

Investing in Closing the Consumer Experience Gap

By Abhijeet Roy

In today's highly competitive and experience-based environment, marketers must demonstrate a serious intent to go the extra mile and find what truly makes an impact for consumers. Consumer behaviour is as complex as we like to make it out to be, but it all boils down to what the brand/product promise is and how it actually gets experienced or used.

There are some key questions that Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) marketers should ask in current times:

- What is it about consumer behaviour that we want to know about?
- What is reality versus what is claimed?
- There are obvious say-do gaps, but do we actually make the distinction or do we get led by unsubstantiated claims that lead to unexpected outcomes?

According to a Bain & Company survey, 80% of companies believed that they delivered a superior experience to consumers. However, when consumers were queried, only 8% said the companies actually delivered to base-level expectations.

What this data shows is that the experience gap is massive, and how important it is for companies to better understand consumers and their experiences.

In a PWC survey, 86% of consumers said they were willing to pay more for better experiences. Additionally, two-thirds of consumers believed a positive experience with a brand was more influential than great advertising, which shows that messaging and advertising alone are not enough to make consumers buy again if they have negative experiences.

For example, a well-known condiment brand recently put out an advertising campaign which promised to improve taste experiences, but some consumers who used the brand complained of watery consistency and the presence of small globules when dispensing the condiment, leading to brand dissonance and looking for an alternative in the next purchase.

According to ZenDesk 2025, 52% of consumers will shift to a competitor if they experience a negative impression, and this can lead to a significant loss in a brand's share and 'market presence'.

EVERY MOMENT OF A CONSUMER'S EXPERIENCE IS IMPORTANT

The real essence of meaningful brand differentiation lies in how a brand delivers at key moments of interaction with consumers.

These moments include:

- The Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT): when consumers first encounter or engage with the brand and form expectations through advertising, messaging, or seeing it in-store or online
- The First Moment of Truth (FMOT): when they make the decision to purchase.
- The Second Moment of Truth (SMOT): when they actually use or consume the product and experience its impact.

It's in these moments that a brand either stands out or fades into the background.

It is about ensuring promised quality to match expectations throughout the value chain and ultimately across the entire consumer journey. True brand power comes to life only if it delivers on consumers' expectations, and a brand can become even more powerful by delivering an experience that exceeds those expectations - delivering true value.

Thus, brands need to focus on what consumers actually 'DO and not just what they SAY'. However, the stark issue is that 96% of consumers will not complain to the manufacturer, which could be due to frustration with the product, amongst other reasons, leaving brands in the dark when they did not return to the brand or product.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCE HAS TO BE MEASURED

It is important that brands are able to get consumer experience feedback with the goal of achieving brand and product superiority through the delivery of exceptional consumer experiences.

With ever-evolving consumer trends and retail environments, marketers and researchers need to stay ahead of the curve to get this understanding. A real-world approach is needed, one that can deliver increased understanding of consumer experiences at speed and help with true facts to drive product planning and marketing effectiveness.

Stepping into the consumer's world to evaluate natural experiences and capture immediate reactions in real time is the actual truth compared to memory-based experiences, which can often differ from the actual event/moment.

By walking with consumers through their entire journey, it is important to see how touchpoints influence behaviour and decision-making.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE VALUE CHAIN

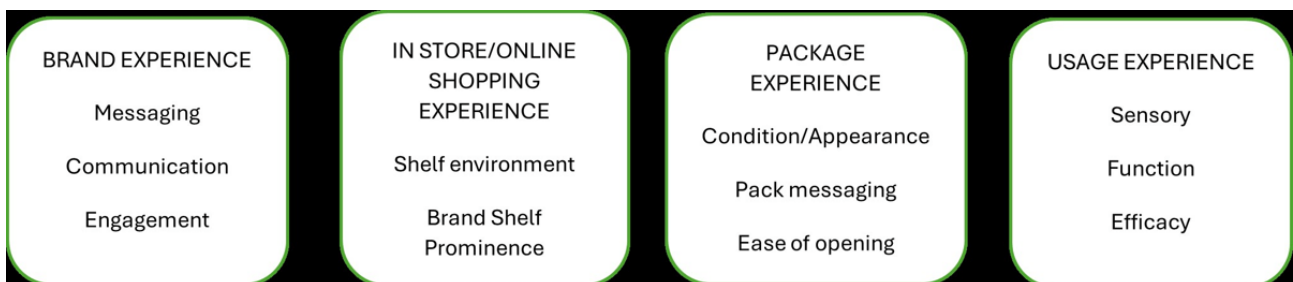
In the research and insights world, a fair proportion of focus and investment is on brand awareness, equity programs, communication, and creative message assessments to strengthen consumer engagement that can be controlled (The Push).

Understanding genuine product experiences is a natural follow-through of this process, where the consumer has control over the marketer (The Pull). Impactful brand campaigns/ marketing can help influence purchase or trial. However, the consumption or usage experience will influence the possibility of a repeat purchase.

Therefore, it is imperative to understand the experience, satisfaction levels, and whether the experience has delivered against what was originally promised via brand messages and campaign. The consumer's feeling and emotions around the product experience creates the decision whether to buy the brand again or not.

This is hugely impactful for marketers as consumer loyalty is a key strategy to grow or maintain market standing.

Consumer's quality experience is a combination of key touchpoints in their journey



This holistic understanding is a true measure of brand and product success when seen through the lens of higher consumer expectations and also competitive performance in the same context.

DELIVER ON PROMISES

To achieve superiority, and hence, brand choice, marketers should measure and understand value delivered through experience beyond preference, as consumers care more than they ever did.

It is essential to understand how positive and negative experiences interact to influence future purchase intent and repeat purchase, to deliver a holistic experience and the resulting impact on developing data-driven, consumer-centric planning and product delivery.

To add to these potential experience-led issues, in the instant gratification world we find ourselves in nowadays, 'de-influencers' are becoming more influential, focused on telling their followers to make more conscious buying choices and informing them of brands and products they do not buy. A brand that does not deliver on its promise is in real danger of coming under the de-influencer radar.

THE KEY TAKEAWAYS

Quality isn't an act, it's a habit. Consumer or customer experience is widely measured and looked at in the Services sector. UX leans towards digital, online, website and app-based experiences. In the CPG world, consumer experience is not yet the real focus of marketers as all product issues and complaints sit outside the marketing and insights function and are dealt mainly by customer support channels. Marketing and Insights teams in CPG need to be more aware of how brand promise gets delivered, as the consumer is more in charge of future choices.

Understanding the real and connected consumer experience is becoming more important than ever. With hyper-personalisation, direct-to-consumer models, localised marketing, and growing sustainability expectations, businesses are realising that measuring product performance and user satisfaction can drive smarter product improvements and open up new growth opportunities.

Currently, most marketing and research spend focuses on the go-to-market phase. In the in-market phase, investment is largely directed at tracking performance: purchase data, market share, and similar metrics.

Redirecting even part of this spend toward understanding consumers' real experiences could unlock deeper insights and ultimately drive stronger market performance.

AUTHOR BIO



Abhijeet Roy With more than 25 years of global research experience spanning Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, and Asia, Abhi has demonstrated exceptional expertise in market research, client consulting, and driving business growth. Having dedicated over two decades to Kantar, he brings substantial sectoral knowledge and is committed to providing outcome-driven insights and strategic solutions across the marketing cycle for organisations that recognise consumer insights as integral to their success.

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