'Welcome to the experience economy': assessing the influence of customer experience literature through bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

Some publications strongly influence how research in a field evolves and in which direction, particularly by introducing and developing new concepts and insights. The analysis of such seminal publications is an interesting way to examine a scholar’s or a theory’s influence on a discipline. It is a sound and valuable method for introducing newcomers to a field, while also providing incumbent researchers with thorough and encompassing updates. In the last few years there has been increasing interest from both academia and practitioners in the topic of customer experience. Pine II and Gilmore’s article published in 1998 in the Harvard Business Review (‘Welcome to the experience economy’) is seen by many as a key forerunner in this area of research. The present paper explores the ‘small world’ of Pine II and Gilmore, based on bibliometric tools. An in-depth analysis of the scientific influence of this article was performed, based on the citations it has received since it was published (1998) to 2012. The results confirm the broad scope of influence of the concept of ‘customer experience’. Indeed, Pine II and Gilmore’s article has been cited by authors from a wide range of scientific areas, not only in business and management but also tourism, sport, leisure and hospitality. Moreover, measurement and innovation emerge as underrepresented sub-topics within customer experience research. Finally, an appeal is made for more quantitative-led research in this field of study.

Keywords: Customer experience; Scientific influence; Bibliometrics; Citations

JEL-Codes: M39; C89
1. Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, Pine II and Gilmore (1998) wrote about how economies change. They contended that experience economy was a new type of economy, after the development of the agrarian, industrial and service economies. For these authors, experiences are personal and unique, based on an individual’s interpretation of events. They reflect the emotional response to a stimulus during service delivery and are dependent on many contextual factors which challenge organizations to control and manage customer experience and their emotions.

The emergence of experience economy is not accidental but rather an inevitable trend (Zhang, 2010). According to Knutson and Beck (2004), there are three converging factors in experience economy: technology, more demanding consumers, and increasing competition. In this era of experience economy, delivering appropriate services to customers is an important concern for service firms (Hsieh, 2011) that are increasingly managing customer experiences to promote differentiation and customer loyalty (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010).

According to Zomerdijk and Voss (2011), experiential services, whose focus is on the experience of customers, is an emergent scientific area, and for many service organizations designing customer emotions is a new territory.

‘Experience’ is indeed a new and exciting concept in marketing, academia and practice (Schmitt, 2010), clearly reflected in the increasing number of related studies. However, it is useful to understand how this concept has influenced research in business and economics, in general, and marketing, in particular. In this latter area, it might be interesting and useful to assess the evolution of the concept.

In order to adequately and comprehensibly examine and understand the impact that ‘customer experience’ has had in the area of management, a review of the state of the art of the literature requires a proper methodological approach (Creswell, 2009). Complementing traditional qualitative methods of literature reviews (Ramos-Rodriguez and Ruiz-Navarro, 2004), the present study departs from the seminal article of Pine II and Gilmore (1998), “Welcome to the experience economy”, and scrutinizes its scientific influence by main scientific areas, outlets, and geographical scope.

Although for Palmer (2010) the multi-dimensional, situation-specific nature of customer experience favours qualitative rather than quantitative measurement approaches, given that many studies of customer experience are essentially conceptual ideas or descriptive guidelines (Chang and Horng, 2010), we use bibliometric techniques to review this literature, as it serves
to identify and better understand potential patterns and, arguably, the evolution of a stream of research or topic (Silva and Teixeira, 2009; Ferreira, 2011). As in Vieira and Teixeira (2010) and Teixeira and Mota (2012), this paper departs from the hypothesis that the references used in a research article are an indication of their impact on the literature.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section (Section 2) provides a qualitative overview of the seminal work in the area of customer experience aimed at defining the key concepts and issues. Then, Section 3 puts forward the main advantages of resorting to bibliometric techniques to review the literature in a given area. Specifically, the main procedures underlying such exercises are described. The main results of the bibliometric account are presented in Section 4. Finally, the conclusions discuss the main findings and point out the future key challenges for the area in analysis.

2. The experience economy: its importance, related concepts and sub-topics

2.1. The importance of experience economy

According to Pine II and Gilmore (1998), the type of economy has changed over the years and can be categorized into four stages. The first was agriculture, followed by manufactured goods, then services, and finally experiences. Each change from commodities, products and services to experiences represented a step up in economic value. For these authors, ‘experience’ can be seen as a new and distinct economic offering that should be consistent in theme and engage the customers’ five senses. It has to be personal, unique, memorable and sustainable over time.

