

IS KANTAR'S "MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE" THE NEW SHIMMY TOOL?

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We've been here before. A shiny new metric bursts onto the scene, promising to reveal the secret to growth. But behind the hype, the same question lingers: **Can any single number truly capture the complexity of customer experience, or are we chasing illusions?**

When Net Promoter Score (NPS) debuted in 2003, it was positioned as the "magic metric" of customer experience—a single question ("Would you recommend us?") supposedly capable of forecasting business growth. Research at the time claimed brands with high NPS outpaced competitors by twice as much, fueling its rapid adoption among companies eager for actionable simplicity.

Today, Kantar's "Meaningful Difference" carries a strikingly similar pitch. Their recent findings assert that brands scoring high on meaningful difference and salience are **2.5 times more likely to increase market share** than those that do not. The parallels are unmistakable.

Familiar Patterns in Customer Experience Metrics

Both NPS and Kantar's "Meaningful Difference" share several core characteristics:

- **Retrospective Correlation with Growth**
Each metric builds its business case around historical correlations between high scores and revenue or share gains, not forward-looking causality.
- **Appeal of Simplicity**
They promise simple scores as proxies for deeply complex customer behaviors and market dynamics, making them attractive to time-pressed executives.
- **Danger of Obsession**
As with NPS, there's a risk that organizations may become fixated on boosting the metric, sometimes at the expense of building genuine customer value or insight.

What's New—and What Isn't

Kantar's measure does represent an evolution in experience metrics:

- It explicitly weighs **competitive distinctiveness and meaningful differentiation**, moving beyond mere customer satisfaction.
- The key insight: satisfaction isn't sufficient if your brand fades into a crowded landscape. The experience must stand out to become a true catalyst for growth.

Yet a fundamental issue persists: **correlation is not causation**. High scores often confirm that a brand is already succeeding for reasons like operational excellence, product superiority, or strategic branding. Metrics capture this momentum but don't guarantee it will persist, nor do they fully explain how to sustain it.

What History Teaches

- No single score reliably predicts or ensures growth.
- External factors such as market evolution, innovation, operational agility, and shifting customer expectations can overshadow the influence of any one experience metric.
- Over time, businesses have cycled through “golden numbers,” each initially embraced as a cure-all, only to be later revealed as merely one useful lens among many.

So: Is “Meaningful Difference” the New NPS?

- **Yes**, in its marketing as the next big thing—a simple answer to a complex challenge, linking perceptions to performance.
- **No**, because it risks repeating the same cycle: widespread adoption, focus on the metric, and eventual frustration when simplicity outpaces reality.

The Real Takeaway

I fundamentally believe that differentiated experiences, delivered consistently and helping customers accomplish their goals, are powerful drivers of loyalty and growth. In that sense, my philosophy aligns with the spirit of Kantar's approach.

But I also know that growth is complex.

Sustainable success means going beyond numbers to ask harder questions:

Are we solving real customer problems, or just polishing our image?

Are our processes flexible enough to pivot when markets shift?

Do we understand not only what customers say, but what they feel and believe?

Growth happens when companies turn these questions into action, blending analytics with empathy and operational excellence.

- **Metrics are tools, not truths.** No number replaces the challenging, ongoing work of delivering experiences that are both distinct and deeply relevant to customers' goals.
- **Growth is multifaceted.** External forces, competition, innovation, and human behavior mean there's never a single formula.

Kantar's insight into the need for meaningful distinction is valuable—but it's neither a shortcut nor a guarantee. The pursuit of growth will always outstrip what any single metric can reveal.

If you want your CX strategy to truly drive business growth, not just hit a score, [let's talk](#).

The ImprintCX team has helped organizations uncover what truly differentiates their experiences and translate that into measurable business results. ●

About the Author

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Ed has achieved a very successful career by building relationships and providing innovative solutions to meet clients' needs. With over thirty years as a global researcher, management consultant, and business leader, Ed brings his experience, expertise, and passion to every consulting assignment.

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