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Research Article

Event Marketing and Customer Experience in India's Service Sector: A Systematic Review of the Literature (2008–2026)

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Abstract

Event marketing has grown from a peripheral promotional tactic into a budgeted, recurring instrument that Indian service organisations now use to build trust with consumers who cannot inspect, sample or return an intangible offering before they buy it. This paper systematically reviews close to seventy empirical and conceptual studies published between 2008 and 2026 on experiential marketing, event marketing, customer experience and buying decisions, drawing the source material from a wider doctoral thesis on event marketing in India's service sector. The review is organised thematically across hospitality and tourism, retail and e-commerce, banking and financial services, healthcare and insurance, food and everyday services and event marketing as a distinct discipline, before turning to the demographic variables most often tested as moderators. Three recurring limitations emerge. Demographic moderation is almost always tested one variable at a time rather than as a full set. Event marketing factors are rarely compared against one another within a single instrument. Indian studies, in turn, remain confined to single cities or single sectors rather than a PAN India, multi-sector design. The paper closes by arguing that these three gaps, taken together, define the space in which future Indian service-sector research on event marketing needs to sit.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Services are promises before they are purchases. A bank account, a hospital visit or a holiday package cannot be tried on, tested or returned the way a shirt or a phone can and that basic fact of intangibility has pushed Indian service organisations toward a form of marketing that lets the consumer touch, attend and participate in the brand ahead of any transaction (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Event marketing, understood here as the staging of product launches, trade shows, brand activations, sponsorships and service demonstrations, is the clearest expression of that push. Industry estimates place India's event and exhibition market at roughly USD 5.69 billion in 2025, rising toward USD 9.04 billion by 2031 (Mordor Intelligence, 2026) while a 2026 industry report found that 88 percent of surveyed brands were increasing rather than holding steady on experiential spend (EY-Parthenon & BookMyShow, 2026).

Spending of this scale would normally be expected to sit on a correspondingly large evidence base. It does not. This paper reviews the literature that a doctoral thesis on event marketing's effect on customer experience and buying decisions in India's service sector drew on and asks a narrower, more useful question than 'does event marketing work': where has research already looked and where, systematically, has it not. The review draws on close to seventy sources published between 2008 and 2026, spanning hospitality, retail, banking, healthcare and cross-sector event marketing studies from India and abroad.

2. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This is a structured narrative review rather than a fully protocol-driven PRISMA review. No formal database search string or inclusion/exclusion flow diagram was run independently of the parent thesis. The source pool consists of the reference set compiled for a doctoral thesis on event marketing in India's service sector, comprising 65 to 70 ISSN articles, book chapters, conference papers and doctoral theses published between 2008 and 2026, together with five current industry reports (Event and Entertainment Management Association of India, 2026; EY-Parthenon, 2026; EY-Parthenon & BookMyShow, 2026; India Brand Equity Foundation, 2026; Mordor Intelligence, 2026; NITI Aayog, 2025). Studies were grouped thematically by service sector and by whether they treated experiential or event marketing as the independent variable and a second pass was made specifically to extract which demographic variables, if any, each study tested as moderators. The limitation of this approach is that it inherits whatever selection choices the parent thesis made. It does not claim the exhaustiveness of a database-driven systematic review and that limitation is revisited in Section 7.

3. Theoretical Foundations

Two frameworks anchor almost everything reviewed here. Pine and Gilmore (1998) argued that economic value moves through four stages, commodities, goods, services and experiences with each stage commanding sharper differentiation and a higher

price. Once a firm competes purely on service delivery it eventually gets commoditised too and staging a memorable experience becomes the next available source of advantage. Schmitt (1999) gave that argument a marketing-specific mechanism through five Strategic Experiential Modules, sense, feel, think, act and relate through which a brand builds experiential value. Both frameworks trace back to Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) earlier claim that consumption is driven by fantasy, feeling and fun as much as by rational calculation, a claim that keeps resurfacing across the empirical literature reviewed below from luxury cosmetics in India (Dhillon et al., 2021) to coffee culture in Thailand (Meeprom & Kokkhangplu, 2025).

A third framework, the Stimulus-Organism-Response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), supplies the behavioural logic that most of the empirical studies reviewed here implicitly assume: an event is a stimulus, customer experience is the internal organismic response and a buying decision is the resulting behaviour. Verhoef et al. (2009) and Lemon and Verhoef (2016) extended this into a holistic, multi-stage definition of customer experience spanning cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial and social elements across pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages, a definition that sits apart from the older SERVQUAL tradition (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) which was built for routine, repeated service encounters rather than the single, high-intensity encounter an event represents. Bitner's (1992) servicescape concept, the idea that the physical and social environment surrounding a service encounter actively shapes response, bridges the two traditions and recurs across the hospitality studies discussed in Section 4.1.