The authors contend that producers are seeking to distinguish their products from increasingly undifferentiated competitive offerings and service companies are looking for the next higher value. Also, in areas like advertising, advertisers face several message options (e.g., ‘functional benefit claims’ versus ‘experiential claims’) when they position a new brand in well-established categories (Samuelsen and Olsen, 2010). Likewise, customers are looking for memorable experiences (Hudson, 2010). For instance, in the case of wine tourism, existing research reveals that wine tourists look for dining, shopping, cultural and recreational activities along with authentic products and experiences that reveal the importance of hedonic and experiential consumption theories (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2012).

Several researchers have put forward ‘experience’ concepts, such as the concept of ‘tourism experience’, which has become a focal point for current tourism research and management (Tung and Ritchie, 2011), ‘commercial experience’ as a new type of business offering,
distinct from goods and services, which provides higher customer value and engage customers in an inherently memorable way (Poulsson and Kale, 2004; Lilja et al., 2010), or service experience which includes four key theatrical components, namely: 1) the actors (service personnel); 2) the audience (consumers); 3) the setting (physical evidence); and 4) the service performance itself (Chang and Horng, 2010), to name a few concepts. It could further be defined as “the customer's cognitive and affective assessment of all direct and indirect encounters with the firm relating to their purchasing behaviour” (Klaus and Maklan, 2012: 10), and customer experience (management) in retail is a relevant concept for managers (Verhoef et al., 2009; Grewal et al., 2009).

In this line of reasoning, experience comes from the feelings of different customers which sometimes they cannot easily express, making it impossible for companies to satisfy every customer (Zang, 2010). This challenges the companies to design, manage and assess/measure the customers’ experiences (Maklan and Klaus, 2011).

According to Johnston and Kong (2011: 5), who referred to Pine II and Gilmore (1998, 1999) as “some of the first writers to address the notion of the customer experience”, there appears to be three main areas covered in the current literature on customer experience: the importance of the customer experience; the nature of customer experience; and the design of customer experience. Gross and Pullman (2012) focus their work on the concept of experience design in the service industry, whereas customer experience management is referred to by Schmitt (2010) as another concept which has gathered attention from academics and practitioners, since it has become imperative to assess (Garg et al., 2010) and measure the service/customer/brand experience (Brakus, 2009; Kim et al., 2011; Klaus and Maklan, 2012).

2.2. The concept of customer experience

Broadly speaking, ‘experience’ is an interaction between a company (brand/product/service) and a customer, being shaped by the characteristics of the customer and those of the product, company or brand, and always influenced by the context/environment in which the interaction takes place (Same and Larimo, 2012). Similarly, for Schmitt (2010), ‘customer experience’ can be defined as perceptions, feelings, and thoughts that customers have when they encounter products and brands in the marketplace and engage in consumption activities as well as the memory of such experiences. According to this author, experiences may be evoked by products, packaging, communications, in-store interactions, sales relationships, events, and they may occur as a result of online or offline activities. However, according to Johnston and
Kong (2011), there appears to be a good deal of confusion in the literature about the definition of an experience and its distinction from a service. For these authors, a ‘product’ is a thing, whereas a ‘service’ is an activity or a process which involves the treatment of a customer; while ‘customer experience’ is their personal interpretation of the service process and their interaction and involvement with it during their journey or flow through a series of touch points.

Scholars from a wide range of fields, including marketing, philosophy, cognitive science, and management practice (Brakus et al., 2009; Walls et al., 2011; Same and Larimo, 2012) have categorized ‘experience’ in various ways, leading to a multiplicity of definitions, sometimes with seemingly circular references (Palmer, 2010) but none of which were really able to cover its essence holistically (Garg et al., 2010).

Thus, from this brief qualitative literature review, it is apparent that the frequent use of the term ‘experience’ tends to focus on different elements, distinct lexical definitions and diverse perspectives (Same and Larimo, 2012), which is revealing of the concept’s broad application (Walls et. al., 2011; Maklan and Klaus, 2011) and poses challenges to its clear-cut understanding (Same and Larimo, 2012).

Same and Larimo (2012) stress that further empirical research is needed to understand the experience construct and its impact on customers who are no longer ‘inert purchasers’ but ‘co-producers’ (Walls et al., 2011). In other words, in experience economy, customers become an essential part of the companies’ offerings (Zang, 2010) and they want to participate (Poulsson and Kale, 2004). Hence, it is important to bear in mind the recent developments in marketing that promote the exploitation of intangible elements linked to the emotional value perceived by customers and not only the rational value from classical economic theory (Gentile et al., 2007). Additionally, according to Klaus and Maklan (2012), experiential theorists suggest that consumer behaviour is not purely rational, but that it is determined by the customer experience which consists of a rational and emotional assessment.

