

## THE EVOLUTION OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (CX) CONSTRUCT: AN INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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### Abstract

Customer Experience (CX) has emerged as a critical construct in contemporary marketing and management due to increasing competition and rising customer expectations. Traditionally, firms focused on service quality and customer satisfaction; however, the growing complexity of customer interactions has shifted attention toward holistic and multidimensional experiences. Despite its importance, the CX construct remains fragmented, with diverse definitions, dimensions, and theoretical perspectives across disciplines. This lack of integration creates challenges for both researchers and practitioners in understanding and managing CX effectively. To address this gap, this study adopts a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review to examine the evolution of CX and synthesize existing knowledge into a unified conceptual framework. The findings reveal that CX has evolved through transactional, relational, experiential, and digital phases, reflecting broader changes in business environments. The study identifies four key dimensions—functional, emotional, social, and digital—that interact dynamically across the customer journey to influence outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. The proposed integrative framework consolidates these dimensions into a cohesive model, addressing fragmentation in the literature and extending existing theories by incorporating digital and omnichannel perspectives. The study concludes that CX is a dynamic, multidimensional construct requiring a holistic management approach. It recommends future empirical validation and highlights the importance of leveraging emerging technologies to enhance customer experience in an increasingly experience-driven economy.

**Keywords:** *Customer Experience (CX), Customer Journey, Experiential Marketing, Omnichannel Strategy, Conceptual Framework*

### INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive and rapidly evolving marketplace, organizations are increasingly recognizing that sustainable differentiation cannot be achieved solely through superior product quality or operational efficiency. Instead, firms must focus on delivering meaningful and memorable customer experiences that resonate across the entire customer journey (Zha et al., 2023). Customer Experience (CX) has therefore emerged as a critical construct in both marketing and management literature, reflecting the cumulative perceptions customers develop through interactions with a firm. These interactions occur across multiple touchpoints, including physical, digital, and social environments, making CX inherently complex and multifaceted. As competition intensifies and customer expectations continue to rise, businesses are compelled to adopt a more holistic and customer-centric approach (Keyser et al., 2025). Consequently, CX has become a key driver of competitive advantage, influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term value creation. Historically, organizations concentrated primarily on tangible outputs such as product features, pricing strategies, and service quality as the main determinants of success. Early management and marketing theories emphasized efficiency, standardization, and performance consistency as the primary means of satisfying customers (Ortiz et al., 2024). However, as markets matured and became increasingly saturated, these traditional sources of differentiation became less effective. Firms began to recognize that customers value not only what they receive but also how they feel during and after the interaction. This realization led to a shift

toward intangible factors such as emotions, perceptions, and engagement, which play a crucial role in shaping customer judgments (Peruchini et al., 2024). As a result, the focus of competitive strategy gradually moved from transactions to relationships and experiences. This paradigm shift has elevated CX to a strategic priority for organizations seeking to build deeper connections and long-term loyalty among their customers. Despite the growing recognition of its importance, the CX construct remains conceptually fragmented and lacks a universally accepted definition. Various academic disciplines—including marketing, service management, psychology, and information systems—have approached CX from different perspectives, each emphasizing distinct aspects of the construct (Wetzels et al., 2023). This diversity has resulted in inconsistencies in how CX is defined, measured, and operationalized across studies. For instance, some researchers focus on emotional responses, while others emphasize cognitive evaluations or behavioral outcomes. Such variation creates confusion and limits the ability to compare findings or develop standardized measurement tools (Arkadan et al., 2024). Moreover, practitioners often struggle to translate theoretical insights into actionable strategies due to this lack of conceptual clarity. Therefore, there is a pressing need to integrate these diverse perspectives into a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of CX.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the evolution of the CX construct and synthesizing existing theoretical perspectives into an integrative conceptual framework. By tracing how CX has developed over time, the study aims to identify key shifts in focus and underlying assumptions within the literature. It also seeks to consolidate the various dimensions of CX that have been proposed by different scholars. In doing so, the research is guided by three central questions that structure the investigation. First, it asks how the conceptualization of CX has evolved across different phases of marketing and management thought. Second, it explores what core dimensions consistently emerge in the literature despite disciplinary differences. Third, it examines how these dimensions can be systematically integrated into a unified and coherent framework. Through this approach, the study provides both a historical and analytical perspective on CX. The primary objective of this article is to develop a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the Customer Experience (CX) construct by examining its conceptual evolution and synthesizing existing theoretical perspectives into a unified framework. Specifically, the study aims to trace how CX has developed over time across different disciplines, identify the key dimensions that consistently define the construct, and address the fragmentation present in current literature.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Foundations of CX**

