

# Exploring the relationship between customer education and customer satisfaction<sup>1</sup>

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Kamel Ben Youssef - Milena Viassone - Philip Kitchen

## Abstract

**Purpose of the paper:** This paper has a dual objective: it explores how to build an effective awareness/education program in terms of customer education (CE) and verifies how this can lead to improved satisfaction and whether customers find value in the education involved in these programs.

**Methodology:** It consists of a literature review on the role of CE, a description of two models - the '5Ms' CE Model and that of Honebein and Cammarano, and adaptation/application of these to two major Italian coffee firms via qualitative research.

**Findings:** Findings indicate that the adapted models fit well with the coffee industry and outline CE dimensions which - if applied - could help underpin increased customer satisfaction in the B2D (business-to-distributor) sector.

**Research limits:** Despite the research contribution, this is an exploratory study that needs to be applied to a larger number of cases, and subsequent empirical testing via quantitative methods.

**Practical implications:** The application of these models to the B2D sector allows the suggestion of strategies to better develop CE programs.

**Originality of the paper:** CE plays an important role in satisfaction, particularly in industrial markets (B2B). However, little is known about CE's educational effect in terms of ROI related to satisfaction in the B2D sector. In addressing this, two models of consumer education are analyzed and applied to the Italian coffee B2D market.

*Key words:* Customer Education (CE); customer satisfaction; relationship management; experience marketing; coffee sector

## 1. Introduction

In accordance with the Pareto principle, it is six to seven times more expensive to gain a new customer than retain a current customer (www.forbes.com, 2015). Yet, based on the marketing concept, customer satisfaction is the lifeblood of a business.

CE, delineated as a company's role in providing customers with the necessary information, skills, and abilities needed for them to become more informed buyers, is widely acknowledged as playing a key role in

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client satisfaction (Bell *et al.*, 2017; Vrabiuta, 2014), particularly in the context of industrial markets (B2B) (Zaho *et al.*, 2008).

While CE is multi-faceted (Aubert and Gotteland, 2010; Monnot, 2010, cited in Volle, 2012, pp. 31-32), it is apparently most effective when used to engage online shoppers or in-store customers. However, while online or offline message structure remains the same, CE areas can vary (Aubert and Gotteland, 2010) though both have the objective of providing customers with information related to products/services. Trust between sellers and buyers is essential in developing and building sound customer relationships.

CE is considered to be (Sharma and Patterson, 1999) the extent to which employees inform and educate customers about service-related concepts and explain the benefits of recommended products. Bell and Eisingerich (2007) demonstrated that perceived technical and functional service quality significantly and positively affects trust. Similarly, CE has a significant, direct, and positive impact on customer trust.

Aubert *et al.* (2005) investigated the effects of CE on the skills, usage behavior and satisfaction of customers, and showed that skill improvement had a significant positive effect on product usage intensity and the variety of functions that customers can develop after CE.

Despite the important role played by CE (Vigolo *et al.*, 2016; Damali *et al.*, 2016; Von Hippel, 1986) in customer satisfaction and loyalty (Eisingerich and Bell, 2006), studies have mainly focused on industrial market context (B2B) (Ho *et al.*, 2015; Elsevier Clinical Solutions, 2015). In particular, studies have demonstrated how educated customers have the potential for achieving higher levels of satisfaction and developing a stronger sense of loyalty for [their] service providers (Suh *et al.*, 2015).

While there is increasing interest in CE programs and their effects on satisfaction in B2B, little is known about CE effects on customer satisfaction in distributors (B2D) (Ben Youssef *et al.*, 2016a) and the roles played in successful educational programs. For example, this is hardly explored in the beverage sector and, in particular, in the coffee industry.

In order to bridge this gap, this study explores how to build an effective awareness/education program and attempts to verify how 'CE' can lead to improved customer satisfaction, and whether customers find value in such educational programs in the B2D sector.

To explore these purposes we use two models:

- the '5Ms' CE Model, which defines critical factors to help organizations achieve success with their online or face-to-face educational marketing activities in terms of ease, relevance, freshness, management and evaluation;
- the Honebein and Cammarano model, which describes six qualities of CE to be incorporated, including: transparency, clear benefits, understanding customer interests, continuing CE, usage of different media and language, simplicity and ease of understanding.