In line with this reasoning, Table 1 lists a number of studies that have investigated and detailed the ‘experience’ concept, highlighting the distinctions and similarities and the scholars’ and practitioners’ perspectives of the dimensions of customer involvement (e.g., emotional, rational). However, despite the various dimensions of experience, each stimulus (e.g., colours, slogans, shapes …) does not have a ‘one-to-one correspondence’. For example, colour can lead to a sensory experience, but may also result in an emotional or intellectual experience (Brakus et al., 2009). Thus, departing from Gentile et al. (2007) but including
more dimensions (as mentioned in Table 1), the ‘customer experience’ could be defined as a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a brand, a service, a company or part of its organization, which provokes a reaction as a result of an ordinary or extraordinary experience (Walls et al., 2011). The experience is strictly personal and subjective implying the customer's involvement at different levels, such as the emotional, affective, spiritual, physical, sensorial, behavioural (e.g., lifestyle), intellectual, cognitive, rational (functional and utilitarian), and relational or social. However, this does not mean that all dimensions would be involved in the customer’s experience simultaneously. Moreover, the evaluation of the experience depends on the relation between the customer’s expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company at different moments, the different touchpoints (Gentile, 2007), and those elements which the company can control as well as those it cannot (e.g., other customers) (Verhoef, 2009).

Complementarily, for Pine II and Gilmore (1998), the more senses an experience engages with, the more effective and memorable it can be. According to these authors, each customer can be related with experience in at least two ways: 1) absorption or immersion level; and 2) active or passive participation. Furthermore, consumers can be engaged in distinct types of experiences, namely entertainment, education, aesthetic (including visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile aspects), and escapism (e.g., in retail and events contexts) (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998).

Thus, it is impossible to escape from creating an experience on every occasion in which a company/brand (e.g., a retailer) interacts with a customer. Such events imply that a customer could have a single experience or a range of experiences as a consequence of these actions (Terblanche, 2009), or as a result of the service (or product) that a customer is buying or receiving, which could be good, bad or indifferent (Berry et al., 2002; Johnston and Kong, 2011).

Based on the existing literature, it is consensual among scholars that, with the commoditisation of products and services, companies have to learn how to design, create, deliver and manage experiences that customers are ready to pay for, in order to obtain corporate reputation, to achieve competitive advantage and differentiate themselves from competitors, to create value and be difficult to imitate (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998; Pullman and Gross, 2004; Verhoef et al., 2009; Terblanche, 2009; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010; Chang and Horng, 2010; Klaus and Maklan, 2012). In this sense, it is expected that companies offering memorable experiences that invoke emotions will achieve higher levels of loyalty.
and repeat purchases (Stuart, 2006). Also, according to Lemke et al. (2011), an effective management of the customer experience across all touch points is the key to building customer commitment, retention, and sustained financial success.

Thus, ‘customer experience innovation’ has emerged as a hot topic within the literature on customer experience, side by side with the important, although more standard, topics of ‘customer experience management’, ‘customer experience design’ and ‘measuring experience’. The next section discusses such topics starting with the most standard ones.

2.3. Main topics addressed in the existing literature on customer experience

2.3.1. Customer experience management

Customer experience management is both a topic and a concept that can be defined as a set of frameworks, tools, and methodologies to manage customer experiences across channels, interaction and transaction with a company, product, brand or service (Schmitt, 2003, 2010).

Pine II and Gilmore proposed five steps to develop a coherent theme to stage the experience: 1) theme the experience; 2) harmonize impressions with positive clues; 3) eliminate negative clues; 4) mix in memorabilia; and 5) engage all five senses. Similarly, Schmitt (1999) contributed with the experiential marketing concept, considering it as a marketing planning tool, based on actions at the tactical and operational level (Same and Larimo, 2012).