The conceptual foundations of Customer Experience (CX) can be traced back to early developments in marketing theory, particularly in the areas of customer satisfaction and service quality. Customer satisfaction research primarily focused on the cognitive evaluation process in which customers compare their expectations with the actual performance of a product or service (Zha et al., 2023). This expectation–disconfirmation paradigm became a dominant framework for understanding how customers form judgments about their consumption experiences. In parallel, service quality models such as SERVQUAL introduced a more structured approach to evaluating service delivery, emphasizing dimensions like reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. These models provided organizations with practical tools to assess and improve service performance, thereby enhancing customer perceptions (Keyser et al., 2025). However, both satisfaction and service quality perspectives were largely transactional and outcome-oriented, focusing on isolated interactions rather than the overall experience. As a result, they offered limited insight into the holistic and dynamic nature of customer interactions across multiple touchpoints.

Over time, the limitations of these traditional approaches led to the emergence of experiential marketing, which marked a significant shift in how firms understood and engaged with customers. Scholars began to argue that customers are not merely rational decision-makers seeking functional benefits, but also emotional and experiential beings who value sensory stimulation, feelings, and meaningful engagement. This new perspective emphasized the importance of creating memorable and immersive experiences that go beyond the core product or service (Ortiz et al., 2024). The concept was further strengthened by the Experience Economy framework, which positioned experiences as a distinct category of economic value alongside goods and services. According to this view, organizations must orchestrate engaging events and interactions that leave lasting impressions on customers. This shift expanded the scope of marketing from delivering value to staging experiences, thereby laying the groundwork for the modern CX construct (Peruchini et al., 2024). Consequently, CX evolved into a more comprehensive and multidimensional concept that integrates cognitive, emotional, and sensory elements within the broader customer journey.

## **Customer Experience and Dimensions of CX**

Customer Experience (CX) has been conceptualized in a variety of ways across the literature, reflecting its complexity and interdisciplinary nature. Some scholars define CX as the internal and subjective response that customers develop because of direct or indirect interactions with a firm, emphasizing the personal and psychological nature of these experiences. Others adopt a broader perspective, viewing CX as a cumulative process that unfolds over time across the entire customer journey, encompassing multiple touchpoints and channels (Wetzels et al., 2023). This longitudinal view highlights that CX is not limited to a single transaction but is shaped by a sequence of interactions before, during, and after purchase. Despite these differences in emphasis, most definitions converge around three fundamental elements: interaction, perception, and response. Interaction refers to the various points of contact between the customer and the organization, including both physical and digital environments (Arkadan et al., 2024). Perception captures how customers interpret and make sense of these interactions, while response reflects the resulting cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions. Together, these elements provide a comprehensive understanding of CX as a dynamic and holistic construct.

The multidimensional nature of CX further underscores its complexity and richness as a concept. Scholars widely agree that CX cannot be fully understood through a single lens, as it encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions that jointly shape the overall experience. The cognitive dimension relates to customers' thoughts, beliefs, and evaluations of a product or service, often involving rational judgment and information processing (Gustafsson et al., 2024). The emotional dimension captures the feelings and affective responses that arise during interactions, such as satisfaction, frustration, or delight, which play a critical role in memory formation and loyalty. The behavioral dimension reflects customers' actions, including participation, engagement, and decision-making processes throughout the journey. Additionally, the sensory dimension highlights the role of physical and perceptual stimuli—such as sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—in shaping experiential outcomes (Wirtz et al., 2025). Finally, the social dimension emphasizes interactions with other customers, employees, and communities, which can significantly influence perceptions and experiences. Together, these dimensions illustrate that CX is a holistic construct that integrates rational, emotional, physical, and social elements into a unified experience.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in a systematic literature review (SLR) to explore and synthesize the Customer Experience (CX) construct. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the study's objective of developing a deeper conceptual understanding rather than testing predefined hypotheses. Relevant literature was systematically identified from major academic databases using carefully selected keywords, including "customer experience," "customer journey," and "experience economy." The selection process followed explicit inclusion criteria, focusing on articles with high theoretical relevance, significant citation impact, and clear contributions to CX literature. This approach ensured that the data corpus was both comprehensive and academically robust. By relying on secondary qualitative data from scholarly sources, the study captures a wide range of perspectives across disciplines.

