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Building Better Outcomes For Brands And Businesses

Understanding The Power Of Interactions To
Drive Human And Business Outcomes

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Executive Summary

Brands matter more than ever in the age of the customer. But as a brand leader, you must work harder to consistently activate consumer engagement and ensure you are taking advantage of each critical customer interaction — or risk losing your empowered customers to the next competitor waiting to explain how they can drive value and take away your market share. Brands know they face stiff competition in today's marketplace, so the question then becomes: How can brands understand the best way to reach their customers and conceptualize the ways in which their interactions deliver value for customers before delivering value back to the brands?

In January 2019, Starcom commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate how brand interactions influence customer behavior and deliver business outcomes. Forrester conducted an online survey of 10,097 consumers in 21 countries who were 18+ years of age and who reported recently shopping for or owning one of seven key vertical categories. Forrester used the findings from this survey to generate a model for understanding the effects of brand interactions on customer or human outcomes, and then how those outcomes influence business outcomes like product trials, purchase frequency, or brand advocacy.

KEY FINDINGS

- › **Interactions are a brand's best opportunity to communicate value and create emotional resonance.** Consumers interact with brands constantly and across channels, and they have high expectations for what those interactions will deliver. To create impact, brand messages need to include both a functional value (a brand's value proposition) and an emotional characteristic like being trustworthy or innovative. The impact of a positive brand interaction is that the customer understands the brand has delivered something of value to them personally, called a human outcome.
- › **Human outcomes drive positive business outcomes.** Human outcomes in this study are strongly correlated to favorable business outcomes, which include increasing market share, rising purchase price, higher sales volumes, first time purchases, and brand advocacy. A brand can deliver many possible human outcomes, but the two strongest predictors of business benefits are created when customers believe a brand has saved them money and helped them feel more confident in their purchases or use of a brand's products.
- › **Brands must differentiate by creating value for their customers.** In addition to driving direct business benefits, human outcomes drive a more general set of beliefs about a brand in the consumers' minds, brand equity. Since brand equity is formed over time, it sustains business benefits as it reflects a customer's broader relationship with a brand. The brand equity elements that had the strongest impact on driving a business outcome were building customer trust, delivering value to customers on their own terms, and building a sense that the brand is a part of a customer's personal identity. The value that brands must deliver to customers includes both short term and long-term benefits.

Capturing The Power Of Interactions

Brands today face a monumental challenge: Their customers are in control when it comes to brand interactions like never before. People are utilizing ad blockers, subscribing to ad-free streaming services, multiscreening, or skipping ads altogether. In fact, among the most progressive digital consumers, fewer than 10% are willing to engage with a mobile or web-based ad today.¹ With access to technology and the know-how to drive the conversation with brands, people demand personalized attention from the brands with which they *might* want to interact and do business.²

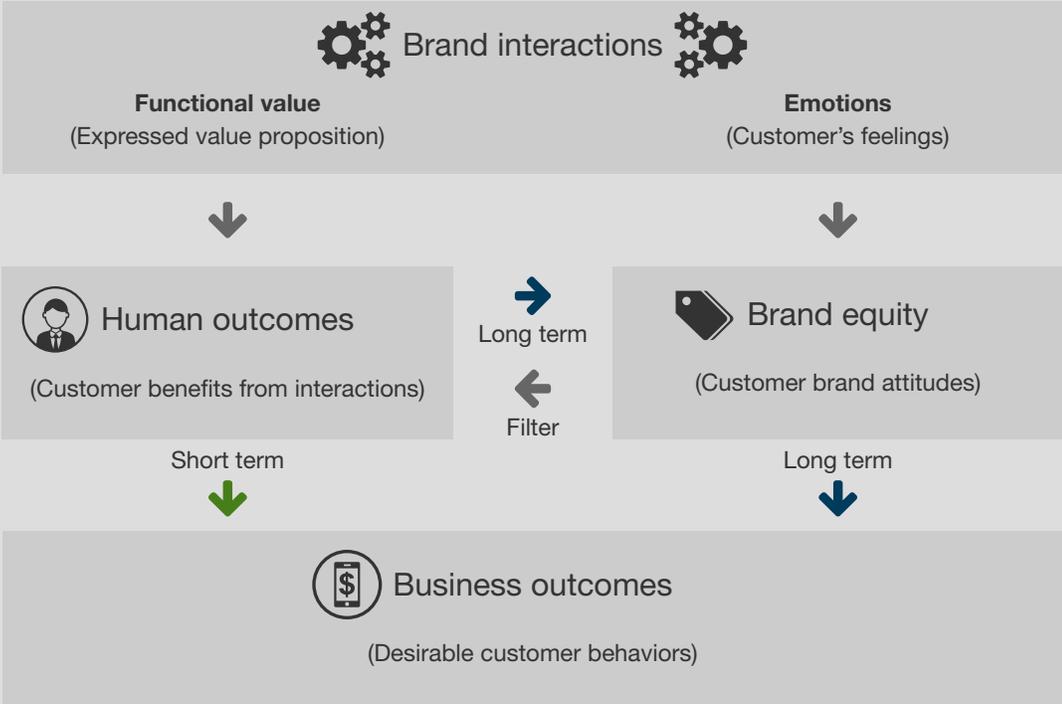
In this environment, brands must make every interaction — every opportunity to win the hearts, minds, and wallets of empowered customers — count to its fullest potential. Brands must ensure they are delivering value through every interaction.

