CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AS A STRATEGIC DRIVER OF VALUE CREATION IN ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Changing business dynamics and increasing competition are driving businesses to focus not only on products or services but also on the customer experience in every interaction. In the entrepreneurial context, flexible, personalized, and proximity-based interactions are characteristics that influence how customers perceive the value they receive. The complexity of interactions involving multiple channels and increasing customer expectations demands more adaptive and targeted experience management. This study aims to examine the role of customer experience as a strategic driver of value creation in entrepreneurial marketing practices. This research uses a qualitative approach, utilizing various relevant secondary data sources for in-depth analysis. The results indicate that customer experience plays a significant role in shaping value perceptions through interaction quality, emotional engagement, and the consistency of the experience. Furthermore, business actors' responsiveness in adjusting interaction strategies and their ability to manage resource constraints are crucial factors in maintaining the relevance of the customer experience. Overall, the integration of customer experience into entrepreneurial marketing strategies has strategic implications for supporting business sustainability, building loyalty, and creating differentiation amidst increasingly dynamic competition.

Keywords: Customer Experience, Value Creation, Entrepreneurial Marketing, Customer Interaction, Business Sustainability.

A. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the global business landscape over the past few decades have prompted companies to rethink how they build relationships with the market. Increasingly intense competition, driven by advances in digital technology and open access to information, has given consumers a much stronger bargaining position than before (Petricevic & Teece, 2019). In this situation, companies are no longer simply relying on product excellence or operational efficiency; they are instead required to deliver memorable, relevant, and sustainable interactions with customers. This shift in orientation is evident across various industrial sectors, where customer experience is becoming a central focus of business strategy, rather than merely an adjunct to transactional marketing activities (Keiningham et al., 2020).

Conversely, the development of modern entrepreneurship demonstrates equally complex dynamics. Businesses, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, face limited resources that require them to be more adaptive, creative, and responsive to market changes. This situation has led to the emergence of more flexible, experimental, and opportunity-oriented marketing approaches, often developing outside the traditional marketing framework (Quansah et al., 2022). In practice, businesses are not only seeking to reach customers but also building deeper engagement through various forms of personalized and contextual interactions. These efforts are often carried out through the use of digital technology, social media, and community-based platforms that enable intensive two-way communication (Singh et al., 2021).

However, the reality on the ground shows that not all businesses are able to manage these interactions optimally. Many initiatives are carried out sporadically without integrated planning, resulting in inconsistent customer experiences. In some cases, the mismatch between customer expectations and the reality they experience has the potential to undermine trust and loyalty (Witell et al., 2020). This becomes even more crucial when customers have numerous, easily accessible alternatives, allowing them to switch from one brand to another in a relatively short time. This situation emphasizes that the quality of interactions built with customers has direct implications for business sustainability (Rattalino, 2018).

This phenomenon is further amplified by the increasing role of digital technology in everyday life. The integration of various digital platforms into business activities has transformed the way customers interact with products and services. The customer experience is no longer limited to physical touchpoints but extends across a variety of interconnected digital channels (Yadav & Pavlou, 2020). In this context, every interaction, whether direct or indirect, contributes to the overall customer perception. This complexity requires businesses to be able to manage multiple points of interaction simultaneously, while maintaining consistency and relevance in each experience (Lin et al., 2020).

Amidst these changes, efforts to create value have become increasingly challenging. Value is no longer perceived as something solely determined by the company, but rather is formed through an interaction process that actively involves customers. Customers are not merely beneficiaries but also play a role in shaping the meaning of the products or services they consume (Laszlo et al., 2020). In entrepreneurial practice, this presents both opportunities and challenges, as businesses need to be able to manage the dynamics of these interactions to generate sustainable value. The inability to understand and respond to these dynamics has the potential to hinder business growth, especially in a highly competitive business environment (Cosenz et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the pressure to continuously innovate is also increasing as customer preferences change rapidly and are not always predictable. Businesses are required not only to respond to existing needs but also to anticipate changes that may occur in the future. In this context, customer experience becomes one tool that can be used to build differentiation that is difficult for competitors to imitate (Anning-Dorson & Nyamekye, 2020). However, efforts to deliver a superior experience are not always smooth, especially when faced with limited resources and organizational capacity. Many businesses struggle to integrate the various elements involved in creating a customer experience, resulting in suboptimal results (Burström et al., 2021).

