the context of online platforms, customer experience is especially important, as customers rely on digital channels to interact with brands and make purchases. In this regard, online platforms should be designed to provide customers with a seamless and enjoyable experience, across all touchpoints, from browsing to checkout (Hellman & Blessington, 2018). A positive customer experience can foster CE, as customers are more likely to interact with a brand, share their experiences with others, and make repeat purchases (Bilgihan et al., 2016).

2.3.2. Customer experience in the luxury fashion industry

The luxury fashion industry has long placed great emphasis on creating immersive, personalized experiences that cater to customers' desires and aspirations, both in-store and online. Customer experience goes beyond mere service provision, and instead focuses on creating an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer.

The physical environment plays an essential role in creating the luxury customer experience. Luxury fashion brick-and-mortar stores are often designed to convey exclusivity with high-end materials, atmospheric lighting, and minimalist layouts; while sales associates are trained to provide personalized attention, expert product knowledge, and attentive service to create a sense of luxury and exclusivity for customers (Keinan et al., 2016; Pencarelli et al., 2019). These elements work together to create a multi-sensory experience that is designed to evoke positive emotions, elevate the brand, and reinforce customer loyalty.

With the growing popularity of online shopping as well as the compulsory acceleration toward digitalization caused by COVID-19, luxury fashion brands have had to adapt to new ways of creating customer experiences in the digital environment. Customers are pursuing unforgettable experiences to improve lifestyle quality (Oh et al., 2007), and this goal of creating a seamless and immersive online experience has become increasingly important (Dieck & Han, 2021; Pangarkar et al., 2022). As a response, many luxury fashion brands have developed their own e-commerce platforms, often with exclusive content, personalized recommendations, and tailored messaging to create a sense of luxury and exclusivity (Liu et al., 2019; Salvietti et al., 2021).

However, the online environment also presents some possible impediments to creating an effective customer experience. For example, the lack of personal interaction and sensory experience can make it challenging for luxury brands to create a strong emotional connection with their customers (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2020; De Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). Additionally, concerns about online security and authenticity can also deter customers from making purchases, which can negatively impact the overall customer experience (Mofokeng, 2021; Aw et al., 2022). Hence, it would be beneficial for luxury fashion brands to address these impediments and ensure an effective customer experience.

2.4. The luxury fashion brand's mobile app

The focus of this study is on the customer experience with luxury fashion brands' online platforms, specifically through mobile apps. While there are various online platforms available, the choice of mobile app as the platform of focus is driven by several factors.

First, mobile apps are increasingly becoming a popular choice for consumers to interact with luxury fashion brands. According to a study by Business of Apps (2020), in the first two-quarters of 2020 the use of mobile apps for shopping increased by 32% compared to the previous year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted an increase in online shopping (Dannenberg et al., 2020; Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022). This highlights the significance of mobile apps in the luxury fashion industry, and the importance of understanding the customer experience with this platform.

Second, mobile apps offer unique features that can enhance the customer experience. For instance, mobile apps can provide personalized recommendations based on customer preferences and purchase history (Gao et al., 2020; Umekwudo & Shim, 2020). This customization can create a sense of exclusivity and personalization, which is an important factor in the luxury fashion industry. Third, mobile apps can also offer a seamless shopping experience with features such as one-click checkout and easy navigation (Spanke, 2020).

However, despite the increasing importance of mobile apps in the luxury fashion industry, there is still a research gap in understanding the customer experience with this platform. As the pandemic has accelerated the shift toward online shopping, it is essential for luxury fashion brands to understand how to create a positive customer experience on their mobile apps in order to maintain CE and continuance intention.

2.5. CECI and the research gap

CECI (Customer Experience Continuation Intent) refers to the customer's intention to continue using a product or service based on their prior experiences and satisfaction with it. In previous literature CECI is also referred to as "continuation of use," "intent to continue," and "continuance intention" (Talwar et al., 2020; Jumaan et al., 2020; Daragmeh et al., 2021). CECI differs from "satisfaction" – a stage that focuses on the emotional state experienced by customers upon completing a transaction (Sashi, 2012) – as it considers the ongoing engagement and intention to continue the experience while the customer is actively interacting with the shopping platform. By encouraging CECI, companies increase the likelihood that customers will complete the transaction and transition into the satisfaction stage (Hoang et al., 2023). It is important to note that the focus of this paper is not solely on the intention to continue using the app in the future (e.g., repeated use), but also on the intention to continue with the current session of app use all the way to the conclusion (e.g., making a purchase).

There are many desirable outcomes that can be acquired with increased CECI. First, CECI contributes to customer satisfaction and overall positive brand perception. When customers have a strong intention to continue their experience, it indicates that their initial interactions and experiences were positive and fulfilling (Chopdar & Balakrishnan, 2020; Song et al., 2021). Additionally, it can result in higher levels of engagement and interaction with the brand's platform, leading to increased usage, more frequent visits, and greater customer involvement (Yang et al., 2017; Harrigan et al., 2018). Furthermore, a heightened CECI can be a foundation to drive business growth and profitability, as this can lead to more satisfied customers, make frequent purchases, and provide positive referrals that in turn can attract new customers (Ho & Chung, 2020; Hoang et al., 2023).

With the heightened role of experience in the context of luxury fashion digitalization, further investigation for CECI should be required for the understanding of managing customer experiences online, as online luxury CECI can be different in terms of how the online platform is able to motivate the continuing behavior of a potentially more demanding type of customer. First, Hoang et al. (2022b) found that there is a greater chance for customers to finalize their transaction after spending more time experiencing various features on online luxury platforms. CECI also reflects customers' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations toward online luxury platforms (Kim, 2019), including the quality of the digital interface, the convenience of the online shopping process, the level of personalization, and the overall user experience (Yi et al., 2021; Ameen et al., 2021; Trawnih et al., 2022). Furthermore, exploring CECI can uncover the factors that influence customers' decisions to continue using luxury fashion mobile apps, which can inform platform design, marketing strategies, and customer retention initiatives (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021, Zhang & Gong, 2022). Therefore, investigating CECI can contribute to the understanding of how luxury fashion customers' behaviors, preferences, and expectations are changing in the digital context, and how luxury brands can adapt their strategies to meet these changing dynamics.

Investigating CECI in the context of luxury fashion e-commerce can provide insights into the factors that influence customers' continuation of use and purchase behavior. Several papers have addressed the continuation intent in mobile apps, indicating that this is an attractive topic. However, COVID-19 has reshaped what we have believed about consumer behavior, calling for further investigation. Another noteworthy point is that not many papers have investigated CECI in online luxury fashion platforms, let alone in mobile apps. Therefore, this study can contribute to the literature by providing a novel perspective on the factors that influence customers' intention to continue using luxury fashion e-commerce platforms.

2.6. Online CECI determinants: Hedonic and Functional

In the field of online consumer behavior, understanding the motivations that drive individuals to engage in various online activities is essential. Two prominent motivations that have gained considerable attention in the literature are hedonic and functional motivations. While hedonic motivations are centered on pleasure and emotional gratification (Patzer et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2022), functional motivations are focused on practical benefits and the achievement of specific goals (Ryu et al., 2010; Hanzaee & Rezaeyeh, 2013).

Hedonic motivations have been widely recognized as powerful drivers of online consumer behavior. Research has shown that consumers engage in online activities such as browsing, social networking, and entertainment, primarily to seek pleasurable experiences and emotional satisfaction (Islam et al., 2019). The hedonic nature of these motivations is often associated with factors such as enjoyment, sensory appeal, and self-expression (Millan & Wright, 2018). Numerous studies have found that hedonic motivations positively influence various online outcomes, including website engagement, time spent on websites, and online purchase intentions (Zhang et al., 2017, Hazari et al., 2017; Akram et al., 2021).

On the other hand, functional motivations revolve around practical aspects of online activities. Consumers are motivated to engage in online transactions and information search processes to achieve specific goals and derive tangible benefits (Busalim et al., 2019). Functional motivations are commonly associated with factors such as convenience, security, efficiency, information seeking, and task accomplishment (Laplante & Downie, 2011; Collier et al., 2014; Maia et al., 2018). Extensive research has demonstrated the significant impact of functional motivations on online consumer behavior, including the intention to purchase, online information seeking, and website loyalty (Chiu et al., 2014; Shaheen et al., 2019).

