

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BRAND EXPERIENCE IN DRIVING CONSUMER EMOTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH SPORTS BRANDS IN AUSTRALIA

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Purpose: This paper aims to fill the theoretical gap in understanding and practical implementation by examining how sports brands in Australia use brand experience to link emotional response and brand engagement.

Design/methodology/approach: The study fits into the positivist paradigm. The starting point is the stimulus-organism-response theory. A quantitative method, which is an online survey, was used to collect data. Responses from 610 respondents were collected, and after they were cleaned, data from 526 participants were analyzed. The conceptual model of the relationships between variables was verified using the regression method.

Findings: The findings confirmed the hypotheses. Brands investing in comprehensive experiences effectively generate positive emotions among consumers, increasing consumer brand engagement.

Research limitations/implications: The study sample was limited to the Australian population. Further limitations include the relatively small sample size and the participants' demographics skewed towards specific age ranges, which limit the potential for generalization to broader populations or industries. Future research could overcome these limitations by exploring different industries or cultural contexts and using more objective means of data collection.

Practical implications: The article offers practical recommendations for creating emotionally compelling campaigns. More significant investment in experiential marketing can strengthen customer bonds and long-term relationships with sports brands.

Social implications: Sports brands uniquely unite people and strongly influence communities, so sports organizations must consider the social consequences of their actions. Their actions can affect physical health and social integration, shaping values and building bonds between people. Sports organizations that consider the social aspects of their activities can build strong, positive relationships with fans, partners, and local communities.

Originality/value: This article advances the understanding of experiential marketing by highlighting the importance of emotional responses in promoting strong associations between consumers and brands. The findings have implications for academics and practitioners working in advertising and brand communication more broadly in the context of the Australian sports industry.

Keywords: Experiential marketing, Brand experience, Emotional response, Brand engagement, sports brands.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The relationship between emotions and consumer experiences has gained significant attention from academics and practitioners in the ever-changing landscape of contemporary marketing (Le et al., 2019). As such, brand experience, which aims to generate intense and memorable encounters between brands and consumers, is gaining popularity (Rather, Hollebeek, 2020). This paper examines brand experience in the context of sports brands operating in Australia, focusing on how these brands leverage their experience and emotional response to enhance consumer engagement.

The intersection of emotional responses and brand experiences is becoming an attractive area of research and marketing practice (Mostafa, Kasamani, 2021; Sykora et al., 2022). Consumers no longer view brands as mere providers of products and services. They seek relationships with brands that align with their values, lifestyles, and goals (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022; Chang et al., 2021). As a result, marketers have recognized the need to appeal to consumers' emotional aspects (Ding et al., 2015). This shift in customer expectations has made the brand experience one of the most crucial brand tactics (Rather, 2020). It focuses on delivering a product and coordinating moments that deeply resonate with consumers (Sprott et al., 2009).

The Australian sports industry, deeply rooted in the country's history and culture (Gilchrist, Wheaton, 2017), provides a unique setting for examining the relationships between brand experiences, emotional responses, and consumer brand engagement (Morgan, Taylor, 2017). As a universal medium, sports can unite people from different backgrounds through shared interests (Scola, Gordon, 2018).

Despite the positive attitudes that can be stimulated through brand experiences (Chang et al., 2021; Rather, 2020), there are barriers to effectively implementing these tactics for sports brands, including rapid technological advances, changing consumer behaviour, and the demand for authentic interactions are obstacles that require creative solutions (Lee, S.M., Lee, D., 2020). Furthermore, assessing the emotional effect and converting it into measurable outcomes is not without complications that deserve to be explored (Funk, 2017; Killick, Griffiths, 2022; Larocca et al., 2020). This paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining the influence of brand experience and emotional response on consumer brand engagement, a topic that is important as evidenced by Rather and Hollebeek (2020) and other articles (Ahn, Back, 2018; Kim et al., 2020; Sykora et al., 2022). Academics and researchers have been exploring the field of sports brand experiences for several years to understand its influence on consumers'

emotional response and brand engagement, examining topics such as live events (Funk, 2017; Morgan, Taylor, 2017), the development of participatory mobile applications (Killick, Griffiths, 2022), social media interactions (Lee, S.M., Lee, D., 2020), the participation of sports brands in multiple sports competitions and promotions (Zhang et al., 2018), and the study of cultural factors and their impact on consumer engagement (Rather, 2020). However, despite the growing body of empirical research on the subject, little is known about how brand experience influences consumer emotional response and brand engagement in the context of the Australian sports industry (Ahn, Back, 2018; Rather, Hollebeek, 2020).

