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The Customer as the Core of the Marketing Environment

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ABSTRACT

As digital innovation modifies international markets, the analysis intends to examine how the change from product-focused to customer-focused marketing affects commitment, faith, and creativity. It examines comparative analysis of generational values, centred on how the dynamics of customer expectations, digital integration, and disruptions like COVID-19 adjust marketing strategies. This study investigates the end-user as the key element of the commercial ecosystem via a study of literature and three instances: LEGO, Airbnb, and GoPro. These cases exemplify how co-development, customisation, and brand engagement content allow consumers to perform as partners in value generation. The study combines concepts of client-oriented marketing, digital evolution, and managing expectations to showcase flexible marketing activities over generations. The outcomes present that brands adopting transparency, honest communication, and technology-mediated engagement promote improved customer faith and loyalty. Customer-focused techniques that rely on customisation and contribution refine long-term strategic advantage. Though there are still gaps in observational evidence concerning loyalty across cultures, fair AI implementation, and trust rebuilding after a crisis, there are opportunities for further research.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital economy, traditional marketing models, which often treat the customer as a passive recipient of value, are insufficient. The rise of social media, digital platforms, and co-creation tools has fundamentally altered the marketing environment, transitioning the customer from a simple target to an active, influential, and integrated participant in the value chain. Despite the acknowledged shift toward customer-centricity, many organisations lack a cohesive, operational framework that formally positions the customer as the core, rather than just a segment, of the total marketing environment (including product development, service design, and promotion). This gap results in misalignment of efforts and missed opportunities for authentic engagement and leveraging the customer's role as a co-creator. This issue is highly relevant because failure to deeply integrate the customer leads to suboptimal resource allocation, inaccurate market sensing, and a heightened risk of brand authenticity crises. Understanding the customer's centrality is no longer a strategic advantage; it is a prerequisite for sustained competitive advantage and necessary for navigating an environment where brand narratives are co-authored in real-time. The marketing environment is highly influenced by changing customer choices and behaviours, especially across generations. Today's marketers face the challenge of addressing generational value gaps, with Gen Z prioritising experiences and sustainability, while older consumers focus on reliability and trust. Understanding this gap is vital, especially during crises like COVID-19, where customer trust is tested by brand responses. This study

will examine how brands analyse customer reactions to new category launches, explore decision-making patterns, and assess trust erosion when expectations are unmet. The goal is to suggest adaptive marketing strategies to enhance consumer confidence and brand loyalty.

This research holds significant value for both academic theory and management practice. Theoretically, it challenges and expands traditional marketing models (like the 4 Ps) by providing a necessary framework for understanding the customer's role in a post-digital, participatory market, thus contributing to the evolution of contemporary marketing thought. Practically, this study will equip marketing officers, strategists, and business leaders with actionable guidelines to restructure their organisations, redefine their KPIs, and reallocate resources to truly reflect the customer's central position. By moving beyond simple rhetoric, the findings will help companies unlock new streams of innovation, drive more authentic brand engagement, and build resilient, co-created value that directly translates into improved customer loyalty and sustained profitability. The research paper examines how the customers centric practises will help in enabling the transformation of customers from passive contributors to active co-creators in platform-based market systems.

The Evolution of Marketing Paradigms: From Product-Centricity to Customer-Centricity

Modern marketing is shifting from a product-centric to a customer-centric approach, where customers' needs are prioritised over simply offering products. This shift reflects the ever-changing marketing landscape of today,

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where companies need to be adaptable, quick to react, and creative (Akin, 2024).

Paradigm shifts in marketing thought denote transformative changes in the fundamental beliefs, strategies, and approaches that guide marketing practices. These shifts often stem from external factors such as technological advancements, societal changes, and shifts in consumer behaviour. For instance, the transition from a product-centric approach to a customer-centric one marked a significant paradigm shift. Other notable shifts include the rise of relationship marketing, digital transformation, and the integration of data-driven insights into marketing strategies. These shifts reflect the dynamic nature of marketing theory, highlighting the need for continual adaptation and innovation in response to evolving market landscapes (Birn & Lee, 2025)

Opportunities in Emerging Markets for Marketing Transformation

Despite existing barriers, emerging markets offer substantial opportunities for growth through digital and customer-centric innovation. The rising mobile penetration, youthful demographics, and robust entrepreneurial ecosystems create an ideal environment for adopting digital marketing. Companies can leverage these trends by implementing cost-effective, scalable technologies, including social media, AI-driven customer service, and mobile applications. emphasise that digital banking in developing economies has personalised customer experiences and broadened financial inclusion. These instances illustrate how a strategic marketing transformation can yield competitive advantages, foster deeper customer relationships, and drive sustained growth (Medel, 2025).

Consumer values are changing as they are giving more weight to health-conscious purchasing, digital interaction, and sustainability, but conscientious spending. These changes point to a major obstacle for marketers, particularly when it comes to bridging the value gaps between generations (Ergen & Sığirci, 2023).

Customer-Centric Marketing Theory

Customer-Centric Marketing Theory asserts that the foundation of business strategy should prioritise creating and delivering value derived from a profound understanding of customer needs, behaviours, and preferences. This perspective shifts the focus from transactional marketing to developing relationship-oriented engagements. In emerging markets, where consumer behaviour is rapidly changing, companies must remain agile in adapting their offerings based on customer feedback and expectations. Emphasizing customer-centricity entails crafting personalised experiences, building trust, and cultivating long-term loyalty – goals increasingly facilitated by digital platforms (Sheth, 2011). This theory underscores the strategic significance of positioning the customer at the heart of marketing innovation (Medel, 2025).