Several authors have underlined that companies should carefully consider their positioning strategies before engaging in experiences in order to avoid inconsistencies (Walls et al., 2011). Hence, managing customer experience can be seen as a crucial strategic ‘ingredient’ for service organizations (Maklan and Klaus, 2011), leading additionally to cost reductions and efficiency gains (Same and Larimo, 2012). However, a systematic management of the customers’ experiences is needed to maintain an emotional customer connection with an organization (Berry and Carbone, 2007). This requires a long-term strategy which includes a shared vision between customers and providers, commonly negotiated experiences, and continuous collaboration (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009).
Table 1: Definitions of customer experience by dimensions of customer involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Area of study</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pine II and Gilmore (1998, 1999)</td>
<td>&quot;Pioneers&quot; in Experience economy</td>
<td>Experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schmitt (1999; 2003; 2010)</td>
<td>Experience marketing and (customer experience management)</td>
<td>Experience marketing can deliver sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational value to customers, to which social and informational based value can be added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentile et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Empirical investigation: to understand the specific role of different experiential features in the success achieved by some well-known products.</td>
<td>&quot;The Customer Experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer’s involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer’s expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touch-points.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhoef et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Retail (customer experience)</td>
<td>&quot;Customer experience construct is holistic in nature and involves the customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer. This experience is created not only by those elements which the retailer can control, but also by elements that are outside of the retailer’s control.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakus et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Brand experience</td>
<td>&quot;Brand experience as subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli ...&quot;; &quot;... for the scale development, it is necessary to generate items along the five experience dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral, and social.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tynan and McKechnie (2009)</td>
<td>Experience marketing</td>
<td>&quot;...social and relational sources of value can be obtained through consumption experiences with other people ...&quot;; &quot;experience marketing under S-D logic requires a totally different approach in terms of working with the customer as partner to configure the offer including an extended range of value from sensory, emotional, functional/utilitarian, relational, social, informational, novelty and utopian sources, communicating and developing that offer, co-creating the negotiated experience, and understanding and evaluating the experience post-purchase.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemke et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Customer experience quality</td>
<td>Customer’s subjective response to the direct and indirect holistic encounter with the firm including but not necessarily limited to the communication encounter, the service encounter and the consumption encounter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same and Larimo (2012)</td>
<td>Experience marketing</td>
<td>&quot;Experience is shaped by the characteristics of the customer and those of the product, company or brand&quot;; &quot;Experience marketing is strategic and holistic marketing of relevant experiences that takes into account the affective (feelings, emotions), cognitive (mental images, understanding, interpretations), and conative (intentions, actions, behavior) perspectives of consumption experience.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors.
Other studies have focused on the specificities that the strategy by which companies deliver the experience require. For example, Johnston and Kong (2011) concluded that the programmes to improve customer experience are similar but the execution is different. They also found that the benefits of these programmes are not simply about an improved experience for the customer but that staff could play an important role in delivering memorable service experience (Stuart, 2006; Hemmigton, 2007).

In this line, Gross and Pullman (2012) noted that an important aspect of developing and implementing a service experience is the creation of relational contexts (i.e., interactions between the service provider and the customer) and physical contexts (i.e., tangible environments and objects). For these authors, the humanic clues (i.e., relational context, for example, the behaviour of employees) play the most significant role in customer evaluation of experiences when compared to mechanic clues, which are generated by things, such as the impressions of a facility’s interior design (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994). Thus, managing customer experiences implies orchestrating an array of “clues” (e.g., functional, mechanic and humanic) (Berry and Haeckel, 2002; Berry and Carbone, 2007), contextual elements (e.g., physical environment, service employees, service delivery process, back-office support) (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), and all touch points between a company and their customers at distinct stages.

Regarding the stages of the experience, some authors (e.g., Knutson and Beck, 2004; Arnould et al. 2004) suggest that they can be divided into three: 1) pre-experience; 2) real-time experience or ‘customer experience’; and 3) post-experience.

The first stage is related to the consumption process and encompasses the expectations created by the provider, previous experience and ‘word of mouth’, while the second stage represents the customers’ real-time experience. Finally, the third stage includes the customers’ personal perceptions of the experience, the value they place on the experience and their satisfaction with the experience.

Looking at other perspectives, Verhoef et al. (2009) noted that the total customer experience includes the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sales phases of the experience, whereas Terblanche (2009) divided ‘customer experiences’ into three stages, namely pre-sales, sales and after-sales.

Regardless of the differences between the perspectives, it is consensual that, for each of these stages, it is not always easy to articulate all the touch points. There may be thousands to
manage that depend on several factors (Garg et al., 2010), which may or may not be within the retailer’s control (Verhoef et al., 2009), and can be complex and expensive to orchestrate (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009). This reveals, for instance, the importance of monitoring consistently the clues in order to identify opportunities to ‘refresh’, ‘redesign’ or eliminate clues that create negative feelings, and test or improvise experience clues (Berry and Carbone, 2007).

Consequently, for Tynan and McKechnie (2009), further research is needed to investigate the problems encountered when creating experiences in practice. They propose (as empirical research into the holistic consumption experience) ethnographic approaches and naturalistic enquiry, to understand the complex interactions in which experiences occur.

