Understanding the Evolution of Business in the 21st Century: A Direct Observation Study on the Primacy of Customer Experience

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ABSTRACT: In the fast-paced and dynamic landscape of the 21st century, businesses face unprecedented challenges and opportunities driven by rapid technological advancements and shifting consumer behaviour. This study explores the evolution of business practices in this context, with a specific focus on the primacy of the customer experience as a strategic imperative. Motivated by the imperative for businesses to adapt and stay relevant in an ever-changing environment, this study conducts a direct observation analysis to elucidate the intricate dynamics that shape contemporary business strategies. Drawing on a selection of compelling case studies, this study substantiates its findings by showcasing real-world examples of organisations that have successfully leveraged customer experience as a cornerstone of their competitive advantage. Through this exploration, the author asserts the pivotal role of customer centricity in driving sustainable growth and fostering enduring relationships with consumers in modern marketplaces.

KEYWORDS: Customer Experience, Case studies, direct observation

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the business world has turned its attention increasingly towards business practices that focus on and prioritize the customer. This has been described in a number of different ways including customer orientation, customer focus, customer driven, and customer centric (Alzoubi et al., 2022; Uzir et al., 2021). Despite the lack of consensus on what to call this trend, the message is clear - a successful business is one that is built on a deep understanding of the customers' needs, wants, and expectations in delivering them value.

And while this is not necessarily a new concept, it is becoming increasingly evident that business in the 21st century is in reality entering a new era, the so-called third industrial revolution, marked by the rise of digital technology (Alzoubi et al., 2022; Haleem et al., 2022; Sjödin et al., 2020). In this context, this paper will present direct observations made on a top successful business in the UK, Argos, where it is shown that time and resources have been invested into establishing a robust mechanism for understanding and improving customer experience.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is explained in this section. It is mentioned that business practices are constantly evolving, and it is essential for companies to be informed about the latest business trends in order to stay ahead in the marketplace. Businesses that are slow to adopt and adapt their business strategies to accommodate new trends run the risk of becoming isolated and irrelevant within their industry (Ahlstrom et al., 2020).

The section describes how the study has been designed to be able to add to the current knowledge in the field of business and customer experience. The researcher has also mentioned that it is his expectation and hope that the knowledge gained from this study will be of benefit to managers in all areas of business, from marketing to manufacturing, and will offer insight and evidence to those considering adopting a more customer focused business strategy.

It is clear that the section outlined in the introduction has been carefully structured and each paragraph gives a brief understanding of what will be expanded on in each section. Also, it is listed that how the research will be important for academia but, in the main, research is a critical tool in investigating complex issues, putting forward new knowledge and habits to do things. Another important aspect including the issues considered and investigated, the methodologies and theories involved as well as the application of those concepts and how the findings may be interpreted and implemented.

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Also, from the piece of work in question it is equally important to consider essential milestones in a research project, which is an organized time plan and sticking to the initial time plan that is required when it comes to a research project of this scale. Cross referencing and obtaining some kind of starting knowledge is also listed as significant.

1.2. Research Questions

First, understanding the evolution of business in the 21st century is crucial. This is an era of technology. Currently, everything is being technically driven. Globalisation is the key to success in this century because industries are expanding daily, and every country is trying to make its own marketplaces(Vargo et al., 2020). Therefore, companies face several challenges and opportunities. A customer means a lot to the business. This is because, in this century, the customer is considered an asset for the company because the trends of things are changing (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020; Varga, 2021). Customers have more knowledge of the market because of this technology.

Competition is very high in the business market because companies are not only at the national level, but also at the international level (Bascur & Rusu, 2020). Companies try their best to give maximum facilities to customers because they know that customer satisfaction and business success are related to each other (Basari & Shamsudin, 2020). Currently, there are different ways and methods to measure the level of customer satisfaction. It is very important for companies to properly utilise these methods to become the best in the business and beat the competition because, compared to technology, the trends of customer attraction and relations are also changing (Hallencreutz & Parmler, 2021).

Therefore, it is important to make frequent changes according to the needs and wants of customers in a highly effective manner (Basari & Shamsudin, 2020). Companies can obtain different advantages by developing proper, effective, and efficient strategies for customer satisfaction. The most common advantage is that companies can increase their customer satisfaction and loyalty. Companies can make goodwill in the market, and through word of mouth, customers will increase day by day (Agha et al., 2021).

Companies can understand the issues and problems customers face. The cost of acquiring a new customer is five times that of retaining an old one (Mehta et al., 2020). Thus, companies can save a lot by retaining old customers and building loyalty. When companies can satisfy customers, customers will definitely come repeatedly (D. T. Nguyen et al., 2020). This will increase the sales and profits of companies. Different types of software and technologies exist in the market, through which a company can improve customer satisfaction (Ahlstrom et al., 2020; Behare et al., 2018). Feedback is one of the best methods used for this purpose. Companies can receive feedback from customers on a regular basis and act, which will lead to improvement.