This study contributes to the debate on the importance of brand experience by examining the complexity of emotional responses, the techniques used and their subsequent impact on consumer brand engagement. Understanding how emotions can be manipulated to enhance consumer engagement in sports brands can inform marketing approaches across industries.

This paper contributes to the growing literature on brand experience related to emotional response. This effect cannot be fully appreciated until we understand how emotional response affects consumer brand engagement and what role brand experience plays in this process. This article advances knowledge in this area by demonstrating the influence of brand experience on emotional response and, as a result, customer brand engagement.

The article is structured as follows. It begins with a conceptual framework and research hypotheses. It then describes the methodology, including the sample selection process, the study procedure, the variables used, and the data analysis and results. It then presents the theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research directions. Finally, it concludes with conclusions.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

2.1. Theory of Stimulus-Organism-Response

We used the stimulus-organism-response model (S-O-R) proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) to explain the relationships between the constructs analysed in the study. This model allows us to show the influence of external factors on consumers and their resulting behaviour (Kim, Johnson, 2016; Jacoby, 2002).

A consumer's experience with a brand influences their emotional responses to that brand (Iglesias, Singh, Batista-Foguet, 2011; Brakus et al., 2009). When consumers have memorable, personalized, and positive experiences with a brand (S), they develop emotional bonds (O) that lead to higher brand loyalty, which can result in brand engagement (Khan, Fatma, 2017; Hwang, Choi, 2019). A brand's sensory appeal plays a significant role in engaging consumers' senses (Krishna, 2012; Lemon, Verhoef, 2016; Roggeveen et al., 2020). These experiences trigger

emotional responses that can reinforce brand perceptions, showing that brand experience is a crucial driver of emotional reactions (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias et al., 2011). Emotional responses mediate between brand experience and consumer behaviour (Ladhari, 2007). Positive experiences trigger joy, satisfaction, and excitement (Dunn, Hoegg, 2014). These emotions, in turn, influence brand-related behaviours such as word-of-mouth marketing and overall brand loyalty, one of the antecedents of consumer brand engagement (R) (Hollebeek, 2011; Islam, Rahman, 2017).

Previous studies have not directly answered whether there is a relationship between brand experience, emotional response and consumer brand engagement.

2.2. Brand Experience

We used the stimulus-organism-response model (S-O-R model) proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) to explain the relationships between the constructs analyzed in the study.

To survive today, brands need to create strong bonds with their customers. Only in this way can they attract them away from other brands (Mostafa, Kasamani, 2020; Akoglu, Özbek, 2022). The concept of brand experience, initially introduced by Schmitt (1999), has gained importance recently (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018; Schmitt et al., 2014). In the Australian sports industry, brand experience is integral (Morgan, Taylor, 2017). These experiences serve as the foundation for the brand experience. When consumers directly engage with a product or service, they develop perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and actions (Khan, Fatma, 2017; Mostafa, Kasamani, 2021). Extensive research conducted in the consumer and marketing fields reveals that these experiences materialize during various stages, including the search for products/services, purchase decisions, decision-making processes, product usage, and post-purchase customer service encounters (Batat, 2024).

Brand experience is essentially characterized by a series of consumer reactions encompassing in particular sensory stimuli reception, emotional responses, cognitive appraisal processes, and observable behavioural manifestations triggered by diverse elements (Ding, Tseng, 2015) associated with the brand's visual identity, packaging, communication methods employed, and even ambience created within promotional settings where it is featured (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018).

The fundamental step towards establishing strong connections between consumers and brands involves facilitating direct interactions wherein customers can personally encounter and immerse themselves in the unique characteristics offered by specific brands (Pina, Dias, 2021; Wiedmann et al., 2018).

Based on the above points, the brand experience can be described as an intangible added value, emphasizing customer senses, feelings, thoughts, and behaviour toward products and services (Girish, Lee, 2019; Van-Dat, Ngoc, 2022).

In conclusion, brand experiences build emotional ties between consumers and brands at a deeper level (Pina, Dias, 2021). In this context, brand experience can be described as an independent variable. It can be assumed that it will positively impact emotional reactions (Ding, Tseng, 2015).