2.3.2. Customer experience design

According to Pullman and Gross (2004), the “customer experience design” seeks to create an emotional connection with customers through careful planning of tangible and intangible service elements which have gained popularity in many hospitality and retail businesses. However, in some contexts, it would be equally important to know and choose which service design elements are more appropriate. Thus, managers (more specifically, experience designers) should understand what is involved in an experience or which main elements contribute to an experience (for instance, a checklist), and in which distinct areas (Poulsson and Kale, 2004).

For Chang and Horng (2010), the management and design experiences are a basis for companies’ efforts to differentiate themselves from competitors and to obtain competitive advantage. For example, it is necessary to engage the customers’ five senses in order to provide personal and memorable customer experiences (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998; Hemmington, 2007; Terblanche, 2009) that could generate a certain value for the individual customer and, in particular, create a brand image (Hultén, 2011).

More recently, Gross and Pullman (2012) have focused on the increasing use of the experience design concept (in the service industry), which is seen as an emergent area. According to these authors, the concept of customer experience has received much attention in the management and marketing literature since the publication of the article ‘experience economy’ and Pine II and Gilmore’s book (1998, 1999). Gross and Pullman (2012) identify three main areas: 1) design the customer experience, 2) theatre-based concepts in experience design and, 3) employees in experience design.
Based on a case study that examines the reactions of managers and service employees to a workplace in which experience design concepts have been implemented, Gross and Pullman (2012) identify divergent interpretations between employees and managers on the understanding of the themes and scripting, which can create conflicts with the management’s goals. In conclusion, they note that the employee perspective related with experience design has received very little attention (for instance, relating complex services), even though they consider that the humanic clues have a significant role on the experience delivery and design. Thus, Gross and Pullman’s article raises a set of new questions related with employee services inexperience economy that need to be answered in further studies (e.g., have employees been trained to help orchestrate the experience; how do employees help deliver the beginning, middle, and end of the experience; what will make guests come in and spend time in your setting, virtual or physical). They also point out that future research could measure outcomes of guest reactions to the intended designed experience in more complex and sophisticated environments, which does to some extent reveal the importance of measuring the ‘experience’.

2.3.3. Measuring customer experience

According to several scholars (e.g., Knutson and Beck 2004; Garg et al., 2010), as the concept of experience is increasingly being used as a strategic tool, it has become imperative to pay attention to managing and evaluating the experience by, for example, understanding the customers’ journey from their expectations before the experience occurs to the assessments they make when the experience ends (Berry et al., 2002). However, as highlighted by Palmer (2010), marketers face a number of challenges in the development of a measurement scale for customer experience, probably due to the complexity of context-specific variables. In fact, ‘experience’ is far broader and less delimited than the concept of product or service quality; hence its measure is far more complex (Maklan and Klaus, 2011). Notwithstanding, Garg et al. (2010) mention that some of the known methods for the evaluation of service processes, which in turn can be used for measuring customer experiences, are blueprinting (Shostack, 1984), service mapping (Kingman-Brundage, 1991; 1995), service incident analysis (Stauss, 1993; Stauss and Weinlich, 1995), walk-through audit (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 1994), service transaction analysis (Johnston, 1999), and experience audit (Berry et al., 2002; Berry and Carbone 2007). By comparing three of these methodologies to assess and enhance the customer experience (experience audit, walk-through audit and service transaction analysis),
Garg et al. (2010) conclude that the service transaction analysis methodology can produce better results. Despite the difficulties in measuring ‘experience’ concepts, some scales have been developed. Brakus et al. (2009) constructed a brand experience scale that includes four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural. Based on six studies, the authors show that the scale is reliable, valid, and distinct from other brand measures. Moreover, and according to Brakus et al. (2009), the brand experience affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty directly and indirectly through brand personality associations. Subsequently, given that the measurement of the customer experience, in particularly, the experience quality, is still in its infancy, Chang and Horng (2010) sought to understand how customers assess experience quality, which stands as a crucial factor for service providers to deliver excellent experiences. These authors developed a multidimensional scale of experience quality (composed of five dimensions: physical surroundings, service providers, other customers, customers’ companions, and the customers themselves) which provides a measurement of customers’ perspectives of experience quality in service settings. This scale is aimed at helping to manage and design excellent experiences for customers (e.g., to work on physical surroundings). However, according to Chang and Horng (2010) further studies are necessary to replicate a more comprehensive model, involving the analysis of the relationship between experience quality, service quality, and outcome variables. Also, Lemke et al. (2011) found that a focus on customer experience quality opens the door to a broader understanding of how customers achieve their goals. Thus, the development of scales for the concept of ‘customer experience quality’ is a research opportunity that would benefit management practices.