This situation is further complicated by the gap between designed strategies and implementation on the ground. It's not uncommon to find that initiatives aimed at improving the customer experience aren't supported by adequate systems and processes. This results in inconsistencies in service delivery, which ultimately impacts customer perceptions of the overall quality of the business. In the entrepreneurial context, where organizational structures tend to be simpler and more flexible, this challenge is further compounded by the frequent lack of standard operating procedures for managing customer interactions (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2019).

Furthermore, rising customer expectations are also a factor that cannot be ignored. Access to extensive information means customers have a more diverse set of references when evaluating a product or service. They compare not only brands within the same industry but also their experiences in other sectors. This creates new standards that businesses must meet, including in terms of service speed, personalization, and ease of access. Failure to meet these expectations can directly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty (Zhong & Moon, 2020).

In this context, there is a need to more deeply understand how customer experience can play a role in supporting value creation efforts, particularly in entrepreneurial practices with their unique characteristics. Furthermore, the increasingly uncertain business environment also demands a more adaptive approach to managing customer relationships (Chen et al., 2018). This uncertainty can stem from various factors, ranging from regulatory changes and market dynamics to rapid technological developments. In such situations, the ability to maintain customer relevance is key to maintaining business continuity. Customer experience, in this context, can be an instrument that enables businesses to stay connected to ever-changing market needs and preferences (Niemimaa et al., 2019).

Considering these various issues, it is crucial to position customer experience as an integral part of business strategy, particularly in the entrepreneurial context. This approach is not only related to efforts to increase customer satisfaction but also as a means to create sustainable value through meaningful interactions. However, implementation in the field still faces various challenges that require further attention, both in planning and implementation. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of customer experience in driving value creation in entrepreneurial marketing practices and contribute to the development of more adaptive and sustainable business strategies.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Customer Experience

Customer Experience can be defined as a consumer's interpretation of their total interaction with a brand. The ultimate goal of implementing this concept is to create a positive relationship with consumers and build loyalty. The concept of customer experience is based on the understanding that when a consumer purchases a service, it involves a set of activities that cannot be clearly stated. However, when a consumer purchases an experience, they are paying to spend time on an unforgettable opportunity or experience that makes a company known uniquely.

There are several categories of customer experience, which divide experience into several categories:

a) Experience in Product
Experience in product is the consumer's experience with a product or service. Experience is one of the product's strengths. This indicates that if a company provides optimal products or services to consumers, consumers will have a positive experience with the product or service they consume (Schallehn et al., 2019).

b) Experience in Environment
Experience in the environment is a company's ability to provide an overall experience to consumers. The business environment is a crucial factor in creating customer experience. This is because the business environment/place is a tool to

introduce consumers to the overall experience that will be felt, and is also the most easily visible exchange and interactive exchange (Calza et al., 2023).

c) Experience in Loyalty Communication

Delighting customers is a key factor in providing a customer experience. The best opportunity to delight customers is after they receive service. Most companies provide a customer experience that only reaches the point of satisfaction, yet consumers sometimes desire something more, which can build trust in a service and foster strong customer loyalty (Torres et al., 2021).

d) Experience in Customer Service and Social Exchange

Experience is the combination of the service provided by a company and customer expectations. Employees are a crucial factor in determining customer experience, as they are the driving force behind consumer trust in a brand, or what ultimately determines whether consumers accept or reject a company's brand. This can be seen in their ability to provide customer service (Nobar & Rostamzadeh, 2018).

e) Experience in Events

Company events can provide customer experiences. With the numerous events held by companies, companies are able to encourage consumers to participate. This way, consumers will receive clear information about products or services, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of them (Yachin, 2018).

C. METHOD

This research will be conducted using a qualitative approach aimed at examining the role of customer experience in driving value creation in entrepreneurial marketing practices. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to more deeply understand the dynamics of interactions between business actors and customers in a real and evolving context. Therefore, this research focuses not only on identifying the phenomena that occur but also attempts to capture the meaning formed from these interactions, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of how customer experience contributes to value creation in entrepreneurial activities. Through this approach, research data will be obtained from various sources, such as research results and previous studies that are still relevant to the research focus. The collected data will then be systematically processed to identify patterns, relationships, and trends that emerge in the context of entrepreneurial marketing. This data processing process is carried out continuously until a comprehensive understanding of the role of customer experience in creating value is obtained, so that the research results can make a meaningful contribution to the development of more adaptive and sustainable business strategies (Roosinda et al., 2021).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Dynamics of Customer Interaction in Entrepreneurial Contexts

Interactions between businesses and customers in an entrepreneurial context exhibit distinct characteristics compared to more established and structured business practices. In many cases, the interaction patterns that develop tend to be flexible, develop organically, and do not always follow standard procedures. This is influenced by limited resources, simple organizational structures, and the need to respond quickly to market situations. Businesses often rely on a more personal approach to communicating with customers, so that interactions focus not only on the exchange of economic value but also reflect closer, more contextual relationships. This flexibility allows businesses to adapt their approach to customer characteristics, but also has the potential to create irregularities in the interaction patterns.