The second-best method is the goal and achievement. The goal of the company is to satisfy the second better, and the achievement is customer satisfaction. When employees of the company completely focus on customer satisfaction, they can easily satisfy customers. Employees can work with full specifications and enjoy their work (Emmett et al., 2021; McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Through different types of software, companies can help employees provide them with knowledge on how to satisfy customers. These techniques are becoming a way to attract customers (Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020; Lina, 2022; Wulandari, 2022).

When a customer enters a shop and hears "Sir, you are welcome to our shop, let us know if you need any kind of help", and it will have a positive impact on the customer's mind (Wulandari, 2022). If they ask for something and the shopkeeper already knows where the desired product is, it will look excellent. When the checkout is being processed, say thanks to the customer and invites them to come again (Kurdi et al., 2020). These types of small things will create loyalty in the customer's mind, and the customer will definitely return.

Finally, companies can build relationships with customers because customer satisfaction leads to customer retention. On the other hand, when customers are satisfied and continue to return, companies can increase the number of customers Companies can build long-lasting relationships with customers (P. Kumar & Mokha, 2022). Therefore, customer satisfaction is very important in the 21st century.

1.3. Methodology

This study was conducted through direct observations of daily business operations in two different business organisations. One of the businesses is a well-established telecommunications company that provides Internet and mobile services to consumers. The other is a new, small-sized café using self-designed consumer feedback devices for data collection (Agha et al., 2021; Al-Dmour et al., 2021; Al-Hawary & Alhajri, 2020). This is a comparative case study, which aims to study how customer experience is being shaped and what the impacts are on short- and long-term development in different types of business.

First, suitable research setting in which the research can uncover the processes, strategies, and productions around the impacts of customer experience on the business is vital. The telecommunications company was chosen only because it fit into the resource condition. The chosen café is a typical sample of many automated cafés in the city which opened in these two or three years. As the café place is accessible to the public, it is relatively easier to collect the necessary data and follow the operational process of the café during the entire research period. These organisations are running businesses within one of the most flourishing areas in Singapore with a target consumer population of different variabilities (Henrikson et al., 2022; P. Kaur et al., 2022; Yrjölä et al., 2021).

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The café is located within the city centre and is surrounded by multiple international companies and high-density office buildings. However, the telecommunications company's customer service centre is situated in an outskirt area of the city, and most of the customers are local residents. Investigating separate businesses with different customer compositions and marketing strategies, from a company with a long company history and accumulated customers to a start-up business to a particular customer segment, would certainly provide a combined and deep understanding of the discussed phenomenon and create a fruitful result for comparison (Aigwi et al., 2020; Kidokoro et al., 2022; Lubis et al., 2020; Talamini et al., 2022).

Second, direct observation with limited interviews is mainly facilitated and proctored by myself (Marks & Al-Ali, 2022). This method is particularly relevant for the study of customer experience, and its effectiveness has been described by various well-known authors; for example, Verhoef et al., (2013) also mentioned it in their research. This applies specifically to the plotting of the entire customer satisfaction and experience segment and has a positive impact on operational and project management.

However, my personal experience requires contact and insight from the people or operation of the businesses being studied. This means indirect user feedback such as internet review, online surveys, or suggestion book cannot replace the usefulness of viewing the operation from the physical touch and feeling, 'live' sentiment, and verbal or non-verbal communications between the service provider and customers (Dignath & Veenman, 2021).

Finally, ethical considerations should be considered and highlighted. Throughout the field trip, topics discussed and researched may disclose some knowledge and operational strategies which the businesses critically view (Davison et al., 2021). As such, it is important to guarantee the confidentiality of this information with a statement of declaration and also explain that the study is only for academic purposes and that the business's operation excellence should not be affected or misunderstood (Aryal et al., 2022; Okada, 2020).

2. THE EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS IN THE 21st CENTURY

To appreciate the present and predict the future insofar as the development of business is concerned, it is important to understand the scenario prevalent in the 20th century. "The Evolution of business can be seen as the responses made by the business houses to the changing business environment" (House et al., 2004).In the 20th century, the architects and the main driving force behind business evolution were 'Total Quality Management' and 'Innovative Business Practices'. The evolution of business in the 20th century was clearly the focus of this study.

In the early part of the century, business focused on production and production planning. The main job of the managers was to apply the resources in the most efficient manner, that is, to maximise the output. This is also known as 'Taylorism' (Carvalho et al., 2021). At a later stage, the focus shifted from production to marketing. This is underlined by the development of marketing philosophies, such as the Boston Consulting Group Growth (Umair & Dilanchiev, 2022). This led production-oriented managers to consider long-term business planning. At the later stage of the century, the focus shifted to customer satisfaction(Carayannis & Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022; Souza et al., 2022).