While hedonic and functional motivations are often portrayed as distinct constructs, there is a growing recognition that they can interact and influence consumer behavior.

Researchers have highlighted the complex interplay between these motivations, suggesting that individuals may seek both hedonic and functional benefits simultaneously during online activities (Bilgilhan et al., 2016; Busalim et al., 2019). For example, consumers may browse online fashion retailers for both the pleasure of exploring new styles and the convenience of comparing prices and making informed purchase decisions. Therefore, understanding the interrelationships between these motivations is crucial for scholars and in crafting effective online strategies that cater to consumers' various needs.

With the enormous role of hedonic and functional factors in online customer behavior study, we believe hedonic and functional factors can be the determinants of CECI specifically. Several studies that have investigated CECI and its determinants, resulting in the findings that contain either hedonic or functional features. On social media platforms, Hussein and Hassan (2017) reported that perceived connectedness and enjoyment enhance customers' continuation of use on social media. Regarding mobile apps, when synthesized, determinants of customers' continuation intent can be hedonic, including perceived enjoyment, personalization, satisfaction, and user experience (Chung et al., 2016; Tam et al., 2020; Akdim et al., 2022). On the other hand, performance expectancy, effort expectancy or perceived ease of use, and usefulness (Chung et al., 2016; Li & Fang, 2019; Tam et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2023) serve as functional determinants. It is noticeable that the studies mentioned above and similar research focus on investigating how hedonic and functional aspects can influence continuation intent..

The literature has consistently highlighted the significance of both hedonic and functional factors as key determinants of CECI. However, it is worth noting that there is currently a dearth of research specifically examining these two motivations in the context of evaluating the continuation intent of online luxury fashion mobile apps. This represents a novel and unexplored field that warrants further investigation to deepen our understanding of how hedonic and functional factors influence customers' intentions to continue their engagement with luxury fashion mobile apps.

2.7. Research questions

This research paper focuses on studying the perspective of Millennial customers toward luxury fashion brands' mobile applications, considering their comfort with online interactions and receptiveness to online shopping for luxury fashion (Burnasheva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020a). The research questions (RQs) in this study are designed to reveal the factors that encourage users' experience continuation behavior and the barriers that prevent them from continuing to use luxury fashion brands' mobile applications.

RQ1: Which aspects of luxury fashion brands' mobile apps can motivate CECI?

RQ2: What are the barriers that prevent CECI toward luxury fashion brands' mobile apps?

To answer these research questions, a deductive framework with predetermined variables from Tam et al. (2020), Hoang et al. (2022b), Akdim et al. (2022), and Wei et al. (2023) is employed, which includes main themes and sub-themes related to hedonic/functional features. The predetermined themes for hedonic features include innovative solutions, realism, and entertainment alternatives; and for functional features, they are transparency, effort reduction, policy, personalization, seamlessness, storytelling, technical defects, slow and lagging, non-exclusivity, privilege expectation, and marketplace alternatives. This framework will serve as a basis to guide the analysis of empirical data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of CECI in the context of luxury fashion brands' mobile applications. In the models generated from the findings, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, both predetermined themes and inductive themes are presented. These themes are categorized into three layers, ranging from broad to specific. To provide a clearer demonstration, all predetermined themes are marked with asterisks.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, as the research topic of online luxury fashion management is exploratory in nature (McDaniel & Gates, 1998). A qualitative approach is suitable for investigating the extensive and authentic context of online luxury management, allowing for an in-depth exploration of real-world issues (Moser, 2017). This approach helps in comprehending the significance that individuals attribute to social phenomena, such as online shopping behaviors (Weinreich, 1996, p. 53). By utilizing qualitative methods, this research aims to capture rich and nuanced insights into the perspective of Millennial customers toward luxury fashion brands' mobile applications and their CECI behaviors.

3.1. Hybrid thematic analysis

This study uses a mixed approach that combines both inductive and deductive reasoning, known as "hybrid thematic analysis" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach is commonly used in management studies (San-Martín & Jiménez, 2021) when researchers have predetermined categories but also aim to develop theory in natural settings.

Deductive thematic analysis is used herein to provide reasonable explanations for the predetermined main themes, supported by empirical data (Mehmetoglu, 2004; Marques et al., 2022). On the other hand, inductive thematic analysis is used to explore potential additional main themes and sub-themes, thus enriching and enhancing the existing model (Garg et al., 2015). This mixed approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the data, joining both deductive and inductive reasoning to develop a fuller and more valuable understanding of the research topic.

The content analysis performed in this study aimed at measuring the occurrences of themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis process, as it is a systematic way to quantify qualitative data and enhance the study's credibility (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). However, it should be noted that the frequency of 3rd order themes was not calculated, as not every 2nd order theme had 3rd order themes. At the 3rd order level many factors were mentioned, and some participants expressed contradictory opinions while others were redundant. Therefore, for the 3rd order themes only those with theoretical and managerial relevancy were selected to ensure the validity and practical implications of the findings.

3.2. Sample design and selection

The goal of this study is to better understand the motivations and hindrances of CECI in the context of luxury fashion mobile apps. In order to obtain insights from individuals with relevant experiences and expertise, interviews were conducted with individuals who have used mobile apps for online luxury fashion shopping.

3.2.1. Sample diversity and nature

To ensure sample diversity and richness of insights, it was preferable to obtain a sample that, despite its limited size, is as varied as possible under the circumstances (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Therefore, the sample for this study includes individuals from different groups including frequent luxury buyers, owners of luxury fashion retailers, customer representatives, luxury bloggers, and luxury researchers. Also, with the special nature of the luxury industry, the sample includes a higher proportion of female participants compared to male participants. This is because female consumers tend to interact more with luxury brands and services, as supported by industry research (Statista, 2022).

After careful recruitment, a total of 21 fashion enthusiasts were selected as participants for this study. The participants are from the Millennial age group, ranging from 27 to 37 years old. They are tech-savvy and highly educated Vietnamese persons who reside in countries in which online luxury shopping is facilitated.

The rationale to choose this type of research sample is based on several justifications. First, Vietnamese millennials can be an interesting population to study due to their growing interest in luxury fashion and their increasing purchasing power. According to a report by Statista (2023), upon rebounding from the drop in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam's luxury market has been experiencing tremendous growth, and millennials are driving much of this growth. Therefore, understanding CECI of Vietnamese millennials toward luxury mobile apps is important for luxury brands seeking to target this demographic.

Second, it is important to focus on Vietnamese millennials who reside in countries with a presence of luxury fashion brands themselves, as the availability of luxury e-commerce channels can influence customers' attitudes and behaviors toward luxury mobile apps. By studying a sample of Vietnamese millennials who live in those countries, we can gain insights into the impact of this factor on CECI.

Finally, this sample was chosen because those in it are likely to have a unique perspective on luxury mobile apps. Vietnamese millennials living abroad may have different experiences and expectations when it comes to luxury mobile apps compared to their counterparts living in Vietnam. By studying this group, we can gain a better understanding of the diverse needs and preferences of Vietnamese millennials regarding luxury mobile apps.

3.2.2. Interview duration, informed consent, and confidentiality

Each interview session lasted from 45 to 60 minutes, allowing for in-depth discussions and insights from the participants. Before commencing the interviews, explicit verbal consent was obtained from each respondent to record the interviews, and all interviews were recorded and then transcribed to ensure accurate data analysis. Furthermore, confidentiality regarding identity was assured, unless the respondent expressed willingness to be acknowledged by name in the publication. To maintain participants' anonymity, they are coded using city names. Detailed information on individual participants can be found in Table 5. For further information on the recruitment process for each sample member, the author is available to provide additional details upon request.