To help brands understand the power of their interactions in driving human and ultimately business outcomes, this study created the Interactions And Outcomes Model (IOM) for this study. The IOM seeks to understand the influence a brand’s interactions with its customers has on their sense of brand value, broader beliefs about what that brand represents, and how those translate to desirable business outcomes like purchase and recommendation (see Figure 1).



The IOM was created to help brands understand how interactions lead to human and business outcomes.

Figure 1: The Interactions And Outcomes Model



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

Through a global survey of more than 10,000 consumers, we found that four major categories drive the IOM:

- › **Brand interactions.** Brand interactions describe the results of any given interaction with a customer. Each interaction expresses a brand's value proposition (functional value) and triggers an emotional response (emotions).
- › **Human outcomes.** Human outcomes represent the benefits a person realizes from their interaction with a brand. These might include getting useful information, saving money, or being entertained.
- › **Brand equity.** Brand equity refers to people's longer-term attitudes about a brand — for example, how much customers trust a brand or how much the brand is seen as responding to their needs — and is built up over time through a series of interactions.
- › **Business outcomes.** Business outcomes are the desirable results a brand achieves. Business outcomes may include switching to a brand from a competitor, increasing purchase frequency, or brand advocacy.



Interactions Fuel Brand Relationships And Business Outcomes

The first element in the IOM relates to individual brand interactions. Brand interactions are the starting point where brand relationships are seeded and are the means by which a brand communicates and fulfills its promise to the customer. In this way, interactions are the foundation upon which business success and customer relationships are built.