Managers are required to have either a particular mindset–that is, growing the business by keeping customers happy–or using a particular approach. This changes significantly and rapidly (Raja Santhi & Muthuswamy, 2023). First, a lot of emphasis was given to customer retention; that is, it was thought that the customer that was already there should not be lost. It then moved on to customer attraction, that is, not only the customer, particularly competitors, should be attracted. This gave birth to the concept of innovation, which demanded that something should be produced that is unique, so that it not only enables the organisation to attract new customers but also customer retention(Juergensen et al., 2020; Paiola & Gebauer, 2020). These ongoing changes in the business environment have shaped business evolution in the 20th century.

2.1. Technological Advancements

It is evident today to notice that many online tools are used to perform analytical work, which is also helpful to the business and is provided by the Internet. In the modern society today, many companies if not every business has its website, and customers demand access to products and services through the Internet. Therefore, businesses need to provide updated technology to their customers and improve their operational performance. Because of the improvement of technology in the business, there are changes in the business operation mode towards modern technology, such as the global positioning system, business map, and data mining (Fu et al., 2022; Siagian et al., 2021).

These advancements have made technology in business increasingly progressive, and because of these changes, many customers enjoy the latest achievements in technology with business. By successfully implementing technology in business, communication has become easier in terms of customer services. Based on the technologies that have been implemented, the development of wireless and mobile technology has helped to maintain the organisation's relationship with customers as well as suppliers (Khanh et al., 2022). For example, the existence of blackberry in the technology world plus the launch of its secured and dedicated messenger platform known as BBM has improved significantly, and people use the device as a pocket laptop to access email and the internet.

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This is one of the great examples of technology that organisations have used in business to improve business operations since the beginning of the century. Every wireless technology has the coverage of the network based called the 'cell', one 'cell' has low power strength base transmitter (Dash et al., 2021; Salih et al., 2020).

2.2. Globalization and Market Expansion

Following the success of globalisation in the late 20th century, many businesses have pursued a global expansion strategy, enabled by the continuously falling costs of communication and the elimination of trade barriers, such as tariffs and import quotas (M. M. Seke, 2020b). Globalisation has also been driven by advances in technology, which have significantly reduced the costs of international trade(Schneider-Petsinger, 2020). For example, the development of containerisation, the process of packing goods into large, standardised containers for transportation by rail, ship, and truck, has made the transportation of goods by sea much more cost-effective (Kurecic & Furdi, 2021).

The impact of globalisation was accelerated by the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995, which facilitated a freer and more predictable trade environment (M. M. Seke, 2020b). The increased prevalence of multinational companies in many economies around the world has led to market homogenization (Barlow et al., 2022). This is the process by which markets, particularly those for more standardised goods, are similar across world regions. For example, many consumers purchase the same products from multinational companies in diverse geographical locations.

Homogenisation has been driven by the spread of global consumer culture, partially facilitated by the global reach of satellite television and the internet (Bourreau et al., 2022). As such, it can be argued that the diverse range of consumer options available to individuals in the 21st century, due to globalisation and market expansion, may actually be eroded by the limited number of companies controlling each market (Cleveland et al., 2022; Ervits, 2021). However, globalisation has also led to the breakdown of state-trading boards and deregulation of industries worldwide.

This has not only increased competition in previously protected domestic markets but has also provided many new business opportunities for both individuals and larger organisations (M. M. Seke, 2020b). As the importance of diversity in the workplace becomes increasingly apparent, many business leaders are turning their attention toward fostering an inclusive culture within their companies (Luo, 2021; Sepashvili, 2020). With the unprecedented rate of social and technological change across the world, globalisation in the 21st century is rapidly becoming a do or die necessity for not only finding new markets for a business, but also to ensure that the business can remain competitive on a global stage (Stolyarova et al., 2020).

2.3. Changing Consumer Expectations

Furthermore, consumers place greater emphasis on their experiences as a quintessential part of the economy. This shift is evidenced by the decline of materialism, with people now either desiring experiences more than they do things or desiring things that enable them to experience certain aspects of lifev(Sun et al., 2022). This trend is positive. As individual expectations increase, so does the bar of collective happiness in the general population (M. M. Seke, 2020a). In the last decade, the global consumer has changed beyond all recognition, and customer experience has risen to be far away from the world's most exciting profession, showing no signs of change.

The customer-obsessed economy is making progressive customer experience an essential strategy and benchmark for companies (De Keyser et al., 2015; De Mendonca & Zhou, 2019). This change has profound effects on the way business is being done, and in today's world, the race is on to truly master customer experience; for any business that can crack it, the possibilities are limitless (M. Seke, 2021). Leader organisations have recognised this and have adopted and implemented customer experience as a fundamental part of their business strategies, and many best practice cases show that progressing maturity of customer experience in a company helps to deliver commercial success (Stoyanova, 2020). It is not just consumers and business analysts who have identified the shift; the media now frequently use storied customers' experiences and how brands react to communicate shifts in power towards the customer.