Table 5: Interviewee details

Participant number	**Gender**	**Age**	**Expertise in luxury fashion**
1	Female	30	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
2	Female	32	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
3	Female	31	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
10	Male	31	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
15	Female	27	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
17	Male	31	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
18	Male	36	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
21	Male	32	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
24	Female	27	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
25	Male	29	Frequent luxury fashion buyer
19	Female	31	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
12	Female	37	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
13	Female	27	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
14	Female	31	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
22	Female	30	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
23	Male	34	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
4	Female	31	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
5	Male	31	Owner of luxury fashion retailer
8	Female	29	Luxury fashion researcher
7	Female	30	Luxury fashion researcher
16	Female	35	Luxury fashion blogger

Participant number	Gender	Age	Expertise in luxury fashion
20	Female	32	Luxury fashion blogger
11	Male	31	Luxury fashion blogger
6	Female	28	Customer representative of a luxury fashion brand
9	Female	28	Customer representative of a luxury fashion brand

3.3. The interview guide

3.3.1. The design of interview guide

The interview guide for this study was designed to ensure that participants with relevant experience with luxury mobile apps could provide valuable insights. The participants were requested to experience two different luxury fashion apps at least one week prior to the interview session, in order to gain a holistic view of the e-commerce trend that luxury fashion brands are pursuing. The two apps chosen for the study were Gucci and Louis Vuitton, as the Gucci app can offer modern hedonic experiences (such as virtual try-on and arcade games), while the Louis Vuitton app is more balanced by providing both effective functional and hedonic features. By experiencing both apps, participants were able to provide their own experiences and insights into the factors that motivate and prevent CECI.

The research questions were prompted and stimulated by the scholarly literature. Additionally, the interview guide employed a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility and customization during the interviews as needed (Bryman, 2012). This approach facilitated the inclusion of follow-up questions and encouraged participants to fully express their opinions, thereby capturing a wide range of perspectives and insights.

As this study employs a hybrid thematic approach, the interview guide included predetermined themes based on the research questions, while also allowing participants to express their opinions freely to challenge or add additional themes and sub-themes.

3.3.2. Key Elements of the Interview Guide

The interview guide comprised four main sections: warm-up, RQ1, RQ2, and wrap up

1. **Warm-up:**

- Introduction: Participants were introduced to the purpose and scope of the study.
- Interest/Work related to luxury fashion: participants were asked about their interest or work experience related to luxury fashion.
- Opinion on the digitalization of luxury fashion: participants were encouraged to share their opinions on the digitalization of luxury fashion.

2. **RQ1:**

- Aspects of luxury mobile apps that motivate CECI: participants were asked to express their opinions freely on this topic.
- Participants were asked to share their opinions on the importance of hedonic and functional features in luxury mobile apps.

3. **RQ2:**

- Aspects of luxury mobile apps that hinder CECI: participants were asked to express their opinions freely on this topic.
- Participants were asked to share their opinions on the importance of hedonic and functional features in luxury mobile apps.

4. **Wrap up:**

- Participants were asked to express if their intention to buy gets stronger after using the luxury mobile app.

- Participants were encouraged to give suggestions for the luxury mobile app's improvement.

3.4. Conducting the interviews

The interviews were conducted using Google Meet, a video conferencing platform that allows for remote interviews. The use of Google Meet afforded flexibility in scheduling interviews and ensured that participants from different geographical locations could be included in the study. The interviews were conducted in a private and confidential manner, with only the participant and the researcher present in the virtual meeting room.

Explicit verbal consent was obtained from each participant before the interview session began. This included obtaining permission to record the interviews for data collection purposes. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing their responses and insights. The recording was done with the participant's permission, and their confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

The participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely and openly, without any fear of judgment or reprisal. The researcher listened to the participants' responses and asked follow-up questions to further explore their perspectives on the motivations and hindrances of CECI in luxury fashion mobile apps.

3.5. Data analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and translated to English, if necessary, to ensure consistency and accuracy in the analysis process. The transcribed data were then analyzed manually, as this affords flexibility in identifying emerging themes and sub-themes that may not have been pre-determined in the interview guide, allowing for a more exploratory approach in analyzing the data.

The recorded interviews were listened to several times to ensure a thorough understanding of the participants' responses. This iterative process of listening to the recordings multiple times allowed the researcher to capture the nuances, tone, and context of the participants' responses, as well as identify patterns and trends in the data.

Following the transcription and analysis process, complete transcripts of the interviews were generated within 24 hours of the completion of each interview, as recommended by Silverman (2010). This allowed for timely review and analysis of the data, ensuring that the insights obtained from the interviews were fresh in the researcher's mind and minimizing the potential for recall bias.

The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis approach, whereby the researcher identified recurring patterns, themes, and sub-themes in the data. The analysis was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study, as well as the literature review. The researcher used a systematic approach to organize and categorize the data, employing rigorous and transparent methods to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, it is worth noting that data saturation was achieved after conducting 18 interviews, indicating that further interviews were unlikely to reveal new insights.

4. Result

In this section the outcomes of the interviews are presented and analyzed. Even though each participant expressed their personal opinions and perceptions uniquely, certain common themes were identified and combined, in which some are identical to the predetermined themes in the deductive aspect of this study. To substantiate and clarify these themes, selected quotes from the interview responses are presented.

All the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order themes are presented in Figures 5 and 6, along with the percentage of frequency as a result from the content analysis. Figure 5 indicates the findings from Sections 4.1 and 4.2 about CECI motivations, while Figure 6 indicates the findings from Sections 4.3 and 4.4 for CECI barriers. The predetermined deductive themes are marked with asterisks.

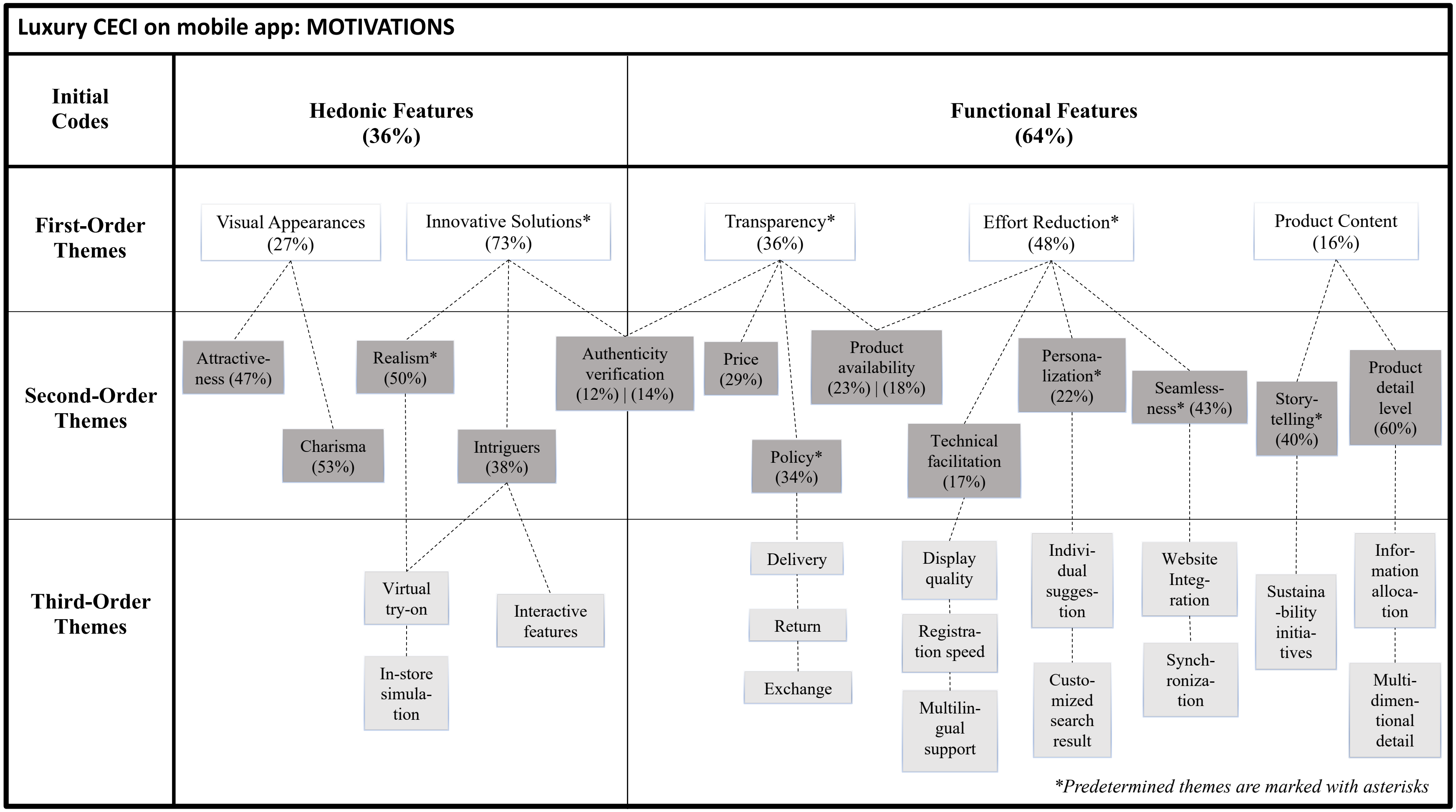

Figure 5: Data structure of initial codes and themes – Motivations (source: author)