The conceptual framework incorporates four essential constructs: customer-centricity, digital marketing practices, strategic marketing transformation, and the dynamics of emerging markets. At its core, the framework emphasizes the interplay between customer-centricity and digital transformation, where businesses innovate customer engagement through digital tools tailored to local market conditions (Medel, 2025). Strategic marketing transformation is perceived because of this integration, marked by transitioning from traditional marketing models to digitally enabled, customer-focused strategies.

Marketing Adaptation

The marketing environment is influenced by micro and macro factors that help build business strategies. Macro factors include industries, markets, technology, and products, whereas the micro factors include customers, investors, and lastly, competitors. The article highlights how turbulence in the marketing environment has affected both levels simultaneously. For example, market shifts and technological changes (macro) may disrupt partnerships with all suppliers and reshape the competition (micro). This demonstrates that for businesses to remain competitive, they must constantly adjust to complex and uncertain conditions (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023).

Customer autonomy has been enhanced by user feedback, through which individuals practice essential impact over brand image and perceived service quality. Instead of showing inactivity, consumers take an active role in collaborative value creation by recounting experiences and designing products. Appraisals and online networking sites implement ongoing feedback cycles, leading firms to track and react to consumer opinions. This attentiveness improves market agility and coincides with emerging expectations. Digital platforms facilitate this impact, allowing immediate distribution of consumer perceptions and strengthening consumer perspectives in framing brand discourse, product innovation, and promotional strategies.

Influence of technology on Customers

Online platforms and internet retail platforms progressively depend on live web navigation analysis to observe and estimate consumer behaviour. This rapidity enables firms to respond to consumer decisions by configuring suggestions, marketing campaigns, and real-time services. Such quantitative approaches stimulate changes in customer choices, as networks can immediately recognise patterns and revise approaches. Eventually, large-scale data analysis strengthens enterprises to coordinate services more thoroughly with changing consumer requirements while refining personalised experiences (Pal *et al.*, 2023).

Digital Acceleration of Customer Voice

(Medel, 2025) mentioned that technology serves as both an enabler and an amplifier of customer-centric strategies. AI, big data, and mobile applications support scalability

and customisation, even when resources are limited. In emerging markets, mobile technology is pivotal in providing an accessible channel for service delivery and customer engagement. indicates that adopting these technologies is influenced by perceived usefulness and ease of use, which are fundamental principles of the technology acceptance model. When integrated effectively, these technologies empower businesses to better understand and anticipate customer behaviour, streamline service delivery, and create a more connected brand experience (Akaka & Vargo, 2014). The strategic implementation of technology thus enables firms to strengthen customer relationships and differentiate themselves in competitive markets.

Evolution of Digital Marketing Ecosystem

Digital marketing has progressed from being an online promotional tool to becoming an integrated ecosystem that fosters real-time customer engagement, behaviour tracking, and automation. Social media, mobile commerce, and artificial intelligence have transformed how businesses connect with customers (Akaka & Vargo, 2014). In emerging markets, mobile-first strategies further accelerate this transformation, reflecting the dominant use of smartphones over desktops (Medel, 2025) highlights that digital channels can effectively deliver marketing messages through culturally relevant formats, even in contexts characterised by low literacy or limited income. This digital evolution allows businesses to bridge communication gaps and offer services more inclusively

Generational Dynamics and Value Perception

Generational differences strongly influence customers' perceptions perception and buying decisions. Baby boomers are often seen as conservative and mainly only focused on stability, and such a generational mindset helps them respond to marketing. Moreover, millennials incorporate technology in their day-to-day life, and care about social issues, which makes them gravitate towards the brands that prioritise innovative ideas and solutions. Gen Z, as digital natives, seeks personalised experiences and are very action-oriented, which shows high interactive responsiveness to digital marketing. These differences show how these generations shape the value perception. Baby boomers value consistency the most, whereas Gen Z and millennials value technology-driven engagement and fast service the most (Boada *et al.*, 2023).

Gen Z: Priorities and Expectations

Gen Z prioritises authenticity, social responsibility and focuses on experiences and proficiency with digital tools. They prioritise the brands that favour demonstrating ethical practices, inclusivity, variety, and respond to customer-focused campaigns. Digital marketing is the key, with the help of social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram serving as primary channels. Moreover, engagement of influencers and peer recommendation plays a significant role in shaping their purchase decisions

(Matsa Prasanna, 2024).

Marketers' Strategies for Bridging Generational Value Gaps:

Marketers can bridge generational gaps in values by applying the insights from consumer behaviour and marketing studies, targeting, and segmentation, which helps in resonating with consumers. Moreover, they should adapt all types of viral content, such as humour and entertainment, to attract the younger audience, whereas older audiences value credibility. Electronic word of mouth enables services and products to remain relevant across all generations. Value-driven marketing that is based on credibility, trust, and cultural fit increases engagement and purchase intentions across generational groups (Matsa Prasanna, 2024).

Customer Reactions and Trust in Crisis Situations

Crises like COVID-19 highlighted how abstract global disruption can redefine customer behaviour and the dynamics of brand connections. The trust of customers suffers during shortages and distancing, which proves that the vulnerability of a brand is essential during a crisis. Traditional customer habits broke down, which opens the room for new trust dynamics. Moreover, empathetic and emotional support is provided by platforms such as Twitter, as it helps the brand restore confidence (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022).

Company Behaviour and Customer Trust Erosion/Enhancement

The report "The Corporate Trust Crisis: Why Customers No Longer Believe Brands" emphasises how end-user faith progressively relies on evident and genuine communication, framing transparency as the recent "currency of credibility". It highlights the significance of credibility and congruence with buyer preferences, indicating that awareness is demonstrated in how firms authentically interact with their shareholders. The article further acknowledged that responsiveness and versatility are crucial, as agencies are required to transform to align with evolving expectations. Moreover, it alerts that strategic manipulation reduces faith, whereas ethical conduct promotes faithfulness, ultimately shaping ongoing brand reputation and future consumption decisions (Businessner, 2025).