EVERY INTERACTION COUNTS

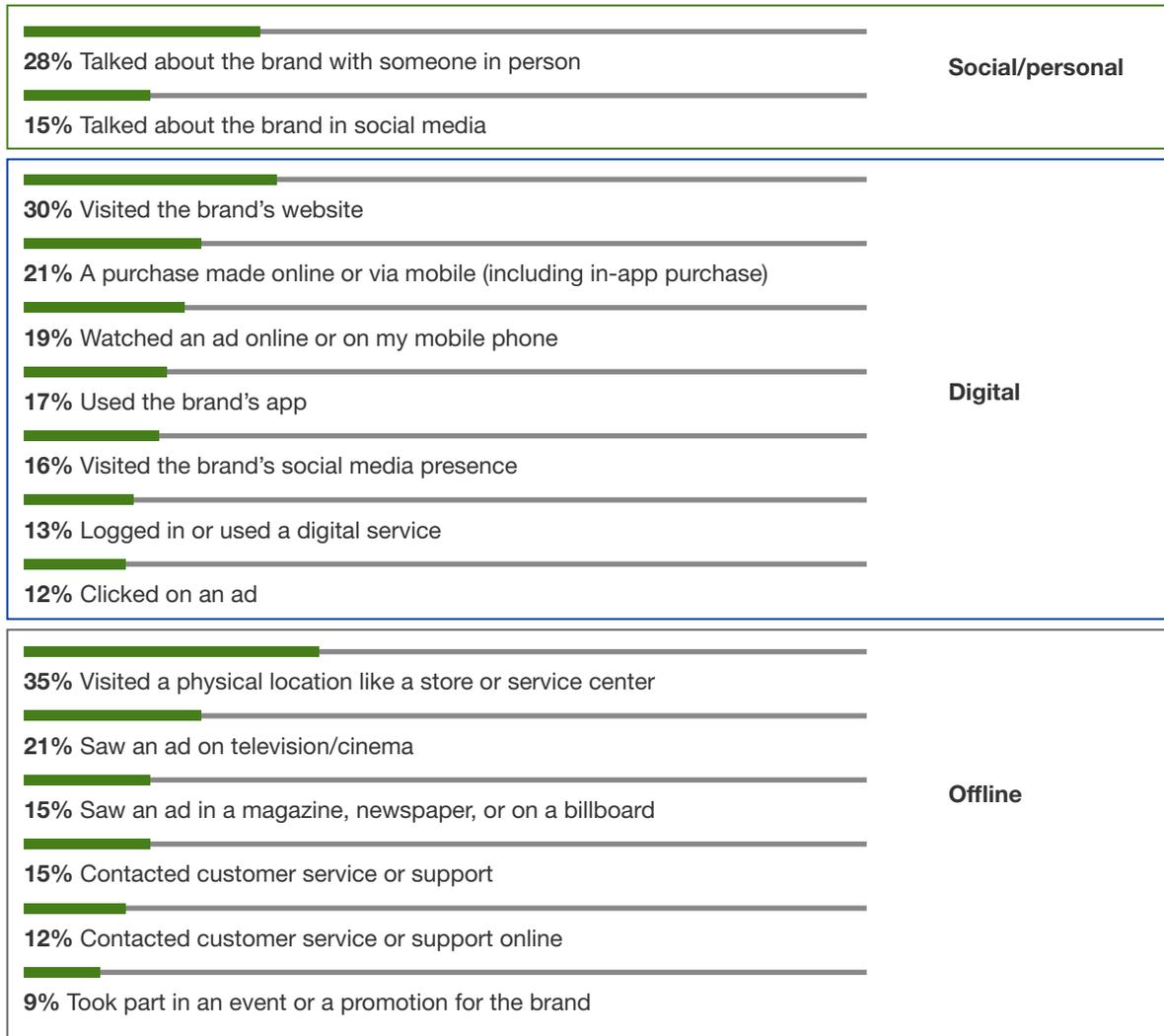
Every interaction a customer has with a brand contributes to that customer's perceptions of what a brand can do for them and also introduces emotional impacts that combine to determine whether that interaction will contribute to positive, negative, or neutral outcomes and brand attitudes. Every interaction is an opportunity to boost or hurt your brand's place in your customers' hearts and minds. While customers may more commonly access certain channels or touchpoints, these interactions occur almost everywhere (see Figure 2).

The challenge here is that none of these can be overlooked. If 9% of customers felt a promotional event was impactful enough to spend 15 minutes filling out a survey about it, that's 9% of your customers who are prepared to be delighted or turned off depending on the outcome of that interaction. Brands must be vigilant that their functional values are communicated and that their emotional salience is properly supported across touchpoints, or they risk turning customers off and, potentially, toward a competitor.

Functional benefits are about the value proposition brands look to communicate to customers through interactions. They set the stage for customers having a valuable outcome and, ultimately, rewarding the brand through desirable customer behaviors.

Figure 2

“Thinking of your experience with this brand, what kind of interaction(s) did you have?” (Select all that apply)



Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

BRAND INTERACTIONS ARE BOTH FUNCTIONAL AND EMOTIONAL

When a customer interacts with a brand, whether through social interactions, digital channels, or offline touchpoints, the brand is communicating two primary messages to them. First, the brand is communicating the functional benefit — the promise that a brand makes about how a customer can expect to derive value from the brand. Yet the functional benefit is only one-half of what arises from a given brand experience. Customers also have an emotional reaction to the interaction.

FUNCTIONAL BENEFITS SET THE STAGE FOR PEOPLE HAVING A VALUABLE OUTCOME

The IOM tested out a variety of functional values for seven brand categories — personal technology, quick-service restaurant (QSR), travel, automotive, financial services, beverage, and luxury — and ranked how important each functional value was in determining a human outcome in the IOM. Each functional value was also assigned an impact score based on how strongly the value was associated with a customer experiencing a human outcome, on a scale of 1 (minimum impact) to 10 (maximum impact). This analysis revealed that, for example, having a robust feature set in personal technology was a very strong predictor of a human outcome, whereas automotive functional values don't have quite as much power to drive customers to derive value from their interactions (see Figure 3).