In this dynamic, the intensity of communication is a factor significantly influenced by the emotional closeness between business owners and customers. Personal relationships often foster more intense and ongoing communication, especially in small businesses that rely on customer loyalty as a primary source of business continuity. This intensity is reflected not only in the frequency of interactions but also in the quality of the engagement, where customers feel more valued and cared for. However, the intensity of communication also depends heavily on the business context, including the type of product or service offered and the characteristics of the market served. In some situations, overly intense communication can actually create uncomfortable perceptions for customers, so businesses need to balance high engagement with allowing customers to maintain their autonomy.

The development of digital technology has expanded the dimensions of these interactions by providing various communication channels that enable faster and broader relationships. Digital platforms provide a space for businesses to reach customers without geographical limitations, while also opening up opportunities to build more interactive and responsive communication. The presence of social media, instant messaging applications, and various community-based platforms has transformed the way businesses interact with customers, where communication is no longer one-way but involves active participation from both parties (Van Veldhoven & Vanthienen, 2022). This accelerates the flow of information and allows businesses to respond to customer needs in real time, but also increases customer expectations regarding the speed and quality of responses. Consequently, businesses are required to be able to manage these various channels simultaneously to remain relevant amidst increasingly dynamic competition.

As the interaction approaches used increase in diversity, customer responses also show significant variation. Differences in background, preferences, and previous experiences influence how customers respond to the interactions they receive. Some customers tend to respond positively to a personal and intense approach, while others prefer efficient and less intrusive interactions. This variation creates unique challenges for businesses in determining the right engagement strategy, as an effective approach for one customer group may not yield the same results for another. Therefore, the ability to read the situation and adapt your approach is crucial to maintaining quality customer relationships.

Amidst this complexity, maintaining a consistent experience across multiple touchpoints is a challenge that cannot be ignored. Interactions that occur through various channels, both in-person and digital, often result in varying experiences for customers. This inconsistency can arise from differences in communication methods, limited coordination, or a lack of integration between the various interaction channels used. For businesses, this situation has the potential to disrupt customers' perceptions of the overall quality of the business, especially when the experience received does not align with pre-conceived expectations. Therefore, more targeted efforts are needed to ensure that each touchpoint delivers a consistent experience, so that the interactions are not only effective in the short term but also support the sustainability of customer relationships in the long term.

2. Customer Experience in Shaping Perceived Value

The experience a customer experiences with a business plays a crucial role in shaping their overall perception of value. This perception is not formed instantly, but rather develops through the accumulation of experiences customers have at various touchpoints, before, during, and after the consumption process. In the entrepreneurial context, where interactions are often more personal and contextual, the customer experience becomes even more significant because it can create a deeper impression than simply the attributes of a product or service. Customers tend to assess the value they receive not only from what they receive functionally, but also from how the interaction unfolds, including the perceived ease, convenience, and relevance throughout the journey.

The quality of interactions between businesses and customers significantly influences the resulting level of satisfaction. Interactions that are responsive, consistent, and meet customer expectations tend to result in higher levels of satisfaction, ultimately strengthening the perceived value. Conversely, poorly managed interactions, such as delayed responses or inconsistencies in information, can diminish the overall quality of the experience, even if the product or service offered is of high quality. In practice, customers don't separate the product from the interaction process, but rather view both as a unified whole that shapes their overall experience. Therefore, the quality of the interaction becomes an integral element in building positive perceptions of value.

Furthermore, emotional aspects also play a significant role in strengthening the impression formed about a product or service. Experiences that evoke positive feelings, such as being appreciated, understood, or cared for, tend to leave a more lasting impression than neutral experiences. In an entrepreneurial context, where interactions are often direct and personal, the opportunity to build emotional bonds is even greater. These bonds not only influence short-term perceptions of value but also play a role in shaping long-term customer attitudes and preferences. However, emotional aspects are also sensitive, so even a small mistake in an interaction can quickly shift a previously positive perception to a negative one.