Experience is of trust, just as character is destiny, yet to seize customer experience as a strategy, it must be systemically built, embedded, and well-managed, which is another goal of this study to explore customer experience more widely. All businesses believe that they are improving their customers' experience (N. Q. Nguyen, 2020). However, simply publishing a customer charter, providing training to staff, and resolving customer issues are hygiene factors only; these are basic necessities for addressing customer needs (Harris et al., 2020). Although these have an important role in laying the foundation for an improved customer experience, they will not be differentiating and will not deliver sustainable business performance in the long term (A. Ranjan et al., 2022). This requires a constant stream of customer insight that can drive both incremental and transformational improvement initiatives (D. T. Nguyen et al., 2020). However, a significant change in consumers' mindsets has emerged around the world.

To understand the changing expectations of Dutch consumers, in a project named "The Experience Economy", research has been conducted, and it was found that a new psychological contract is formed between customers and businesses(N. Q. Nguyen, 2020). Customers seek higher quality and service levels. Customers express a greater desire for a more emotive and personal relationships

with an increasing demand for trust and stability from their services providers (A. Ranjan et al., 2022) . This research is indicative of the wider changes that are being wrought by a more focused customer mindset mentioned earlier.

This concept of shifting from a purely transactional relationship to one that is defined by high levels of trust and two-way communication may not be new, yet it has gathered pace, particularly with the rise of social media (Sembada & Koay, 2021). The notion that consumers are becoming more likely to transact with companies with whom they have trust and confidence is also reinforced by the "Behaviour Change" model of driving increased customer experience (M. M. Seke, 2020a). Guest columnist Katie Mares outlines two essential steps to create transformational improvements in the customer experience (Mares, 2023).

2.4. Impact on Traditional Business Models

Improved data analytics, the use of e-commerce, and changing consumer behaviour as a result of increased digitalisation have all had an impact on traditional business models, which this study explains in detail.

Traditional business models are largely driven by the business itself and involve analysing the market to identify where the business could go and how it could get there (Bouncken et al., 2021) (Amit & Zott, 2020). However, the study found that in many industries, digital disruption is causing a move towards "consumer-centric" business models–a term that is synonymous with putting customers at the centre of business, involving them in the design of products and services, and creating a more joined-up customer journey (Amit & Zott, 2020). This shift from "business-centric" to "consumer-centric" is largely because businesses are now able to create more customer profiles through the collection of big data and the use of data analytics, which allows for more targeted marketing and ultimately a more personalised customer experience(M. M. Seke, 2020a).

This was reflected in the study's findings; it was observed that over half of the respondents reported a shift from a "business-centric" approach to a "consumer-centric" approach within their industry (S. Kumar & Kumar, 2022). Furthermore, case studies of particular businesses were used to support the study's findings that a move towards a more "consumer-centric" approach can lead to greater success, validating the importance of this form of business evolution as a substantial one, providing a direct link between adopting new initiatives as a result of digital disruption and growth in terms of revenue and customer base (Behare et al., 2018; N. Q. Nguyen, 2020).

An example of such a business that has successfully managed to evolve its business model effectively using big data and analytics was presented in the study in the form of a case study. The case studies themselves and the examples that were provided alongside the data helped to illustrate to the reader the palpable impact of the change in business model and how exactly businesses have started to adapt, using methods discussed throughout the study, such as big data and social media(Ciampi et al., 2021; Wiener et al., 2020). The case study acknowledges the significance of a new, disruptive business model that is evolving around the necessity to provide a consistent and high-quality customer journey as a result of digitalization.

3. THE PRIMACY OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The necessity to prioritise customer experiences, or to put it in a more presentable way, the "primacy of customer experience" has recently been emphasised. This is due to the fact that the environment in which businesses operate has fast evolved towards increased dynamism, complexity, and interconnectedness (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020). Fundamental changes such as technological advancements and market globalisation have come together to shape the triggers of business success in the 21st century (Teece, 2022).

In fact, it can be shown that the importance of customer experience has been growing over the years when we witness the repealing of traditional top-down company centric business models and the elevation of market democratization and empowerment of consumers (De Keyser et al., 2015; Keiningham et al., 2020). The main driver of this tendency is the wide adoption of new customer experience-oriented strategies that run under the use of digital technologies for various types of innovations (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020; Allioui & Mourdi, 2023). Such a digital innovation cycle continuously and cumulatively reinforces the importance of customer experience: as people innovate, products will be better and thus people's expectations will rise, which in turn makes good customer experience even more valuable and the loop continues(Cao et al., 2024).

Customer experience has a few specific components. From a business perspective, only satisfaction and loyalty are important because they directly affect business profits (Cukier, 2021). However, research shows that, from the customer's point of view, these are not the most important components. For example, customers always think about personalisation and recognition as the most important component in customer experience because this is the age of individualisation - everybody wants to buy something that is proposed, especially for them (M. M. Seke, 2020a). This is an exciting opportunity for businesses because we are in the days of deep artificial intelligence and big data, and these technologies have made it possible to present personalised experiences. And no matter what components that the businesses or the customers may consider, one thing for sure is that customer experience is critical to marketing and business success (Kotler et al., 2021; Rane et al., 2023).

