The Role of Experiential Marketing in Enhancing Customer Loyalty in the Digital Era: An Applied Study on Iraqi E-Commerce Platforms

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Abstract:

This study seeks to: understand the nature of customer interaction with marketing experiences and the impact of these experiences on customer loyalty towards the platform. The study is on e-commerce platforms in Iraq, which are chosen based on their activity and importance. The sample was selected in the Tamata and Miswaq platforms, and the targeted sample included 200 active customers working on using e-managing platforms in Iraq. This study adopted the mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative. The data was collected using questionnaires that were administered to a sample of customers who used Iraqi e-commerce platforms. The data represented that customers identified positively with the dissimilarity in marketing experience and this shows marketing experientialism positively contributes to customer loyalty. The researcher suggested that Iraqi electronic commerce sites should start investing.

Keywords: Experiential Marketing, Customer Loyalty, Digital Era, E-Commerce, Iraq, Interactive Marketing.

Introduction

Customer experience is one of the key indicators of brand success in the digital age, raising the importance of experiential marketing as an effective way to increase customer loyalty Experiential marketing exceeds traditional advertising channels by focusing on direct and impactful experiences. In this way, customers can make emotional connections with brands, increasing their loyalty and increasing the chances of repeat purchases (2bonline, 2024, p. 1) Experiential marketing (A/B Testing) in our modern digital age era through their online channels Experiential marketing has become an important tool for companies seeking to increase customer loyalty It is a scientific method of testing different products and they test performance-tested marketing strategies, which enable companies to make data-driven decisions rather than relying on traditional assumptions (Gupta & Kim, 2020, p. 12). In the e-commerce environment, where competition is intensifying and customer interaction patterns are changing rapidly, this test is essential to understand what attracts customers and how to increase their satisfaction and performance (Kumar et al., 2021, p 45). In the context of Iraq, e-commerce is a growing industry that presents many opportunities and challenges. The importance of studying the impact of experiential marketing in increasing customer loyalty on Iraqi e-commerce platforms is obvious, as these strategies can help build a loyal and sustainable customer base (Al-Jabouri, 2006). 2022, p. This pilot study aims to investigate the use of experiential marketing in Iraqi e-commerce initiatives and how it can contribute to increasing customer loyalty

Chapter One: Research Methodology

Research Problem:

In our digital age, there is a growing need for effective marketing practices that help companies increase customer loyalty. A/B testing is a powerful tool to achieve this goal, as it can further improve marketing strategies for testing between different variables and isolating results but differentiate A/B testing expertise and its effectiveness in the local market, especially in Iraq. Companies in Iraq face unique challenges in terms of optimizing marketing strategies and customer response, making continuous marketing innovation essential for market survival and competitiveness. Based on this context, the research problem can be framed with the following main question:

What is the role of A/B testing in enhancing customer loyalty on e-commerce platforms in Iraq?

This main question branches into several sub-questions:

➢ How can A/B testing be used to improve customer experiences on e-commerce platforms in Iraq?

➢ What challenges do companies face in implementing A/B testing in the Iraqi market?

➢ How does the use of A/B testing affect the increase of engagement and loyalty between customers and companies in the field of e-commerce in Iraq?

➢ What are the best practices for efficiently implementing A/B testing on e-commerce platforms in Iraq?

Research Objective:

This research aims to explore and analyze the role of A/B testing in enhancing customer loyalty in the digital age, with a focus on an applied study of e-commerce platforms in Iraq. The objective is to understand how unique and distinctive customer experiences can lead to increased customer loyalty and trust in brands in the Iraqi digital market. This main objective branches into several sub-objectives:

1. Identifying how A/B testing can be used to improve customer experiences on e-commerce platforms in Iraq.

2. Identifying the challenges companies face in implementing A/B testing in the Iraqi market.

3. Evaluating the impact of using A/B testing on increasing customer engagement and loyalty in the e-commerce sector in Iraq.

4. Developing best practices for effectively implementing A/B testing on e-commerce platforms in Iraq.

Importance of the Research:

1. Increasing understanding of A/B testing: Through this research, it will be possible to increase awareness among business owners and SMEs about the benefits of A/B testing and how to use it effectively.

2. Improve customer experience: Companies can use the results to develop effective marketing strategies that increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, and contribute to sales growth and brand engagement.

