

MBA · THE CUSTOMER ENVIRONMENT

What Companies Can Learn from Their Biggest Fans

From Customer Satisfaction to Customer Advocacy — the modern customer environment

Dr. Aftab Ahmad

July 2026

THE SHIFT

We stopped asking “are they satisfied?”

- ◆ Twenty years ago: Are customers satisfied? How many complaints?
- ◆ Today: Why do some customers love us enough to promote us for free?
- ◆ That single change reshapes the whole customer environment.

20 yrs

since satisfaction was the goal

NEW ROLES

One customer now plays five roles

- ◆ Reviewer · influencer · content creator · brand ambassador · product innovator.
- ◆ They don't just buy — they broadcast, recommend and co-create.
- ◆ Marketing now happens between customers, not just at them.

5
roles

one customer plays today

THEN VS NOW

One-way broadcast became many-to-many

- ◆ Traditional: customers, competitors, suppliers, retailers — company → customer.
- ◆ Modern: brands, AI, social media, communities, influencers, reviews, family.
- ◆ Customers now influence each other's decisions continuously.

many- to- many

how customers communicate now

MARCUS BUCKINGHAM

Study your fans, not just your critics

- ◆ Companies over-invest in fixing unhappy customers.
- ◆ Instead, learn from your biggest fans — they reveal what truly creates value.
- ◆ Loyal customers are a company's most valuable strategic asset.

#1
asset

loyal customers

LEARNING OUTCOME 1

One fan can reach thousands

- ◆ Emirates passengers share Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Google Reviews.
- ◆ A premium experience becomes free global marketing.
- ◆ Emirates competes for attention, reviews and trust — not just seats.

1 →
1000s

reach of one loyal customer

LEARNING OUTCOME 2

Customers trust customers, and crave experiences

- ◆ Trend 1: people trust Google Reviews, TikTok and Reddit over adverts.
- ◆ Trend 2: they buy experiences — atmosphere, personalization, shareable moments.
- ◆ A Dubai tourist checks reviews before any hotel or restaurant.

Reviews > Ads

who customers believe

LEARNING OUTCOME 3

Value is emotional, not only functional

- ◆ Trust, personalization, belonging, recognition and confidence beat price alone.
- ◆ Careem: one app, local relevance, reliability — the payoff is peace of mind.
- ◆ Value = Functional + Emotional + Social + Digital Experience → Loyalty.

4
layers
of customer value

LEARNING OUTCOME 4

Strengthen what they love — not just fix complaints

- ◆ Old question: what complaints do we fix? New: what experiences do we strengthen?
- ◆ Apple invests in ecosystem, retail and simplicity customers already value.
- ◆ Dubai Airports: Smart Gates, biometrics, digital baggage, multilingual help.

Strengthen

don't only repair

LEARNING OUTCOME 5

One connected journey across every channel

- ◆ Tools: loyalty programs, CRM, AI, apps, WhatsApp, communities.
- ◆ Emirates Skywards: miles, tiers, personalized offers, lounges, app.
- ◆ Discover on Instagram → book on web → app check-in → post the journey.

8+
touchpoints
in one omnichannel journey

LEARNING OUTCOME 6

Customers decide what matters — not the company

- ◆ Value can be speed, trust, design, community, sustainability — pick your mix.
- ◆ Talabat: fast delivery, tracking, variety, promotions, a simple interface.
- ◆ The same product creates different value through different experiences.

Customer

decides what's valuable

LEARNING OUTCOME 7

Five ways to learn from your fans

- ◆ Listen to fans · personalize with CRM & AI · build communities.
- ◆ Reward advocacy · empower frontline staff to create moments.
- ◆ Jumeirah & Atlantis let staff fix issues on the spot — recovery becomes loyalty.

5 methods

to turn customers into fans

INTEGRATION

Six elements, one connected system

- ◆ Behaviour: loyal customers become advocates (Emirates sharing).
- ◆ Values & technology: experience over price; AI & CRM reward loyalty (Careem, Talabat).
- ◆ Social influence & improvement: reviews shape choices; strengthen what they love.

6 elements

of the customer environment

THE BIG IDEAS

Fans don't just buy — they bring others

- ◆ “Don't just fix what customers dislike — invest in what they love.”
- ◆ “A satisfied customer may return; a passionate fan brings others.”
- ◆ “The experiences customers remember become the stories they share.”

“Fans bring others”

advocacy beats advertising

15 MINUTES · GROUPS

Why are people fans of Careem?

- ◆ Why recommend Careem when alternatives exist?
What emotional value does it create?
- ◆ Which environment factors drive loyalty? Which learning outcome best explains it?
- ◆ As Chief Customer Officer, how would you create even more advocates?

15
min

map answers to the 7 LOs

THE TAKEAWAY

Advocacy is the new engine of growth

- ◆ The modern customer environment is no longer defined by transactions alone.
- ◆ Customers shape success through experiences, emotions, reviews and recommendations.
- ◆ Learn from your biggest fans — they reveal what truly creates value.

Advocacy

a defining competitive advantage

FROM CUSTOMERS TO FANS

If your biggest fans disappeared tomorrow, what competitive advantage would you lose first — and why?

Dr. Aftab Ahmad