Challenges of new category launches

Launching a new category is slightly different from introducing a product, as it requires building awareness and familiarising the customer with the new products; moreover, shaping their perspective on the newly launched products. In contrast with brand launches or line creation, creating a category is riskier because the demand for it has not been demonstrated, nor have any benchmarks been established. Moreover, it indicates that only 4% of the literature on new product development focuses on product launch, revealing a significant gap in research.

The author mentions two megatrends: globalisation and digitisation, signalling that the combination of the two will lead to three further megatrends: “hyper-competition, mobility, and networking”. Ultimately, it will influence the expansion of the product in global contexts as the success of new categories is similar in the international

context as well (Salmen, 2021).

Sources of Customer Hesitancy

Customers often hesitate a lot before adopting platforms. This hesitancy covers four sources, which align with cognitive load, habit, uncertainty, and, lastly, perceived risk.

Table 1: Strategies to Overcome Challenges in Business

Business challenge	Customer-centric strategy	Generational relevance	Marketing implication
Low customer trust	Transparent communication, reviews, and open feedback systems	Gen Z and Millennials often value authenticity and peer validation	Brands must communicate honestly and make customer feedback visible
Weak customer engagement	Co-creation, online communities, and interactive campaigns	Younger consumers often prefer participation rather than one-way advertising	Customers should be treated as collaborators, not only buyers
Difficulty adopting digital platforms	Simple design, personalization, and secure transactions	Digital-native consumers expect fast, seamless, and user-friendly experiences	Platform usability becomes part of the brand experience
Negative word-of-mouth	Fast response, complaint resolution, and public accountability	Social media users can quickly amplify dissatisfaction	Brands need active listening and rapid service recovery
Weak brand differentiation	User-generated content and experience-based storytelling	Younger generations often trust real customer stories more than traditional ads	Authentic customer stories can strengthen brand identity
Changing customer expectations	Continuous feedback and adaptive innovation	Different generations may define value differently	Firms must update strategies based on evolving customer needs

After (Cutinha & Mokshagundam, 2022) and (Lehtimäki, n.d.)

lastly perceived risk. In general, users experience cognitive strain when evaluating multiple options, whereas existing habits make them reluctant to switch from familiar services. Users usually have perceived risk in financial apprehensions, fear of social judgment, and discomfort when making decisions about unfamiliar homes while booking stays in Airbnb. Lack of prior knowledge and leveraging third-party support reviews help influence perception, and Airbnb reduces uncertainty with a strong brand, trust, and a proven reputation for credibility, which reduces such doubts (Jun, 2020).

Strategies for Building Customer Confidence

In peer-to-peer business models, consumer confidentiality is very important, as trust is the key to keeping the consumers active and building long-term relationships. In the context of Airbnb, strategies that help in building confidence certainly require minimising perceived risk while solidifying trust. Values such as affordability and exclusive local offerings play a very important role in determining purchase intention. Educating buyers

through clear and honest information eases perceived doubts. Secure payments and verified hosts act as trust cues that boost confidence, while reviews and host credibility act as social proof that has a significant impact on customers (Jun, 2020).

The Role of Expectations in Customer Satisfaction and Trust

Expectation confirmation theory explains how customer satisfaction arises when perceived performance meets customers’ expectations, whereas dissatisfaction arises when it is not met fully. Within e-commerce, trust plays a crucial role in building customer satisfaction and driving approval. In a situation where a customer deals with a “trust defect,” an unfulfilled expectation diminishes both lasting trust and satisfaction in the provider over time. This shows that strategic expectation control hinders the loss of trust, which is usually caused by overpromising, while honest and transparent communication cultivates loyalty and satisfaction (Kim *et al.*, 2003).

Causes of Unmet Expectations

The collapse of Sears illustrates how poor expectation management, unsteady promotional approaches, and weak leadership can push a brand towards decline. For years, the brand struggled to balance discount shopping with premium branding, which left customers perplexed and undermined their trust. In contrast to Walmart and Target, which strategically employed discounts to draw in and retain consumers, Sears was unable to strike a balance between pricing and customer value or profitability. Sears neglected investments in product quality, presentation, and customer experience in favour of cost-cutting, as (Sears: A Case Study in Business Failure, 2018; and The Sears Bankruptcy and a Flawed Customer Experience: Interview with a Brand Strategist, 2018) explains. Unmet customer expectations, waning loyalty, and bankruptcy in 2018 were the results of this misalignment between promises and delivery.

Loss of Credibility: Impact on Customer Trust and Loyalty

The art of understanding and responding to customer behaviour is essential for maintaining both growth and profitability. (Ahmed *et al.*, n.d.) revealed that misleading advertising severely damages customer trust and brand credibility. Exaggerated claims, discounts, and hidden fees that are designed to manipulate customers lead to negative implications for consumer trust and brand loyalty. Such strategies may ultimately lead to a disconnection between expectations and actual product experience by customers. It eventually damages both immediate satisfaction and long-term brand loyalty.

When consumers discover a brand's claims are false, they perceive the company as unreliable and dishonest, leading to a loss of loyalty and a reluctance to make future purchases. This scepticism can make it more difficult for brands to build and maintain a good reputation. Ultimately, deceptive practices can cause irreparable harm to a brand's credibility, as trust is difficult and costly to regain.