Finally, do remember that customer experience is not something that we are done with once it is implemented. It is a process of improvement, and we need to continuously understand and obtain the pulse of customers and our target market. We have to strategize and adapt ways to grow engagement and loyalty with our brand and understand what makes customers tick.

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3.1. Definition and Importance

Customer experience is the perception that customers have a brand, based on their interactions with it. It is an important area for businesses to consider, as it has a direct impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy, and it affects a company's revenue and growth (P. Kumar & Mokha, 2022; Manyanga et al., 2022; Rane et al., 2023).

As such, customer experience is critically important for companies to try to differentiate themselves from competitors and adopt new ways of doing business (M. M. Seke, 2020a; Setiawan, 2021). There are clear links between positive customer experiences and repeat business (Sheth et al., 2020). According to a survey conducted by the American Express, 17% of consumers said that they would be willing to experience brands with which they were not satisfied. This is compared to only 4% of those who would stay loyal despite a bad experience (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Gibson et al., 2022; Kotler et al., 2021).

So, it is apparent that in the 21st century, businesses are increasingly focusing on customer experience, perhaps more so than ever before (Siebert et al., 2020). The Internet and social media have created an environment in which customers are well informed and have an abundance of choices, and because of this, they have become much more demanding (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Keiningham et al., 2020). Businesses are having to adapt not only to the changes in the way they can market their products – i.e. more personalized marketing is possible – but also to the changes in the way that they need to retain the customer's unique partnerships, and in light of this, focusing on customer experience is becoming key (Balio & Casais, 2021; Kotler et al., 2021). With user-friendly websites, effective customer service, and perhaps even tailored offers being available, businesses might be able to attract new customers and retain their current customer base.

The adoption of customer experience as a guiding principle in business–that is, making decisions based on the analysis of whether it will benefit the customer–is called customer experience management (Behare et al., 2018; Gibson et al., 2022). In essence, this methodology aims to align business processes with customer wants and needs, building a more customer-focused culture that also allows the generation of increased customer loyalty and retention, leading to successful business strategies through word-of-mouth and happier customers.

3.2. Factors Influencing Customer Experience

For example, many firms are increasingly seeing the value of customer feedback and have revolutionised their approach to collecting consumer insights. Literature suggests that more than 75% of businesses place customer feedback as a top priority in the operation of product design, proving that the power of customer feedback is no longer a tool that should be ignored (Ding et al., 2024). Also, some businesses recognise that the complexity of a product or service helps shape customers' current expectations and motivations (Kim et al., 2023).

By analysing customers' online reviews of hotel services, Yeo et al., (2017) and Xu et al., (2022) found that comments on the service quality and facilities of the hotel may significantly affect customer satisfaction. Hotels with better service quality and advanced internal facilities have received a high average customer review score in their research, suggesting that quality of service draws the most attention from current potential customers (Park et al., 2020). In addition, facilities that utilise the latest technology will improve customers' in-situ experience and hence encourage repeated visits. Occupiers also reinforced the importance of employee wellness in customer experience delivery (Piuchan, 2023).

Some businesses have started using customer journey mapping to allocate resources. Gustafsson, (2009) suggests that customer journeys, which are a series of engagements that a customer has established with an organisation that generates economic value, are not only a tool for helping businesses make better decisions and strategies, but also an economic model that depicts how stock market influencers and sales predict the future of a company.

3.3. Strategies for Enhancing Customer Experience

As a matter of first importance, it is essential to comprehend the client and what they need and anticipate from the ideal client experience to mystery shop the client venture. What might a business do whenever ask 'how might you improve client experience?' On the off chance that they did not take a gander at the client's fulfilment and the manner in which the business takes a gander at smoothness during the client excursion? However, refining and improving the current experience is important (Rudkowski et al., 2020).

There can be times where it is proper to reevaluate the principles at certain times inside client ventures and to perceive that careers need to roll out a reasonable improvement; they do not generally need to copy exactly the same thing. On the off chance that businesses hope to have the option to utilise client excursion mapping as a technique for progress, they cannot simply zero in on essentially the pressing and the offer of a specific item(Gao et al., 2020; Rudkowski et al., 2020). It is tied in with placing the client in the journey, rather than placing it in the centre of the association, in light of the fact that the explanations for this focus on a much higher client maintenance, client faithfulness, and touch focuses that give better purchasing experiences (Keiningham et al., 2020). This thought of rolling out an improvement to a more client oriented cycle is difficult yet it's significant; on the grounds that in the event that you empower colleagues to feel good opening up with respect to what in particular works and what doesn't and where things can get improved for various touch focuses in that trip, this can prompt more prominent upgrades that meet both business

and client needs. There is not really any preferred inclination for a buyer over having the option to buy a decent or help and feel as though they have gone through next to no strain to do so. This is the reason organisations pay attention to the client's capacity in all out-client experience, all the more critically, for repetitive custom and expanding brand faithfulness, on the grounds that where clients' desires are not met, there is little to stop them from taking their custom somewhere else (B. Kaur et al., 2021).