4.1. Motivation – Hedonic Features (64%)

4.1.1. Visual appearances (27%)

The results for the section on "visual appearance" reveal that 27% of the participants mentioned this aspect as the most noticeable thing in the luxury fashion app. Within the first subtheme – "attractiveness", participants were impressed with the overall design, graphics, and layout of the app. One participant stated: "Generally, when I've just experienced the app, it looks really beautiful and attractive" (Participant 15). Thus, the visual appearance of the app can be a critical factor in shaping the users' overall experience and impression of the brand.

Another effect of appealing visual design is how it can represent the "charisma" of the brand and portray its identity effectively. A participant mentioned: "I feel like walking on the street and gaze at the brand's window.... The brand's visual design is really eye-catching and expresses its charisma successfully...It makes me want to explore more." (Participant 1). Thus, the importance of visual design is further emphasized, as brand's essence and personality can impress users in the very beginning and contribute to their overall experience journey.

4.1.2. Innovative solutions (73%)

The majority of participants (73%) mentioned "innovative solutions" as a crucial factor for enhancing hedonic experience. Despite having contradicting opinions, users can be stimulated to discover more as the innovative solutions implemented in luxury fashion apps can bring new and exciting experiences for users. There are three subthemes regarding this aspect of hedonic features.

First, regarding the "realism" of the app, participants expressed that in-store simulation was a superb feature that replicated the boutique experience, providing a new perspective on luxury trends: "I found that in-store simulation is superb… not only does it allow me to replicate the boutique experience, but also show me a new perspective on luxury trend... where a luxury brand can help relieving the burden for physical boutiques from customers like me." (Participant 2). This feature can be beneficial for customers who are unable to visit a physical boutique or for those who prefer the convenience of shopping from home.

The next subtheme is "intriguers" that participants mentioned about the new and exciting experiences. For some participants, accompanied features also raise new feelings: "…so many entertaining options, with some interesting games." (Participant 11). Virtual try-on was an especially impressive experience for Millennial buyers: "What I like most about the app is the try-on function... not every brand has this ... such as try-on watches, it reflects every angle and feels so real." (Participant 13). This feature allows customers to obtain a sense of how the product looks and feels before purchasing, making the shopping experience more interactive and immersive.

The final subtheme is "authenticity verification". The use of near-field communication (NFC) scanners was mentioned as a motivating factor for customers: "With NFC scanner, I feel like checking the authenticity of the brand's product, including what I will buy and what I already have... whenever I want." (Participant 20). This feature ensures that customers feel confident in their purchases and can trust the authenticity of the products they are buying, which can lead to a better chance for CECI and satisfaction.

4.2. Motivation – Functional Features (64%)

4.2.1. Transparency (36%)

"Authenticity verification" can also play a functional role, as this feature can motivate participants to use the app: "To me, this is very practical. I often question myself why I need to install any app when I am already used to buying in stores and websites... but with this feature, I feel more assured about the brand" (Participant 19). This feature helps to build trust and confidence in the brand, which may encourage customers to use the app more frequently.

When it comes to "price", luxury customers tend to appreciate if it is transparent: "I think everyone likes to see the price publicly. As the price of each product is displayed in the app, it makes me feel comfortable... I kind of get shy, asking the price in the store" (Participant 8). By displaying prices publicly in the app, customers may feel more comfortable and confident about closing the transaction.

Another functional feature that participants appreciated was clear "policy" information: "What I found relieving when shopping in the app is the policy. I can see the clear exchange and return policy, or the maximum waiting time for delivery. I don't like to ask much about this in store" (Participant 22). With clear and concise policy information, customers can make informed decisions and feel more confident about using the app.

Finally, participants noted that one of the benefits of using the app was being able to see exactly what was available for purchase. "What I see in the app is what I can get ... I can feel more fairness online, as everyone who got the app can see which are the available products" (Participant 10). With this, customers can be more confident and satisfied in their purchases. Also, they can avoid the disappointment of finding out that a desired product is not available after shopping in the physical store, and this point is further explained in the next section.

4.2.2. Effort reduction (48%)

Although effort reduction is a predetermined theme, some valuable novel insights were generated during empirical research. "Product availability" also appears in this category as an effort reduction factor, as providing clear product availability information in the app can reduce customer effort in finding what they want and prevent disappointment when a desired item is not available or sold out: "It's so convenient. Sometimes when I went to the physical boutique, I see things I want at the window but it was not for sale or have the size that I want...or once I had to see my favorite bag get taken by someone else in front of me while I was waiting in the line" (Participant 4).

At the same time, "technical facilitation", such as quick download and registration processes and high-quality display, can make the app usage easier and more effortless for customers: "First impression is the app was downloaded very quickly...registration is also quick. The app display quality is also high and clear" (Participant 3).

Additionally, "personalization" features in the app can reduce customer's effort by finding the suitable products for them: "The app gives recommendations based on individual's characteristic...it has very smart functions that can help me choose the model and color that suits me" (Participant 2).

And finally, "seamlessness" appears as one of the most popular concerns when talking about channel consistency and the ability to mingle among brand's different channels. Here in the app environment, participants expressed how seamlessness can reduce their effort: "It's so convenient when my web experience is also compatible in mobile app... also my personal data is synchronized on various app platforms. Normally I don't like this, but I can rest assured to share my data with a big brand like this. They will only serve me better" (Participant 15).

4.2.3. Product content (16%)

One of the functional features of the app that participants appreciated was the ability to access detailed "story-telling" information about the products. This feature not only provides customers with a better understanding of the product they are purchasing but also allows them to share the story behind the product with others: "By using this app I can freely read about products in more detail. It's really cool to know exactly what I am buying, where it came from, and how it is contributing to sustainability... It gives me a good story to tell after I purchase the product" (Participant 20).

Participants also appreciated the level of detail provided about each product in the app, as it allowed them to make more informed purchase decisions: “I have a good impression after using the app, especially how I can see the product in different dimensions... Also, I can choose to see relevant information in each product, without watching the whole fashion show like before” (Participant 21). With the quality of content provided, the shopping experience in the mobile app becomes more efficient and satisfying for luxury customers.