4. Thematic Findings by Service Sector

4.1 Hospitality and Tourism

Hospitality is the most heavily researched of the sectors reviewed here and Indian tourism scholarship in particular clusters around Jammu and Kashmir. Rather (2018) linked customer experience to loyalty and recollection among 170 domestic and foreign visitors to four- and five-star hotels there and Rather and Hollebeek (2020, 2021) extended the same setting into a customer-engagement framework. The 2021 study reported that cognitive engagement mattered more to experience for consumers under forty while affective and behavioural engagement strengthened with age, a moderation results revisited in Section 5. Paulose and Shakeel (2022) showed that perceived value and service experience shaped guest loyalty in Indian hotels even during the early COVID-19 lockdown, mediated by satisfaction.

Outside India, Yuan and Wu (2008) traced experiential marketing to satisfaction through feel and think perceptions among Taipei Starbucks patrons and Lee and Chang (2012) reported, across 871 Taiwanese wine tourists, that experiential marketing and activity engagement shaped loyalty intentions through satisfaction as a mediator. Bruwer and Kelley (2015) identified facility-related quality, not amenities, as the stronger predictor of purchasing at a United States wine festival and

noted that repeat visitors aged thirty-five and above were the highest-yielding attendee segment, a rare instance of age and spend being linked directly. Bi et al. (2020), working from nearly 1.55 million TripAdvisor reviews across 75 cities, showed that the same attribute can affect satisfaction differently depending on hotel type, traveller type and region, evidence that a single satisfaction model rarely travels cleanly across market segments.

4.2 Retail and E-Commerce

Sadachar and Fiore (2018) tested Pine and Gilmore's four experience-economy components, education, entertainment, escapism and aesthetics, in two Indian shopping malls and reported that entertainment, escapism and aesthetic experience shaped patronage intention through experiential value, one of the few Indian retail studies to operationalise the experience economy directly. Jaiswal and Singh (2020) identified economic value, customisation, post-purchase experience and customer service as the drivers of online satisfaction among 325 Indian internet shoppers while Shi et al. (2020) built and tested an Omni channel experience model in which perceived risk and perceived compatibility connected experience to purchase intention. Turan (2021) offered a rare behavioural, rather than intention-based, test: field data showed real sales rose 40 percent when ingredients were branded, a magnitude few intention-only studies can claim.

4.3 Banking and Financial Services

Wasan (2018) reported that functional cues, convenience and believability, predicted Indian retail banking customers' discretionary behaviour more strongly than mechanic or humanic cues. Chauhan et al. (2022), reviewing 88 articles on digital banking published between 2001 and 2021, proposed integrating customer experience with the service-profit chain and flagged gamification as an underused lever. Bag et al. (2021) showed that experiential satisfaction moderated link between experience quality and behavioural intention among 560 Indian public-sector bank customers during a crisis period while Mensah and Amenuvor (2022) concluded that marketing communication broadly shaped purchase decisions in Ghanaian financial services but that celebrity endorsement and advertising specifically did not, one of the few studies in this review to compare tactics against one another rather than reporting a single composite effect.

4.4 Healthcare, Insurance and Related Services

Kumar et al. (2018) positioned customer experience as the primary mediator between marketing activities and customer-based brand equity in healthcare, finding eight of fifteen marketing initiatives worked through experience while two worked against it. Aburayya et al. (2020), drawing on 3,070 patient and 205 staff surveys in Dubai primary care, reported that satisfaction fully mediated the effect of frontline customer orientation on loyalty. Eckert et al. (2022) reviewed 106 sources on insurance digitalisation and mapped four customer

touchpoints, contract completion, contract revision, claims and follow-up where digital tools could lift satisfaction.

4.5 Food, Beverag and Everyday Services

This cluster is dominated by Southeast Asian coffee and restaurant research. Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) reported that emotive, sensory and intellectual experience shaped satisfaction and through it, advocacy and repurchase intention among Thai speciality coffee patrons. Soebandi and Dharmani (2020) and Soliha et al. (2021) both showed that Indonesian café satisfaction mediated the link between experiential marketing and repurchase or loyalty while Satti et al. (2021), working across Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, tied sensory marketing to satisfaction through service quality. Chang (2020) is the outlier here: brand image, not experiential marketing directly turned out to be the full mediator of loyalty for Starbucks in Taiwan, a result that complicates any assumption that experience translates automatically into loyalty.

4.6 Event Marketing as a Distinct Discipline

A smaller cluster treats event marketing itself, rather than experience broadly, as the object of study. Wood and Masterman (2008) judged existing measurement approaches for experiential marketing insufficiently rigorous given the intangibility of the event experience itself, a critique still echoed in the 2026 industry data on measurement uncertainty (EY-Parthenon & BookMyShow, 2026). Setiawan et al. (2022), reviewing 40 Scopus-indexed papers, proposed engagement, rather than entertainment value alone as the mechanism connecting events to brand equity, loyalty, word-of-mouth and purchase intention. Prayudi and Nugraha (2022) compared event and experience, advertising and direct marketing within one structural model and reported that event and experience carried the largest total effect on brand awareness. In an Indian setting, Chowdhary and Kulkarni (2024) showed that event marketing significantly predicted enrolment decisions among 200 students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities of Western India, one of very few Indian event-marketing studies outside hospitality or tourism.