Negative Word-of-Mouth

Negative Word-of-Mouth (NWOM), as discussed (Tosun *et al.*, 2024), is when people share negative experiences about a brand to their friends, family, or others. This usually happens because they feel strong negative emotions like brand hate. NWOM is a type of "attack" behaviour that occurs when customers have negative feelings about a brand. It involves talking with others and influencing their opinions. Traditionally, NWOM happens through face-to-face conversations, but with the internet, people also share negative opinions online through reviews, social media, blogs, and other platforms. Sometimes, people post negative content as a way to get back at the company for a bad experience.

Negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) is a significant concern for companies, as customers are more sensitive to negative information, which can severely damage their

reputation (Tosun *et al.*, 2024). NWOM has a bigger effect on potential customers than positive reviews because bad reviews make people hesitant to purchase a product. Negative emotions make customers more likely to spread NWOM. This happens more often with services than products, and things like personal beliefs and a company's history with social responsibility also impact how much NWOM spreads.

Balance Theory helps explain why people behave this way towards brands. It says people want their feelings, thoughts, and actions to match up so everything feels consistent and balanced. Brands often represent more than just products; they symbolise values or groups that people identify with or aspire to. If a brand doesn't match a person's identity or beliefs, that person might talk negatively about the brand to feel balanced.

So, when people don't feel connected to a brand, they may spread negative word-of-mouth because it fits with their dislike or disagreement with the brand. This negative talk is a way for them to express and maintain consistency with their bad feelings about the brand. Tosun *et al.*, (2024) suggest that when people see a brand as different from their own values or beliefs, they are more likely to share negative opinions about it.

(Azemi *et al.*, 2020) have mentioned that the tendency of customers to spread online NWOM that usually originates from their perception that the company's failure was an unethical act, as they believe that the company could have avoided that failure. Service failure was the most important factor in this case.

E-WOM is an important marketing strategy for attracting and retaining customers in the e-business environment (Chang *et al.*, 2015). While prior research has explored the motivations behind NWOM, fewer studies have focused on the impact of company response strategies. Chang *et al.* (2015) focused on how a company's response to an online complaint can influence a reader's perception and willingness to engage in NWOM. It specifically discusses the ways to choose the right response strategies to mitigate the negative effects of NWOM.

Customer Churn from Brand Image

Churn rate is an important indicator of customer retention and business health. It is a vital metric for assessing the relevance and performance of businesses. It is essential to reduce churn rate as the cost of acquiring new customers is higher than the cost of retaining existing ones. By improving customer support and user experience, a business can create a satisfying customer experience, resulting in the reduction of churn (Majka, 2024).

Damaged Brand Image

Organisations must focus on building brand reputation and strong relationships with customers. (Ali, 2022) has mentioned that brand reputation is an intangible source driving the performance of organisations. It serves as an asset that differentiates it from competitors, and products

can be offered at a higher value to the target customers. It also helps gain stakeholders' confidence. Literature mentions that a positive reputation consequently contributes to higher customer retention, strategic benefits such as reduced operating costs, and increased revenue from higher product prices. This study concluded that the trust of customers is not the result of brand reputation and word-of-mouth.

Adaptive Marketing for Enhanced Consumer Confidence and Brand Loyalty

The emerging marketing dynamics highlight the significant impact of the consumer, who now plays a formative role in brand management strategies instead of simply reacting to them. According to Rosário and Casaca (2025), consumer commitment is no longer wholly based upon functional capacity or cost but progressively relies upon faith, approval, and sentimental allegiance that brands nurture. This illustrates a transition in which customers, primarily younger generations, stimulate adjustment in promotional strategies by requiring authenticity, customisation, and technological integration. Cohort differences further underscore this interplay. Generation X is observed to demonstrate the maximum level of customer loyalty, being value-driven, less affected by digital promotion, and located in their peak career stage.

Firms that operate in fast-changing and unpredictable environments must embrace adaptive strategies, such as customer oriented strategies that unites digital transformation with explicit expectation setting practises, from the practical standpoint it highlights the necessity for agility where enterprise adopt AI, mobile solutions and social media channels to deliver personalised and tailored experiences. Moreover, organizational leaders should focus on sustainability and inclusivity in their practises to ensure alignment with generational values whereas to protect the interests of consumers, policymaker can enact laws about transparency. These recommendations support that the shift towards customer centricity not only amplifies strategic competitiveness but also fosters long-term brand loyalty (Medel, 2025).

Product-driven strategies have given way to customer-centric models in marketing, where consumers influence markets through value-based expectations, digital engagement, and feedback. The vulnerability of trust is brought to light by crises like COVID-19, which emphasise the importance of openness and moral behaviour in building resilience. Younger consumers' demands for technology-driven experiences, personalisation, and authenticity further reshape brand strategies due to generational differences. The introduction of new categories shows how crucial it is to lower risk and control expectations in order to foster confidence. Finally, in increasingly complex and competitive environments, adaptive marketing that combines innovation with customer-centric values builds consumer trust, encourages loyalty, and guarantees

sustainable growth.

However, there are a few gaps in the literature review. Firstly, there is not much data on how customer-centric tactics maintain loyalty over time among various generations. Secondly, a more thorough examination of ethical, cultural, and contextual differences is necessary when integrating cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, huge amounts of information, and automation into customer-centred frameworks. Third, there is not enough examination of long-term post-crisis brand recovery tactics, despite the discussion of crisis-driven trust dynamics. Fourth, how businesses in emerging markets strike a balance between affordability and personalisation in customer-centric digital models is not sufficiently covered in the literature. Lastly, empirical research on cross-cultural variations in consumer value perception is lacking, especially when it comes to how different generational cohorts react to adaptive marketing in international settings.