BRANDS ENERGIZE INTERACTIONS THROUGH EMOTION

Forrester has come to understand that brands can energize their customers and activate their brand messaging not only by communicating salient facts about how they will drive customer value, but also by tapping into emotional triggers that customers will use to form their beliefs and attitudes about what a brand means to them. Forrester sees that more brands are treating emotional levers as increasingly important to driving the kinds of fruitful customer relationships that businesses crave.³ The IOM took this foundational understanding and applied it to ascertain the relative contribution of different emotional states to driving human outcomes.

Figure 3: The Importance Of Different Functional Values In Driving Human Outcomes

	Personal technology	Quick-service restaurant	Travel	Automotive
Functional value delivered to customer	Has the features that I'm looking for (10 Impact Score)	Has good-tasting food (7.8 Impact Score)	Is easy to plan and make purchases from (10 Impact Score)	Creates a positive purchase experience (5.0 Impact Score)
	Products are technologically advanced (10 Impact Score)	Has friendly staff (7.1 Impact Score)	Has a positive online experience (7.4 Impact Score)	Has many positive reviews from other purchasers (4.9 Impact Score)
	Has many positive reviews from other purchasers (8.5 Impact Score)	Has a good value/combo menu that I like (7.1 Impact Score)	Was recommended by a friend or family member (5.1 Impact Score)	Has many options/upgrades to choose from (4.7 Impact Score)
	Financial services	Beverage	Luxury	
Functional value delivered to customer	Has competitive rates (7.5 Impact Score)	Has many positive reviews from other purchasers (6.9 Impact Score)	Has a positive in-store experience (5.3 Impact Score)	
	Creates a positive experience (5.2 Impact Score)	Has knowledgeable staff/customer service representatives (6.5 Impact Score)	Has many options/upgrades to choose from (4.6 Impact Score)	
	Has competitive financing options or rates (5.1 Impact Score)	Creates a positive experience (5.7 Impact Score)	Is exclusive (3.4 Impact Score)	

Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

We found that emotional drivers associated with brand trust — measures like believing a brand was genuine, honest, reliable, or trustworthy — were more likely to appear in the top three emotional drivers of human outcomes across industries using the same impact scoring methodology. The other primary category that had broad applicability across verticals was what Forrester calls brand progression — or how cool, exciting, innovative, or progressive customers believed a brand to be after their interaction (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Interactions’ emotional value contribution to driving human outcomes (Showing top three drivers for each)

■ Brand trust ■ Brand progression

	Personal technology	Quick-service restaurant	Travel	Automotive
Emotional value delivered to customer	Genuine (9.2 Impact Score)	Reliable (10.0 Impact Score)	Reliable (7.8 Impact Score)	Progressive (8.8 Impact Score)
	Stimulating (9.1 Impact Score)	Reassuring (9.3 Impact Score)	Trustworthy (7.0 Impact Score)	Exciting (7.1 Impact Score)
	Honest (8.7 Impact Score)	Innovative (9.2 Impact Score)	Personable (7.0 Impact Score)	Reassuring (6.8 Impact Score)
	Financial services	Beverage	Luxury	
Emotional value delivered to customer	Honest (9.0 Impact Score)	Personable (7.5 Impact Score)	Exciting (6.4 Impact Score)	
	Cool (7.2 Impact Score)	Fun (6.8 Impact Score)	Intuitive (6.1 Impact Score)	
	Innovative (6.2 Impact Score)	Exciting (6.5 Impact Score)	Progressive (6.0 Impact Score)	

Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

Human Outcomes Drive Business Outcomes In Two Ways: Directly And Through Brand Equity

Human outcomes are the tangible benefits a person takes away from a brand interaction. In today's crowded marketing landscape full of empowered, choice-overloaded, ad-blocking consumers, human outcomes represent an interaction that has fulfilled its purpose by creating genuine value for a consumer.

Human outcomes have two primary effects in the IOM. First, they can lead directly to a short-term business outcome such as a purchase or recommending a brand to a friend or family member. Human outcomes also contribute to longer-term business benefits through building a sense of brand equity or set of beliefs about a brand.