2.3. Emotional Response

Emotions and their associated reactions are central to brand experience due to their immense power (Mostafa, Kasamani, 2021; Sykora et al., 2022). Emotional responses are determined by the brand experience, generating profound effects that go beyond traditional marketing techniques (Chang et al., 2021). For example, emotions consolidate lasting memories long after the experience ends, stimulating active participation. Consumers who feel emotionally connected are likelier to engage in multiple interactions, such as posting on social media, sharing, and attending live performances (Ahn, Back, 2018). Moreover, other studies emphasize that emotionally engaged customers become brand advocates (Funk, 2017; Brzozowska-Woś, 2020). Therefore, emotional reactions offer a unique competitive advantage in a crowded market (Hollebeek et al., 2019). In addition, emotional resonance distinguishes a brand as a significant differentiator (Larocca et al., 2020). Australian sports brands have identified emotional responses as a prerequisite for transforming the typical consumer into an engaged consumer (Greenham et al., 2017). These emotions are at the heart of brand experiential approaches that seek to cultivate a sense of identity, passion, and commitment that surpass traditional advertising offers (Ding, Tseng, 2015). Furthermore, live events play on emotions, where excitement and adrenaline combine to create a unique environment (Trinh, 2018).

Furthermore, some research has shown that in the sports industry, brand experience plays a crucial role in shaping the consumer journey (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022). The emotional responses generated by this brand experience significantly influence how consumers perceive and interact with sports brands (Jung et al., 2011). The connection between consumers and sports brands is firmly rooted in the emotional responses reinforced by solid brand experiences (Coelho et al., 2018). It highlights the importance of engaging with customers' experiences in sports (Morgan, Taylor, 2017). Research has also highlighted that the quality of the brand relationship acts as a mediator in the sports industry.

Since consumers show more positive emotional responses when they have better brand experiences, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H1. Brand experience positively influences consumers' emotional responses in the context of Australian sports brands.

2.4. Consumer Brand Engagement

In recent years, there has been growing interest among academics in consumer brand engagement (Lourenço et al., 2022; Mclean et al., 2021; Obilo, 2021; Schivinski et al., 2020; Fernandes, Moreira, 2019). Several studies have highlighted the importance of understanding customer interactions with brands, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects (Cheung et al., 2021; Hollebeek et al., 2016). These dimensions contribute to theoretical discussions and hold practical significance (Lourenço et al., 2022). For instance, cognitive and emotional factors greatly influence customers' decision-making processes, and their behaviour can result in repeat purchases (Bowden, 2009; Dwivedi, 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2020; Prentice et al., 2019). The amalgamation of these dimensions during brand encounters plays a vital role in shaping the overall customer experience and subsequently impacts a brand's success (Hollebeek, 2011).

Studies have consistently demonstrated that these complex interactions yield positive business outcomes such as increased customer loyalty, higher sales volume, and improved market share for the brands involved (Bowden, 2009; Islam, Rahman, 2016; Schivinski et al., 2020).

Some studies have confirmed that the emotive response generated by brand experience supersedes transactional exchanges (Prentice et al., 2019). Thus, brand experience lays the groundwork for emotion-based consumer brand engagement (Zollo et al., 2020). Some studies (Killick, Griffiths, 2022; Larocca et al., 2020) have demonstrated that consumers with positive emotional involvement are more inclined to increase brand engagement.

Therefore, it is apparent that Australian sports brands recognize that emotional responses construct an engagement ensemble, ensuring that consumers remain devoted participants in the brand's evolution (Morgan, Taylor, 2017). Nike, a sportswear giant worldwide, deliberately implemented brand experience in Australia to increase consumer brand engagement (Quintal et al., 2020). Brand participation in multiple athletic competitions and promotions provides participants with emotionally resonant and immersive experiences (Zhang et al., 2018). These interactive events, such as the "Nike Run Club" and "Nike Training Club", allow consumers to become involved with the brand's active living philosophy. These encounters surpassed conventional marketing, presenting Nike as a lifestyle facilitator instead of a mere product provider (Quintal et al., 2020).

In the dynamic field of the sports industry, the significance of emotional responses in driving consumer brand engagement has been well established (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022). Additionally, including sponsored athletes in brand mentions indicates that forging positive emotional responses with renowned sports figures can significantly enhance consumer brand engagement (Jin et al., 2013; Zhang, Su, 2023). Leveraging imagery featuring athletes is vital in shaping consumer brand engagement with outdoor sports brands as it stimulates robust emotional responses (Soboleva et al., 2017).