Customer-Centric Marketing Strategies: Insights from LEGO, Airbnb, and GoPro Case Studies

Case Studies from three organisations, Lego, Airbnb and GoPro, were used to understand their strategy to accomplish the marketing objectives by including customers (Kipling, 2015). This will be a guide for brands to incorporate the role of customers and adopt competitive strategies. Moreover, it will help readers to understand evidence-based results from customer-centric marketing strategies. Consumer behaviour is increasingly shifting from consumption to participation, where customers partner with brands to co-develop values. The current marketing approach is only centred on customers, prioritising customer needs, values, feedback, and responses.

Lego illustrates Co-creation by directly engaging with customers through innovation, which helps enhance engagement and lower development uncertainty. Similarly, Airbnb demonstrates the importance of trust and technology Adaptation by aligning platform performance and user experience outcomes. The adoption of Airbnb means the platform can be understood by the technology acceptance model, which focuses on perception of usefulness, trust and usability. Meanwhile, GoPro reflects the role of customer-generated content, which enables the customer to act like the storyteller, improving the authenticity, brand engagement and credibility.

Collectively, these case studies show that customer-centric marketing can be actionable as well as theoretical. It is a practical approach that allows the firm to foster trust, create sustained value with the help of active customer participation, and strengthen long-term engagement.

Case study of LEGO

LEGO's strategy for inclusive co-creation

Lego is the global leader in the toy industry and is now regarded as a leading example of customer-centric innovation after facing a setback in the early 2000s

because reliance on the standard method of R&D failed to keep pace with the evolving needs of customers. To address these limitations, LEGO pivoted towards customer-led innovation by directly engaging with its fan network. The Adult Fans of LEGO (AFOL) community stood out as a vital platform. Acting as the central hub that encouraged design sharing, nurtured creativity, and led to collaborations that shaped LEGO's final product. By adopting this approach, customers shifted from simply buying to co-creating, showing that creativity can fuel innovation. In addition to reviving its brand, LEGO demonstrated the strategic value of consumer-driven innovation by leveraging customer insights and participation.

How did LEGO pursue customer-centric strategies?

The company has been the best example of integrating brand loyalty and repeat customers through several strategies. The LEGO Group empowered customers through inclusive innovation by creating community-based crowdsourcing platforms like LEGO CUUSOO and later LEGO Ideas, launched in 2014. ("Lego History," n.d.) LEGO Ideas is a crowdsourcing platform that allows fans aged 13 and up to submit, vote on, and share ideas for new LEGO sets. This move brought LEGO fans of all ages closer into the product development process, allowing them to submit, support, and co-develop new product ideas.

Key customer-centric strategies include:

Engaging fans in innovation: Recognising adult consumers' creativity and innovation, LEGO actively involved fans in the design and development process, valuing their ideas to fuel product innovation. Based on customer feedback, LEGO has a plan to make its core products from sustainable materials by 2030.

Crowdsourcing platform evolution: LEGO CUUSOO started in 2008 in Japan as a pilot, where fans could submit ideas and get support to become official products. It went global in 2011, requiring ideas to reach 10,000 supporters to be reviewed. Due to massive growth, LEGO Ideas replaced CUUSOO in 2014 with a more robust platform aimed at a better user experience and wider age participation (lowering the age limit to 13) ("Lego History," n.d.).

Structured idea selection: Ideas need to gather 10,000 supporters within a limited timeframe on LEGO Ideas to qualify for review by the LEGO Review Board, which ensures quality and manages volume ("Lego History," n.d.).

Rewards and incentives: LEGO uses an attractive incentive program to motivate participation. A creator whose idea is selected for production receives a 1% royalty on the set's net sales and is recognised as the product's official creator. Other members who contribute to the platform are rewarded with points and badges. The platform is managed with strict rules, including an age restriction, to ensure users understand the guidelines. A

moderator is assigned to resolve any conflicts regarding copyrights or plagiarism (AK, 2015).

Precedents paving the way: Concepts like LEGOfactory.com (2005) and LEGO Design (2009) involved fans in creating designs and building custom models online, setting early examples of crowd sourced innovation ("Lego History," n.d.).

The LEGO brick is viewed as a language enabling fans to express ideas and stories, and the LEGO Group leveraged this by providing platforms that channel fan creativity into new products, turning consumers into collaborators and co-creators in innovation. This focused, inclusive approach deepened customer engagement and became a key driver of LEGO's product development and success. LEGO made its fans a key part of its innovation process. The company used a digital platform called LEGO Ideas to let customers help create new products. On this platform, fans submit ideas for new sets. Other users can vote on them, which helps LEGO see what people want. This helps the company reduce the risk of launching a product that won't sell. The platform also acts as a powerful marketing tool, as the winners get international attention. By involving fans and offering them clear incentives, LEGO created a steady stream of creative ideas.

Lego's transformation from near collapse to cultural and Market leadership reflects a paradigm shift towards co-creation, inclusivity, and customer empowerment. By inviting fans into its innovation process through platforms, hiring, and transparency, Lego reignited trust, renewed its fan base, and sustained a competitive advantage. This case offers rich insights for companies seeking to embed customer-centric and digitally facilitated innovation in their strategic DNA.

Lego's turnaround from near collapse to becoming a cultural and market leader represents a profound shift toward co-creation, inclusivity, and customer empowerment. By actively involving fans in the innovation process through digital platforms, collaborative hiring, and transparency, Lego rebuilt trust, revitalised its fan base, and secured a sustainable competitive edge. This case offers valuable lessons for companies aiming to embed customer-centric, digitally enabled innovation deeply into their strategic core.