Figure 1. Customer Experience and Loyalty

This figure illustrates the relationship between customer experience and the formation of perceived value in a structured manner. Customer experience acts as a starting point that influences the quality of interactions and customers' emotional responses, which then collectively shape perceived value. This perceived value then determines the level of customer satisfaction, which ultimately contributes to the formation of loyalty. This visualization emphasizes that value creation is a gradual process influenced by the interconnectedness of customer experience elements.

Consistency of experience across various touchpoints is a crucial factor influencing customers' level of trust in a business. When customers receive a consistent and predictable experience in every interaction, they tend to build confidence that the business can consistently meet their expectations. Conversely, inconsistencies in experience can raise doubts, even when some interactions are positive. In an increasingly competitive business environment, trust is a valuable asset, serving as the foundation for building long-term relationships with customers. Therefore, maintaining consistent experience is not only operational but also has strategic implications for strengthening a business's position in the eyes of customers.

On the other hand, negative experiences have a disproportionate impact on the perceived value. A single unsatisfactory experience can erase previously established positive experiences, especially when the experience touches on aspects that customers consider important. In many cases, disappointed customers not only lower their assessment of the value they received but also tend to share the experience with others, both directly and through digital platforms. This creates a ripple effect that can influence the perceptions of other potential customers. Therefore, the ability of businesses to manage and respond to negative experiences is crucial, not only for restoring relationships with affected customers but also for maintaining the overall perception of value in the market.

Considering these dynamics, it is clear 5 that customer experience plays a highly complex role in shaping perceived value. This process is not influenced by a single factor but rather the result of the interaction of various interrelated elements, ranging from the quality of interactions and emotional engagement to the consistency of the experience. In the entrepreneurial context, where flexibility and customer intimacy are key characteristics, managing the customer experience becomes increasingly important as part of efforts to create sustainable value. Without adequate management, the potential of customer experience in shaping value perceptions will not be optimally utilized, thus limiting the ability of business actors to compete in an ever-evolving business environment.

3. Entrepreneurial Responsiveness in Designing Customer Experience

The ability of businesses to respond to changing customer preferences is a key determinant in creating relevant experiences amidst ever-evolving market dynamics. These changes in preferences don't always occur gradually, but often occur rapidly and are influenced by various external factors, such as digital trends, information flows, and lifestyle shifts. In the entrepreneurial context, this requires a high level of sensitivity to changing signals emerging from customer behavior. Businesses that accurately read these changes tend to be more adaptive in adjusting their approach, ensuring that the experience delivered remains aligned with evolving expectations. Conversely, delays in responding to changing preferences have the potential to create a gap between what customers expect and what they receive, ultimately reducing the overall quality of the experience.

This responsiveness is inextricably linked to businesses' ability to utilize customer feedback as a basis for adjusting interaction strategies. Feedback, whether delivered in person or through digital channels, provides insight into how customers perceive their experiences. In practice, businesses that actively process and act on feedback tend to have a better understanding of customer needs, enabling them to design more targeted interactions (Sheng, 2019). However, this process doesn't always run systematically, especially in small businesses that lack formal mechanisms for managing customer data. As a result, much of the potential information goes unutilized, limiting opportunities to improve the customer experience.

Amidst these limitations, flexibility is a prominent characteristic in businesses' efforts to create relevant and contextual experiences. This flexibility is reflected in the ability to adapt interaction approaches based on the situation, including in communication, service delivery, and tailoring offerings. In many cases, businesses rely on an improvisational approach to respond quickly to customer needs, without being tied to rigid procedures. This approach allows for more personalized and context-specific experiences, but also carries the risk of inconsistency when not balanced with an adequate framework. Therefore, flexibility needs to be carefully managed to continue providing value without sacrificing the overall quality of the experience.

Resource constraints are an integral challenge for businesses in optimally managing customer experiences. These limitations relate not only to financial aspects but also to time, manpower, and technological capacity. In these circumstances, businesses are often faced with strategic choices regarding resource allocation, which ultimately impacts the quality of the experience they can provide to customers. For example, workforce limitations can result in slow customer response times, while technological limitations can limit the ability to integrate multiple interaction channels. This situation requires clear priorities in customer experience management to ensure that available resources are utilized effectively for maximum impact.

On the other hand, efforts to continuously innovate to create engaging experiences often clash with the need to maintain service consistency. Innovation is necessary to maintain customer appeal and relevance, especially in a competitive and rapidly changing business environment. However, innovation undertaken without considering consistency can create confusion or uncertainty for customers, especially when changes are not accompanied by adequate communication. Therefore, businesses need to balance the drive to innovate with the need to maintain the stability of the experience customers are already familiar with. This balance is crucial because it directly relates to how customers build expectations and trust in the business in question.