The analysis of the selected literature was conducted using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within textual data. Key concepts, definitions, and dimensions of CX were coded iteratively, allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data. Through this process, recurring patterns and relationships among CX components were identified and organized into meaningful categories. The development of the integrative framework followed a structured qualitative procedure consisting of three main stages: first, identifying core dimensions of CX; second, examining the interconnections among these dimensions; and third, synthesizing them into a coherent conceptual model. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed systematic cross-referencing of multiple sources and maintained transparency in the coding and analysis process. This rigorous qualitative approach strengthens the validity of the proposed framework and ensures its relevance for both academic and practical applications.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Evolution of the CX Construct**

The evolution of Customer Experience (CX) can be understood as a progressive shift across four distinct phases, each reflecting broader changes in marketing thought and business practice. The first phase was predominantly transactional, where the primary focus was on customer satisfaction and service quality as key indicators of organizational performance (Gounaris & Almoraiash, 2024). During this stage, firms concentrated on delivering consistent and reliable services, with success measured through the fulfillment of customer expectations.

Models such as the expectation–disconfirmation paradigm and SERVQUAL dominated this period, emphasizing efficiency, standardization, and measurable outcomes (Carazas et al., 2024). Customer interactions were viewed as discrete events rather than part of a continuous journey, limiting the scope of analysis to individual transactions. As competition intensified, it became evident that merely satisfying customers was insufficient for long-term success. This realization paved the way for a broader understanding of customer relationships beyond isolated service encounters (Popli et al., 2022).

The second phase marked a shift toward relational perspectives, where organizations began to prioritize customer retention, loyalty, and engagement. In this stage, the focus expanded from short-term transactions to long-term relationships, recognizing the value of maintaining ongoing interactions with customers (Velooso & Gómez-Suárez, 2023). The third phase further extended this perspective by introducing experiential elements, emphasizing that customers seek not only functional value but also emotional and memorable experiences. This phase highlighted the importance of understanding customers’ feelings, perceptions, and holistic journeys across multiple touchpoints. Finally, the fourth and current phase is characterized by rapid digital transformation and the emergence of omnichannel environments. Advances in technology have enabled firms to interact with customers across various platforms, creating seamless and integrated experiences (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2022). In this phase, CX is shaped by real-time data, personalization, and the integration of physical and digital channels, making it more dynamic, complex, and customer-centric than ever before.

**Table 1.** Evolution of Customer Experience (CX): Phases, Characteristics, and Strategic Implications

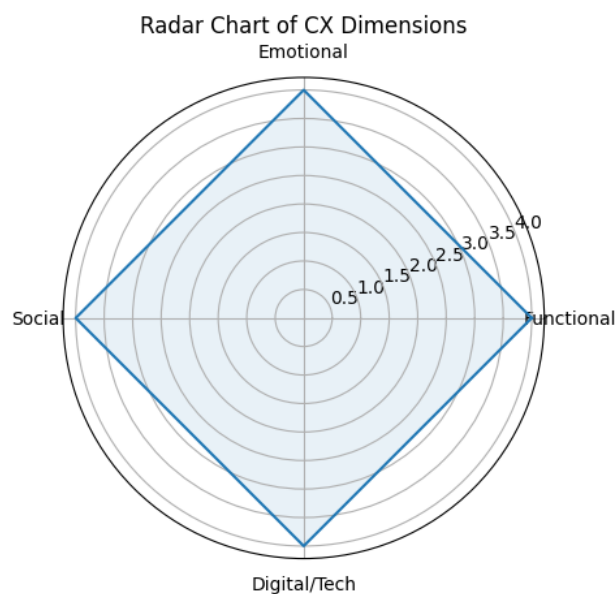
Phase	Focus	Key Characteristics	Strategic Implication
Transactional	Customer satisfaction & service quality	Efficiency, reliability, standardized service, discrete interactions	Ensure consistency and meet customer expectations
Relational	Loyalty and engagement	Long-term relationships, ongoing interactions, customer retention focus	Build trust and enhance customer loyalty
Experiential	Emotions and holistic experience	Focus on feelings, perceptions, and memorable multi-touchpoint experiences	Design engaging and meaningful customer experiences
Digital/Omnichannel	Personalization and integration	Use of technology, real-time data, seamless cross-channel interactions	Deliver personalized and integrated customer journeys

