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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**CUSTOMER KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ROLE IN  
IMPROVING BRAND EXPERIENCE**

– SUMMARY –

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## **ABSTRACT**

Customer Knowledge Management (CKM), Knowledge Dynamics (KDY), and Brand Experience (BEX) represent pivotal areas in contemporary marketing research, and are recognized for their potential to enhance effective marketing strategies. Despite growing emphasis on customer experience (CX) and customer management, the creation of successful customer experiences remains a significant challenge for companies. A critical gap exists in the marketing literature regarding the comprehensive measurement and understanding of what constitutes an impactful customer experience. This PhD thesis aims to fill these gaps by exploring the intricate relationships between CKM, knowledge dynamics, and brand experience, providing a multidimensional perspective on customer experience.

This thesis aims to develop and validate a formative framework and measurement concept for enhancing brand experience, applicable across various industries, and to identify the key drivers at the intersection of customer knowledge and empowerment on the outcomes of customer experience. This study leverages a mixed-method approach, beginning with a bibliometric literature review to establish a theoretical foundation. This was followed by a qualitative study involving interviews with 17 specialists to develop scales for knowledge dynamics. Finally, quantitative research was conducted to validate the scales and the overall measurement model.

The findings from this research underscore the necessity of a suitable measurement concept to comprehensively understand the multidimensional construct of brand experience. The developed formative measurement concept identifies cause indicators, dimensions that drives brand experience, and is validated through rigorous testing across multiple industries. This concept enhances marketing managers' ability to design, implement, and evaluate effective customer-experience strategies.

This study also highlights the positive effects of a well-designed brand experience on marketing-related outcomes, including the customer knowledge management scale, consumer empowerment index scale value, and brand management scale. By integrating the knowledge dynamics concept as a main mediator, this study offers a deeper understanding of how knowledge flows within organizations and influences brand experience.

This thesis extends fundamental brand experience research by providing empirical evidence on the drivers and outcomes of brand experience, and ultimately, customer experience. The insights derived from this study offer practical implications for managers

seeking to enhance brand experiences and consequently improve their marketing strategies. This study bridges existing gaps in the literature and sets a foundation for future research on the dynamic interplay between Customer Knowledge Management (CKM), Knowledge Dynamics (KDY), Consumer Empowerment (CEI), and Brand Experience (BEX), ultimately contributing to the creation of successful customer experiences across various industries.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) has gained significant momentum as companies increasingly recognize the pivotal role of customer knowledge in enhancing both customer and brand experiences. Despite a lack of substantial scholarly focus in this domain, numerous studies have explored how companies leverage product innovation and development by employing unitary systems approaches. These include research and development, product financial performance, market opportunity, customer co-creation, and strategies for enhancing intellectual capital (Kianto et al., 2010; Ricceri, 2011; De Biazzi, 2012; Jordão & de Almeida, 2017; Jordão & Novas, 2017; Xu & Wang, 2018; Le & Lei, 2019). However, interactions between customers, organizational actions, and product development frequently occur without adequately considering the interrelationships between these processes and their resultant impact levels (King & Anderson, 2002; Massey & Kyriazis, 2007; Jiming & Holsapple, 2013).

This gap overlooks the critical role of organizational knowledge systems and the influence of CKM on product development and customer experience. Corporations extensively utilize customer knowledge to monitor and evaluate customer interactions with products and services, promote new offerings, or send reminders (Baker, Hunt, & Scribner, 2002). Effective CKM enables brands to identify emerging market opportunities and shifts in customer behaviour ahead of their competitors, thereby creating significant economic value for the company, its shareholders, and its customers (Jiebing, Bin, & Yongjiang, 2013). Managing and leveraging customer knowledge has become paramount for companies to develop more responsive and adaptive business strategies that closely align with market dynamics and consumer needs. This approach enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty and drives continuous improvement and differentiation of products and services in the marketplace.