Starting from these models, we tackle two research questions related to the overarching issue of how CE may work in a specific B2D market:

- RQ1. How can an effective awareness/education program be developed?
- RQ2. How can Honebein and Cammarano's CE model be used in the

B2D coffee sector to create customer satisfaction, and is this model appropriate for building customer satisfaction in this sector?

In exploring these questions, we review the literature, then propose and adapt the models. The models are explored and applied via interviews with the Marketing Manager and Marketing Director of two major Italian private coffee distributors. Finally, results are discussed in an attempt to offer nascent managerial implications and recommendations.

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## 2. The role of CE

In recent years there has been an increasing need for CE because of usage criteria (Aubert, 2006), complex services and novice consumers (Burton, 2002). Such education can be delivered through educational programs such as professional advice, blogs, seminars, advertising, forums and other online and offline activities (Suh *et al.*, 2015). CE seems to offer several organizational advantages: enhancement of individual product knowledge, facilitation of purchases (Zhou and Whitla, 2013), enhancement of customer loyalty through perceived service quality (Suh *et al.*, 2015) and by attracting and retaining customers.

In a very early paper, Bloom (1956) developed a model that promoted higher forms of thinking in education such as analyzing and evaluating, rather than just teaching students via rote learning, and shared learning in three domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Nevertheless, this model did not always succeed in changing behavior or enhancing knowledge at that time. Therefore, Gilbert (1978) suggested other solutions to change behavior, most of which were not focused on education in the traditional sense. This later became known as 'human performance' (see Honebein and Cammarano, 2011). In designing education, it is essential to clearly define what a specified audience can or may learn. Thus, a content and task analysis needs to be performed prior to delivery. To develop content, existing sources, subject-matter experts, and other educational materials should be considered. Nevertheless, these can only answer questions of what customers need to know partially at best. Therefore, it is incumbent upon businesses to ask their customers what they need to know and what they would like to do or learn (Thrassou and Vrontis, 2009; Maggioni and Del Giudice, 2011; Thrassou *et al.*, 2014). This approach is thus primarily customer-centered or business-centered once analysis is complete.

In order to operationalize CE, companies could organize groups of customers, provide a general description of what the company does, and ask customers for any questions or issues they may have about the subject. With these in mind, content and delivery of subsequent educative programs can be developed or adjusted. Follow-up discussions involve comprehending why a customer needs to answer posed questions and, of course, prioritize questions. This process enables customer interactivity and becomes an essential part of the teaching process. Trust is very important in this context. Before customers can develop attitudes toward a brand (Bloom, 1956), they need certain knowledge or skills. When preparing content for teaching, it is crucial to prioritize certain topics and

find the most essential aspects, as too much content may not be recalled (Honebein and Cammarano, 2011).

In general, there is a strong relationship between marketing and CE, so it may be wise to consider an integrated marketing communications approach in disseminating CE (Kitchen, 2017). IMC requires or mandates customer-orientation. Other models have developed different aspects of CE. For example, Temerak *et al.* (2009) developed a model of the relationship between CE and customer participation. It consisted of forms of CE, customer participation, psychological mechanisms mediating CE/participation relationships and contextual factors moderating CE effects (Ben Youssef *et al.*, 2016b).

### 3. Two important models of CE

#### 3.1 The “5 Ms” of the CE Model

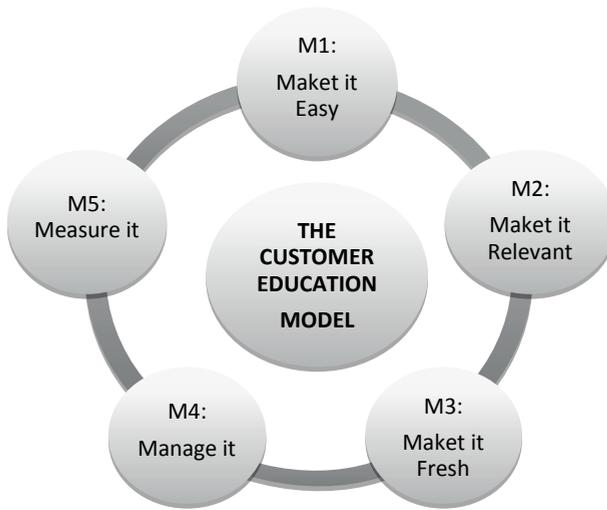
Through their client experience and independent research on CE, the Intrepid Learning Solutions Consultancy Group defined five factors to help organizations succeed with their online or face-to face educational marketing activity (the 5’M’ CE Model) summarized by Ben Youssef *et al.* (2016a) in table 1:

*Tab. 1: The five success factors for the CE Model*

1. Make It Easy	“The centerpiece of any successful program is an interactive on direct contact website designed specifically for the targeted audience the company is seeking to reach. The classroom environment (Young, 2005) or website sophistication should mirror the organization’s training and communications needs and budget (Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010)”.
2. Make It Relevant	“A successful educational marketing solution must include topics and formats that are customer-generated, covering not just how to use specific products, but also related topics that help customers achieve their fundamental goals and objectives aiding them to consider [your] products and services (Bell and Eisingerich, 2007; Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010)”.
3. Make It Fresh	“Develop an education and awareness strategy that is regularly updated and improved by customer feedback, as it can motivate learners who tend to lose interest in an overt classroom environment (Young, 2005) or in web sites that do not provide compelling reasons for them to return. Companies need to post fresh educational content (Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010; Ben Youssef <i>et al.</i> , 2016a)”.
4. Manage It	“Behind the scenes, an effective educational marketing website or classroom environment (Young, 2005) needs to capture critical customer information, such as what content your customers are viewing, how content preferences differ by type of learner, and where and why customers might “bail” from your site. Furthermore new content and site improvements can be developed and critical data regarding customer and prospect preferences garnered (Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010)”.
5. Measure It	“Scorecards and dashboards make it easy for decision makers to see the impact of educational marketing (Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010; Honebein and Cammarano 2011). Website analytics and content consumption data enable marketers to see the impact of CE on product sales and gain macro-level information to refine and focus marketing campaigns (Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010)”.

Source: Based on Ben Youssef *et al.*, (2016a, pp. 209-218)

Fig. 1: The 5 M CE Model



Kamel Ben Youssef  
Milena Viassone  
Philip Kitchen  
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Source: Personal elaboration based on Intrepid Learning Solutions (2010)

The 5 M CE model (if used) allows a company to maximize the potential of success of their CE programs with established goals, when tied to a strategy and where return on investment can be encrypted.

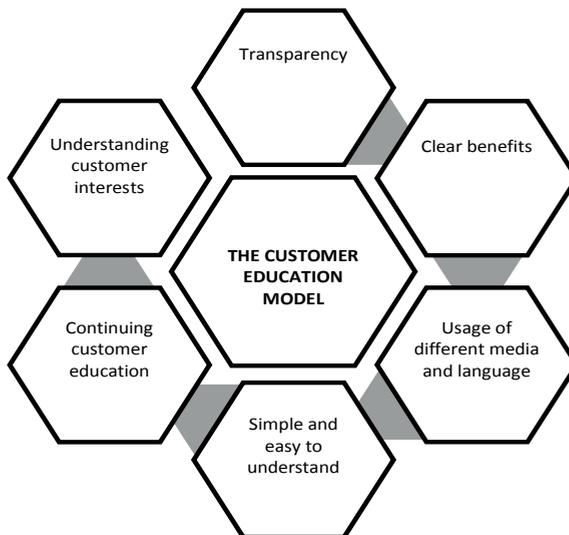
### 3.2 The Honebein and Cammarano CE Model

Honebein and Cammarano (2005) essentially connected Gilbert's (1978) concepts in relation to 'human performance' with their own approach and coined their approach 'customer performance'. This has resulted in the orchestration of four elements in creating customer experience focused upon changing behavior so jobs and tasks can be successfully performed:

- Vision: goals, feedback, and expectations that guide and shape performance;
- Access: the experience environment includes processes, interfaces, and information that enables sound performance;
- Incentives: rewards and punishments that motivate performance;
- Expertise: CE that enhances the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required for performance.