Interestingly, studies have shown that consumers' emotional attachment to a sports brand can outweigh their dissatisfaction with certain aspects (Dessart et al., 2016). Hedonic associations, such as positive emotional responses, have been shown to influence consumer brand engagement (Schivinski et al., 2020). This engagement, in turn, directly affects consumers' emotional reactions (Fernandes, Moreira, 2019). Confirming this, another study by Prentice et al. (2019) indicated that consumers who experience positive emotional responses are likelier to engage with the brand.

In this context, the following hypothesis was developed:

H2. Emotional response positively influences consumer brand engagement within the context of sports brands in Australia when controlled for age and gender.

The proposition of the conceptual model is summarised in Figure 1. This model displays only direct effects.

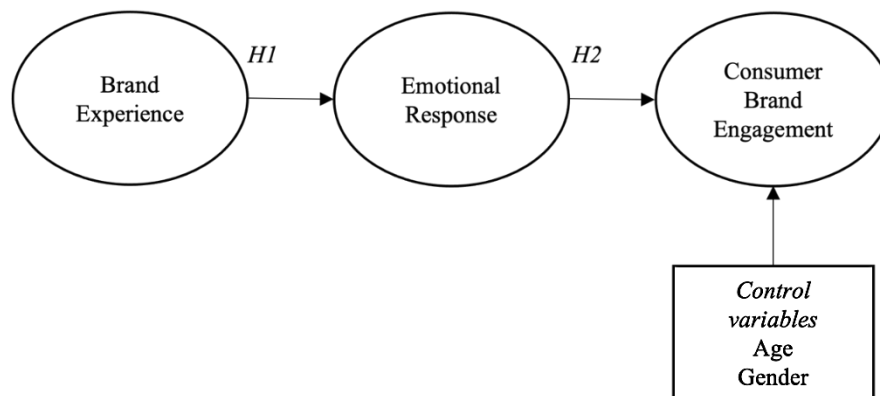


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Source: own elaboration.

3. Methodology Sample and Procedure

In this study, different brands were used to assess the impact of brand experience on the emotional response and consumer engagement with the brand in the context of sports brands. Each respondent was asked to name a brand in real life whose advertisements they had seen. When people have a comparable experience (for example, contact with a promotional campaign of a sports brand), they are automatically exposed to this brand and, in most cases, start to feel emotions towards it. Therefore, customers were assumed to be exposed to brand experiences that provoke emotional reactions.

The designed study aligns with the positivist paradigm, which is based on verifying previously formulated hypotheses through operationalizing variables and measures (Park et al., 2020). The study focuses on identifying causal relationships using a quantitative approach, which is an online survey. The questionnaire for data collection was created using the Qualtrics platform (Qualtrics XM – Experience Management Software). The questionnaire was pre-tested

on 30 people of different ages. No comments were made to it. The data in the primary study were collected online using the CAWI technique. The study used a non-random (snowball sampling method). A link to the survey was shared on social media (e.g. Facebook (including Messenger), Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat) and sent by email with a message encouraging people to participate and share the information with friends who had similar experiences with sports brands. The survey invitation also explained the research topic and included brief examples of experiential marketing practices to ensure that respondents understood the concept of “real-life advertising experiences”. Each respondent could only rate one brand. A screening question was also asked to adjust for brand experience bias: “Have you had a real-life advertising experience with a sports brand in Australia?”

A Qualtrics calculator was used to determine the sample size (Sample Size Calculator – Qualtrics). Australian society is relatively young. The average age in 2024 was 39.6 years. The population of Australia is 27,122,411 (as of March 31, 2024) (National, state and territory population, March 2024). Assuming a 95% confidence interval and a margin of error of 5%, the minimum sample size was estimated at 385 units. A total of 610 individuals participated in the study. Only fully completed surveys were assessed for the project; therefore, no data were imputed. After removing incomplete surveys, 551 entries with 28 marks were analysed. The next step was to screen the data and detect univariate outliers. In this phase, responses from 25 individuals were removed, leaving 526 valid questionnaires.

All participants willing to participate in the study were informed about its nature and required to give online informed consent before providing their answers. They were also provided all the necessary information about the study's ethical aspects, including anonymity, confidentiality, the right to discontinue participation, and the right to withdraw their answers before submitting them. Respondents also had to be of legal age to participate in the study. Respondents who did not pass the screening process in the data set were omitted.