In theoretical terms, the strategy of Lego alliance with co-creation, in which the customer plays an important role in value creation instead of being treated as a passive customer, this strategy not only helps in strengthening engagement but also mitigates product development risk and improves the alignment between the expectations of customers and innovation outcomes.

Case study of Airbnb

Introduction

Airbnb is an international platform that connects guests with unconventional housing options and hospitality services, and it has transformed the travel industry

through customer-driven innovation methods. The preference and behaviour of travellers changed after pandemic and Airbnb realised that the traditional strategies were insufficient to keep pace with the changing needs and demands of customers. Focusing on travellers' experiences, the company introduced category-based search functionality, which enables the customer to explore distinctive accommodations such as castles, vineyards, and treehouse that provide choices beyond the traditional parameters of date and destination filters.

By focusing on the needs of customers, the redesign prioritised adaptability, inspiration, and personalisation, resonating with the new ways of lifestyle shaped by digital autonomy and flexible work; moreover, with the help of community opinions and an understanding of modern travellers, Airbnb showed that customer-focused ideas can keep a brand relevant. Much like LEGO's interaction with its AFOL community, Airbnb's strategy highlights the importance of listening to the customers' needs and incorporating their ideas, ensuring marketing is aligned with the expectations of customers.

Key customer-centric strategies include:

User-generated content through the co-creation of content and brand storytelling

The case study (How Uber, Airbnb, and Etsy Attracted Their First 1,000 Customers 2016) explores how Airbnb focused on a customer acquisition strategy. They initially targeted hosts by helping them market their spaces through professional photography and then leveraged high-quality customer experiences to attract millions of guests. As guests share their stay experiences, they create a stream of user-generated content (UGC). The guests' feedback and photos serve as an authentic testimonial. Thus, UGC provides and credible promotion and enhances trust for users. Airbnb's referral program also incentivises both hosts and guests to bring new users to the platform. The "Super host" program rewards hosts who provide exceptional service, which helps maintain quality and encourages positive reviews (Airbnb, n.d.).

Community Building and Trust

Airbnb has leveraged a community-driven program, which will help in cultivating trust and strengthening its brand image as a platform that values connection and kindness. Through campaigns such as #OneLessStranger, Airbnb offered 1 million dollars by providing 100,000 customers \$10 each, motivating individuals to perform a meaningful act of charity. The participants were invited to allocate funds towards projects such as cultivating plants in neighbourhood gardens, or offering resources to local community centres, and to post their act of kindness online on social media by tagging the campaign hashtag. By showcasing these efforts via an exclusive web portal, Airbnb launched a chain of goodwill that united communities and reinforced its commitment to openness and hospitality (Spary, 2015).

Personalisation

In a McKinsey interview (Chesky, 2008), Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky discussed personalisation as a key aspect of the "Airbnb experience". Chesky explains that Airbnb works to evolve beyond just a platform for booking stays into one that offers unique, personalised travel experiences. He had revealed that presently, travellers seek more than just accommodation; they want memorable, authentic experiences that reflect their individual preferences and lifestyles. Airbnb aims to deliver this by enabling hosts to offer personalised stays and experiences, catering to tastes and budgets. This focus on personalisation aligns with the company's broader mission of helping users "belong anywhere," creating a deeply personalised and human-centric travel journey that connects people to communities worldwide.

Additionally, Airbnb uses personalised messaging by tailoring marketing emails and recommendations to users' interests, helping them discover local experiences and listings that match their preferences. This approach expands users' travel horizons while keeping the experience relevant and engaging. Solomon (2016) mentions how Airbnb combines localisation and personalisation to create a "global" experience, making the platform feel customised to each country and guest. This includes supporting over 60 languages, offering locally created guides and recommendations, and customising listings and policies to regional needs, along with adapting the user interface based on preferences.

Leveraging Customer Participation in Marketing Strategy Through event partnerships that enhance localised and authentic experiences, Airbnb strategically leverages customers as co-creators in marketing. By positioning customers as fans with collaboration at global events such as FIFA tournaments, Lollapalooza music festivals, and the Tour de France, Airbnb directly engages travellers by offering immersive opportunities that merge cultural participation with brand-driven experiences. Airbnb's co-creation approach of word of mouth influence, while defining itself as more than just a booking site, it emerges as a lifestyle catalyst. In transferring events into cultural narratives, which empowers the customer to become more influential and a storyteller (Airbnb, 2025b) and (Airbnb, 2025a). By positioning customers as explorers, Airbnb enables them to not only consume but also share and amplify their unique event experiences. This organically extends the brand's reach and authenticity in diverse markets. Ultimately, presenting Airbnb not just as a lodging platform but also as a facilitator of memorable experiences.

Case study 3

Gopro

Introduction

GoPro is not just a camera or an editing app; it is way beyond that. It has successfully positioned itself as a lifestyle brand that helps the audience get involved

with chroniclers and artists. GoPro has created a global community of adventurers and content creators who serve as brand ambassadors thanks to its creative marketing techniques. The app replaces traditional advertising with social media, user-generated content, and strategic partnerships to create a powerful cycle of engagement and loyalty.

Key companies' strategies include

User-Generated Content - GoPro's marketing strategy is designed to encourage customers to record their experiences and publish them online. Hashtags like #GoPro and #GoProAwards help users promote their content and increase the visibility of their posts (GoPro, n.d.). This strategy creates a constant flow of genuine content over the internet while shaping regular customers into brand supporters.

Community Building and Recognition - The GoPro Awards program provides many incentives, such as offering cash prizes, gear, and recognition. The GoPro team online channels and rewards the users for posting more updates online; this builds loyalty among the community of users who constantly share high-quality visuals.

