CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE: UNDERSTANDING THE USAGE OF THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING

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Abstract: In the last few decades, due to the booming of the Internet and the flourishing of new technologies connected to it, there has been a major change on how people interact with businesses. With the development of smart devices, companies started to unwrap the power of customer behaviour. A new kind of marketing, based on customer knowledge, emerged.

However, firms are still grappling with how to understand their consumers and it is still ongoing to change how companies and customers interact. Contrary to traditional media, the Internet allows for amassing data, associated with millions of users, companies encompassing a constantly evolving amount of online marketing channels.

To address this new complexity, the current paper contributes to the existing literature and theories regarding customer behaviour, customer journey and customer experience and explains the connection between the three concepts. This allows a better understanding of the mechanisms underneath consumers' decisions and actions taken across different purchase phases. Built upon the literature reviewed, a customer journey mapping model is suggested and explained.

Finally, customer journey mapping is necessary for companies to determine and analyze customer touchpoints in purchasing company's products and/or services. Companies have to be able to develop customer journey mapping in order to analyze customer behaviour from their customer journey. Once companies understand the customer journey from the customer's point of view, they can actually see where customer experience lags are present, focus back in on them and develop.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, customer journey, customer experience, customer journey mapping, touchpoints.
JEL Classification: M30, M31.

1 Introduction

Customer journey mapping is a method that has recently attracted considerable attention from both managers and academia. It integrates the activities, decisions, touchpoints, emotions and pain points that customers face during the purchase process into a map.

Customer journey mapping helps companies identify key points where communication is most likely to break down, allowing businesses to better understand the experiences customers have when they interact with the products and/or services offered under certain brand. These interactions, called touchpoints, are constantly growing in number (both digital and offline) and are used by customers in a variety of ways.

Today's customers value not only the traditional aspects of buying a brand, price and functionality (for example), but also intangible aspects that are related to the overall customer experience. Indeed, various methods of building and incorporating journey maps into business operations can be found online, but the scholarly literature needs extensive research on the topic.

The current paper is structured as follows: section one is dedicated to a short analysis of the existing literature as well as to the explanation of the concepts that facilitate the understanding of research. Then, sections two describes customer journey mapping. Section three sets out a proposal for a visual model of the customer journey map. The main components of the model are presented and explained. The last section concludes the paper and provides an outlook. The findings of this paper should make a contribution to pave the way for further usage of customer journey maps as the visual model helps companies understand every step a customer takes, allowing for strategic enhancements that can elevate the shopping experience.

2. Literature review

In this section, the three research areas that support the current study are presented and explained through a short analysis of the existing literature and knowledge. These are as follows: 1) customer journey, 2) customer experience and 3) consumer behaviour. Consequently this chapter aims to provide the required information for a better understanding of the presented research problem.

As Kuehnl *et al*. (2019) highlight, a widely accepted definition of customer journeys is still lacking. And indeed, many of the papers that have been reviewed for the purposes of this research failed to clearly define the term customer journey. In addition, there are authors (Anderl *et al*., 2016; Hildebrand and Schlager, 2019; Batra and Keller, 2016) that use path-to-purchase and customer journey terms as synonyms and this is adding to further confusion in understanding the customer journey concept.

Despite the fact that a number of authors discuss path to purchase, definitions are usually not given. Jones *et al*. (2018) state that a shopper engages in a subset of consumer behaviors that is the path to purchase for a particular occasion. Consumer behavior can be defined as the process that consumers experience when they make purchases, which includes a series of factors, internal and external, that shape and influence their decisions. These factors can be grouped into 1) cultural factors, 2) social factors, 3) personal factors, and 4) psychological factors (Singh, Dhayal, Shamim, Humanity, 2014).

Additionally, Jones *et al*. highlight the fact that once customers have identified a specific purchase need, then those customers are in the so called "shopping mode" - an active process that involves the outcome of a purchase decision as a result of engagement with path-to-purchase. This statement is also supported by other authors (Shanker *et al*., (2011); Mccollough *et al*. (2000)). There are also alternative terms related to experiences that have been used in previous research on this topic, referred to as consumer journeys/experiential consumption journeys (Akaka and Schau, 2019). In general, it can be summarized that there are many terms that are related to customer journeys and this fact demonstrates a lack of clarity and consistency and highlights the need for better framing in order to understand the concept of the customer journey.