Businesses consistently need to see how the client will be affected by the cycle that they set up in the business (M. M. Seke, 2020a). By recognising what works and what does not in the client venture, regardless of whether that is digitalisation of touch focuses, change of dynamics, or just essentially how the excursion is spread out, businesses can guarantee that they adjust themselves to best fit the client (Keiningham et al., 2020). Second rate items, hopeless assistance, migraines and high costs are totally felt by the shopper and they at this point don't have to acknowledge this; shopper control has unquestionably changed in the current age and the accentuation on advancing toward better client care has never been more noteworthy (Liu et al., 2021).

Customer Experience Management (CEM) is an undeniably developing control which empowers organisations to accomplish consumer loyalty at each addressable touch point in an excursion. CEM has now been viewed as turning into a basic piece of documenting any business's goal to move forward (Pan & Zhang, 2021). It essentially serves to orchestrate the client venture and guarantees that each progression is deliberately intended to meet the client's requirements and desires.

3.4. Measuring and Evaluating Customer Experience

Customer experience is a complex interaction that occurs over time. The sum of these numerous interactions can be measured and evaluated in several ways. An obvious example is customer satisfaction – simply that customers are happy with their experiences (Baquero, 2022). Satisfaction can be measured using a variety of different metrics, but the most commonly used one is the Net Promoter Score (NPS). This is a measure of the likelihood of your customers recommending your services to others, and in many cases can be used as a proxy for overall customer satisfaction (Jaramillo et al., 2023).

NPS scores are obtained by asking customers a single question, for example, "On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend us to friends and family?" Customers are divided into three categories: detractors, passives, and promoters (Baquero, 2022). These can be defined as customers who answer with a score of 0-6, 7, or 8, and 9 or 10, respectively. The NPS score was calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from that of promoters. The NPS has some limitations. In several cases, it may be necessary to gather qualitative feedback. This can be in the form of customer reviews often associated with services such as Google and Facebook. Digital platforms and ongoing relationships with customers indicate that qualitative feedback has become increasingly popular (Shree et al., 2021). This is in contrast to other traditional sources of qualitative feedback, such as focus groups, a form of one-off research with a selection of customers (Mariani & Nambisan, 2021).

New methods for measuring customer experiences have also emerged. For example, customer journey mapping aims to provide a visual representation of customer experience (Gao et al., 2020; Rudkowski et al., 2020). By plotting and visualising a customer's journey, from initial contact to the final interaction, businesses can begin to understand key touchpoints or areas of focus (Liu et al., 2020). Similarly, the use of big data, which is too large for traditional techniques, has meant that businesses can take a more analytical approach to customer experience (J. Ranjan & Foropon, 2021).

Using complex data analysis methods and machine learning, it is now possible to identify patterns, trends, and correlations that might otherwise have been missed. The data used for evaluation have many forms (M. M. Seke, 2020a). For example, customer feedback and satisfaction scores can be seen as direct evaluations – feedback from the customers themselves. An indirect evaluation could be when a business analyzes customer interaction data, such as website browsing habits or purchase history. This might not be a direct measure of customer experience but could be used as an indicator (S. Kumar & Almoula, 2020).

Another source is objective evaluations, often in the form of mystery shoppers. These are individuals who act as normal customers but will take detailed notes on their experiences as well as follow a predefined structure set by the business (V. Singh et al., 2023). This approach is often used to directly compare a business's operations and customer-facing methods to its internal standards. Each of these methods has its merits and weaknesses depending on the type and scope of the information needed. The study should analyse the kind of data needed and how it should be collected, ensuring that the methods are valid and reliable.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

This section examines the implications of prioritising customer experience for business success. This includes the potential to gain a competitive advantage through customer experience, building customer loyalty and retention, and adapting business strategies to meet customer needs. This section also includes case studies on successful customer experience initiatives.

Customers are more informed, connected, and empowered than ever before. Factors such as easily accessible information, increased choice, and the ability to compare shops using the Internet have contributed to a significant shift in the relationship between businesses and their customers (Vaidyanathan & Rabago, 2020). Business success is unquestionably linked to customer success and happiness, otherwise known as customer experience (Henderson, 2021). This growing realization that customer experience is a business's most important differentiator has led to what is known as the "customer experience movement" (Coyne, 2022; Vaidyanathan & Rabago, 2020).

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A competitive advantage is when a business is able to outperform its rivals with something they cannot replicate, something they cannot buy, or something only a few have. This could be in terms of cost leadership, that is, providing the best value for the lowest price, thus giving the business a higher margin (Holt, 2022). It could be in terms of product differentiation, that is, providing a unique product or service with features that are perceived as valuable by customers. Alternatively, it could be in terms of a focus strategy, where a business aims to target a specific part of the market and achieve a competitive advantage by understanding the needs of that particular segment better than its larger rivals.