HUMAN OUTCOMES DRIVE IMMEDIATE BUSINESS OUTCOMES

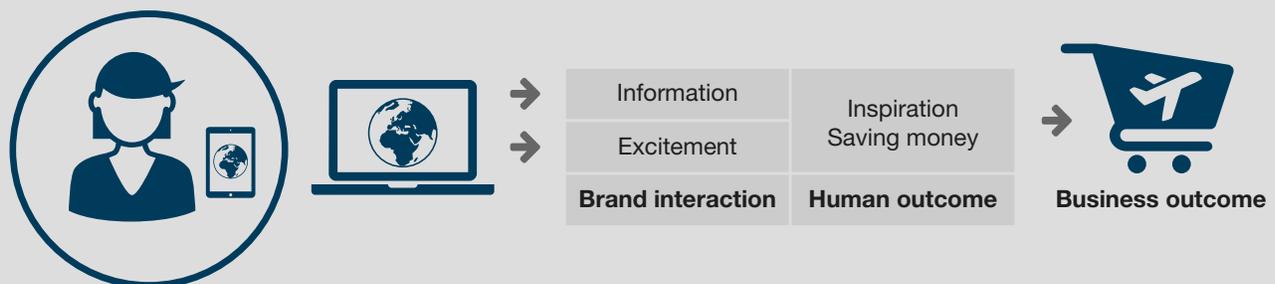
To illustrate the direct effect a human outcome can have on business outcomes, let's create an example (see Figure 5). A travel company created content to inspire future travelers. A person is planning a vacation. While scrolling through their feed on a social media site, they see that ad from the travel company. When they click through for more information, they discover they can go to a destination they never thought possible for an affordable price. Ultimately, they end up booking the trip. In their early interactions with the brand, their experience created the human outcomes of inspiration and saving money. Those outcomes led to a business outcome for the brand: a booked trip.

A brand can deliver a variety of human outcomes. This study's results show that the two strongest human outcome drivers of business outcomes are helping a customer feel confident in their purchase and making them feel special as a result of their interaction. These two elements consistently show up in the top three human outcome drivers across multiple geographies as well.



Human outcomes are the value people derive from an interaction with a brand.

Figure 5: Example: Short-Term Business Outcome (Purchasing Travel) Driven By A Human Outcome



Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

DIFFERENT HUMAN OUTCOMES, DIFFERENT BUSINESS OUTCOMES

It's also worthwhile to consider how different human outcomes align to different business outcomes. For example, the study showed that helping a person feel more popular was linked to sales increases or sales volume gains. Conversely, providing a person with inspiration or a new idea was most strongly linked to a brand being able to command premium price. Areas where a human outcome was particularly strong include the power of inspiration to drive increases in purchase price and the role of confidence in a first-time purchase (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Human Outcomes Align Differently To Individual Business Outcomes

	Gained market share	Increased purchase price	Sales volume gains	Trial/penetration	Advocacy
Short-term impact of human outcomes on business outcomes	I felt more popular (5.6 Impact Score)	I got inspiration/ a new idea (10.0 Impact Score)	I felt more popular (7.0 Impact Score)	I felt more confident (8.4 Impact Score)	I got better at something (7.2 Impact Score)
	I felt more confident (4.7 Impact Score)	I felt more confident (6.9 Impact Score)	I got inspiration/ a new idea (4.6 Impact Score)	I felt more popular (8.2 Impact Score)	I felt more popular (6.5 Impact Score)
	I was able to save time (4.0 Impact Score)	It entertained me (6.5 Impact Score)	I felt special (3.5 Impact Score)	It solved a problem for me (7.7 Impact Score)	I felt more confident (5.7 Impact Score)
	It entertained me (3.3 Impact Score)	I got better at something (5.2 Impact Score)	It entertained me (3.4 Impact Score)	I got useful information (7.5 Impact Score)	I felt special (5.1 Impact Score)
	I got better at something (3.2 Impact Score)	I got useful information (5.1 Impact Score)	I got useful information (2.8 Impact Score)	I was able to save money (7.0 Impact Score)	I got inspiration/ a new idea (3.0 Impact Score)

Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

THE TOP HUMAN OUTCOME DRIVERS ALSO VARY BY GEOGRAPHY.