Storytelling and Brand Identity - GoPro sells not just cameras, but also the stories and emotions tied to them giving customers a personalised experience. Its social channels like YouTube and Instagram that specifically highlight posts published by users on sports, adventures, and personal moments taken from different perspectives. This approach to storytelling encourages new content creators and showcases GoPro as a brand that is an enabler of creating memorable experiences.

Collaboration and Sponsorships - GoPro actively contributes to the action-sports community by partnering with athletes like Travis Rice and sponsoring events like X Games (GoPro, 2015). These connections build recognition, trust, showcase product usage, and increase brand exposure in the market.

Product innovation through feedback - GoPro constantly considers customers' feedback while developing new products. Features such as HyperSmooth stabilisation and waterproofing designs were developed directly as per users' feedback. This concludes that customers' input helps in both the development and marketing stages.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research applies a qualitative approach to explore the customer's role as the core of the marketing environment. This approach is suitable because it helps in understanding deeper about customer behaviour, trust perception, and interaction with the brand, rather than only focusing on quantitative outcomes. The study mainly relies on secondary data, which is supported by case studies of GoPro, Airbnb and Lego to illustrate practical understanding.

The approach is appropriate because it assists in

examining the impact of customer-centric approaches, digital transformation, and generational differences on marketing outcomes. It dwells upon such aspects as engagement, trust and co-creation. A qualitative method enables the understanding of the subject matter in a more profound way by better interpreting the practical examples and theoretical concepts. A qualitative method allows for a very detailed interpretation of practical and theoretical insights.

Further, this study relies mainly on secondary data, which is collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, company websites, case studies and lastly industry reports. These sources help in providing very detailed insights into the transformation of digital marketing crisis communication strategies and the behaviour of customers. The inclusion of Airbnb, GoPro, and Lego as case studies was based on their strong focus on user-generated content, co-creation, and customer participation.

Data analysis was conducted by thematic analysis, identifying the code theme, such as generational values, co-creation trust, customer centricity, and digital engagement. This method helped the study to draw connections and highlight patterns in organisational responses to shifting the expectations of customers.

Despite its major contribution, this study includes several limitations. It relies only on secondary data, which may constrain empirical evidence and also limit the capture of real-time behaviour of the customers. Furthermore, there is a lack of primary data, such as interviews and surveys, which reduces the ability to gain more insightful insights into the perceptions of customers. Additionally, the focus on the well-known brands in the case study may introduce bias by not focusing on less successful brands. The resilience of published articles may also influence, objectively, the methodology remains appropriate for providing valuable insights into customer-centric marketing practices

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature reveals a fundamental transformation in marketing philosophy. Traditional product-focused approaches have been replaced by customer-centric models where the needs, behaviour, and preferences drive business strategy. Several organisations claim to be customer-centric but lack the structural changes necessary to operate with this approach. While there is a paradigm shift, there is a gap between what brands claim and what is actually implemented.

Today, technology has played a pivotal role in businesses' marketing strategies. It has enabled businesses to introduce products rapidly across the globe, enabling customers to contribute to products individually. With the use of AI and big data, businesses are innovating customer services by estimating their behaviour and strengthening their personalised experiences when purchasing a product. In the emerging market, with a larger number of people engaging with mobile devices and social media, this has led the business to further provide low-cost but

personalised services. By allowing customers to share their reviews and feedback, online platforms enhance the power of customers in directing the actions of the brand. For instance, LEGO Ideas, GoPro, and Airbnb highlight how technology strengthens the role of customers, shifting from merely consumers to co-creators with the help of digital marketing.

Businesses are tailoring digital tools according to local market conditions. With this, customers play an active role in promotional strategies. Their feedback influences brand perception and the quality of the services they provide, ultimately affecting the business in the long run. How the brand reacts to feedback influences its agility and customer expectations. Hence, influences product innovation and promotional strategies. While this enables the brand to gather insights, it also opens them to increased scrutiny and puts a need to respond rapidly to customer concerns.

Data-driven insights have been a key strategy adopted by organisations. It provides insights into customers' interaction with the products, their retention, and purchase behaviour. There is a pressing need for continuous adaptation and innovation by integrating technology in businesses for sustained growth. The findings reveal the importance of customer engagement, digital marketing, and most importantly, customer satisfaction, putting the needs of the customers at the centre of marketing strategies.

The review elaborates on variations in how different generations perceive value and interact with brands. The older generations value stability and rely on traditional marketing, while the millennials prioritise technology integration and innovative ideas. Gen Z seeks personalisation in marketing; they are highly interactive and responsive to digital marketing. As research suggests, the brands should focus on catering to generational differences, but there is less information on how the value can be provided to different generations simultaneously.

The literature review primarily focused on four reasons for customer hesitancy: cognitive load, habit, uncertainty, and perceived risk. With the Airbnb case study, brands can understand how platforms can address these concerns through credibility, social proof, and risk mitigation strategies. The literature lacks a comprehensive framework for predicting and managing hesitancy across markets.

Misleading marketing practices damage trust and credibility for brands, leading to negative word of mouth, churn, and damage to brand image. Challenging times bring flaws to the surface, linking trust to kindness, openness, and truthful exchange. Promises that are misaligned and have bad communication weaken customer loyalty, but consistent transparency and clarity strengthen it. The case study follows this pattern: GoPro increased engagement through UGC and recognition initiatives, Airbnb restored trust following crises through personalisation and user-driven campaigns, and LEGO promoted innovation and loyalty through LEGO Ideas co-creation. The findings

reveal the importance of customer engagement, digital marketing, and most importantly, customer satisfaction, putting the needs of the customers at the centre of marketing strategies.