The table as shown in Table 1 illustrates the progressive evolution of Customer Experience (CX) across four distinct phases, highlighting how organizational focus and strategic priorities have shifted over time. In the transactional phase, firms concentrated primarily on ensuring customer satisfaction through reliable and standardized service delivery, viewing interactions as isolated events. As competition intensified, the relational phase emerged, emphasizing the importance of building long-term relationships, fostering customer loyalty, and encouraging continuous engagement (Mao et al., 2023). This was followed by the experiential phase, where organizations recognized that customers value not only functional outcomes but also emotional and memorable experiences across multiple touchpoints. In this stage, the focus expanded to designing meaningful interactions that shape perceptions and feelings (Kim & So, 2022). Finally, the digital and omnichannel phase reflects the current landscape, where technological advancements enable firms to deliver personalized, seamless, and integrated experiences across various platforms. Overall, the table demonstrates a clear shift from a product- and transaction-oriented approach to a holistic, customer-centric strategy driven by experience and digital innovation (Zha et al., 2023).

**Key Dimensions Identified**

The analysis identifies four primary dimensions that collectively shape the Customer Experience (CX), highlighting its inherently multifaceted nature. The functional dimension focuses on the core performance aspects of a product or service, including efficiency, reliability, and usability. This dimension reflects customers’ rational evaluations of how well a service meets their needs and expectations, often serving as the foundation of the overall experience (Keyser et al., 2025). Without strong functional performance, it is difficult for organizations to create positive impressions, regardless of other experiential elements. In contrast, the emotional dimension captures customers’ feelings and affective responses during interactions, such as satisfaction, excitement, frustration, or

delight. Emotional responses play a crucial role in shaping memory, influencing future behavior, and strengthening customer loyalty (Ortiz et al., 2024). Together, the functional and emotional dimensions form the core of how customers evaluate and internalize their experiences. Beyond these internal evaluations, the social and digital/technological dimensions extend CX into broader interactive and contextual domains. The social dimension emphasizes the importance of interactions with other customers, employees, and communities, recognizing that experiences are often co-created through social engagement and shared environments (Weidig et al., 2024). This includes word-of-mouth communication, online communities, and peer influence, all of which can significantly shape customer perceptions. Meanwhile, the digital and technological dimension reflects the growing role of digital platforms, data analytics, and personalization in modern CX. Advances in technology enable organizations to deliver seamless, real-time, and tailored experiences across multiple channels, enhancing convenience and relevance for customers (Quiñones & Rojas, 2023). These four dimensions do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact dynamically to influence the overall experience in a holistic manner. Their integration underscores the need for organizations to adopt a comprehensive approach when designing and managing CX in today's complex and digitally driven environment (Kandampully et al., 2022).



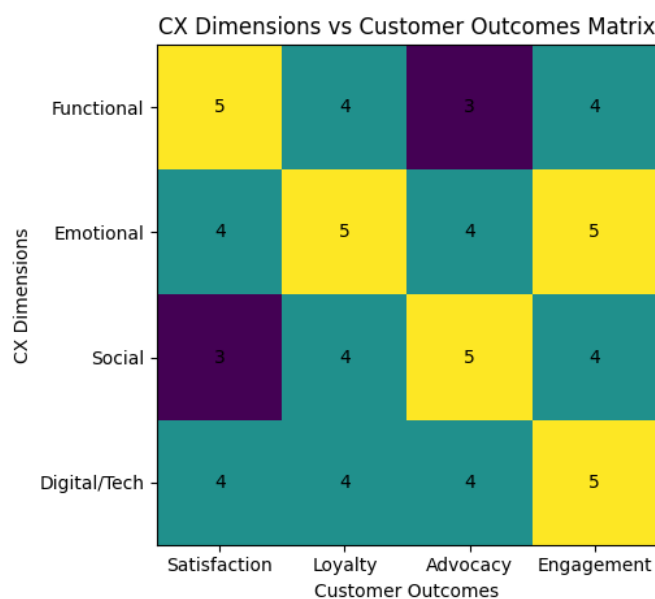
**Figure 1.** Radar Chart of Key Customer Experience (CX) Dimensions

The radar chart as shown in Figure 1 visually represents the four key dimensions of Customer Experience (CX)—functional, emotional, social, and digital/technological—highlighting their equal and interconnected importance in shaping the overall customer experience. Each axis extends outward to indicate the relative contribution of each dimension, and the symmetrical shape of the chart suggests that all four dimensions are equally significant in this conceptual model (Gahler et al., 2022). This balanced representation reinforces the idea that CX cannot be dominated by a single factor; rather, it is the integration of multiple dimensions that creates a holistic and meaningful experience for customers. The uniform values across all axes also imply that neglecting any one dimension could weaken the overall experience, as each plays a complementary role (Silva et al., 2023).