3. Competition and innovation: In the rapidly growing e-commerce market, A/B testing is an important tool for continuous innovation and continuous improvement of products and services.

4. Supporting the Iraqi Economy: This research can help strengthen the Iraqi business sector by providing effective marketing tools and strategies, which can contribute to economic growth and new job opportunities.

5. Data and Scientific Knowledge: Additional knowledge will be added about the application of A/B testing in the Iraqi market, which can provide a scientific basis for future studies and policy reports.

Research Framework:

1. **Independent Variable (X)**: Experiential Marketing with 3 dimensions:

✓ User Experience

✓ Promotional Atmosphere

✓ Emotional Interaction

2. **Dependent Variable (Y)**: Customer Loyalty, which includes 3 dimensions:

✓ Satisfaction with Service

✓ Purchasing Behavior

✓ Purchase Recommendation

Figure 1: Hypothetical Research Framework
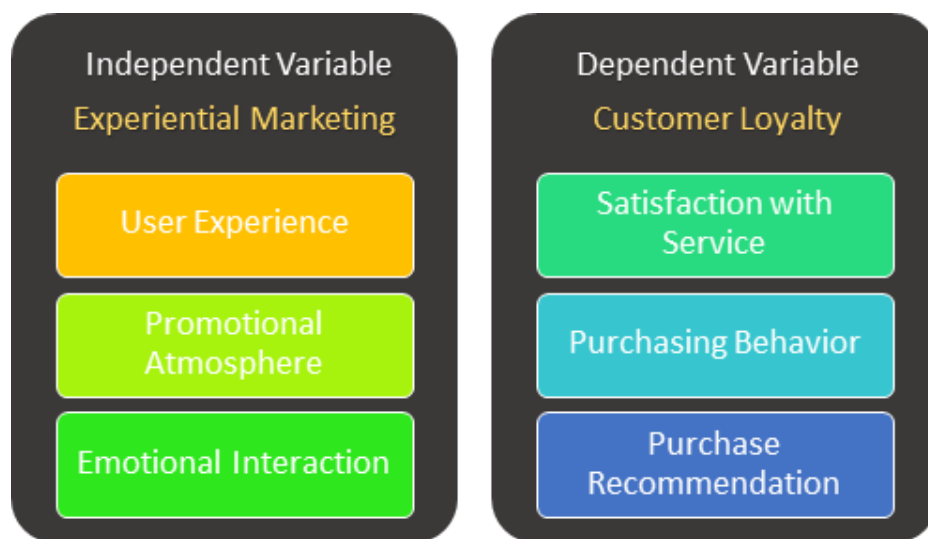
Source: Prepared by the Researcher

Research Hypotheses:

Main Hypothesis of the Research:

There is no statistically significant relationship at the 0.05% significance level between experiential marketing and customer loyalty on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

Sub-Hypotheses of the Research:

➢ There is no statistically significant relationship at the 0.05% significance level between experiential marketing and satisfaction with service on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

➢ There is no statistically significant relationship at the 0.05% significance level between experiential marketing and purchasing behavior on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

➢ There is no statistically significant relationship at the 0.05% significance level between experiential marketing and purchase recommendation on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

Research Methodology:

The descriptive analytical method will be used to identify and understand the impact of experiential marketing on customer loyalty. This will involve collecting data from scientific sources and analyzing it to draw conclusions about the relationship between experiential marketing and customer loyalty.

Research Boundaries:

✓ **Spatial Boundaries:** E-commerce platforms in Iraq

✓ **Human Boundaries:** Customers of e-commerce platforms in Iraq

✓ **Temporal Boundaries:** 2024-2025

Sample of the Research:

The research sample consists of two e-commerce platforms in Iraq:

✓ "Tamata" Platform

✓ "Masaweq" Platform

The sample size is set at 250 customers for these platforms.

Research Tool:

The researcher used a questionnaire that includes a set of questions following the five-point Likert scale to measure customer experiences and opinions regarding experiential marketing and its impact on their loyalty to the electronic platforms. The questionnaire will be distributed online using social media platforms and email to ensure maximum reach to customers. After conducting extensive research on the theoretical literature of the subject, the researcher designed a questionnaire aligned with the research objectives. The questionnaire comprises 33 questions: 3 questions related to personal information, 15 questions concerning the independent variable (experiential marketing), and 15 questions related to the dependent variable (customer loyalty), with 5 questions designated for each dimension.