4. Strategic Implications for Sustainable Value Creation

In the context of entrepreneurship, customer experience increasingly plays a crucial role in supporting business sustainability amidst a competitive and ever-changing business environment. Sustainability is no longer solely determined by a business's ability to maintain financial performance, but also by its capacity to build stable and enduring relationships with customers. Consistent, relevant experiences that meet customer expectations contribute to creating relationships that are not easily replaced by competitors. In situations where customers have many alternative options, meaningful experiences are one factor that can resist the tendency for customers to switch, thus providing a stronger foundation for long-term business sustainability.

The link between customer experience and long-term loyalty becomes even more evident when interactions are not merely transactional but also involve emotional dimensions and trust. Customers who repeatedly experience satisfying experiences tend to develop a deeper attachment to the business in question. This attachment is reflected in more stable behaviors, such as a tendency to make repeat purchases, provide recommendations, and demonstrate a higher tolerance for potential shortcomings. Loyalty formed through this experience has more lasting characteristics compared to loyalty driven by price factors or short-term incentives, thus providing significant strategic value for business actors in maintaining their customer base.

Furthermore, the interactions between businesses and customers also play a crucial role in creating business differentiation. In many cases, the products or services offered by businesses do not always offer significant functional differences compared to competitors. Therefore, the experience generated through these interactions becomes a key means of distinguishing oneself in the market. This differentiation lies not only in what is offered, but also in how it is delivered and perceived by customers. Responsive, personalized, and consistent interactions can create a unique impression, ultimately shaping a business's identity in the eyes of customers. Thus, the customer experience serves not only as a tool to meet needs but also as a medium for building a stronger competitive position.

The implications of this strategic role are reflected in how businesses make decisions in their entrepreneurial marketing activities. Decisions are no longer solely focused on efficiency or market reach, but also consider their impact on the quality of the customer experience. This encompasses various aspects, from the choice of communication channels and interaction design to the method of delivering value to customers (Adel et al., 2020). Businesses are required to have a more holistic perspective in viewing the relationship between marketing activities and the customer experience, so that every decision they make supports long-term goals. In practice, this often requires adjustments in the way of thinking and acting, especially for business actors who were previously more oriented towards an operational approach.

However, efforts to maintain a quality customer experience are not without challenges, particularly as a business grows. As business scale increases, operational complexity also tends to increase, which can ultimately impact the consistency of experience delivery. Interactions that were previously personal and direct can become more fragmented, especially when involving more parties or communication channels. This situation has the potential to diminish the quality of the customer experience if not balanced with adequate systems and processes. Furthermore, business growth often demands standardization in various operational aspects, which, while necessary for efficiency, can also reduce flexibility in tailoring the experience to diverse customer needs.

Another challenge arises from the need to maintain a balance between business expansion and the ability to manage customer relationships. Growth that is too rapid without being accompanied by readiness to manage the customer experience can create a gap between expectations and reality. This can result in decreased levels of satisfaction and trust, ultimately disrupting efforts to create sustainable value. Therefore, businesses need to carefully consider how their growth strategies align with their ability to maintain a quality customer experience. In this context, customer experience is not only the result of business activities, but also a primary consideration in determining the direction of future business development.

E. CONCLUSION

Customer experience plays a significant role in shaping and driving value creation in entrepreneurial marketing practices. Flexible, personalized, and contextual interactions are the primary foundation for building value perceptions that are not only functional but also emotional. In this process, the quality of interactions, the consistency of experiences, and the business owner's ability to respond to the dynamics of customer preferences are interrelated factors that determine how value is created and maintained. This demonstrates that customer experience can no longer be viewed as a supporting element, but rather as a strategic component that influences the direction and sustainability of a business. Furthermore, the ability of businesses to adaptively manage customer experiences is key to navigating the ever-evolving complexity of the business environment. Responsiveness to customer feedback, flexibility in designing interactions, and efforts to maintain a balance between innovation and service consistency are crucial aspects in ensuring that the experience delivered remains relevant and meaningful. On the other hand, limited resources and increasing operational complexity, especially as a business grows, present challenges that must be carefully managed to avoid compromising the quality of the customer experience. Ultimately, customer experience has proven to have broad strategic implications in supporting business sustainability, building long-term loyalty, and creating differentiation amidst increasingly fierce competition. Effective customer experience management enables businesses to not only meet customer expectations but also build stronger, more sustainable relationships. Therefore, integrating customer experience into entrepreneurial marketing strategies is a must, especially for businesses seeking to maintain long-term relevance and competitiveness.

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