Companies are still not technologically or philosophically equipped to further personalize the customer experience and touchpoints based on behaviours. There remains a critical need for a paradigm shift in investments away from traditional, costly marketing communication and toward building meaningful customer connections through digital channels (Mahmud, Ramayah, & Kurnia, 2017). This shift is essential, as the pandemic crisis has highlighted the efforts companies must exert to design consistent digital footprints and consumer knowledge-based systems.

Digital advancements have profoundly impacted marketing models, complicating the differentiation between product functions and benefits. As competitive advantages can now be quickly imitated, the focus of marketing has shifted towards influencing consumer judgment

or perception prior to brand or product consideration, with an emphasis on practical experience post-purchase. This shift necessitates moving from mere memorability to immersion and active participation in customer experiences (Salomann, Dous, Kolbe, & Brenner, 2005).

The concept of dynamic customer experiences, in which consumers are active rather than passive recipients, is gaining traction. Mahmud, Ramayah, and Kurnia (2017) noted that while passive experiences remain popular, there is a growing trend toward experiences that allow customers to drive their own engagement.

This thesis endeavours to address the intricate issue of how companies approach and integrate customer knowledge practices and consumer empowerment or co-creation to enhance brand experience and improve performance in customer-oriented business processes while simultaneously addressing the challenges associated with practicing customer knowledge management (CKM).

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND SYSTEMIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on an extensive literature review and bibliometric analysis. The literature review delves into the evolving definitions of customers, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of customer knowledge and behaviour. Traditional definitions, which view customers as habitual purchasers, are expanded to include a broader spectrum of interactions between customers and organizations (Al-Shammari, 2009; Simons, 2005).

Knowledge management literature underscores the importance of capturing and leveraging both explicit and tacit knowledge within organizations. Alfred Marshall's early recognition of knowledge as a powerful engine of production laid the groundwork for modern knowledge management practices (Marshall, 1920). Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) concept of knowledge creation through the interaction of explicit and tacit knowledge remains a cornerstone of this field. Recent advancements emphasize the dynamic nature of knowledge, which allows it to transform and adapt across different contexts (Bratianu, 2008a, 2022).

Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) integrates principles from Knowledge Management (KM) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM). It emphasizes the dual role of customers as co-creators and co-producers of value, facilitating stakeholder collaboration at different stages of product and service development (Smith & McKeen, 2005; Bratianu et al., 2011; Kang et al., 2015). Effective CKM practices help organizations anticipate

market trends, personalize customer interactions, and innovate continuously, enhancing both customer and brand experiences.

Recent advancements in knowledge creation theory, as discussed by Bratianu (2008a, b, 2022), highlight that knowledge represents a dynamic human process of justifying personal beliefs in the pursuit of truth. This dynamic nature allows knowledge to transform into explicit and tacit forms, making it adaptable and multifaceted across different contexts.

Knowledge dynamics involves multiple transfers of knowledge through four conversion processes: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. These processes facilitate the movement of knowledge between tacit and explicit forms, thereby highlighting the innate human characteristics of knowledge transformation. Observations, judgments, and a comprehensive understanding have enabled humans to leverage these processes for practical benefits in their work environments.

There are various definitions for CKM. Lu et al. (2021) define CKM as a dynamic process that captures and optimizes valuable customer data through diverse methods, sharing customer-generated knowledge throughout the organization. This process enhances and optimizes customer relationships through customer-oriented organizational models, frameworks, and environments. For example, according to Castagna et al. (2020), CKM combines organizational practices and dynamic skills related to creating, storing, and transmitting customer knowledge to gain a sustainable competitive advantage and improve e-business productivity through specific development strategies.

To make CKM tangible, three types of knowledge play a vital role in company-customer interactions: customer knowledge, customer knowledge, and customer knowledge (Khoddami & Osanloo, 2015). Each knowledge flow affects the performance speed and quality differently. By gathering customer information about other products, markets, and competitors, knowledge from customers helps companies better understand their positions and develop new ideas for innovation (Smith & McKeen, 2005).