Statistical Methods Used:

The researcher utilized an appropriate statistical program, SPSS.27.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

1. Experiential Marketing:

❖ **The Concept of Experiential Marketing:**

➢ In the current digital age, experiential marketing has become one of the most important ways for companies to gain a deeper understanding of their users and deliver more effective shopping experiences Data is collected to deliver user experiences and then analyze this information to determine which experience is more effective at achieving the desired goals" (Waxen, 2023, p. 45).

➢ John Sinker (2022) offers a comprehensive definition, considering experiential marketing as "a method of testing and learning through experiments involving various marketing elements, focusing on the possible meanings of each experience." in on consumer behavior" (Sinker, 2022) , p. 67).

➢ Based on previous definitions, the researchers define experiential marketing as "the process of providing users with multiple experiences and analyzing data collected to improve marketing strategies to evaluate experience a." more effective for the desired goals.

❖ **The Importance of Experiential Marketing**

In today's digital age, experiential marketing has become an essential tool for enhancing marketing strategies and increasing their effectiveness. It allows companies to gain a better understanding of consumer capabilities and desires by testing different products, programs and marketing messages the importance of experiential marketing comes from several key factors:

Improving the Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies

Experiential marketing is one of the most important tools to maximize the effectiveness of marketing strategies. As Marco Frank (2018) explains, companies can use experiential marketing to analyze advertising materials, promotions, and website design to determine which strategies are most effective at targeting audiences and motivate them to take specific actions. This helps companies achieve better returns from their marketing investments (Frank, 2018, p. 123).

Understanding Consumer Behavior

Understanding consumer behavior is one of the most important success factors of any marketing strategy. Peter Jones (2019) argues that experiential marketing can provide valuable insights into consumer reactions to changes in content, design, and marketing messages. This helps companies develop more effective individual marketing strategies (Jones, 2019, p. 78).

Enhancing Customer Experience

Improving customer experience is one of the key goals in digital marketing strategies. James Samuels (2020) notes that experiential marketing can enhance customer experience by evaluating and improving various features such as user interface, convenience of navigation, availability of information for users and what etc. This increases customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Samuels, 2020, p. 145).

Improving Website Performance

➢ Website performance is one of the keys to a successful digital business. Christopher Marshall (2021) argues that experiential marketing can enhance website performance by examining various factors such as product layout, page layout, and detailed content description. This helps to increase the conversion rate of visitors as customers and increases corporate sales (Marshall, 2021, p. 92).

❖ **Types of Experiential Marketing**

In the world of digital marketing, experiential marketing uses a variety of experiments to improve marketing strategies and understand consumer behaviour. Below are the types and applications of experiential marketing (Waxman, 2021, p. 110).

Content testing: The purpose of content testing is to evaluate the effectiveness of systems and content provided to customers. These tests can include making changes to directed ads, emails, and web pages. It is used to identify content that is most effective in engaging customers and motivating customers to take specific actions.

Design testing: Design testing is one of the most important types of experiential marketing as it focuses on improving website design and user interface These tests can include button design, page layout and features testing images. Used to identify designs that increase visitor conversion rates to customers.

Price testing: Price testing is used to assess the impact of price changes on consumer attitudes and buying behavior. These experiments may involve offering different prices to a particular group of consumers, and measuring how these changes affect their buying preferences and behaviors. They help to find the best prices that increase the profitability of

the company.

Email testing: Email testing is used to evaluate the effectiveness of emails sent to customers. This may include analyzing email subject lines, message text, and reply links. These tests aim to evaluate which emails are able to capture attention and motivate customers to take specific actions.

Social Media Testing: Social media testing looks at the effectiveness of content posted on social media platforms. These tests may include evaluating posters, content images, and response links. It is used to identify content that is most effective in encouraging customer interaction with brands.