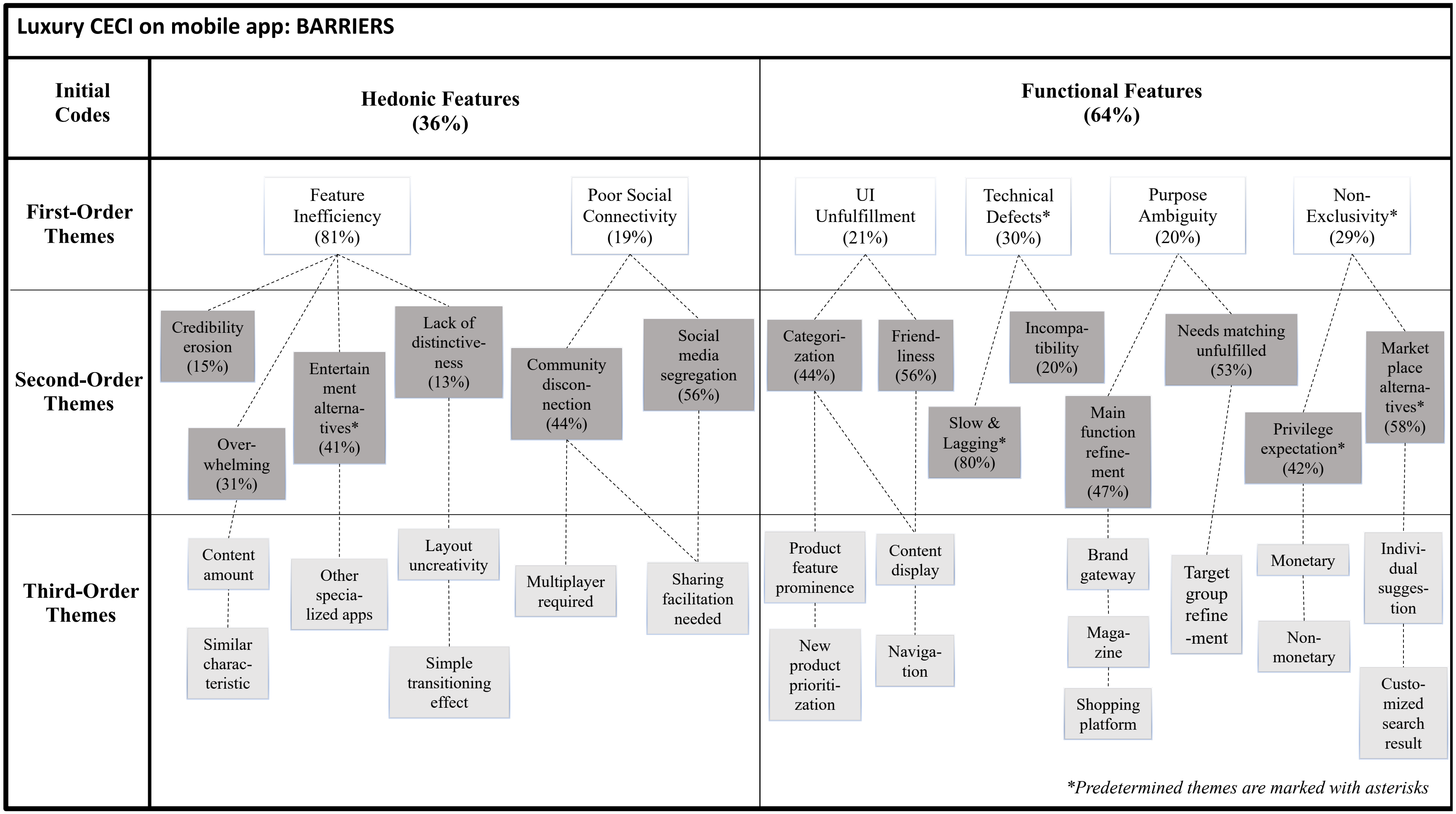

***Figure 6**: Data structure of initial codes and themes - Barriers (source: author)*

4.3. Barriers – Hedonic Features (36%)

4.3.1. Feature inefficiency (81%)

Besides the motivating factors, the luxury app contains some notable feature drawbacks that were highlighted by most of the participants (81%). One of the drawbacks of using the app can be the “credibility erosion” caused by inaccurate features such as the make-up try-on feature. As one participant pointed out: “Some try-on features like make-up is not accurate. It is totally different in real life. Therefore, I kind of doubt the accuracy of other AR features.” (Participant 15). With this argument, if a feature cannot provide an accurate representation of the products, it can erode the trust that customers have in the app and the brand.

Another drawback can be an “overwhelming” number of features and marketing content. As one participant explained: “The marketing content is interesting and informative, but so overwhelming. If I am not a fashionista or brand’s advocate, I will not care about several features such as podcast... Besides there are many games available in the app, but they have similar concepts... it gets me tired and bored at the same time.” (Participant 24). It can be understood that too many features can result in fatigue and disinterest, especially if they do not align with the customer’s interests or needs.

Furthermore, participants also noted that the app’s features were not specialized and can be dominated by better “entertainment alternatives”: "…if I want to listen to fashion podcast, I will go with Spotify as it has more than one brand. On my iPhone, there are better games, and other apps with better make-up augmented reality. The features in this fashion app are not specialized, making them so half-hearted.” (Participant 2). When the app’s features do not stand out and provide a unique or specialized experience, customers may seek out the better and more popular alternatives.

Finally, another less prominent feature flaw critical of brand’s identity expression is “lack of distinctiveness”. Some participants felt that the app lacked uniqueness and did not live up to their expectations for a luxury brand: "I expected more from a prestigious luxury brand... The effects in the app are so simple, such as product transitioning effect. Even some fast fashion apps are better at this" (Participant 14). As luxury customers tend to look for a more innovative and engaging experience, this can make the app less appealing and erode brand's identity.

4.3.2. Poor social connectivity (19%)

In the feedback gathered, "poor social connectivity" is identified by those with more academic expertise in fashion study. "Community disconnection" is an important aspect to be aware of, as this can help with CECI: "A notable thing here is the app's lack of social aspect. If there's a community on this app, users can discuss about the brand, or play the app's game together online. They will be more likely to stick to the brand" (Participant 7).

Moreover, participants also identified another overlooked social aspect known as "social media segregation". "If this app can link directly to users' social media accounts like Facebook, it will be super convenient. On social media, users already have the platform to share app experiences... Even the brand can have benefit when its advocates can be the ambassador there, which can help to boost engagement for this virtual community" (Participant 9). By facilitating social sharing and community building, the app can potentially increase its reach and influence, as well as create a more engaging and enjoyable experience for users.

4.4. Barriers – Functional Features (64%)

4.4.1. User interface (UI) unfulfillment (21%)

The first issue that users encounter with functional features in the app is the "categorization" problem, when users expect to find the latest products or best-sellers at the forefront of the app, but this is not always the case: "On the front-page, I saw some old products out of nowhere. If you take a look at the website, you can see the latest model or the best sellers that got pinned and prioritized. I could not find them in the app" (Participant 18). This issue can cause frustration to users' experience, whereby they must spend more time searching for the products they want. This can be a strong barrier for users whose purpose is searching for more functionality and convenience – something they expect from a mobile app. Such users might abandon the whole experience journey if they cannot easily find what they are looking for.

Issues regarding the app's navigation and content display were presented under not only "categorization" but also expressed under the "friendliness" subtheme: "I want to delete the app after this interview. It got all messed up in the first page...very bad navigation with too many garish contents...scrolling down seems endless, while nothing happened when I swiped left and right. They could have done much better" (Participant 14). Therefore, it is important for app developers to prioritize user experience and consider user feedback when designing and updating their apps.

4.4.2. Technical defects (30%)

To begin with, "slow and lagging" plays a prominent role in technical defects and is often mentioned by participants. "It's time consuming to load some AR features. Switching to another feature in the app can freeze my phone for a while. It's kind of frustrating" (Participant 1). In addition, Participant 16 encountered a more frustrating experience: "…the podcast kept playing even though I switched off the app. To make it stop I had to uninstall it".

Also, some participants with old phone models encountered some immediate issues: "I got an issue right from the start... I had to upgrade IOS to download the app. Afterward, I cannot use any feature smoothly, got frozen and forced quit frequently" (Participant 23). This issue highlights the "incompatibility" issues that can arise with different phone models and operating systems. Users with older devices may not be able to use the app effectively and may encounter technical difficulties.

4.4.3. Purpose ambiguity (20%)

The success of a functional feature in an app derives greatly on its clarity and purpose; and in other words, it needs a clear "main function refinement". When an app fails to convey its primary function, it can lead to confusion and frustration among its users: "After using, I felt unclear. In the end, is this supposed to be a full e-commerce app, e-magazine, or a gateway to the brand? This app really needs a standout purpose." (Participant 2). If the primary function of the app is not well-defined, users may struggle to use the app efficiently. They may also have a harder time finding what they are looking for, leading to frustration, and ultimately decreasing the likelihood that they will continue to use the app.

Another issue – "needs matching unfulfilled" – can be a barrier of functional features, in which the app fails to meet the needs and expectations of its targeted users: "I believe the brand's targeted luxury customers do not expect to see this much. This app has too many features and content. Do users really need all of these? And is it worth to invest too many resources for the unnecessary utilities?" (Participant 7). In other words, the interviewee believed that the app was overloaded with features and content that luxury customers may not necessarily need or even want. This leads to a mismatch between the app's offerings and the needs of its users, resulting in potential damage to CECI.