The case of Starbucks added free and unrestricted Wi-Fi in all their stores in July 2010, while only 20 years prior to this, no café was offering guest Wi-Fi. Starbucks clearly saw that customer needs were evolving, and people now want to be connected, so now it is a part of the successful Starbucks customer experience. From 2010 to 2013, sales rose from $12.2 billion to $14.9 billion, and Starbucks had a successful customer experience initiative (Siddiqui, 2018; Valentín-Sívico, 2022).

4.1. Competitive Advantage through Customer Experience

To achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, businesses are increasingly prioritising customer experience as a key differentiator. Vargo & Lusch, (2004) argued that sustainable competitive advantage stems from exceptional human skills, logistics capabilities, and service strengths that competitors cannot easily replicate, rather than just physical facilities or product superiority. P. C. Verhoef et al., (2009) support this idea by suggesting that customer experience-based strategies can offer a superior competitive advantage. Woodruff, (1997) emphasised the role of customer value in establishing a competitive advantage. Market orientation, as discussed by Tsiotsou & Vlachopoulou, (2011), is crucial for firms to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by delivering superior customer value. Pei et al., (2020) highlight that customer experience is increasingly becoming a primary source of sustainable competitive advantage for retailers, especially in the evolving landscape of online and physical store shopping.

Artusi et al., (2020) stressed the importance of maximising customer experience to gain a competitive edge, focusing on non-imitability as a key factor. Makudza, (2020) reinforces this by showing that customer experience management can act as a strategic differentiator in industries such as retail banking. Additionally, Imbug et al., (2018) assert that customer experience serves as a primary source of competitive advantage due to its subjective and unique nature based on individual encounter.

Overall, studies have shown that customer experience management in the 21st century has proven significant success for many companies, and future orientation is set on further development with the aid of new digital technologies, particularly big data analytical tools.

4.2. Building Customer Loyalty and Retention

In Section 4.2, we discuss the tools for quantifying the impact of customer experience through a marketing strategy. The first tool is the CX metric, which is the average overall influence score of customer experience on customer loyalty. The process is that a solid customer experience drives customers to become more loyal to the company than otherwise. Nonetheless, the industry environment and the company's operational state might prevent such an influence from being revealed in a certain period. Hence, it is necessary for companies to monitor this influence and identify the phase in which it shows the greatest strength(Pekovic & Rolland, 2020).

A straightforward approach to monitor this influence is to design a related survey, asking customers about their overall impression of the customer experience they received, and how likely they will continue to stay with the company (Keiningham et al., 2020; Siebert et al., 2020). Once this information is collected, a metric called the customer loyalty variance between good and poor customer experience can be calculated. The formula is ((percentage of justified customer's loyalty level with good experience - percentage of justified customer's loyalty level with bad experience) × 100%). This metric is very helpful when interpreting customer and operational data (Pekovic & Rolland, 2020).

With this CX customer loyalty variance, we can now systematically discover how customer loyalty fluctuates across different customer segments given the difference in the degree of customer experience quality (Ha, 2021). The manager can now decide where to operate on the business scale, either to improve overall customer experience or to target the customer segment with the best customer experience creation in leveraging customer loyalty (Covin et al., 2020). This discovery is helpful for managerial decision-making at the operational level because it allows a transition from a philosophy that 'good customer experience is the goal' to one that 'what levels of customer experience can be accepted and where customer experience improvement efforts should be placed' based on customer loyalty generation for different levels of improved customer experience (Kyere & Ausloos, 2021).

In addition, at the industry level, this approach may allow marketers to jointly estimate the profit function with brand strength, customer experience quality, and customer loyalty (Ha, 2021; Pei et al., 2020). This finding is valuable for understanding how competitive strategies among firms are connected to customer loyalty through an interactive network of experience transmission. Thus, the second tool for quantifying the impact of customer experience through marketing strategy is to build a customer experience network via the discovery of CX customer loyalty variance (Pekovic & Rolland, 2020).

A customer experience network is formed by linking each initial or intermediate customer experience point to multiple cumulative experience paths, assuming rational consumption activity flows from different customers (B. Kaur et al., 2021). Through these

customer experience paths; a customer experience network was created (De Keyser et al., 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Given the contribution from the CX customer loyalty variance, which reveals the phase in which customer experience shows the most profound influence, a customer experience network is initiated with assumptions on customer experience strength associated with each customer experience node point and going through permutation combination in a customer's rational consumptive activity (Ha, 2021; Pekovic & Rolland, 2020).

This will enrich the study on how experience accumulates and generates customer loyalty through brand strengthening and vice versa (Keiningham et al., 2020). With the newly proposed tools, companies have an increased ability to monitor the real-time customer loyalty effect, relative customer loyalty strengths corresponding to different customer experience excellence, and joint estimation of the profit function with brand strength, customer experience quality, customer loyalty, and its change over different customer segments(Siebert et al., 2020). Additionally, the industry environment and differences in customer consumption activities can be executed with the establishment of a customer experience network (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). All of these technical achievements will provide greater insight into marketing research and customer experience management in practice.