### Proposed Integrative Conceptual Framework

The proposed integrative conceptual framework positions Customer Experience (CX) as a dynamic and multidimensional construct that is continuously shaped by interactions across the entire customer journey. It brings together four core dimensions—functional, emotional, social, and digital/technological—highlighting their interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature (Gounaris & Almoraish, 2024). Rather than operating in isolation, these dimensions interact in complex ways to influence customers' overall perceptions and responses. The framework emphasizes that CX is cumulative, evolving through multiple touchpoints before, during, and after purchase. As customers engage with organizations across physical and digital channels, their experiences are formed through both direct interactions and indirect influences, such as social networks and digital environments (Carazas et al., 2024).

Ultimately, these combined experiences lead to key outcomes, including customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy, which are critical for long-term organizational success. By integrating these dimensions into a single model, the framework provides a more comprehensive and realistic representation of how CX is formed and managed (Popli et al., 2022). The findings derived from this framework contribute to both theoretical development and managerial practice by addressing existing fragmentation in the CX literature. The framework consolidates diverse perspectives from various disciplines into a cohesive model, while also extending prior theories by incorporating contemporary elements such as digital transformation and omnichannel engagement (Velooso & Gómez-Suárez, 2023). From a managerial standpoint, the study underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to CX management, where organizations must ensure consistency and integration across all customer touchpoints. This includes designing seamless customer journeys, leveraging data analytics for personalized experiences, and aligning internal processes to support a unified CX strategy (Pantouvakis & Gerou, 2022). Additionally, the framework offers practical guidance for identifying gaps and improving specific dimensions of CX to enhance overall performance. From a theoretical perspective, the study provides a structured foundation for future research by offering a clear and unified conceptualization of CX. It opens avenues for empirical validation and encourages further exploration of how different dimensions interact in various contexts, thereby advancing the development of CX as a robust field of study (Weidig et al., 2024).



**Figure 2.** Customer Experience (CX) Dimensions and Customer Outcomes Matrix

The matrix chart as shown in Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual relationships between the four key Customer Experience (CX) dimensions—functional, emotional, social, and digital/technological—and critical customer outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, advocacy, and engagement. The varying intensity values in the matrix indicate the relative strength of influence each dimension has on specific outcomes, highlighting that CX is not uniform in its effects (Quiñones & Rojas, 2023). For instance, the functional dimension shows a strong contribution to customer satisfaction, reflecting the importance of reliability and performance in meeting expectations. The emotional dimension demonstrates a particularly strong influence on loyalty and engagement, underscoring the role of affective responses in building deeper customer relationships. Similarly, the social dimension is closely associated with advocacy, as interactions and community engagement often drive word-of-mouth and customer recommendations (Kandampully et al., 2022). The digital/technological dimension appears to consistently influence multiple outcomes, especially engagement, due to its role in enabling personalization and seamless interactions. Overall, the matrix emphasizes the interdependent and differentiated impact of each CX dimension, providing a useful tool for organizations to prioritize strategic initiatives and optimize customer experience outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines the evolution of the Customer Experience (CX) construct and proposes an integrative conceptual framework that synthesizes diverse perspectives within the existing literature. Drawing on a qualitative systematic literature review, the study traces the progression of CX from transactional and relational approaches to experiential and digitally driven paradigms. The findings highlight that CX is a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of functional, emotional, social, and digital dimensions across the customer journey. By integrating these elements, the proposed framework offers a comprehensive understanding of how customer experiences are formed and how they influence key outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. This integrative approach addresses the fragmentation in prior research and provides a structured lens through which CX can be analyzed and managed.

The study contributes to both theory and practice by consolidating fragmented knowledge into a coherent and unified model that enhances conceptual clarity and supports strategic decision-making. From a theoretical perspective, it establishes a foundation for future empirical research by identifying key dimensions and relationships within the CX construct. From a managerial standpoint, it emphasizes the importance of adopting a holistic and customer-centric approach to experience design and management. However, the study is limited by its conceptual nature and reliance on secondary data, which may restrict its generalizability. Future research is encouraged to empirically validate the proposed framework across different industries and contexts, as well as to explore the impact of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality on CX. Overall, the study underscores the necessity for organizations to embrace an integrative view of CX in order to remain competitive in an increasingly experience-driven economy.

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