4.4.4. Non-exclusivity (29%)

One of the issues that some users face when using luxury brand apps is the lack of exclusivity. Luxury users expect "privilege" that can be something unique and special and that is available only on the app and not elsewhere: "I am a bit disappointed. When I install the app, I expect some exclusivity for me there...something that's not available on marketplace, brand's website, or at store. If only there is something only app user, or loyal app user can have, like special access to limited edition, special offer, or ticket to distinguished events....” (Participant 10). Without some sense of exclusivity, the app may have some difficulties in generating CECI and retaining luxury customers, who are accustomed to receiving special treatment and privileges.

Additionally, the lack of exclusivity issue also reflected in “marketplace alternatives”, when luxury brand's products are also available elsewhere with better offer. Customers expect a premium experience when using the app, but when the same products are available on other platforms at a better price, it can diminish the appeal of the brand's own app. As mentioned by Participant 21: “Honestly, third party distributors always have better deal. I see the product in app, I search for it on the marketplace and voilà!... With the same product, yet if it is cheaper than that what's available on brand's platform, there is no reason why I need to buy in the brand's app”. It can be implied that this issue can significantly damage CECI, when customers can be demotivated and thus have little incentive to continue using the app.

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of the findings

The research asks the question about the aspects of a luxury mobile app that either motivate or prevent CECI. Based on the literature, a preliminary inductive framework was constructed as the basis of the conceptual model. It is noteworthy that when the “experience” theme was further investigated with more empirical data, many important variables were identified, especially in the context of luxury mobile app. In Hoang et al.'s (2022b) model, only “innovative solutions” and “seamlessness” were the themes depicted, which are merely a small part of a big picture known as motivations and barriers of CECI in luxury mobile apps. In the model generated in this paper, hedonic and functional features serve as initial codes along with several predetermined themes and sub-themes. By interviewing a population that has expertise in luxury fashion, we managed to gain some valuable insights.

First of all, regarding hedonic motivations for CECI, the "visual appearance" of luxury fashion apps is a critical factor that can shape the user's overall experience and impression of the brand. To users, the overall design, graphics, and layout of the app were impressive to them, and it can represent the brand's charisma and identity effectively. The study also aligns with the findings of Hussein and Hassan (2017) and Akdim et al. (2022) on how enjoyment can play the direct role that leads to CECI. The enjoyment factor is referred to in this paper as "innovative solutions" – the implementation of immersive technology in luxury fashion apps that can bring new and exciting experiences for users and stimulate them to discover more. In-store simulation, virtual try-on, and authenticity verification were mentioned as some of the innovative features that participants found impressive. With all these features, new perspectives on luxury trends are generated toward luxury users, making their shopping experience more interactive and immersive. Customers can feel more confident in their purchases, leading to a better chance of CECI and satisfaction.

Additionally, regarding functional motivations for CECI, the important factors that influenced the luxury customer's experience with a mobile app include transparency, effort reduction, and product content. This study aligns with the findings of Chung et al. (2016), Tam et al. (2020), and Akdim et al. (2022), in which the role of effort expectancy is highlighted as one of the most prominent factors in CECI functional motivations. In this paper, "effort reduction" was facilitated by technical features such as quick download and registration processes, personalization, and seamlessness across channels. Subsequently, "Transparency" was achieved through features such as displaying prices, clear policy information, and product availability. Ultimately, “product content” was enhanced by the ability to access detailed information about the products, including their story and sustainability, and the level of detail provided about each product to make more informed purchase decisions. Overall, these factors contributed to building trust and confidence in the brand, enhancing the shopping experience, and encouraging more frequent use of the app.

On the contrary, the luxury mobile app contains a substantial number of barriers to CECI. On the hedonic axis, “feature inefficiency” appears to be a noticeable issue that may lead to credibility erosion, overwhelming content, and lack of specialization and distinctiveness. In addition, “poor social connectivity” is also a major issue, with community disconnect and social media segregation identified as potential problems. This calls for creating more social aspects and facilitating community building, which can help improve the app’s influence and more comfortable user experience.

Last ,but no less important, the four issues discussed in functional barriers to CECI are UI unfulfillment, technical defects, purpose ambiguity, and non-exclusivity in luxury brand apps. “UI unfulfillment” refers to the frustration of users’ experience when they cannot easily find the latest products or best-sellers at the front of the app. Also, “technical defects” can cause some unnecessary disappointments, which include slow and lagging performance and incompatibility with older phone models. Also, “purpose ambiguity” occurs when an app fails to convey its primary function, leading to confusion and frustration among its users. Last, “non-exclusivity” refers to the lack of privilege and special treatment that luxury customers expect from using a luxury app, which can cause them to seek alternative marketplaces with better offers. These issues can damage CECI and decrease the likelihood that users will continue to use the app. Therefore, it is important for app developers to prioritize user experience and consider user feedback when designing and updating their apps.

5.2. Theoretical implications

Along with the findings obtained, this study comes with several noteworthy theoretical implications. First, it contributes to the current understanding of CECI in the context of luxury mobile apps, which has been largely overlooked in academia. Despite the growing importance of mobile apps in the luxury fashion industry, previous research has predominantly focused on traditional channels or other aspects of luxury digitalization such as livestreaming or metaverse. This study helps to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence of the factors that motivate and prevent CECI on luxury mobile apps.

Next, the study confirms the importance of both hedonic and functional features in shaping user experience and influencing CECI. Through the 25 interview sessions, the factors that motivate and prevent CECI were found to be closely related to these two initial codes. This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the importance of hedonic and functional aspects in shaping consumer behavior, such as the investigations of Akdim et al. (2022) and Wei et al. (2023). However, the current study provides a more nuanced understanding of the specific features that are most important in the context of luxury mobile apps. This insight can help future researchers in the luxury field to focus their research on these two initial codes without deviating to other aspects of luxury fashion CE.

In addition, this study contributes to the growth of factors that affect hedonic and functional features of luxury CECI. By focusing on a specific context of mobile apps, this study was able to identify both large and small factors that contribute to CECI. This is especially important in light of the increased importance of online channels in the context of the post-COVID-19 pandemic scenario. Thus, the findings of this study can provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that are currently most important in shaping luxury customer experiences in the digital context.

Moreover, this study provides a systematic organization of the determinants of customer experience in the CECI journey. By recategorizing and hierarchizing the predetermined themes taken from the model of Hoang et al. (2022b), this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to luxury customer experiences in apps. Specifically, the main themes identified in this study can be further explored up to 3rd order sub-themes, providing a more detailed understanding of the specific factors that drive CECI in the context of luxury mobile apps.

Finally, this study emphasizes the tremendous role of CECI in customer experience studies, with its fundamental role in satisfying customers and closing transactions. Most interviewees positively state that by combining current motivating factors while trying to handle CECI's barriers effectively, it is more likely for them to gladly finalize the transaction. This shows the relevance and importance of the revisited CE cycle model in the luxury fashion industry (Sashi, 2012; Hoang et al., 2022b; Hoang et al., 2023) and how it can contribute to completing the experience stage in the CE cycle model, bringing customers closer to satisfaction.

5.3. Managerial implications

By having a clear understanding of what drives customer experience in the online luxury shopping context, luxury brands can tailor their CE activities to meet the needs and expectations of their target customers. The detailed information on the factors that affect online CECI in luxury fashion presented in this study can serve as a useful reference for luxury brands to design and develop their mobile app platform.

Beside the details in the models, we highlight some top priorities. Initially, the findings of this study show the fundamental aspect of online CE in the luxury industry, which is about not attempting to replicate the physical boutique experience – things that luxury fashion brands and scholars have tried to implement (Blázquez, 2014). The truth is that no matter how great the effort, exquisite physical stores cannot be completely replaced. Instead, this study suggests that technology should be utilized to create a new experience journey, which can offer customers more experience choices, especially since they can encounter intriguing and unexpected things brought by modern technology.