The nature of the task is not of prime importance, as an experience that effectively juxtaposes these elements permits better customer performance and thus successful completion of the respective task, which leads to greater satisfaction. It is thus therefore important to link "customer performance" with "CE", as the performance experience seems to be crucial in an educative sense (Honebein and Cammarano, 2005). According to the authors (2011, *ibid*), six qualities of CE need to be incorporated (see Figure 2):

Fig. 2: The CE model



Source: Authors' elaboration albeit based on Honebein and Cammarano (2011)

Transparency is very important for CE, as customer concerns may increase otherwise. It is essential to pro-actively disclose information that customers might misinterpret, so businesses can use transparency to reinforce customer trust. Another crucial aspect is that customers need to be educated about the benefits of teaching. Businesses tend to position product features as benefits. Another issue is that CE consists of rationally-framed benefits that may not generate attention or interest or may be ambivalent in nature. The usage of differential media and languages is also important. This usually concerns employees, as they can act as brand ambassadors. Other media can also be used to transmit CE messages. Language and imagery play an important role in this context. It is also crucial for CE to be continuous, as it is more effective when designed as a process and not as an event. Effective education relies somewhat upon repetition. The use of simple language is another crucial aspect for educating customers. There are quantitative and qualitative rules relating to this. Last, seeking to understand customers' interests is essential in CE. Customer needs and interests can be ascertained by questioning, but it is important to provide the opportunity for customers to dig deeper into topics that are deemed important. A so-called 'opt-in' concept is recommended, as teaching minimalistic information might dissuade, rather than persuade, customers regarding product/service usage or benefits.

#### 4. Methodology

In order to explore how to build effective awareness/education CE program and illustrate whether this can increase customer satisfaction, we apply the two models described above to the coffee sector via two case

studies, and assess their suitability to create customer satisfaction. Then, we explore the research questions. In order to arrive at this point we describe the different qualities affecting the two models throughout the literature review, before adapting them. Then we apply the model to the examples of major Italian private coffee distributors.

A case study methodology can be defined as:

*“An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context - especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”* (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

This can be applied in different situations (Yin, 2012), such as when the research addresses a descriptive or exploratory question as is done here. Thus, by emphasizing the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context, data collection takes place in a business setting rather than relying on “derived” data (Bromley, 1986, p. 23). For these reasons, the case study method seemed appropriate for the investigated topic. In-depth interviews were chosen to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees’ perspectives. This type of interview involves asking informants open-ended questions, and probing wherever necessary to obtain data deemed useful by the researchers. In particular we adopt the standardized open-ended interview that is “utilizing open-ended questions carefully worded and arranged and minimizing variation in questions posed” (Patton 1987, p. 112).

The coffee sector was specifically selected because in recent years it has invested significant resources in developing CE programs.

The company chosen for the application of the 5M CE Model is an Italian SME that provides coffee. The research design is based on an interview with their marketing manager and questionnaires with product distributors. The questionnaires for the distributors aimed at providing insights into how important CE implementation is for them, especially in light of their own business strategy. A total of seven questions were sent. The interview with the marketing manager of this firm aimed at analyzing the company’s marketing strategy vis-a-vis CE implementation. A total of fifteen questions dealing with the expected benefits of CE initiatives by organizations are addressed. The second company was selected as the six qualities of the Honebein and Cammarano model seem to be emphasized and may be applicable. In this company, it is claimed that innovation is immediately translated into education, i.e. a program capable of educating customers to transmit the qualities that characterize this coffee. Naturally, we seek to understand the interactions between CE and specific purchase contexts. After a first round of data collection of the company and its culture, an in-depth interview with the Director of Marketing was carried out. This was structured into six sections aimed at investigating:

- the presence of the six drivers through open questions;
- the level at which they affect customer satisfaction by asking the interviewee to express a level of agreement about several items through a 5-point Likert scale (1= total disagreement; 5= total agreement).

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then we defined the coding categories (the 5 “Ms” for the first model and the 6 drivers described by Honebein and Cammarano) and summarized the main results concerning

their management. Furthermore, we classified relevant information, underlying the most important information and expressions.