5. Demographic and Contextual Moderators

Age is the most consistently tested moderator across this literature, though rarely alongside other demographic variables. Rather and Hollebeek (2021) reported that cognitive engagement mattered more to experience for consumers under forty than for older consumers while affective and behavioural engagement strengthened with age. Manyanga et al. (2022) tested age, gender, income and education together within Zimbabwean banking and concluded that only age moderated the satisfaction-loyalty link. Kim, Lee and Kim (2020) showed that both gender and prior hotel experience moderated the sensory marketing-satisfaction relationship in South Korea. Table 1 summarises the moderating variables tested across the studies reviewed in this section.

Table 1: Demographic Moderators Tested in Reviewed Studies

Study	Sector / Country	Variables Tested	Key Moderation Finding
Rather & Hollebeek (2021)	Tourism, India	Age	Cognitive engagement stronger under 40; affective/behavioural stronger with age
Manyanga et al. (2022)	Banking, Zimbabwe	Age, gender, income, education	Only age moderated satisfaction–loyalty link
Kim, Lee & Kim (2020)	Hospitality, South Korea	Gender, prior experience	Both moderated sensory marketing–satisfaction link
Bruwer & Kelley (2015)	Festival, USA	Age, visit history	35+ repeat visitors highest-yielding segment
Bi et al. (2020)	Hospitality, global	Hotel type, traveller type, region	Asymmetric effects vary by market segment

What Table 1 makes visible is a pattern rather than a single missing study: every study that tests demographic moderation confines itself to one or two variables within one sector and one country. None of the studies reviewed here tests a full battery of demographic variables, gender, age, education, occupation, income, marital status, residence type, area and family size, together, against a common outcome set within one PAN India, multi-sector sample.

6. RESEARCH GAPS

Read as a connected body of work rather than as isolated studies, three specific and recurring limitations emerge from Sections 4 and 5.

- Demographic heterogeneity is under-tested. Where demographic moderation is examined at all, it is almost always one or two variables within a single sector, not a full demographic battery within one comparable sample.
- Event marketing factors are rarely compared against each other. Most studies measure experiential or event marketing as a single composite score or apply Schmitt's five generic modules uniformly. Mensah and Amenuvor (2022) and Prayudi and Nugraha (2022) come closest to factor-level comparison, but neither does so for event marketing specifically across multiple service sectors.
- PAN India, cross-sector comparison is absent. Indian studies identified in this review, Rather (2018, 2020), Rather and Hollebeek (2020, 2021), Sadachar and Fiore (2018), Wasan (2018), Jaiswal and Singh (2020), Bag et al. (2021), Dhillon et al. (2021), Paulose and Shakeel (2022) and Chowdhary and Kulkarni (2024) among them, are each confined to a single sector, city or small cluster of cities.

7. DISCUSSION

Three broad conclusions follow with reasonable confidence. First, customer experience is a consistently positive predictor of satisfaction, loyalty and purchase-related outcomes across an unusually wide range of service categories, from hospitality and retail to banking, healthcare and insurance. This conclusion is not seriously contested anywhere in the literature reviewed. Second, the mechanism connecting experiential stimuli to outcomes is consistently mediated rather than direct, with satisfaction recurring as the mediating variable from Indonesian ride-hailing (Abadi et al., 2020) to Indian hotels (Paulose & Shakeel, 2022) to Zimbabwean banks (Manyanga et al., 2022).

Third and most relevant to the argument developed here, the literature is heavily weighted toward single-sector, single-country, single-variable designs. Hospitality and retail dominate. Banking and a handful of other categories are reasonably represented. But no reviewed study brings together a full demographic battery, a multi-factor comparison of event marketing's components and a PAN India, multi-sector sampling frame within one design.

The methodological limitation of this review is worth restating plainly rather than glossing over. Because the source pool was compiled for a specific doctoral thesis rather than through an independent, protocol-driven database search, this paper cannot claim the coverage guarantees of a formal PRISMA systematic review. It is better read as a structured, thematically organised narrative synthesis of a large and fairly representative literature. Future work aiming for full systematic-review status on this topic would benefit from a documented search string across Scopus and Web of Science, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria and a PRISMA flow diagram.

8. CONCLUSION

Indian service organisations are spending more on events each year than the evidence base guiding that spend can currently justify. This review of close to seventy studies published between 2008 and 2026 finds strong, repeated support for the general claim that experiential and event marketing shape customer experience and, through it, buying-related outcomes, but very little support for more specific claims that practitioners actually need: which demographic groups respond differently, which of several competing event marketing factors carries the most weight and whether findings from one Indian city or one Indian sector generalise to the country's wider, more heterogeneous service economy. Closing those three gaps, together rather than one at a time, is the task the next stage of this research programme takes up.

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