Another noteworthy point is that a majority of research participants expressed their admiration for the virtual try-on feature. Given that this feature creates a good first impression and has been identified as a prominent factor in boosting CECI, it is essential to handle its AR features properly. This includes eliminating any inaccurate and redundant features and addressing any technical flaws. If done effectively, users can continue to experience the intriguing features more smoothly, leading to a better customer experience overall.

The next important factor is the app's content. While product content received positive feedback from the participants, the marketing content was overwhelming and not well-categorized. This means that users were becoming distracted or annoyed by the marketing content, which was negatively affecting their overall experience with the app. To improve the user experience luxury brands can improve some readjustments, which involve re-categorizing the marketing content so that it is not disruptive to the user's experience and does not detract from the other features on the app. Also, by having well-categorized marketing content, users who are interested in the brand can easily find the content they are looking for and engage with it in a more focused and deliberate manner.

Additionally, customers tend to have higher expectations for exclusivity in the luxury context, compared to other industries. Therefore, luxury brands need to find ways to offer a sense of exclusivity to their mobile app users. If the exclusivity offered online is not as strong as in the physical boutique experience, the brand can consider other methods – either monetary or non-monetary – to provide this feeling of exclusivity. By offering exclusive privileges to mobile app users, luxury brands can stimulate online CECI, thereby further engaging with them.

On a final note, it is noticeable that the interviewees express more opinions on functional features than hedonic ones. This could be surprising to some luxury brand managers who traditionally place a heavy emphasis on creating a luxurious and emotional experience. Nevertheless, this aligns with Hoang et al.'s (2023) findings and the notion that during the experience stage in the CE cycle model customers are at the cognitive stage and tend to focus more on the functional benefits of a product or service rather than the emotional benefits. Therefore, luxury brands should consider allocating their resources toward providing more functional benefits that can enhance the online customer experience. By providing more functional benefits, while focusing on enhancing the prominent hedonic features, luxury brands can enhance their CECI possibility and increase the likelihood of customers making a purchase and fully engage with them thereafter.

5.4. Future research and limitations

5.4.1. Future research

Based on the findings of this study there are several avenues for future research that could further advance the understanding of the luxury fashion customer experience. As discussed in the theoretical contribution section, researchers interested in studying the luxury fashion industry can consider focusing mainly on hedonic and functional features as the foundational codes, rather than deviating into other aspects of luxury fashion customer experience.

As the follow-up study from Hoang et al. (2022b) and Hoang et al. (2023), this study has further emphasized the relevancy of the revisited CE cycle model in academia. The opportunity for future researchers is more transparent, as this study covered only a small portion of the CE cycle model – the "experience" stage. There is great potential for future researchers, as they can explore deeper other CE aspects within the luxury mobile app context, such as retention or advocacy. By doing so, a more comprehensive understanding of the luxury mobile app customer experience could be gained.

Also, future scholars interested in online customer experience of luxury fashion can expand the scope of this study by exploring other aspects of experience beside CECI. This could provide a complete guideline for luxury practitioners to effectively handle the entire customer experience journey. One suggestion can be studying the role of social media in luxury mobile app customer experience. Although social media was not often mentioned as a factor by interviewees, the luxury fashion experts in this study have pointed out its significance. Thus, more research is needed to explore how luxury brands can effectively leverage social media to enhance the customer experience.

Scholars interested in studying CECI could also explore the concept in other luxury platforms beyond mobile apps, such as Facebook or Instagram, to gain a broader understanding of the luxury customer experience. Additionally, they could consider expanding the study to include research participants from different generations, such as Generation Z, to investigate if there are any generational differences in CECI perception. Furthermore, studying CECI in different countries or regions could provide a global perspective and help identify any cultural differences in CECI perception. Finally, exploring CECI in other industries outside the luxury fashion industry could also provide valuable insights into how CECI can be implemented in other contexts.

5.4.2. Limitations

Aside from all the contributions, this study also has several limitations that need to be acknowledged to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Regarding the methodology, the participants in this study were self-selected, which means that they may not be representative of the larger population of luxury fashion consumers. Also, time is a sensitive factor in this growing industry, and it is possible that consumer behavior and attitudes toward mobile apps might evolve due to the rapid development of technology and changing social trends.

6. Conclusions

This study explored CECI of Millennial fashion enthusiasts who use luxury fashion mobile apps through a hybrid thematic qualitative approach. The findings reveal the specific set of both hedonic and functional factors that can potentially shape the motivation of user experience, and also depict the detailed factors that can, on the other hand, discourage the continuation of use. Regarding theoretical implications, this study contributes to the academic literature on luxury fashion customer experience by further validating the revisited CE cycle model and highlighting the relevance of hedonic and functional features as initial codes for future research. Additionally, practitioners such as mobile app designers or managers may benefit from the guidance provided to enhance user experience, especially Millennial fashion enthusiasts. In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights to improve CECI on luxury fashion mobile apps, and establishes promising research avenues for both customer experience and engagement study.

Interview Script

Introduction: Hello, thank you for participating in this study. Before we start, please confirm that you have downloaded and installed the mobile app of a luxury fashion brand. As this study is about your experience with the app, we kindly ask you to have the app open during the interview.

Section 1: Motivating factors for CECI

1. If you already have the app of this luxury fashion brand before participating in this study, what motivated you to download and install it?
2. What specific features or aspects of the app do you find motivating or enjoyable?
3. How do these features or aspects contribute to your overall satisfaction with the app?
4. Have you made any purchases using the app? If yes, can you describe your experience and what motivated you to make the purchase?
5. Have you recommended the app to others? If yes, what aspects of the app did you highlight as reasons to use it?

Section 2: Preventing factors for CECI

6. Have you encountered any issues or challenges while using the app? If yes, can you describe the issue and how it prevented you from continuing to use the app?
7. Are there any features or aspects of the app that you find frustrating or inconvenient? If yes, can you describe what they are and how they have prevented you from using the app?
8. Have you experienced any technical issues or glitches with the app? If yes, how have they impacted your motivation to continue using the app?

9. Have you ever thought about deleting the app? If yes, what motivated you to consider deleting it, and what prevented you from doing so?

Conclusion: Thank you for your participation in this study. Your feedback will be valuable in helping us understand the motivating and preventing factors for CECI toward luxury fashion brands' mobile apps.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

This dissertation comprises both theoretical and empirical components, providing justification for enhancing CE in the contemporary context, particularly in the midst of rapid digitalization. Chapter 2 focuses on the revisiting of CE concepts in a more online-dominant manner, to align them with the post-pandemic scenario. Chapters 3 and 4 further examine the revisited CE concepts within the luxury fashion industry. This final chapter serves as a platform to highlight the significant findings of previous chapters, along with their theoretical and practical contributions.

Chapter 2 insights

CE has undeniably garnered strong attention over the past decade, with a substantial number of theoretical and empirical papers exploring its manifestations in online contexts. The volume of existing publications within a given domain presents an opportunity to undertake a systematic literature review, as recognized by Paul and Criado (2020). Thus, Chapter 2 of this dissertation serves as a pioneering effort to investigate, synthesize, and provide guidance on online CE for both academics and practitioners, particularly within the ambiguous post-pandemic context. This ambiguity arises from various factors, such as the substantial shift toward online channels following prolonged periods of social distancing, the heightened reliance on e-commerce, and the increased emphasis on security and personalization. It is worth noting that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic created a substantial research avenue (Gentili & Cristea, 2020; Sheth, 2020). Given the abundance of resources and the urgent need for research on the pandemic's impact, it is essential to re-evaluate CE, enhance our understanding, and speculate on its implications in the post-pandemic era. Motivated by these literature gaps, which persist even in prior review work, this systematic literature review was prompted.

The main contribution of this study lies in the innovative exploration of Sashi's original model and its potential features. By leveraging this model, I have effectively aligned and clarified the concepts related to CE antecedents and consequences, which previously lacked a consensus among scholars. Through the allocation of these concepts within a circulation, I have presented a comprehensive overview of the general flow of CE activities.

Furthermore, Sashi's model has allowed us to bridge the gaps between the three dimensions of CE theory, which were previously disconnected in the literature (Hapsari et al., 2017; Do et al., 2019). By integrating these dimensions into specific periods within the model, I have identified the cognitive dimension within Connection, Interaction, and Experience; the emotional dimension within Satisfaction, Retention, and Commitment; and the behavioral dimension within Advocacy and Engagement. This comprehensive integration has provided a fresh and holistic perspective on the widely discussed concept of CE.