In the data reduction stage, invalid entries containing missing responses were excluded, as well as those in which participants responded in all blocks using only one reference point (e.g., using only the value of 5 to complete the study as quickly as possible; $SD_{\text{items}} = 0$) or had little or no variance in response trends (SD_{items} ranging from 0.1 to 0.5) (Schivinski et al., 2021). To avoid data imputation, questionnaires with missing data were also discarded.

Males comprised 54.1% of all respondents, females 45.2%, and 0.7% were non-binary. The majority, 74.7% of the respondents, were from the state of Victoria. The age ranged from 19 to 51, with most participants being 22 (12.3%). In terms of the educational level of the study sample, 60.2% of respondents had at least some tertiary education. Most respondents (34.9%) reported earning less than A\$25,000 annually. In addition, 61.6% of participants worked as paid employees.

The study adopted a twelve-item scale for measuring brand experience (BE) (Zarantonello et al., 2010), a seven-item scale for measuring emotional response (ER) (Organ et al., 2015), and a ten-item scale for consumer brand engagement (CBE) (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The scales

for measuring brand experience and consumer brand engagement were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The emotional response scale also used a 5-point scale with responses ranging from “not at all” (1) to “very much” (5).

3.2. Data analysis and results

Validation of the scales was accomplished by using the skewness and kurtosis values. There is not a single product with skewness values > 3.0 or kurtosis > 8.0 (Kline, 2011; the data for skewness and kurtosis are displayed in Appendix, Table 3). Cronbach's alpha, mean, and standard deviation were used to ensure the measurements' reliability and validity (Table 1). The components utilised in our investigation generated alpha coefficients ranging from 0.63 to 0.76. Two values were above the threshold value of 0.70 proposed by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), with one scale below the threshold but still acceptable for the study (Van Griethuijsen et al., 2015; Taber, 2018). In this context, the alpha ratings provide evidence of the validity of the scales' internal validity. A correlation analysis was carried out to validate the linkages proposed by the overall model. No correlation was above 0.80, suggesting a moderate correlation between variables (Schivinski et al., 2021).

Table 1.

Correlation matrix and indicators of reliability and validity

	ALPHA	MEAN	SD.	BE	ER	CBE
Brand experience (BE)	0.76	3.41	0.57	1		
Emotional response (ER)	0.63	3.80	0.60	0.39**	1	
Consumer brand engagement (CBE)	0.75	3.62	0.60	0.47**	0.51**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. ALPHA = Cronbach's alpha, SD. = standard deviation.

Source: own elaboration.

The SPSS regression analysis for brand experience produced statistically significant results. The results of this study do validate hypothesis 1 ($\beta = 0.39$; t -value = 5.10; p -value = 0.001) because brand experience directly influences the consumers' emotional response. In addition, emotional response positively influenced consumer brand engagement, supporting and confirming the hypotheses H2 ($\beta = 0.57$; t -value = 7.11; p -value = 0.001). Furthermore, the VIF factors did not exceed the threshold of 10 (Hair et al., 1995) or even the threshold of 4 (Pan, Jackson, 2008). All the relationships between the control variables and consumer brand engagement were not statistically significant. The results of our testing of hypotheses and estimates are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.
Standardised structural coefficients of the model

	STANDARDISED BETA	t-VALUE	p-VALUE	ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION	VIF
H1. Brand experience → Emotional response	0.39	5.10	0.001	Accepted	1.02
H2. Emotional response → Consumer brand engagement	0.50	7.11	0.001	Accepted	1.00
Control variables					
Age → Consumer brand engagement	0.13	1.82	0.71		
Gender → Consumer brand engagement	0.01	-0.23	0.81		

Note. $n = 526$. VIF = variance inflation factor.

Source: own elaboration.