This methodology allows us to explore the research questions that lead to nascent theoretical and managerial implications.

## 5. Case studies: discussion of results

### *The case study referred to the 5 Ms CE Model*

The Oro caffè company trademark was created in 1972 as a place where coffee was served, consumed and enjoyed. Fifteen years later, the two owners took over a small coffee roasting center and decided to run it on their own. By continually improving the original recipe, sophisticated blends were perfected over time. What made the company successful was the owners' direct involvement in carefully selecting raw coffee and the use of high-tech, fully automated coffee roasting equipment, a mix guaranteeing high and consistent quality levels. Starting in the 90s, distribution extended beyond national borders (company website).

The Company School was established in 2009 with the final objective of getting the most out of the company blends and, at the same time, improving the types of offer, while diversifying them in a creative way (Ben Youssef *et al.*, 2016a).

Nowadays, this educational offer is accessible to anybody wishing to attend courses with the intent of spreading knowledge about the world of coffee and training an increasingly aware and careful consumer. In classrooms, courses are held by a team led by an expert coffee trainer and sector specialist, who is also a professional barman.

The syllabus goes from a historical outline on the origin of coffee to the study of its organoleptic features distinguishing Arabicas from Robustas. After examining roasting processes, the practical stage begins, with the golden rules for getting the best from the blends: correct use of the machines, appropriate extraction times and full advice, and the secrets for being able to offer all the flavour and aroma of Italian quality espresso. A visit to the production plant completes attendees' training path (Source: [www.orocaffe.com/en](http://www.orocaffe.com/en)).

### *The application of the 5M CE Model*

We applied the model to this specific company in order to reply to RQ1: How can an effective awareness/education program be developed?

In this specific company, the main benefits of CE initiatives were to increase knowledge on qualitative coffee and associate it to the good reputation of the company. Both of these benefits were effectively achieved.

These courses are considered very important by distributors who became commercial partners of the company a few years ago and by final consumers (Table 2).

Tab. 2: CE model perception by distributors and final consumers

Kamel Ben Youssef  
Milena Viassone  
Philip Kitchen  
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The perception of CE by	
The distributors	The final consumers
<p>The distributors purchase the company's products because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- their products are high-quality;</li> <li>- the quality/price ratio is optimal;</li> <li>- the owners and employees are very kind and helpful;</li> <li>- of the professionalism of the firm;</li> <li>- of the quality of the offered services.</li> <li>- companies interact directly with their distributors.</li> </ul>	<p>Attending the Oro Caffè School is considered to be very important by final consumers because it enables :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the preparation of coffee by competent and highly-educated barmen;</li> <li>- a high quality of coffee;</li> <li>- passion in the preparation of coffee;</li> <li>- innovative products.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' elaboration, albeit based on questionnaire for the marketing manager of Oro Caffè and an overview of their distributors (2016)

This shows how distributors acknowledge the company as being able to provide high quality/innovative products and a high level of education. Starting from this consideration, we can deduce that a 5 M CE Model has been well developed by the company. In fact, through a theoretical and practical approach, its school makes the learning process easy for participants. This is possible also thanks to visits to the production plant and on-site presentations/demonstrations of the processing cycle (make it easy). Furthermore, this school doesn't only provide a description of the characteristics and origin of coffee but also teaches barmen the correct use of coffee machines, proper extraction times and the secrets to preparing a very high-quality Italian coffee. These are all very useful abilities for participants (make it relevant); the company communicates with its participants also by means of social media (facebook, twitter) and this makes communication easy, informal and fast: in this way the company can always be informed about participants' new needs (make it fresh) (Intrepid Learning Solutions, 2010; Ben Youssef *et al.* (2016a)). In addition, distributors perceive the importance of this school for several reasons and this means that the CE process is well-managed (manage it); finally, thanks to specific tools we can deduce measure the return on investment, given that the Marketing Director was able to provide specific information in terms of the increase in reputation, customer loyalty, as well as the decrease in costs (measure it).