*Knowledge About the Customer:* This dimension involves collecting and analysing customers' demographic data, purchasing habits, preferences, and feedback. Understanding customers allows organizations to tailor products, services, and marketing strategies to meet expectations efficiently.

*Knowledge From the Customer:* This dimension focuses on gathering valuable insights, feedback, and innovative ideas from customers and actively involving them in co-creation to enhance products, services, and business processes.

*Knowledge To the Customer:* This dimension aims to disseminate valuable information to

customers to facilitate informed decision-making. It includes providing product information, usage guidelines, and support resources. Companies can enhance customer experience and foster loyalty by providing customers with the required knowledge.

Despite the widespread discussion on KM, contemporary research on online and digital CKM remains limited. Moreover, the literature has not fully explored the complete set of CKM mechanisms or dynamic ways in which brands and companies build valuable customer experiences in an ever-changing digital context (Nysveen et al., 2012).

Bratianu and Andriessen (2008) introduced, for the first time, knowledge as an energy metaphor as an application of metaphorical thinking in knowledge management, which considers only two forms of knowledge, rational knowledge and emotional knowledge, because of the mapping of mechanical energy and thermal energy. Subsequently, Bratianu and Bejinaru (2019) reframed the concept from the knowledge entropy perspective by proposing knowledge as an energy field approach with three fundamental forms of knowledge: rational, emotional, and spiritual.

*Rational knowledge* is often considered synonymous with explicit knowledge, as it is expressed in natural or symbolic language. This form of knowledge is characterized by its reliance on reflection and logical thinking, making it a crucial aspect of intellectual discourse.

*Emotional knowledge* involves affective and intuitive aspects of knowledge. This includes feelings, emotions, and subjective insights that influence how individuals perceive and interpret information (Hill, 2008). Emotional knowledge is often tacit, meaning that it is difficult to articulate and share it explicitly. However, it also plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes, motivation, and interpersonal relationships within organizations.

*Spiritual knowledge* pertains to values, beliefs, and ethical dimensions of knowledge. This reflects an individual's deeper sense of purpose, meaning, and connection to a larger whole (Zohar & Marshall, 2004). Spiritual knowledge influences organizational culture and leadership by fostering a sense of commitment, trust, and moral integrity (Schein, 2004).

In contemporary marketing literature, it is widely recognized that consumers are active participants in and contributors to their own value creation rather than merely perceivers or assessors of value (Gummerus, 2013). Consumers' experiences with a brand stem from their exposure to the brand and the attention they pay to the experiential aspects of the brand's execution (Kruger, 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2007). Brand experience encompasses all types of experience, including consumption, shopping, products, and service encounters. brand-related stimuli such as a brand's design, identity, packaging, communication, and environment (Brakus et al., 2009). This involves all interactions between the consumer and the business,

product, or service, which includes points of contact (Grewal et al., 2009; Beckman et al., 2013; Merrilees, 2016; Dasgupta, 2016; Şahin et al., 2017). John Dewey, a philosopher, theorized that experience arises from the interactions between individuals and their surroundings (1922).

Brakus et al. (2009) conceptualized brand experience with four components: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural. Over time, the fifth component, relational, has emerged (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). Chahal and Dutta (2014) recently defined customer experience as encompassing five dimensions: sensory, affective, cognitive, physical, and relational. Thus, brand experience affects these customer experience dimensions.

Brand experience can be evaluated using metrics that assess the intensity and quality of the sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual dimensions. These metrics often involve consumer surveys and Likert-scale questionnaires, providing insights into consumer behaviour, brand loyalty, and overall brand equity. Researchers have used these scales to design and refine brand strategies and create targeted and effective marketing campaigns. Customer experience is not a static construct but a dynamic phenomenon that evolves over time. It is influenced by many factors, including individual interpretations, situational contexts, and previous brand interactions (Helkkula et al., 2012a). Understanding this dynamic nature is crucial for marketing managers to create and manage meaningful customer experience.