The model is statistically significant and explains 27% of the total variance in the outcome variable, as indicated by the R^2 (coefficient of determination) value. While this value might seem low at first glance, especially given that R^2 values can theoretically range from 0% to 100%, it is crucial to consider the context and nature of the study, which revolves around consumer behaviour (Hair et al., 2016). The R^2 measures the proportion of variance in the dependent variable, which the independent variables in the model can explain. An R^2 of 27% indicates that the model accounts for 27% of the variability in the outcome. This leaves 73% of the variability unexplained, which might suggest the presence of other factors not included in the model. In social sciences, particularly in consumer behaviour studies, lower R^2 values are pretty typical and are not necessarily a defect in the model. Consumer behaviour is inherently complex and influenced by numerous factors, many of which may be unobservable, difficult to quantify, or not captured by the available data. For instance, individual preferences, emotional states, cultural influences, and external market conditions can all significantly shape behaviour but are hard to model comprehensively. Because of these complexities, predicting consumer behaviour with high precision is challenging. Even the best models in the field often achieve moderate R^2 values, as consumer choices are subject to high variability and unpredictability. It is expected to see R^2 values below 50% in behavioural studies (Frankot et al., 2024). The important thing is that the predictors are statistically significant (Figure 2) (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

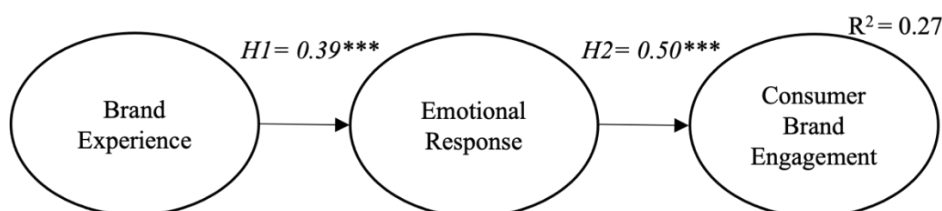


Figure 2. Standardized direct estimates for the final conceptual model.

Source: own elaboration.

4. General discussion

4.1. Theoretical contributions

This paper aimed to address a gap in the existing literature by investigating the relationship between brand experience, emotional response, and consumer brand engagement within the Australian sports industry (Ahn, Back, 2018; Kim et al., 2020; Rather, Hollebeek, 2020). Inspired by previous studies (Funk, 2017; Killick, Griffiths, 2022; Sykora et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2018), this research sought to understand how brand experience influences emotional response, impacting consumer brand engagement.

To achieve this goal, two primary hypotheses were formulated and tested: First, that brand experience positively affects emotional responses among consumers of sports brands in Australia (Coelho, 2018; Jung et al., 2011; Pina, Dias, 2021). Second, emotional response positively influences consumer brand engagement within the same context (Chang et al., 2021; Dessart et al., 2016; Larocca et al., 2020; Zhang, Su, 2023). The findings of this study confirmed both hypotheses, finding support from different studies (Ahn, Back, 2018; Greenham et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2019).

These results validate and enhance the original concept of brand experience by incorporating emotional responses and consumer engagement as crucial factors in understanding brand interactions (Schmitt et al., 2014; Wiedmann et al., 2018). This expanded framework offers a more comprehensive lens for future research on consumer psychology and marketing opportunities (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022).

Additionally, the research results contribute to understanding emotional drivers influencing consumer brand engagement alongside other relevant works, enriching our knowledge about these psychological mechanisms behind decision-making processes (Ahn, Back, 2018; Rather, Hollebeek, 2020).

The theoretical significance of undertaken research lies in enriching the understanding of the interplay between brand experience, emotional response, and consumer brand engagement within the Australian sports industry. This research strengthens existing experiential marketing frameworks by carefully examining how brand experience influences emotional responses and drives consumer engagement (Larocca et al., 2020; Le et al., 2019). The regression analysis employed in this study provides a robust methodological approach for quantifying these relationships, enhancing our precision in comprehending their interconnectedness (Rather, 2020; Rather, Hollebeek, 2020).

Moreover, this study highlights the crucial role of emotional responses as intermediaries between brand experience and consumer brand engagement (Dessart et al., 2016). This contributes to expanding knowledge of emotional-based marketing, specifically within the context of sports industries (Chang et al., 2021; Funk, 2017).

Furthermore, contextualizing these findings within Australia's sports industry extends the applicability of experiential marketing theories to an environment characterized by deep-rooted emotions and experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Gilchrist, Wheaton, 2017; Morgan, Taylor, 2017). The nuanced insights from this investigation validate existing theoretical foundations while paving new pathways for future explorations. They provide tangible frameworks to guide practitioners in evaluating and improving their branding strategies to cultivate more vital consumer engagements (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022; Cheung et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2019).