*The case study referred to the Honebein and Cammarano Model*

Diemme Caffè has produced toasted coffee since the beginning of the 1900's and claims to be a historic coffee company. It has been coordinated by a single family for three generations and it tries to educate its customers in order to do business together (The company website). The company has coffee roasting as core business but it has also actively invested in other companies in the catering and bar business, operations in shopping malls, and the direct management of a number of prestigious venues where their coffee is marketed. Their current production capacity exceeds three million kilos of coffee per year (The company website).

*“In our Drink Different School”- explained the Marketing and Communication Director of the company – “we organize several courses delivered by qualified teachers and structured on different levels. In this way we transfer know-how, allowing participants to learn several things about the coffee plant, its manufacturing and the correct use of professional tools. We allow them to assist in tasting to see how to prepare our main coffee products and refined cocktail drinks, happy hours, and learn about a perfect ‘mise en place’ and specific topics about the management of a bar . At the end of the course we issue a participation certificate and the “Coffee Passion” guide. Up until now, the typical barman who attends our courses is between 20-45 years old, is the bar owner or an employer, has a secondary school degree, sometimes in the catering sector”.*

*“We believe that investing in training is of increasing importance to enable the development of a business and increase its competitive edge”. Training, organized at different levels, transmits fundamental notions about the coffee plant, its processing, the proper use of professional equipment, interesting tasting tests, the correct methods to prepare coffee products and the refined Drink Different cocktails, and in-depth information on how to properly set up, arrange and run a bar.*

#### *Application of the Honebein and Cammarano CE model*

Replies to the second research question (*How can Honebein and Cammarano’s CE model be used in the B2D coffee sector to create customer satisfaction, and is this model appropriate for building customer satisfaction in this sector?*) are provided throughout the case study, which offers an application of the Honebein and Cammarano CE model to Diemme Caffè and, in this way, to a specific industry, i.e. the coffee industry. It provides the following results: (1) *Transparency*: while customers demand transparency, being completely transparent with customers is something most utilities find challenging (Honebein and Cammarano, 2011). The concept of transparency in this company is mainly addressed to bar operators or pastry chefs, given that they participate in their educational programs. These programs are communicated online, by brochure and through territorial retailers. Communicative style used in delivering courses is simple and easy to understand. Also, information is easily accessible by participants and lessons are delivered by qualified employees who assist participants during the theoretical and practical parts of the course. Most relations with consumers are managed through territorial retailers and only in few cases by e-mails addressed to specific offices. This aspect (transparency) has an important effect because it also generally increases trust although only up to a certain point (Horvath and Katuscakova, 2015). (2) *Clear benefits*: According to the company, the benefits deriving from attending the organized courses are communicated clearly by the company and the most used channels are the web, brochures and retailers. It is important to consider that utilities sometimes mistakenly present position features as benefits (Honebein and Cammarano, 2011). A clear communication of benefits offered by these courses contributes to increasing customer satisfaction. (3) *Usage of different media and language*: Since there is a

tight relationship between marketing and CE, it is advisable to adopt an integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach (Tafesse and Kitchen, 2016), i.e. involving the blending advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing and sales promotion media channels (Honebein and Cammarano, 2011) in order to disseminate CE. The company uses different media to transmit consumer education concepts (media, brochures, sellers). A relevant role in the communication of educational courses and information about products is played by word-of-mouth, which can have a strong impact on new customer acquisition (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). According to the Marketing Director of the company the usage of different languages allows the company to reach a greater number of consumers. (4) *Continuing CE*: as suggested by Honebein and Cammarano (2011), CE must be designed as a process and not an event. This company adopts this approach, delivering courses every week. This is a very important aspect because it allows the company to satisfy every type of participant and pursue educational objectives. In fact, CE affects customer perceived value in terms of benefits (Ben Youssef *et al.*, 2016b) and, in particular, customer satisfaction (Bonfanti and Brunetti, 2014). (5) *Usage of simple language*: in this company the usage of a simple language is the rule: only information that is considered fundamental for every specific level of course is provided, transmitted in its key points through verbal, visual and hands-on styles. This reflects the rules of simple communication proposed by Honebein and Cammarano (2011): the organization of elements through bullet points and a design that incorporates the three primary learning styles: verbal, visual, and kinesthetic. A relatively simple use of language is considered very important in order to educate and satisfy consumers. (6) *Understanding of customer interests*: the company develops specific courses based on the customers' needs. These are analyzed by observing customers and via continuous interaction with them. In fact, as sustained by Honebein and Cammarano (2011), CE is always constructed on the needs of an audience, and these can be discovered through audience analysis, which should initially be broad in scope, given the limited customer information stored in the information system and the costs of acquiring primary data about customers. The relevance of the contents of the courses delivered by the company is constantly monitored and can contribute to increasing customer satisfaction. Results show a particular attention on the company's part to all dimensions of the CE framework, as proposed in figure 2. According to the company, the dimensions that are most able to affect customer satisfaction are "continuing CE" and "usage of simple language". In the application of these six qualities, the relationship between CE and satisfaction is also emphasized, thus replying also to the second research question ("RQ2. Is Honebein and Cammarano's CE Model appropriate for building customer satisfaction in the coffee sector?). Each of these qualities contributes to developing customer satisfaction in different ways: transparency can positively affect trust, while clear benefits can improve the perception of the company by customers.