In this line, Kim et al. (2011) formulated a consumer experience index that consists of 26 items to determine the underlying components for a consumer’s experience. They argue that with this management tool (metric) companies can help to move their brand into the experience economy and develop effective marketing and promotion strategies for providing memorable experiences for customers. Based on seven dimensions (environment, benefits, convenience, accessibility, utility, incentive, and trust), this tool allows the managers to measure how important each attribute is to their target markets, thereby showing managers in which experience areas the brand is strong and/or weak. While this tool was designed to measure general consumer experience, it would be beneficial to develop a new tool for service
providers with specific characteristics, namely banks, retailers, restaurants, health care, and airlines.

Complementarily, as noted by Maklan and Klaus (2011), continuing to measure service quality is probably necessary for most firms, but not sufficient. Organisations are increasingly competing on the basis of customer experience and although the ‘experience’ concept is defined imprecisely, market researchers will serve their organisations and customers better if they take an active role in updating the customer experience measurement and agree on measures of it.

Accordingly, a multiple-item scale for measuring customers' service experience quality (EXQ) was recently proposed by Klaus and Maklan (2012). In this case, the study focused on a mortgage provider from the customers’ point of view. In total, 19 items in four dimensions of the EXQ scale were identified, namely product experience, outcome focus, moments-of-truth and peace-of-mind. They conclude that the service experience has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty and word-of-mouth intentions referred to as the most important outcomes of service quality identified in the literature. They also suggest that it would be worthy to investigate more hedonic consumption services (e.g., providers of high involvement, or high impact services), in cross-industry, cross-sectional and cross-national settings. They also propose to examine if EXQ and its dimensions explain important marketing outcomes such as market share, share of wallet and, ultimately, profitability.

In sum, further research is needed to develop metrics of customer experience as a measure (with impact on marketing outcomes) and tool of management (that can monitor and improve the quality of experiences delivered to customers) to apply in a specific context.

2.3.4. Customer experience innovation

As mentioned above, there is an increasing demand for experiences determined by several factors (e.g., people seek social status, more meaning and excitement in life, and psychological self-realisation) which calls for innovation. According to Sundbo (2009), innovation in experiences is becoming more strategic, systematic and interactive with customers, which necessarily implies some instruments (e.g., innovation systems) to increase innovation considered as crucial in experience economy. Indeed, for Zang (2010), without innovation we would still be stuck in an agrarian economy.

According to several authors, the customer experience may provide a new means of competition (Johnston and Kong, 2010). For example, Hemmington (2007), focusing on the
hospitality business, suggests that ‘lots of little surprises’ should be included in the design of
guest experience over time. Poulsson and Kale (2004) also argue that to obtain a competitive
advantage an experience should have personal relevance for the customer, as well as novelty,
surprise, learning, and engagement.

Also highlighting the role of innovation, Su (2011) shows that service innovation has
significant effects on behavioural intention and customer experience, and a very important
influence on experiential design, being crucial to improve continually innovations to avoid
‘on time experiences’ and influence the customer’s behavioural intention to repeat and
recommend the experience. In this vein, Sundbo (2009) states that the forms of organisation
and innovation in the experience sector are more varied than in manufacturing and services.
He also contends that innovation in experiences is considered an economic phenomenon,
which needs further research in this field.

3. Methodology

The main goal of this work was to study the contribution/influence of the seminal article of
Pine II and Gilmore published in HBR, in 1998, ‘Welcome to the experience economy’. As
such, and based on the studies that cite this article, we have identified the recent paths in this
area, its geographical influence (based on the nationality of authors and country/region of the
studies that cite the article), the subject areas covered (based on the journals that cite the
article), the main topics related with the ‘experience’ concept, and the evolution of the type
and method of research.

Relevant data was gathered in April 2012 from Scopus SciVerse from 1998 to April 2012. A
first search was conducted with the keywords ‘experience’ and ‘customer experience’
resulting in a large set of articles, including some top-cited articles. The data obtained was
ordered by the number of citations. Based on this data, it was possible to identify and select
the article of Pine II and Gilmore as one of the most cited and ‘pioneering’ in the experience
concept. Subsequently, a final search in the database for citations of Pine II and Gilmore’s
work yielded 286 articles covering distinct areas and types of publications. Out of the 286
articles, 77.7% were published in journals whereas the remaining 64 articles (22.4%) were
conference proceedings and similar.
4. Results and analysis

4.1. Brief description of the selected papers

Although the article “Welcome to the experience economy” was published in 1998, it was only a decade later that the paper started to receive a reasonable amount of citations per year (Figure 1). In the wording of scientometrics, one might call this paper a ‘sleeping beauty’ (van Raan, 2004; Van Calster, 2012), that is, a paper with delayed recognition - that received very little attention (and got few citations) shortly after publication, but later got a great deal more interest and many citations. In fact, the last three years correspond to almost 60% of the total article citations for the period 1999-2011. This seems to reflect that the experience topic is starting to draw more attention from academics seeking to solidify it.