Within existing CE literature, certain limitations have been observed in the scope and focus of previous studies. For instance, some works have been confined to specific geographical areas, thereby hindering the applicability of their findings in broader contexts (Dutot, 2013; Potdar et al., 2018). In contrast, I attempt to re-evaluate online CE in the current era and provide propositions that can be applied universally, without geographical restrictions.

The significance of this study resonates within the CE research field, particularly in the investigation of online CE during the accelerated shift toward online shopping forced by the pandemic. By addressing the ambiguities of the post-pandemic era, this chapter sheds light on these pertinent issues. Moreover, the study contributes to the CE research avenue by presenting a set of propositions that offer valuable insights and opportunities for scholars to further expand the understanding of CE in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

Chapter 3 insights

The luxury fashion industry, renowned for its longstanding legacy and trillion-dollar market worth (Kapferer, 2015), has faced an unprecedented and peculiar situation with the advent of COVID-19. The repercussions of the pandemic were felt intensely by numerous luxury fashion firms, resulting in substantial revenue losses. Traditionally, many scholars have believed that luxury products and online sales are incompatible due to the immense significance of physical stores and the exclusive nature of luxury offerings that cannot be easily accessible to the mass community. However, despite these reservations, online sales in the luxury sector have been steadily growing, making it impossible for luxury firms to overlook the potential of this lucrative platform. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the urgency for luxury fashion brands to adapt and present themselves in novel ways on the internet, as digitalization became a synonym for survival. In light of this rapidly evolving landscape, it is crucial to explore the implications of online CE in the luxury fashion industry, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, when consumer behaviors have been significantly shaped by prolonged periods of online shopping.

In this chapter, to investigate the dynamics of online CE within the luxury fashion industry, I apply the revisited CE cycle model in a more practical manner. The research employed a qualitative approach, gathering insights from esteemed luxury fashion experts to gain valuable perspectives. To access a rich pool of information, web content from platforms such as YouTube was harvested as a source of qualitative research data. The content available on this platform exhibited satisfactory quality, enabling me to extract valuable insights through thorough exploration.

To analyze the data collected, a hybrid thematic analysis approach was employed. Initially, a deductive thematic analysis was performed, aligning the emerging themes with the pre-existing themes derived from the revisited model proposed by Sashi (2012). This deductive coding allowed for a comprehensive examination of the themes identified in the luxury fashion context. Furthermore, an inductive coding process was employed to identify and code sub-themes that emerged from the insights provided by luxury fashion experts. This combination of deductive and inductive coding ensured a thorough and nuanced analysis of the data, enriching our understanding of the intricacies of online CE in the luxury fashion industry.

This chapter makes significant theoretical and managerial contributions to the understanding and management of online CE in the luxury fashion industry. The theoretical contributions stem from the exploration and use of Sashi's (2012) model, which has allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and consequences of CE. By incorporating insights from luxury fashion experts, I have obtained valuable perspectives on the industry, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Thematic analysis based on content exploration has enabled the inclusion of diverse opinions from various geographical regions, strengthening the robustness of the findings.

From a managerial perspective, this chapter offers practical implications for luxury fashion firms seeking to effectively manage online CE in the post-pandemic era. The insights derived from luxury fashion experts highlight the importance of innovative technology solutions in enhancing the online CE experience. Moreover, the study emphasizes the unique characteristics of the young generation, known as Generation Z, and their inclination for online experiences over traditional brick-and-mortar stores. The findings underscore the need for luxury brands to adapt their strategies to cater to the preferences and values of this tech-savvy generation. Lastly, the study provides guidance for resource allocation in online CE, focusing on retention rather than acquisition and emphasizing the significance of customer-centric approaches. Overall, this research contributes to advancing the understanding of online CE in the luxury fashion industry and offers actionable insights for industry theorists and practitioners.

Chapter 4 insights

The study of CECI on luxury fashion mobile apps is essential in the post-pandemic context, considering the critical role of online CE and the increasing popularity of mobile apps. Luxury fashion brands have had to adapt to new ways of creating customer experiences in the digital environment, and understanding how to provide a positive customer experience on mobile apps becomes crucial for maintaining CE and continuance intention. CECI, which reflects customers' intentions to continue using a product or service based on their prior experiences and satisfaction, plays a significant role in driving customer behavior. By investigating CECI in the context of luxury fashion mobile apps, this study contributes to the literature by offering a novel perspective on the factors influencing customers' intentions to continue using these platforms, especially considering the limited research available in this area.

In this chapter, I conducted an in-depth exploration of the "experience" theme, which was introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. My objective was to investigate the determinants of CECI on luxury fashion mobile apps, specifically focusing on hedonic and functional factors. Using a hybrid thematic analysis approach, I combined inductive themes derived from the literature with deductive themes obtained from empirical research. Through this analysis, the motivations that drive customers' intentions to continue using luxury fashion mobile apps, as well as the barriers that may hinder their continuation intent are identified. By uncovering these key factors, I aimed to provide valuable insights into enhancing the customer experience and fostering CECI in the luxury fashion mobile app context.

Chapter 4 makes significant theoretical contributions with its focus on the gap in the understanding of CECI, by expanding the current literature's knowledge of luxury mobile apps, which have been overlooked in previous research. This chapter provides empirical evidence of the factors that motivate and hinder CECI on luxury mobile apps, shedding light on the importance of both hedonic and functional features in shaping user experience and influencing CECI. By identifying these factors, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the specific features that are crucial in the luxury mobile app context. Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature by organizing and categorizing the determinants of customer experience in the CECI journey, providing a structured framework for future research in the luxury field.

The findings in this chapter also have valuable managerial implications for luxury brands. By understanding the factors that drive customer experience in online luxury shopping, luxury brands can tailor their customer experience activities on mobile apps to meet the needs and expectations of their target customers. This chapter highlights the importance of utilizing technology to create a new experience journey, rather than attempting to replicate the physical boutique experience. Additionally, this chapter emphasizes the importance of well-categorized marketing content on mobile apps, as overwhelming or disruptive marketing content can negatively impact the overall customer experience. Furthermore, luxury brands should find ways to offer a sense of exclusivity to mobile app users, considering both monetary and non-monetary methods to provide a feeling of exclusivity. Lastly, luxury brands should allocate resources to provide functional benefits that enhance the online customer experience, while also enhancing the prominent hedonic features to increase the likelihood of customers making a purchase and engaging with the brand.

Future research

Based on the insights provided in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the main collective question that arises is: How can businesses effectively adapt and leverage CE strategies in the post-pandemic era, considering the evolving digital landscape, changing consumer behaviors, and the specific dynamics of different industries? I have sought to address the question by providing some CE insights generally and specifically for the luxury fashion industry. Nevertheless, there are several key areas that remain unanswered. First, there is a need for further investigation into the geographical differences and the development of region-specific propositions, as the studies lack diversity in their findings. Additionally, the influencing factors identified in Chapter 2 that can impact key CE activities are not fully addressed in the subsequent studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4. Bridging this gap and exploring these factors in more depth would provide valuable insights into enhancing CE. Furthermore, future research should examine the applicability and customization of the revisited CE cycle model to other industries or specific contexts outside of luxury fashion, as this would broaden our understanding of its effectiveness in different sectors.

Concluding remarks

Throughout the course of this research, I have played a pioneering role in reinvestigating CE in the post-pandemic world. By recognizing the need to adapt traditional CE concepts to the contemporary context, I have undertaken ground-breaking analysis and reorganized these concepts to make them more relevant and applicable. This innovative approach has allowed for a deeper understanding of the presumed incompatibility between online CE and the luxury industry, challenging conventional assumptions and shedding light on new possibilities.

In conclusion, this dissertation offers significant contributions to the field of marketing. Theoretically, I have opened meaningful future research opportunities for scholars, as the revisited CE cycle model provides a solid foundation for future in-depth exploration of various themes. From a practical standpoint, by providing a comprehensive framework and guidelines, I have offered practical recommendations to improve the CE journey in their respective business environments.

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