Tab. 3: The CE model applied to a major private coffee distributor

- Transparency	- Communication by web, brochures and retailer; simple communicative style; easily accessible info
- Clear explanation of benefits	- Benefits communicated clearly by web, brochures and retailers; the company pays attention to verify the perception of benefits by the customer
- Use of different media and language	- Importance of word-of-mouth
- Continuing CE (not just one educational event)	- Courses delivered every week
- Simple and easy to understand	- Only fundamental concepts, delivered by key points, through verbal, visual and hands-on styles
- Understanding customer interests	- Courses on the basis of the customers' needs; continuous interaction with customers; monitoring

Source: Our own elaboration based on Honebein and Cammarano (2011)

In addition, through “usage of different media and language”, the company will be able to reach a higher number of consumers, who are more aware of the company’s products, while “continuing CE” allows the company to satisfy different kinds of participants; finally “usage of simple language” makes it easier for participants to understand the content of courses, while “understanding of customer interests” allows it to provide the best solutions for them.

*Theoretical Implications*

This paper replies to two research questions (1) How can an effective awareness/education program be developed? and (2) How can the Honebein and Cammarano CE model be used in the B2D coffee sector to create customer satisfaction, and is this model appropriate for building customer satisfaction in this sector? It presents various advantages for implementing CE programs. More advantages are indicated, including customer loyalty, participation, satisfaction, retention and clear customer roles. If firms are able to appropriately tackle these challenges, CE tools can result in beneficial outcomes. Appropriate tools (Aubert and Gotteland, 2010; Monnot, 2010, cited in Volle, 2012, pp. 31-32) must be chosen in order to match various variables like customer age (Cole and Gaeth, 1990), expertise (Eisingerich and Bell, 2008), and participation levels (Bitner *et al.*, 1997).

*Managerial Implications*

The main managerial implications concerning these initial case studies may be summarized as follows:

- users/customers don't always understand the full value of your product or service. In this case, educating them becomes an essential remedy in addressing this deficiency / gap;

- through the School of Coffee, Management refocused the entire company on helping Clients/Distributors realize the extensive value of the offered product that they hadn't realized to date, and revolutionized the customer experience and value;
- the School of Coffee is now perceived and valued as a marketing tool that provides ongoing value via customer insights. By educating its customers, the company managed to achieve more frequent engagement for longer periods of time;
- the attention shown by this firm toward educational programs can increase its reputation, so these kinds of initiatives may be considered in programs of brand reinforcement

Furthermore, with reference to the second case study, the present paper shows how CE can increase customer skills satisfactions. The development of company knowledge by customers, along with subsequent interaction can strengthen relationship marketing and facilitate the product/service co-creation process. If companies employ CE they may be able to enhance effectiveness. This would allow companies to verify if they are using the right channels to communicate with their customers, and if/or the language used during education is suitable for the participants. Furthermore, an increased adoption of social networks could help companies obtain fast and continuous feedback by customers (Vrontis *et al.*, 2015). Finally, companies should consider investing in CE and see it as a tool that, if adequately incorporated, can lead to customer satisfaction and this can result, in a second step, in increased customer loyalty.