![Figure 1: Evolution of the number of citations of Pine II and Gilmore’s article, 1999 -2011](image)

Source: Authors’ computation based on data from Scopus SciVerse (reference date: 4 August 2012)

The literature that has cited Pine II and Gilmore’s article is of reasonable scientific ‘quality’, as evaluated by the ISI impact factor in which the articles have been published. Figure 2 shows that 117 articles were published in top-quality journals (AA-B), which represent 53% of the total articles (222).

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1 Based on the work of Cruz and Teixeira (2010), journal rankings have been classified as: AA: generally accepted top-level journals; A: very good journals covering economics in general and the top journals in each field; B: good journals for all research fields; C: other journals indexed in ISI; NC: journals not indexed in ISI. The cut off values considered are as followed: AA: > 3; A: > 1.5; B > 0.3.; C: >0.1, and NC: journals that are not ranked (in ISI Web of Knowledge).
Figure 2: The influence of Pine II and Gilmore’s article by journal quality

Note: A total of 222 articles that cited Pine II and Gilmore’s article were published in journals indexed in Scopus SciVerse.
Legend: AA: generally accepted top-level journals; A: very good journals covering economics in general and the top journals in each field; B: good journals for all research fields; C: other journals indexed in ISI; NC: journals not indexed in ISI

When specifying the journals that have cited Pine II and Gilmore’s article the most (Figure 3), which represent 42% of all publications (i.e., 93 articles), we can see that three quarters of these articles were published on top-quality journals (AA – B). The first three journals with the most published articles are: International Journal of Hospitality Management (2011 ISI impact factor: 1,771); Service Industries Journal (ISI impact factor: 2,579); and Tourism Management (ISI impact factor: 2,597).

Figure 3: The most influenced journals by Pine II and Gilmore’s article, 1999-2011

Note: A total of 222 articles that cited Pine II and Gilmore’s article were published in journals indexed in Scopus SciVerse. The 24 journal listed here represent 42% of the 118 articles published in indexed journals.
Based exclusively on the ISI indexed journals (i.e., 58 journals), we obtained 19 subject areas\(^2\) (Figure 4) which confirms the broad scope and multidisciplinary nature of the experience concept. Management (17.3%) and Business (16.9%) are the subject areas that have been the most influenced by the seminal paper on customer experience. Moreover, tourism, sport, leisure and hospitality emerged also as highly influenced subject areas. This result reveals the multidisciplinary nature of the area evidenced by an enormous dispersion of articles and journals, reflecting that the area has not yet created sufficient critical mass to achieve scientific autonomy (Vieira and Teixeira, 2010).

![Figure 4: The influence of ‘experience economy’ by subject area](image)

Scientific papers have been recognized as a way to transmit knowledge (Silva and Teixeira, 2009). In this line, citation analysis is based on the premise that authors cite texts which they consider to be important in the development of their research (Ramos-Rodriguez and Ruiz-Navarro, 2004). Based on the country of affiliation of the authors that cite Pine II and Gilmore’s article, Figure 2 shows the influence of this seminal article worldwide. Interestingly, this analysis reveals that the influence of Pine II and Gilmore’s article covers 36 countries in the world. Notwithstanding, the United States, with 89 citations (24.3%), and the United Kingdom, with 50 (13.6%), are the most influenced by the seminal article. Asia has

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\(^2\)Some journals encompass more than one subject areas.
been also highly influenced by this article absorbing more than 20% of total citations, with Taiwan (9.8%) and China (6.3%) at the forefront.

Figure 5: The geographical influence of Pine II and Gilmore’s article

Note: The number of citations gathered from Scopus on August 4, 2012, was 320.
Source: Authors’ computation.

4.2. Classification of the articles according to topic, type and method.

Based in the taxonomy gathered from the literature review (Section 2), we identified four main topics related with the experience concept: customer experience design, customer experience management, customer experience measurement and customer experience innovation. We considered two additional topics, ‘Customer experience’, as a broad category related to customer experience (e.g., healthcare experience, tourism experience, virtual experience, visitor experience, commercial experience, customer experience, country experience, co-experience, experience expectations, consumer experience hospitality) but not with design, management, measurement or innovation, and a residual category, ‘Others’.