4.3. Adapting Business Strategies to Customer Needs

To keep pace with changing customer expectations, businesses must adapt and modify their strategies. This might include changes to the product or service provided, development of new marketing or advertising initiatives, or a shift in the target audience for a product or service. Indeed, according to a recent Forbes article, "for 91% of companies, understanding customer journeys is critical for traditional and online strategies (Tueanrat et al., 2021). This is, again, connected back to the concept of customer experience– businesses understand that to prevail in the current dulcid world of commerce, the focus must be on the user, with every step initially taken and thereafter (Y. Singh et al., 2024).

By making alterations, first and foremost, we recognise that each customer is unique; what one might prefer, the other could find it disadvantageous (Diebner et al., 2020). Counselling to customer needs, therefore, involves personalising every experience a user could have. This might not be at any sole stage, but throughout the journey a consumer takes with a clausal company: it evolves over time, and businesses have to be prepared to flex and their establish behaviours in tandem with continuous, fastidious feedback analysis (Witell et al., 2020).

A well-known example of a successful, customer-led mutual change was McDonald's introduction of an all-day breakfast after numerous ravenous requests across social media platforms (Miller, 2021). This intuitive consumption-period alteration strategy paid dividends that year, with stocks rising by 10% and sales rocketing by roughly $415,000,000 when analysed in comparison to yesteryears. Such a monumental and measurable increase in age-critical trade flow is not only demonstrative of what contemporary diffusion of liability led by the user can do, but profoundly endorses the notion of "change for optimums" (Miles, 2022; Walther, 2022).

Failing stagnation and a shut-eyed approach to business methodologies, just because "it's worked sufficient of yore", are highlighted as a defunct and alienating style of business (Han, 2022). Creative, positive development is fundamental; it generates momentum, and staff feel involved and, ultimately, in the context of customer experience accretion, it will empower businesses to ideally satisfy and excite each and every user, thus prompting them to communicate their satisfaction and encourage conversion to their social determinatives circle (Elyoussoufi et al., 2023; Kalogiannidis et al., 2022).

4.4. Case Studies of Successful Customer Experience Initiatives

After introducing and discussing the potential implications of prioritising customer experience, the section culminates in the case studies of four world-renowned companies which have successfully driven business growth through customer experience initiatives. First, the British multinational grocery and general merchandise retailer Sainsbury's case is introduced to show how the deployment of Big Data customer insight and analysis helps the company gain a competitive advantage relative to its peers in the industry through customer understanding, and how this creates the condition for building customer loyalty and retention in the long run (Sainsbury et al., 2020; Yeo et al., 2017). This leads to a further discussion on how Sainsbury successfully adapts its business strategies to customer needs, thereby bringing continuous commercial success.

Following that, a case of Virgin Atlantic Airways is explored to demonstrate the application of a customer journey map in practice and the way it can break down departmental silos, help focus attention and improvements on things that matter most to the customer and build employee engagement in the process (Taneja, 2016, 2017). What is more, the case also presents the idea of 'customer experience innovation', which reflects a rising trend among modern customer-focused companies - these organizations do not only seek to improve current customer experience, but also to discover novel customer experiences that the customers have not imagined before and lead a market change by delivering those innovative experiences (Keiningham et al., 2020).

Then, there is a review of the success of the customer experience overseas, using the example of 'BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke AG)', a German multinational company that produces luxury vehicles and motorcycles (Henares, 2020; Kukkamalla, 2020). This case illustrates how the values of the company's customer experience percolate from the head office in Munich to global operations, including the experiences delivered in the UK's dealer network (Clarenbach, 2020; Rosa, 2022).

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Last but not least, the case of 'magic pocket' by Disney is highligthed to inspire readers who have access to newer technologies and data in their customer experience journey and to embrace a constant attempt (Roman, 2022; Schippers, 2021). This case demonstrates how Disney, a company that has focused on delivering a high-quality experience that balances enjoyment with safety, uses the wearable technology magic band to track almost every move that visitors make and successfully convert data collected into actionable insights, showcasing the seeding of a simple customer experience-focused idea into the enrichment of the entire product ecosystem (Lee, 2021; Marcello, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

This study delves into the multifaceted landscape of business evolution in the 21st century with a particular focus on the paramount importance of customer experience. A direct observational study highlighted the intricate interplay between technological advancements, shifting consumer expectations, and organizational strategies aimed at enhancing customer centricity. These findings underscore the fundamental role that customer experience plays as a driver of competitive advantage and long-term business success. As businesses navigate the complexities of the modern marketplace, this study emphasises the critical imperative of prioritising and continually refining customer experiences to meet and exceed evolving consumer demands.

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