4.2. Practical implications

This paper is of practical value for advertising professionals, specifically those in the Australian sports industry (Morgan, Taylor, 2017). Its main aim was to provide actionable suggestions for brands to improve their brand experience initiatives using the literature review and research findings (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022). These recommendations primarily focus on maximizing the brand experiences of consumers to create more impactful emotional responses and increase consumer brand engagement (Chang et al., 2021; Larocca et al., 2020; Trinh, 2018; Sykora et al., 2022).

The study's empirical results indicate that advertising strategies emphasizing a holistic brand experience effectively generate positive emotional responses, fostering greater consumer brand engagement (Greenham et al., 2017; Lee, S.M., Lee, D., 2022; Rather, Hollebeek, 2020). Advertising agencies can utilize this discovery to develop emotionally focused campaigns that engage consumers and establish enduring brand relationships (Dwivedi, 2015; Larocca et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this research provides valuable insights into identifying the emotional triggers that enhance consumer brand engagement within sports brands, where emotional response often plays a significant role (Trinh, 2018).

Following the findings of previous studies in this field (Lee et al., 2019; Lohneiss, Hill, 2014; Pina, Dias, 2021), the goal of this article was to provide practical guidelines for designing and executing experiential marketing campaigns aimed at cultivating consumer brand engagement. Based on the reviewed literature and findings presented in this paper, a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between our variables has been achieved. This knowledge is crucial for advertising professionals in the Australian sports industry (Davey et al., 2023; Morgan, Taylor, 2017). Given that interactions within the Australian sports industry tend to be emotionally charged for consumers, leveraging brand experiences to evoke positive emotional responses becomes paramount in driving greater consumer brand engagement (Chang et al., 2021; Trinh, 2018).

Advertising practitioners should anticipate that carefully crafted brand experiences resonate with consumers and elicit emotional responses that foster their engagement (Funk, 2017; Larocca et al., 2020). The practical insights from this article can guide advertising managers in developing emotionally driven campaigns grounded in understanding how consumers progress

from experiencing a brand to engaging with it. Furthermore, practitioners aim to achieve more impactful consumer brand engagements by tailoring these campaigns to suit specific attributes of the Australian sports industry while aligning them with consumer values and lifestyles (Rather, Hollebeek, 2020; Lee et al., 2019).

Moreover, this study emphasizes a holistic approach when designing meaningful branding experiences where each touchpoint is intentionally designed to elicit desired emotional responses, resulting in enhanced engagement (Akoglu, Özbek, 2022). Advertising practitioners may leverage these findings into refining strategies, ensuring campaign elements create a resonant branding experience, thus enhancing initial consumer engagement and long-lasting relationships (Dwivedi, 2015; Pina, Dias, 2021).

4.3. Limitations and further research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. Firstly, it focused solely on the sports industry, which may restrict the applicability of its findings to other sectors. Second, this research project used data reported by the respondents themselves (study participants were not part of the research panel), introducing potential response biases.

Another limitation is that one of the scales employed for validation yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient falling below the generally accepted threshold of reliability (Bagozzi, Yi, 1988), thus compromising result dependability.

The research sample was not representative, and the proportions did not reflect Australia's population. Consequently, such restrictions reduce the generalisability of the findings.

Future studies could explore these variables across different industries and cultural settings to overcome these drawbacks by employing more objective methods while achieving a more diverse participant base, yielding enhanced and less biased outcomes. Investigating additional emotional and psychological factors that potentially influence consumer brand engagement would be beneficial, promoting a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour (Kim et al., 2020).

Expanding the research scope to encompass various geographical locations is essential to validating the findings on brand experience, emotional response, and consumer brand engagement. The specific context of Australia may have influenced the results obtained; thus, conducting similar analyses across different countries would provide a more comprehensive understanding of these constructs.

Additionally, incorporating other relevant variables, such as brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, or digital engagement, into this research's model could further enhance our comprehension of factors affecting consumer-brand interactions.

Finally, investigating how digital technologies and social media platforms impact consumer brand interaction using this research framework could offer valuable guidance for advertisers navigating today's digital landscape (Schivinski et al., 2021). With rapid advancements in digital media channels come both challenges and opportunities for brands desiring increased

consumer involvement through experiential marketing. By adopting a multidimensional analytical approach while broadening geographic and sectoral contexts under investigation, future studies can significantly contribute to the existing knowledge base while providing practical recommendations for advertisers to maximize engagement levels and build lasting customer loyalty.

5. Conclusions

This paper studies brand experience, emotional response, and consumer brand engagement in the Australian sports industry.