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3 The classification was based on 74% of the total data collected. The first two years (1998, 1999) were cut off due to the reduced number of observations available.
For the overall period of analysis (2000-2012), the results show a wide-ranging dispersion of topics (cf. Figure 6), with a relatively large proportion of papers falling in the residual category ‘Others’. This reflects the fact that almost one third of the papers that cite Pine II and Gilmore’s article do not directly relate to customer experience subjects and cite the study *en passant*. Regarding the papers strictly related to customer experience, the topics that gather more attention are ‘customer experience management’ (22.5%) and ‘customer experience design’ (19.2%). ‘Customer experience innovation’ is still barely tackled (6.1%) but it may be considered as an emergent topic.

‘Customer experience measurement’, encompassing 12.2% of the total papers, is rather underrepresented, suffering a significant decline in its relative importance (from 23.8% down to 10.6%) in the most recent period (2008-2012).

Next, Figure 7 reveals the distribution by period of the different types of articles (conceptual, discursive, and empirical). The results show the growing importance of empirically-related works in the domain of customer experience. Indeed, the studies that involve some kind of theory testing increased by almost twenty percentage points, from 50.0% in first period (2000-2003) to 69.5% in third period (2008- April 2012). In contrast, opinion-based, discursive studies saw their share fall dramatically over the period in analysis. It is interesting to note the dynamism of the area of customer experience evidenced by the increasing share of

![Figure 6: Papers published by research topics](source: Authors’ computation based on the data (213 articles) from Scopus SciVerse (reference date: 4 August 2012)
conceptual, theory-building papers, which is likely to reflect the rise of a new research domain.

Restricting the analysis to the empirical research on customer experience (that is, 158 studies), we can see that their focus of analysis involved 41 countries/regions. However, only four countries/regions represent almost half of the empirical papers - United States, United Kingdom, Taiwan and China.
Although papers that resort to qualitative methods represent the majority for the whole period and for each of the periods considered (cf. Figure 9), their relative importance has been steadily decreasing. In contrast, the quantitative-led papers saw their importance rise over the period, from 10% in the initial period (2000-2003), to 36.4% in the most recent period (2008-2012).

![Empirical papers by method of research](source: Authors’ computation based on the data (158 empirical articles) from Scopus SciVerse (reference date: 4 August 2012))

5. Conclusions

The main goal of the present paper was to study the emergent field of customer experience based on the ‘small world’ of Pine II and Gilmore’s article published in the Harvard Business Review in 1998. The bibliometric exercise undertaken was based on a set of articles that have cited Pine II and Gilmore’s seminal article, which served to assess the contribution of customer experience research within the scientific field of management, in general, and marketing, in particular, constituting a complement to other, more qualitative, analyses of the literature (Ferreira, 2011).

The results show that the publication activity on ‘customer experience’ and related concepts has been increasing, mainly in the most recent years (2008-2012), and has achieved a broad geographical influence. Such trends seem to convey that the customer experience topic is
solidifying its importance in terms of research, receiving increasing attention from marketing academics. Moreover, the ‘quality’ of the papers within the topic of customer experience is reasonably high, with 53% of the articles published in top-quality journals.

The multidisciplinary nature of customer experience is quite apparent, ranging from tourism, sport and leisure to hospitality, albeit with prominence in the areas of management and business. The results show a wide-ranging dispersion of the topics addressed in customer experience studies, being the bulk related to ‘customer experience management’ and fewer contributions on ‘customer experience innovation’ and ‘customer experience measurement’.

Although revealing a positive trend, quantitative research methods are used to a lesser extent than qualitative methods in empirical research on customer experience. This latter evidence might in part be explained by the still embryonic stage of research related to customer experience measurement. Measurement is today critical as companies need to know what experiences they want to provide, what factors are more important for their customers and which (limited) resources are necessary in order to create the most positive experiences. Given that the management of customer experience is crucial to marketing strategies (e.g., positioning and branding), to achieve sustained financial success, satisfy and keep customers, further studies are required to increase scientific knowledge in this area. For instance, resorting to different methods of research design, such as ethnographic (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009) or experimental approaches, might contribute to better understanding experience in practice, namely through the assessment of the dimensions/components of customer experience, the quality of the experiences (Chang and Horng, 2010; Lemke et al., 2011), and the monitoring of companies’ marketing strategy (Berry and Carbone, 2007; Maklan and Klaus, 2011).

References


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