The most important human outcome for brands in AP, LATAM, and MENA is helping a customer feeling more confident while customers in the US and EU were most likely to react to an outcome where they saved money. Generally, US motivations to save money were the most powerful human outcome across geographies, whereas AP's focus on confidence in their purchase, while strongest of all human outcomes in that region, was relatively less powerful (see Figure 7).

HUMAN OUTCOMES CONTRIBUTE TO BRAND EQUITY

Harnessing human outcomes to lead to short-term or direct business benefits qualifies as a win for any brand. Human outcomes can also contribute to long-term brand equity. Think of every human outcome created as a coin in the bank that has a cumulative effect at building brand equity. To the degree you are able to build brand equity, it can either amplify positive interactions or insulate from negative interactions.

You communicated that you had the best price available and the customer agreed and made a purchase — that's great! But the question becomes: What then? Is that customer going to keep buying from you based on the one-time lowest price you could offer? No, their loyalty is likely only as permanent as the next discount or flash sale. Brands therefore must consider how their interactions generate longer-term, sustainable relationships with customers. Put another way, how do you harness this win into also building a broader sense of equity with the customer?

The IOM demonstrates that these human outcomes contribute to a sense of brand equity. Especially strong are outcomes like making a customer feel special, saving them money or time, and helping them feel more confident. Think of every human outcome created as a coin in the bank that has a cumulative effect at building brand equity.

Figure 7: Most Important Human Outcome Drivers By Geography

Region	Top human outcome
AP	I felt more confident (8.7 Impact Score)
EU	I was able to save money (9.1 Impact Score)
LATAM	I felt more confident (9.7 Impact Score)
MENA	I felt more confident (9.0 Impact Score)
US	I was able to save money (10.0 Impact Score)

Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

Brand Equity Is A Long-Term Path To Sustainable Business Outcomes

As customers interact with a brand, those interactions translate into outcomes and action, but also accumulate over time into a broader set of beliefs and opinions about what the brand represents for the customer. That broader sense of beliefs form long-term attitudes and opinions that — just as they aren't built on any one interaction — so too can't be undone by one.

This is brand equity, which is fed by brand interactions and human outcomes. At some point, the brand that keeps you informed becomes a trustworthy brand, the brand that gives you lots of personalized recommendations becomes a brand that reflects your identity, and the brand that saves you time and money provides value in the areas you need the most.

The IOM's brand equity measures were based on a number of different potential attributes a brand may earn from customer interactions. Analysis of these different factors focused on which ones ultimately were most aligned to a sense of brand affinity — the notion that a customer loves a brand — and found three classifications of brand equity that most closely aligned with a sense of affinity: trust, identity, and empathetic value.

Trust is relatively straightforward: How much does the customer trust the brand's offerings and messages? Identity is a measure of how much the brand aligns to a customer's personal lifestyle or how much a brand is for people like them. Empathetic value relates to how much a customer believes a brand gives them what they want, on their own terms. In order, brands that are trusted, that align to a customer's identity, and that deliver empathetic value are more likely to earn business outcome benefits like purchase frequency and advocacy. In particular, trust had the strongest driver relationship to business outcomes, rating as the top measure in three business outcome categories (see Figure 8).

Across geographies, these three brand equity variables will trade places in position for driving business objectives, with the exception of trust. Globally, the surest way to build sustainable relationships between your customers and your brand is to communicate your brand's trustworthiness.



Brand equity is built over time through interactions and human outcomes. But your beliefs about a brand inevitably filter the way you interpret the interactions and outcomes that brand delivers.

Figure 8: Brand Equity Categories Drive Business Outcomes

Gained market share	Increased purchase price	Sales volume gains	Trial/penetration	Advocacy
Trust (7.8 Impact Score)	Identity (3.6 Impact Score)	Trust (4.6 Impact Score)	Trust (10.0 Impact Score)	Empathetic value (2.9 Impact Score)
Identity (5.0 Impact Score)	Empathetic value (3.2 Impact Score)	Identity (3.1 Impact Score)	Identity (8.7 Impact Score)	Identity (2.5 Impact Score)
Empathetic value (4.8 Impact Score)	Trust (2.2 Impact Score)	Empathetic value (2.9 Impact Score)	Empathetic value (8.1 Impact Score)	Trust (1.5 Impact Score)

Brand equity variable	No. 1 driver frequency
Trust	3
Identity	1
Empathetic value	1

Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND EQUITY AND HUMAN OUTCOMES IS A TWO-WAY STREET

Human outcomes accumulate to create positive brand equity. At the same time, positive brand equity provides a filter to interactions that lead to a better chance of more positive human outcomes. Previous research indicates that customers filter every interaction through a lens of existing brand attitudes and judge the interaction accordingly.⁴ Customers are wired to avoid cognitive dissonance, and so a customer’s perception of a brand colors the lens with which they view their experiences and benefits.