This scientific research program on "Customer knowledge management role in improving brand experience" aims to study and analyze how companies/brands use and manage data, information, and knowledge about consumers in the context of the current business and how drivers like the type of knowledge and customer context (Knowledge Dynamics – KDY and Consumer Empowerment Index – CEI) will improve brand performance indicators and overall consumer experience. The present topic begins by identifying the problems of cleavage and discontinuity in the literature regarding how customer knowledge models are integrated within companies and continues by proposing an integrated model of customer knowledge where dynamic knowledge and customer empowerment or co-creation play a pivotal role.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the impact of CKM on brand experience. The research begins with a bibliometric literature review, followed by qualitative interviews with 17 specialists to develop scales for knowledge dynamics. The quantitative phase involves a questionnaire-based survey with 291 respondents, primarily top and middle managers and specialists in the Romanian business market. The survey data is analyzed using SPSS and PLS-SEM software to test the proposed hypotheses and validate the measurement models.

The research model was established based on the hypothesis that the Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) model (Gebert et al., 2002) has a positive influence on Brand Experience (BEX) moderated by the Knowledge Dynamics model (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2019). The secondary objective of this study is to create a practical and informative method for measuring knowledge dynamics (KDY) and its three components: rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge management. This scale's comprehensive development makes it applicable across multiple industries, particularly in the B2C segment.

The research questions focus on the role of knowledge dynamics as a mediator between CKM and brand experience and the development of a comprehensive CKM framework. Specific objectives include investigating how CKM affects brand experience, developing a reliable measurement scale for knowledge dynamics, and exploring the integration of CKM with CRM systems to deliver personalized experiences.

#### **3.1. Research Objectives and Questions**

The primary objective is to investigate how CKM affects brand experience and to develop a reliable measurement scale for knowledge dynamics. The study aims to explore the various types of consumer knowledge management and their integration into marketing strategies. It also examines the role of knowledge dynamics and consumer empowerment in enhancing brand experience.

The research in hand intends to achieve the following objectives:

- O1.** To investigate the effect of Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) on Brand Experience (BEX) and how gaining structured and qualitative customer insights has a positive impact on customer experience.

- O2.** The development of Knowledge Dynamics (KDY) constructs, a research instrument, aims to assess reliability and validate a new scale that focuses on the rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge of customers.
- O3.** To investigate the different types of consumer knowledge management currently in use, how marketers integrate and use them in marketing strategies, and the value of knowledge dynamics in the consumer experience.
- O4.** To investigate the effect of additional mediators such as KDY and the Consumer Empowerment Index (CEI) on the relationship between Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) and Brand Experience (BEX) and how these pathways provide a better gauge of customer value to a brand or company than other models.

The research framework utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the research questions related to customer knowledge management and brand experience, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research components to enhance the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

### **3.2. Qualitative Research**

The qualitative component involves in-depth interviews with marketing and business professionals across various sectors, including banking, telecommunications, IT, retail, FMCG, B2B, marcom, health, digital advertising, and services. These interviews aim to gather insights into the practical application of CKM and its impact on brand experience. The data is analyzed using NVivo software, identifying key themes and patterns in customer knowledge management practices.

The interview process is designed to explore managers' perceptions of CKM, their investment in collecting and maintaining customer information, and the involvement of customers in the co-creation process. The interviews also examine strategic orientation, organizational structure, and culture related to customer knowledge expertise. The analysis focuses on identifying best practices and trends in managing brand experience through CKM and empowerment.

### **3.3. Quantitative Research:**

The quantitative phase involves a detailed survey distributed among top and middle managers, specialists, and consultants from various companies in the Romanian market. The questionnaire includes 60 inquiries divided into four sections, each designed to explore

different facets of the conceptual research model. Participants are asked to assess their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements on a 5-point Likert scale.