2. Customer Loyalty

Concept of customer loyalty: In the world of digital marketing, customer loyalty is one of the most influential factors for the success of companies. The definition of customer loyalty varies according to the researcher's perspective. Maria Santa Maria describes customer loyalty as "consumers' continued commitment to a particular brand, including repeat purchases, recommendations, and positive feedback about the brand, which leads to profitability." do result from the goods or services offered by the brand" (Santa Maria, 2021, p. 54). Pierre Frankel defines consumer loyalty as "a sustained emotional and psychological level of acceptance of the brand and a desire to continue using its products or services, which results in repetitive purchase behavior and information." positive feedback about the brand occurs, accompanied by moral support and encouragement to continue using the brand" (Frankel, 2022, p 78)Based on the previous definitions, a new definition of customer loyalty can be presented as follows: "Customer loyalty is an ongoing emotional and mental commitment to a particular brand, characterized by repeat purchases, recommendations to others, and positive performance towards the brand. This definition also includes moral support for the brand and continued dealings with it, contributing to building long-term relationships and increasing customer retention."

Factors Enhancing Customer Loyalty: Customer loyalty is defined as the positive attitude of customers towards specific products or services, which drives them to make repeated purchases and maintain their relationships with the company (Kotler & Keller, 2021, p. 360). The goal of companies is to enhance this loyalty by providing an exceptional and integrated customer experience across all available digital marketing channels. The factors that enhance customer loyalty are essential in achieving this goal and include a variety of elements, the most important of which are (Reichheld & Sasser, 2020, p. 195):

➢ **Product Quality:** Numerous studies indicate that product quality is one of the main factors affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty to the company (Zeithaml, 2019, p. 175).

➢ **Customer Service:** High-quality customer service significantly contributes to enhancing customer loyalty and reducing churn rates (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 2022, p. 50).

➢ **Ease of Use:** When a product or service is easy to use, it increases customer satisfaction and leads to greater loyalty (Narver & Slater, 2021, p. 28).

➢ **Trust:** The ability to build customer trust in the quality of products and services, along with responsiveness and problem-solving capabilities, are key factors in enhancing customer loyalty (Boulding, 2022, p. 120).

➢ **Added Value:** Customers' assessment of the added value provided by a product or service plays a crucial role in enhancing customer loyalty (Heskett et al., 2020, p. 75).

These elements are an important part of digital marketing strategies as they contribute to continuous growth and prosperity for online businesses. By focusing on these elements, companies can build long-term relationships with their customers and deliver value that

goes beyond just buying and selling.

Impact of Experiential Marketing on Customer Loyalty: In today's digital marketing world, experiential marketing has become one of the most effective ways to build customer loyalty. Experiential marketing is an effective way to increase brand awareness and improve customer experience, contributing significantly to customer loyalty. It provides a real opportunity for consumers to interactively engage with a brand's products or services, enhance customer experience and encourage repeat purchases, experiential marketing is an effective way to connect with customers if it lasts longer, with a focus on creating unique experiences that customers can personally engage in. Studies show that consumers who have a deeper interactive experience with a brand are more likely to maintain their relationship with that brand and recommend it to their friends. Furthermore, research shows that consumers interested in a particular type of experiential marketing are more likely to interact with the brand and purchase products more frequently, some experiential marketing strategies include product demonstrations, direct promotions, products special discount programs, new product launches, and… special events for customers. These channels aim to create a unique customer experience that goes beyond just buying and selling, and helps increase loyalty and customer retention over time, plus experiential marketing plays an important role in loyalty increasingly through the emotional connection with the brand. Research shows that consumers who have a strong emotional connection with a brand are more likely to maintain their relationship with it,it helps create these emotional connections by providing a unique experience that consumers can personally relate to (Sparn & Rüdiger, 2018, p. 80).

Chapter Three: Practical Framework

First: Research Tool

To collect data from the research sample in order to test the hypotheses, we designed a questionnaire suitable for the research hypotheses. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: the first section was dedicated to personal information, the second section focused on experimental marketing, and the final section addressed the variable of customer loyalty. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed to participants in the sample, and 219 questionnaires were retrieved, resulting in a response rate of 87.6%. However, 20 questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete responses or errors in the answers, leading to a discard rate of 8%. Consequently, the number of valid questionnaires for analysis reached 200, representing 80%.Secondly: Validity Tests

Internal Consistency:

It is based on the degree of correlation of each item with the overall construct that the item falls under.

Table No. (1) Internal Consistency Validity

No.	Questionnaire	Pearson Correlation	Sig
1	experimental marketing	.788**	0.00
2	customer loyalty	.801**	0.00

Source: Field Research

It is evident that there is a significant correlation, meaning the statements are accurate and fit the purpose of the study.