If a customer thinks highly of a brand, but that brand in some way makes a mistake in an interaction, the customer would tend to excuse that as an anomaly. If a brand they thought of poorly did the same thing, the customer wouldn’t have thought the brand could do anything differently. This buffer advantage isn’t permanent; after several missteps, the equity begins to erode — hypothetically to the point where the brand has to work *against* its built-up negative equity to deliver a positive experience.

Take Every Opportunity To Drive Business Outcomes By Delivering Customer Value

Your customers know that you need them more than they need you. They know they are in the driver's seat when it comes to deciding which brands will win their hearts, minds, and business. The IOM was designed to understand how the part of this cycle where brands have the most control — in their interactions with the customer — translates to a sense that they are providing real value to customers. Furthermore, it provides an understanding of how brands can expect customers to repay brands' efforts at driving excellent experiences by engaging in desirable behaviors. Finally, it is intended to illustrate some of the triggers brands can pull to focus their efforts and have the best likelihood of driving these desirable business outcomes.

Still, this is no easy task. It requires that brands become highly intentional about each and every interaction along their customers' journeys — to understand which levers to pull for which desired human outcome. The way that these interactions will be conceived should reflect a brand's reputation and voice, and, just as importantly, the customers' context in order to maximize its benefits and minimize dissonance. It also requires strategy so that the long-term equity picture is aligned to each individual short-term interaction, human outcome, and eventually business outcome.

Key Recommendations

Forrester's in-depth survey of over 10,000 global consumers about their brand interactions and opinions yielded several important recommendations:



Align every employee to understanding and delivering customer value. Customers are constantly creating and reinforcing their sense of who you are as a brand and what role, if any, your brand will play in their lives. Every customer-facing employee — from your marketing teams to your front-line sales or service staff — must be focused on delivering great customer experiences. As a foundational measure, begin by educating employees about your customers, your vision for how your brand wants to treat those customers, and what their role in fulfilling that vision will be.



Keep your brand focused on short-term and long-term business outcomes. In today's complex media and customer landscape, it's critical for brands to simultaneously manage both the short-term and long-term impacts of brand interactions. The short-term impacts represent a direct path from an interaction to a human outcome to a business outcome like purchase, while long-term impacts require a focus on the equity your brand builds up with a customer over time. Brands today are tasked with understanding and communicating in a way that contributes positively to both.



Ensure your creative efforts tap into the power of value and emotion. The IOM shows that customers respond to interactions that accomplish two primary objectives — communicating that the brand is committed to driving value to the customer and triggering an emotional response. Effective creative links the essence of the brand with the context of the consumer and therefore creates a human outcome that drives desirable business outcomes and helps build a lasting connection with your brand. Therefore, your brand must give creative full consideration to ensure it consistently communicates value and takes the resulting emotional connections like trust or a sense of progressiveness into account.