The survey data is analysed using statistical techniques such as factor analysis, regression, and correlation analyses to validate the hypothesized relationships. The use of PLS-SEM allows for the examination of complex structural relationships between variables, providing robust insights into the impact of CKM on brand experience.

The study tests several hypotheses, including:

**H1.** Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) has a positive impact on Brand Experience (BEX)

**H2.** Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) has a positive impact on Knowledge Dynamics (KDY)

**H3.** Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) has a positive impact on Consumer Empowerment Index (CEI)

**H4.** Knowledge Dynamics (KDY) has a positive effect on Brand Experience (BEX)

**H5.** Consumer Empowerment Index (CEI) has a positive effect on Knowledge Dynamics (KDY)

**H6.** Knowledge Dynamics (KDY) mediates the relationship between Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) and Brand Experience (BEX)

**H7.** Knowledge Dynamics (KDY) mediates the relationship between Consumer Empowerment Index (CEI) and Brand Experience (BEX)

**H8.** Consumer Empowerment Index (CEI) mediates the relationship between Customer Knowledge Management (CKM) and Brand Experience (BEX)

From this perspective, our study will enlarge its first scope to investigate the impact of (CKM) on (BEX) and the role of (KDY and CEI) as mediator in the relationship between (CKM) and (BEX) analysing the pathways and possible positive correlations between CKM-BEX, CKM-KDY, CKM-CEI, KDY-BEX, CEI-KDY, CEI-BEX along with CKM-KDY-BEX having KDY as mediator and CKM-CEI-BEX having CEI as mediator.

## **4. Theoretical Contributions:**

This thesis makes several theoretical contributions:

*Integration of CKM, KDY, and CEI:* Provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between these constructs and their impact on BEX.

*Validation of KDY Construct:* Develops and validates a new scale for measuring rational, emotional, and spiritual knowledge, applicable across multiple industries.

*Empirical Evidence on Drivers and Outcomes of BEX:* Offers empirical evidence on how CKM and CEI drive brand experience through knowledge dynamics.

The integration of these constructs contributes to a deeper understanding of how organizations can leverage customer knowledge to enhance brand experience. The validated KDY construct offers a new perspective on measuring knowledge dynamics, incorporating rational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

## **5. Practical Implications**

*Enhanced Marketing Strategies:* The validated measurement concept aids marketing managers in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective customer-experience strategies.

*Improved Customer Insights:* Highlights the importance of CKM in fostering dynamic knowledge environments that enhance customer experiences.

*Empowerment as a Strategic Tool:* Demonstrates the significant role of consumer empowerment in improving brand experiences, suggesting that businesses should focus on empowering consumers as part of their marketing strategies.

These practical implications are critical for marketing managers seeking to enhance brand experiences. By leveraging the insights from CKM and empowering consumers, organizations can create more personalized and engaging customer experiences.

## **6. Limitations**

*Sample Size and Scope:* The sample size, though adequate, was limited to specific industries and geographical regions, which may affect the generalizability of the findings.

*Cross-sectional Data:* The use of cross-sectional data limits the ability to infer causality between the studied constructs.

*Potential Bias in Self-reported Data:* Reliance on self-reported data from interviews and questionnaires may introduce bias.

These limitations suggest areas for future research, including expanding the sample size and scope to different industries and regions, and using longitudinal data to better understand causality.

## 7. General Conclusions

The study concludes that CKM, when effectively managed, significantly enhances knowledge dynamics within an organization, which in turn improves brand experience. Consumer empowerment also plays a crucial role in this process, further enhancing the impact of CKM on BEX. These findings underscore the importance of integrating CKM, KDY, and CEI in marketing strategies to create successful customer experiences.

The research bridges existing gaps in the literature and sets a foundation for future studies on the dynamic interplay between CKM, KDY, CEI, and BEX. It provides valuable insights for both academics and practitioners, highlighting the need for continuous adaptation and innovation in customer knowledge management to remain competitive in the evolving market landscape.

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