This study provides compelling evidence demonstrating the influence of brand experiences on emotional responses and subsequently affects consumer brand engagement with sports brands. The approach taken in conducting statistical analyses ensures the reliability and validity of these findings. These results underline the evolving nature of consumer behaviour and emphasise the growing significance of emotions in branding strategies.

This article has implications for the field and the industry involved. In an era when consumers are becoming increasingly discerning, insights gained from this paper hold significant value. They guide navigating complex landscapes encompassing consumer expectations and shifting behavioural patterns.

In addition to contributing theoretical discussions, this study offers actionable recommendations for brands seeking to enhance their experiences by leveraging emotions. These suggestions underscore the importance of creating genuine customer connections rather than focusing solely on transactional interactions.

The results obtained effectively fill the identified gap in the literature, particularly regarding the Australian sports industry. It is a valuable resource for academics and practitioners seeking a well-rounded comprehension of experiential marketing strategies.

This paper highlights the power of interdisciplinary research, combining psychology, advertising, and data analytics to shape a holistic understanding of consumer behaviour. This contribution aligns with larger objectives to create an experience-focused advertising landscape central to consumers' needs in today's changing environment.

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Appendix

Table 3.

List of constructs and descriptive statistics

Constructs and measurements	Mean	Sd.	Skewness	Kurtosis
<i>Emotional response</i> (adapted from Organ et al., 2015)				
[ER] Looking back at your last interaction with a sports brand experience, please indicate the extent to which you felt the following emotions				
[ER1] Happy	4.03	0.83	-0.78	1.05
[ER2] Pleasantly surprised	3.73	0.96	-0.40	0.04
[ER3] Pleased	3.68	1.02	-0.56	-0.21
[ER4] Excited	3.91	0.90	-0.66	0.28
[ER5] Unfulfilled	3.69	1.20	-0.60	-0.53
[ER6] Annoyed	3.83	1.07	-0.63	-0.42
[ER7] Disappointed	3.75	1.19	-0.71	-0.41
<i>Brand experience</i> (adapted from Zarantonello et al., 2010)				
[BE1] I find BRAND X interesting in a sensory way	3.62	1.09	-0.41	-0.54
[BE2] BRAND X makes a strong impression on my visual sense	3.60	1.09	-0.60	-0.24
[BE3] BRAND X does not appeal to my senses	3.36	1.16	-0.38	-0.57
[BE4] BRAND X induces feelings and sentiments	3.56	1.09	-0.71	-0.06
[BE5] I do not have strong emotions for this BRAND X	3.14	1.25	-0.23	-0.96
[BE6] BRAND X Is an emotional brand	3.66	1.18	-0.57	-0.56
[BE7] BRAND X stimulates my curiosity and problem solving	3.21	1.17	-0.12	-0.70
[BE8] I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter BRAND X	3.13	1.15	-0.01	-0.67
[BE9] BRAND X does not make me think	3.09	1.21	-0.13	-0.79
[BE10] I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use BRAND X	3.75	1.08	-0.63	-0.39
[BE11] BRAND X results in bodily experiences	3.51	1.02	-0.38	-0.31
[BE12] BRAND X Is not action-oriented	3.38	1.22	-0.31	-0.77
<i>Consumer brand engagement</i> (adapted from Hollebeek et al., 2014)				
[CBE1] Using BRAND X gets me to think about BRAND X	3.32	1.11	-0.32	-0.47
[CBE 2] I think about BRAND X a lot when I am using it	3.21	1.13	-0.06	-0.70
[CBE3] Using BRAND X stimulates my interest in learning more about BRAND X	3.13	1.18	-0.02	-0.82
[CBE4] I feel very positive when I use BRAND X	3.88	0.96	-0.76	0.31
[CBE5] Using BRAND X makes me happy	3.77	1.00	-0.78	0.40
[CBE6] I feel good when I use BRAND X	3.82	0.98	-0.85	0.65
[CBE7] I am proud to use BRAND X	3.77	0.98	-0.66	0.21
[CBE8] I use more BRAND X, compared to other sports brands	3.79	1.14	-0.80	-0.16
[CBE9] Whenever I am wearing a sports brand, I usually use BRAND X	3.63	1.09	-0.46	-0.65
[CBE10] BRAND X is one of the brands I usually wear when I wear sports brands	3.90	1.14	-1.11	0.57

Note. All the items used a 5-point scale.

Source: own elaboration.