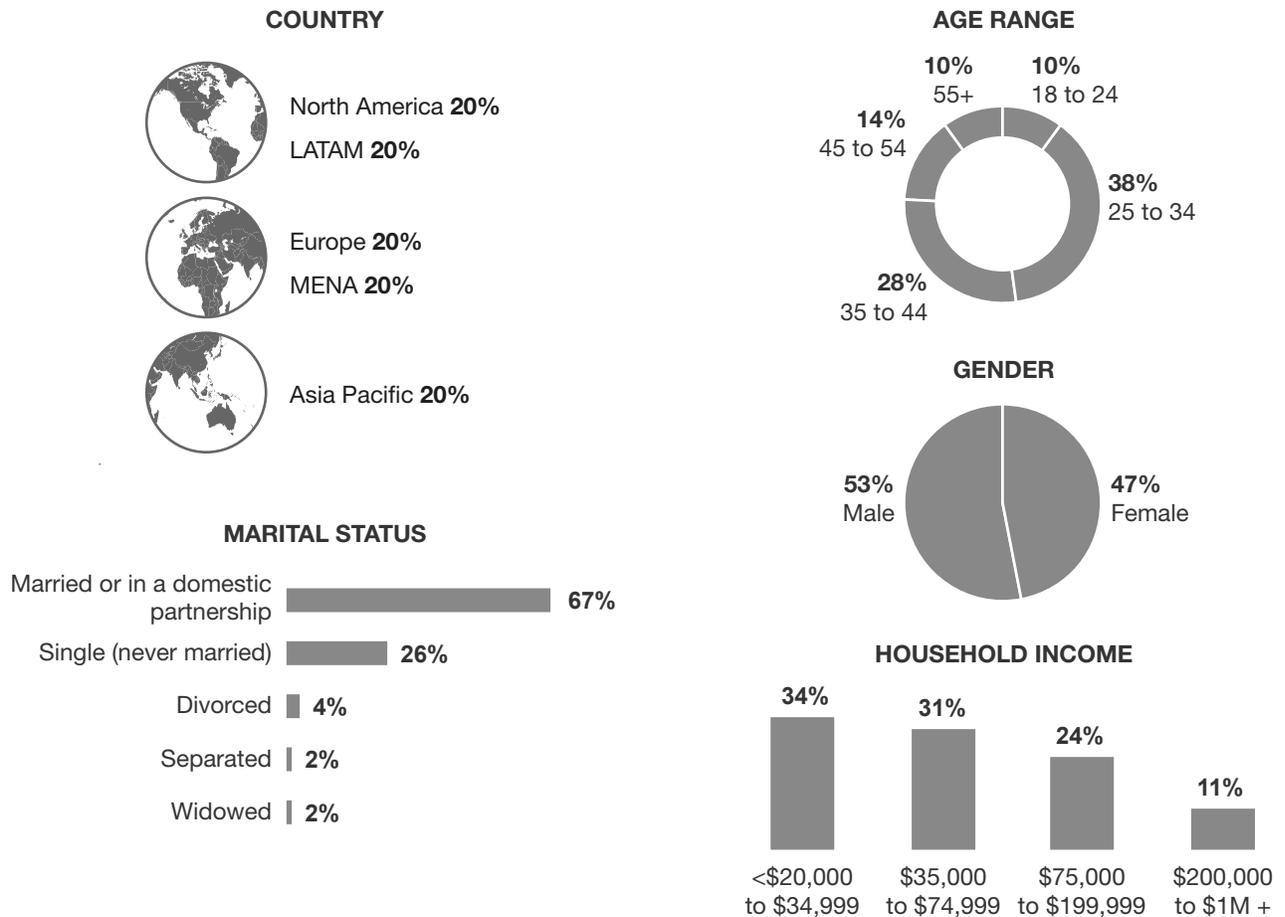


Find or enlist partners to amplify your brand's customer obsession. Agencies are brands' best partners to apply brand creativity equally across experiences, customer marketing, and campaigns. Brands will more effectively achieve human and business outcomes by working with agencies that excel in both customer obsession and creative differentiation. These agencies can bring their experience and creative talents to bear ensuring that the appropriate emotional triggers and functional values are delivered to the right audience, at the right time.

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 10,097 consumers in 21 countries to better understand how brand interactions fuel productive customer relationships. Survey participants were 18+ years of age and reported recently shopping for or owning one of seven key vertical categories. Questions provided to the participants asked about recent brand interactions the consumers had, followed by questions on their attitudes and behaviors toward those same brands. Respondents were offered a nominal financial incentive as a thank you for time spent on the survey. The study began in January 2019 and was completed in June 2019.

Appendix B: Demographics/Data



Base: 10,097 consumers who have shopped for QSR, luxury, beverage, personal technology, or travel products in the last six months or who own an automotive or financial service product
 Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Starcom, June 2019

Appendix C: Endnotes

- ¹ Source: “The Future Of Omnichannel Advertising Must Be Customer Obsessed,” Forrester Research, Inc., June 4, 2018.
- ² Source: “Create A Customer-Obsessed Brand Experience,” Forrester Research, Inc., January 9, 2019.
- ³ Source: “Emotions Fuel Your Brand Energy,” Forrester Research, Inc., November 19, 2018.
- ⁴ Source: “Branding Never Sleeps: Relentlessly Measure, Manage, And Improve Your Brand,” Forrester Research, Inc., November 21, 2018