Construct Validity:

Table (2) Construct Validity

No	Axis and Part	Relationship Style	Significance Value (SIG)	Number of Statements 33	Sample 200
1	**experimental marketing**	0.811**	0.00		
2	**customer loyalty**	0.780**	0.00		

Source: Prepared by the Researcher

The high values of the axes indicate the validity and effectiveness of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Scale

Cronbach's Alpha is commonly used to estimate reliability. It calculates the average inter-correlation among all items in a scale. Specifically, it estimates the proportion of variance in the total score that is attributable to the true variance in the construct being measured, rather than to measurement error. This coefficient ranges from zero to one.

➤ Acceptable Values

A value above 0.7 is generally considered acceptable for research purposes, while values between 0.6 and 0.7 may be acceptable depending on the nature of the study and the specific items being measured. Values below 0.6 indicate poor internal consistency. Very high alpha coefficients may indicate redundancy of items and indicate that some items can be eliminated to improve the scale's performance.

➤ Accounting system

Cronbach's alpha is calculated as the average of the items of the variance matrix divided by the sum of the squared standard deviations of each item multiplied by the number of items.

$\alpha = \frac{n}{n-1} \times \frac{\Sigma\sigma x^2}{\Sigma\Sigma sxy}$

In summary, Cronbach's alpha is an important measure of reliability, indicating the reliability of the scale and its ability to adequately capture a standardized construct

Table (3): Results of Cronbach's alpha test

Axis	Number of paragraphs	Cronbach's alpha
experimental marketing	15	0.881
customer loyalty	15	0.802

Source: Prepared by the Researcher

The table shows high stability scores for the axes.

Third: Average of the questionnaires:

The average and the verification value were used as follows:

Table No. (4) Average of Responses

NO	Questionnaire	Mean	Verification
1	**experimental marketing**	2.19	High
2	**customer loyalty**	1.92	High
	Overall average	2.05	High

Source: Field research

According to the table, the average rating of all axes is 2.05, indicating high rating.

Fourth: hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing is a statistical technique that examines the validity of certain hypotheses based on available data. These tests are an important tool in scientific research and market studies, as they help researchers analyze data, interpret results and make informed decisions The primary purpose of hypothesis testing is whether evidence there is enough to support or reject a particular hypothesis. It formulates two hypotheses: the null hypothesis (H0), which assumes no effect or relationship between the variables, and the alternative hypothesis (Here), which indicates the existence of an effect or relationship In this section, we will test the main research hypothesis has been observed , viz.

➤ There is no statistically significant relationship between test marketing and customer loyalty on Iraqi e-commerce platforms at 0.05% significance level. To complete this exercise, we have three subpropositions that need to be addressed as follows.

H1: There is no statistically significant relationship between survey shopping and service satisfaction in Iraqi e-commerce platforms at 0.05% significance level.SPSS version 25 was used.

Table (5): Testing the First Hypothesis

service satisfaction	Model Indicators					Levels		
	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.	B	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.87	0.47	0.44	11.4	0.00	2.07	3.30	0.00
experimental marketing						0.37	3.69	0.00

Source: By the researcher based on the outputs of SPSS 25.

R: Refers to the relationship between experiential marketing and service satisfaction, with a value of 0.87, indicating a very strong relationship between the two variables.

R²: Represents the variation in service satisfaction that can be explained by experiential marketing, with a value of 0.47, meaning that 47% of the variation in the service satisfaction variable is explained by the independent variable.

Adjusted R²: Reflects the adjusted change in the dependent variable, which reached 0.44.

F: The value was 11.4, which is a significant value, indicating a statistically significant effect.

B: Shows the values of the regression coefficients; for the independent variable, the value was 2.07.

T: The value was 3.30, which is a significant value, indicating a statistically significant effect.

The analysis results indicate a significant impact of experiential marketing on service satisfaction on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

H2: There is no statistically significant relationship at the 0.05% significance level between experiential marketing and purchasing behavior on Iraqi e-commerce platforms. We obtain the following results.

Table (6): Testing the Second Hypothesis

purchasing behavior	Model Indicators					Levels		
	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	S.g.	B	t	S.g.
(Constant)	0.74	0.40	0.39	14.7	0.00	2.77	7.20	0.00
experimental marketing						0.26	3.24	0.00

Source: By the Researcher

R: Indicates the degree of correlation between experiential marketing and purchasing

behavior, which is 0.74, signifying a strong correlation.