## 6. Conclusions

By juxtaposing concepts from CE, consumer behavior and satisfaction, this exploratory paper shows how to build an effective awareness/education program CE in the coffee industry and verifies how CE can lead to improved customer satisfaction and how customers find value in an education sector that seems to be involved in these types of programs.

With regard to RQ1, results show how the main effects of these initiatives affect loyalty and show a relevant increase. This confirms the hypothesis supported by Eisingerich and Bell (2006). Furthermore, important effects are also registered in terms of costs reduction: in fact, the programs promote a greater knowledge of products (Challagalla *et al.*, 2009) and need less assistance; this results, as observed by Intrepid Learning Solutions (2010), in a reduction of costs.

It is important to also emphasize an increase in reputation. This is also thanks to customers' understanding of the full potential of the products (Bell and Eisingerich, 2007, p. 470), given that customer wants to know what to expect (Bitner *et al.*, 1994). This attention of the company to educational issues is well perceived by distributors, who consider it very important in delivering the best product possible to their customers. In this way, distributors seem to have clearly understood the benefits that this kind of school can bring and improve the image of the firm. Finally, this company seems to adapt well to the 5 M Model, achieving success with its

online or face-to-face educational marketing activity (Ben Youssef *et al.*, 2016a).

With regard to RQ2, the paper provides an adaptation of the CE model by Honebein and Cammarano (2011) and illustrates how this can be considered and used in a B2D sector to enhance customer learning and satisfaction. Also, by means of the case study of a major private coffee distributor and further research, we emphasize the role played by six dimensions (as shown in Figures 1 and 2) in order to enhance customer satisfaction. Particular attention is paid to a continuing CE process, (inter alia ... considering it as a process and not a single event) and to the language, i.e. the language used in communication must be simple both at the qualitative (verbal, visual, etc.) and quantitative (bullet points) levels.

The paper provides a helpful and illuminating approach to designing CE in the Italian coffee B2D market. The findings show how transparencies, simple communication, clear benefits, CE, understanding of customer interests and usage of simple language are important features for a successful CE program.

In general, companies in this sector could embrace these qualities that may underpin effective, efficient and appealing CE. Prior to necessary further research, it is felt that this adapted model could become a referential framework for B2D firms interested in developing educational programs in order to increase customer satisfaction. From a theoretical point of view, this paper shows how a generic CE model can be applied to a specific industry. In addition, it maps the qualities supported by the literature that are confirmed by the case studies. It also demonstrates how CE qualities can achieve the needed objectives: transparency can increase trust and benefits, communicating well can achieve clarity via customers, using different media and languages extends customer reach, continuing CE leads to customer satisfaction, usage of simple language facilitates the understanding of concepts by participants, and the understanding of customer interests via market analysis allows a company to provide the necessary materials in the right ways and at the right time.

## **7. Limits**

Despite the contribution provided by the paper, it is an exploratory study that needs to be applied to a larger number of cases at an Italian and European level.

In addition, further empirical testing via quantitative techniques could be applied in order to test the two research questions.

Furthermore, with reference both to the 5 M CE Model and to the Honebein and Cammarano Model, the paper only proposes an application/adaptation of existent models to specific cases without providing an estimate of how much the different dimensions affect the coffee industry. However, these limits could be considered as the starting point for future research.

In addition, firms should investigate their customer base regarding their preferences for technical and detailed explanations, or whether or

not customers prefer individual training approaches to get the best results. More research is needed to empirically test and construct frameworks for both CE models and the different types of CE.

Kamel Ben Youssef  
Milena Viassone  
Philip Kitchen  
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between customer  
education and customer  
satisfaction

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### Academic or professional position and contacts

#### **Kamel Ben Youssef**

Associate Professor of Marketing  
University of Paris Nanterre - France  
e-mail: kbenyoussef@parisnanterre.fr

#### **Milena Viassone**

Associate Professor of Management  
University of Turin - Italy  
e-mail: milena.viassone@unito.it

#### **Philip Kitchen**

Full Professor of Marketing  
Salford University UK and Affiliate Professor, Rennes School of Business - France  
e-mail: P.J.Kitchen@salford.ac.uk