The transition from product-centric to customer-centric marketing represents a fundamental paradigm shift driven by technological advancement and changing consumer expectations. Modern marketing landscapes demand adaptability and responsiveness, where organisations must prioritise customer needs over product features to remain competitive. Digital transformation has accelerated this shift by amplifying customer voice through social media, online reviews, and real-time feedback mechanisms. Customers have evolved from passive recipients to active co-creators who influence brand discourse, product innovation, and marketing strategies. Technologies like AI, big data, and mobile platforms enable unprecedented personalisation while empowering consumers with information access and choice, fundamentally altering power dynamics between businesses and customers.

Generational differences significantly shape marketing strategies and value perceptions. Baby Boomers prioritise stability and traditional communication channels, Millennials emphasise social consciousness and technological integration, while Gen Z demands authenticity, personalisation, and demonstrable ethical practices. These distinctions require sophisticated segmentation strategies that bridge value gaps through targeted messaging, viral content, and electronic word-of-mouth that resonates across cohorts. The emergence of Gen Z as a dominant consumer force particularly challenges organisations to demonstrate genuine commitment to social responsibility, inclusivity, and transparent communication.

Crises expose the fragility of customer trust and the critical importance of authentic brand communication. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that transparency serves as the "currency of credibility," with customers demanding empathetic responses and ethical behaviour from brands. Organisations that responded with genuine support enhanced trust, while those perceived as opportunistic suffered lasting reputation damage. This vulnerability is amplified in the digital age through negative word-of-mouth, which spreads rapidly via online platforms and exerts disproportionately greater influence than positive reviews. Customer hesitancy in adopting new categories, as illustrated by Airbnb, stems from perceived risks, uncertainty, and cognitive load, requiring systematic confidence-building through secure systems, social proof, and clear value propositions.

Expectation management emerges as a critical strategy for maintaining customer trust and loyalty. The Sears bankruptcy illustrates catastrophic consequences of misaligned promises and delivery, where strategic incoherence and cost-cutting sacrificed customer experience. Misleading marketing practices may generate short-term gains but inevitably erode long-term brand credibility. Conversely, the case studies of LEGO,

Airbnb, and GoPro demonstrate that customer co-creation generates sustainable competitive advantages. LEGO's Ideas platform transforms customers into innovation partners, reducing product launch risk while deepening engagement. Airbnb repositioned from an accommodation provider to an experience facilitator through personalised offerings and user-generated content. GoPro built its marketing ecosystem entirely around customer-created adventure content, turning users into authentic brand ambassadors.

These findings reveal several strategic implications. Organisations must integrate digital tools with ethical practices, recognising that technology enables rather than replaces genuine customer relationships. Adaptive strategies prove essential in volatile environments, requiring organisational agility to respond to changing expectations while maintaining brand integrity. Sustainability and inclusivity are no longer optional but essential for relevance, particularly among younger generations. However, significant research gaps persist, including insufficient longitudinal data on cross-generational loyalty retention, limited examination of ethical considerations in AI integration, inadequate understanding of post-crisis recovery strategies, and sparse cross-cultural research on value perception.

Customer-centricity represents a strategic imperative rather than an optional orientation in contemporary markets. The interplay between technology, trust, and value co-creation defines successful marketing strategies, with authentic communication and consistent value delivery serving as foundational requirements. Organisations that embed customer-centric principles into their strategic core, cultivate agility, and maintain unwavering commitment to ethical conduct position themselves optimally for sustained success. The research confirms that placing customers genuinely at the marketing environment's core is fundamental for organisational survival and prosperity in increasingly dynamic global markets, where continuous adaptation to evolving customer a permanent necessity rather than a temporary one.

Limitations and Future Research

The research paper has some limitations. Firstly, it entirely depends on secondary data and does not use any kind of primary data, such as interviews or surveys. As this is related to constraints related to resource availability, time and access to respondents, which hinder the feasibility of primary collection, it limits the generalizability of the research findings. Furthermore, it only focuses on 3 established companies, which are Lego, Airbnb and GoPro, which may not entirely capture the relevant data and limit the transferability of the findings, especially of less developed or small firms.

In addition, generational differences are discussed, but they are not empirically examined across the geographic

context and different cultures. Future studies can help in addressing these gaps by comparing cross cultures, integrating more primary data and analysing customer-centric strategies across diverse industries and different organisational sizes. Further, quantitative research can help link trust, customer loyalty and engagement.

CONCLUSION

The study explores the transformation in customer purchasing behaviour over time and its impact on the current marketing environment. Further, it highlights that the shift toward customer-centric strategies has fundamentally changed how companies connect with their customers. As generational values evolve, and all the digital platforms have expanded, transparency has become very important, as it has changed how brands build loyalty and trust. A major strength of the study lies in the integrated look at customer perception, technology engagement, and crisis response, which enables the brand to foster enduring and loyal customers within a constantly changing marketing environment.

These findings hold real-world relevance for marketers and businesses striving to create customer-centric strategies. The findings stress the need for transparent communication, innovation, analytics, and honesty to align with the customers. The research enhances the insights about generational gaps, differences, and how they impact customer choices and trust. With the use of social media and AI, brands can aim to achieve personalisation and engagement, and demonstrating how sincere brand behaviour during crises like COVID-19 fosters enduring trust.

Although the study provides some meaningful insights about customer-centric strategies and shifts the behaviour of the customer, its main limitation lies in being conventional and a lack of primary empirical data. Further research should examine customer segmentation and the diverse market to confirm these findings through measurable outcomes. With the help of generative AI and examining cross-cultural perspectives, it may lead to deeper insights into the content. Furthermore, the expanding framework of customer-focused advertising in a digital and values-based economy can be advanced by sustained attention to crisis communication and generational trust dynamics.

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