R²: Shows that 40% of the variation in "purchasing behavior" is explained by experiential marketing.

Adjusted R²: Reflects the adjusted change in the dependent variable, which reached 0.39.

F: The value is 14.7, which is significant, indicating a meaningful impact of experiential marketing on purchasing behavior.

B: The B value for experiential marketing is 2.77.

T: The value is 3.24, which is significant, indicating a statistically significant effect.

The analysis results indicate a significant impact of experiential marketing on purchasing behavior on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

H3: There is no statistically significant relationship at the 0.05% significance level between experiential marketing and purchase recommendation on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

Table (7): Testing Hypothesis Three

unemployment rate	Model Indicators					Levels		
	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.	B	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.65	0.30	0.27	10.1	0.00	2.66	4.96	0.00
R&D costs						0.39	4.59	0.00

Source: By the Researcher

R: Indicates the degree of correlation between experiential marketing and purchase recommendation, which is 0.65, signifying a strong correlation.

R²: Shows that 30% of the variation in "purchase recommendation" is explained by experiential marketing.

Adjusted R²: Reflects the adjusted change in the dependent variable, which reached 0.27.

F: The Fisher value was 10.1, which is significant, indicating a meaningful impact of experiential marketing on purchase recommendation.

B: The B value for experiential marketing is 2.66.

T: The T value was 4.96, which is significant.

The analysis results indicate an acceptable impact of experiential marketing on purchase recommendation.

Based on the testing of the sub-hypotheses, we conclude that the main hypothesis is valid, as experiential marketing has a significant effect on customer loyalty on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

Fourth Chapter: Conclusions and Recommendations

First: Results

1. The overall average for the study axes was 2.05, indicating a high degree of agreement among the sample members with the study axes.

2. The results of the study revealed a significant impact of experiential marketing on service satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of R=0.87.

3. A significant impact of experiential marketing on purchase behavior was found, with a correlation coefficient of R=0.74.

4. An acceptable impact of experiential marketing on purchase recommendation was observed, with a correlation coefficient of R=0.65.

5. The results of testing the sub-hypotheses showed a high impact of experiential marketing on customer loyalty on Iraqi e-commerce platforms.

Second: Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. The mean of the study axes is 2.05, indicating that the sample members agree significantly on the importance of experimental marketing. This positive response demonstrates the importance of this type of marketing in increasing customer loyalty in the digital age.

2. The results show a strong relationship between marketing and service evaluation and customer satisfaction. This suggests that trial marketing can be an effective tool to improve service satisfaction, which in turn increases loyalty.

3. Temptation marketing has a significant impact on buying behavior. This means that test marketing can encourage customers to buy more, directly increasing customer loyalty.

4. Trial marketing has a recognized effect on the likelihood that customers will recommend the product or service to others. This positive response suggests that test marketing can positively enhance the image of the product or service among potential customers.

5. The results confirm the significant impact of experimental marketing on customer loyalty on Iraqi e-commerce initiatives. This finding suggests that trial marketing can be an effective tool for building emotional and behavioral loyalty among consumers on e-commerce platforms.

Third: Recommendations

1. Implementing technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) to provide unique and engaging marketing experiences.

2. Providing customer services through artificial intelligence and chatbots to ensure instant and effective experiences.

3. Designing websites and mobile applications with simple and user-friendly interfaces.

4. Offering 24/7 customer service across multiple channels (live chat, email, phone).

5. Developing loyalty programs that include reward points, special discounts, and different membership tiers.

6. Encouraging customers to refer friends and family by providing shared rewards for both referrers and referees.

7. Using predictive analytics to anticipate future customer trends and adapt marketing strategies accordingly.

8. Conducting regular customer satisfaction surveys to identify strengths and weaknesses, and using customer feedback to continuously improve products and services.

9. Creating educational and engaging content that helps customers make purchasing decisions and encourages interactions with the audience on social media, responding to comments and reviews.

10. Developing loyalty programs that contribute to building long-term relationships with customers.

11. Providing technical support and after-sales services to deliver a comprehensive customer experience.

12. Utilizing artificial intelligence to deeply analyze customer data and train machine learning models for behavior predictions.

13. Providing immediate feedback to customers on their inquiries and addressing their questions as quickly as possible.

14. Conducting ongoing training programs to enhance the skills of the team in experiential marketing and customer service.

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