This paper views *customer journey as consisting of various touchpoints created in a way that organizes the best communication between a customer and a company*. Customer touchpoints are all the different ways consumers experience a product or service, offered under a certain brand, from the moment they first become aware of it to the moment they dispose of it. Many articles describe touchpoints as a direct or indirect contact moment, service event or encounter

(Følstad *et al*., 2018) that occurs between a company and a customer (Heuchert, 2019) at various points in the customer's experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Moreover, these encounters can be physical or non-physical, active or passive, and can be captured by any of the human senses (Bascur, Rusu and Quiñones, 2018).

Touchpoints are usually chronologically ordered along the horizontal axis of the customer journey script and thus form a timeline sequence (Rosenbaum *et al*., 2017), so, from the customer's perspective, it resembles a process (Halvorsrud *et al.,* 2016). However, with the spread of new technologies, the retail environment is undergoing a paradigm shift, which has made this sequence of events less linear and more complex (Vakulenko., 2019). Instead, customers no longer use few touch points to move from one stage of the purchase process to another, as journeys are now a combination of multiple touch points (Herhausen *et al*., 2019).

Research by Micheaux and Bosio (2019) explains that the value of customer experience at each touchpoint influences the perceived quality of the relationship, which in turn influences commitment of the touchpoint, which can occur across online and offline channels. Prospective research should focus on the variety of touchpoints used from the customer's perspective. This will allow companies to gain additional insight into these touchpoints that are critical to improving the customer experience.

Given the evolution of market development, the value of customer experience ultimately changes – from being ignored to emphasizing its great importance (see Table 1). As indicated in the table above, the idea of user experience has become more relevant when Pine and Gilmore (1998) presented the progression of economic value. The basic idea is that during the purchase process, experiences are seen as an economic proposition and serve as the next point after commodities, goods, and services.

Customer experience is about "what customers think, feel, and do," which is the result of the interactions that occur between them and companies along the customer journey (Gao *et al*., 2019, p. 2). These responses that customers give to each interaction with a brand can be 1) cognitive, 2) emotional, 3) behavioural, 4) sensorial and 5) social (Vakulenko *et al*., 2019). In the early 2000s, however, customer experience gained a lot of awareness and several contributions have focused their attention on the topic and experience as a new form of value creation for both customers and companies (Gentile *et al*. 2007).

Table 1. Customer Experience Literature

Year	1960's	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000's	2010's
Model	Consumer Buying Behaviour Process Models	Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	Service Quality	Relation-ship Marketing	Customer Relation-ship Manage-ment	Customer Engage-ment

Research	Howard & Sheth (1969)	Bushkirk & Rothe (1970) Sheth (1970) Markin (1971) Webster &Wind (1972)	Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988)	Berry (1995) Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995) Pine and Gilmore (1998)	Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon (2000) Payne & Frow (2005)	Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić & Ilić (2011) Vivek, Beatty & Morgan (2012) Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek (2013) Kumar & Pansari (2016) Kumar (2017)

Source: Compiled by the author for the purposes of this paper

3. Customer journey mapping

Customer journey mapping, which originated within market research in the 1960s and 1970s (Crosier and Handford, 2012), visualizes the main touchpoints and stages that customers must pass through when doing business with a company. Customer journeys may seem simple and straightforward. However, customers go through various stages and experiences before they buy a particular brand and actually become customers of the company.

As customers base their decisions on interactions across multiple media types, many devices and different locations, the challenge for companies, to interact at critical moments that can influence purchase decisions, is growing. Among the potential customers, there is always a group of people who have thought about buying a brand but did not actually convert. While secret shoppers and focus groups can be effective tools for gathering information about customers' experiences and emotional responses, neither approach specifically addresses how customers react to products and services at different stages of their journey (Crosier and Handford, 2012).

Therefore, it is important for companies to understand customer experiences throughout the customer journey, to identify the gaps between and eliminate them in order to provide better customer experiences throughout the customer journey and encourage more potential customers to convert (see Table 2). This is where the need for customer journey mapping comes in. Because journey mapping is a flexible method, it can be modified to serve different types of companies.

Table 2. Customer journey map and its importance

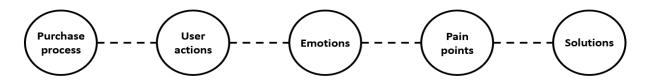| How to create a customer journey map	Why is it important?
Set a clear goal	Understanding customer paint points
Create customer personas	Increasing customer retention
Identify target personas for a particular journey map	Tracking (staff) performance
List touchpoints	Planning better marketing strategies
Detail available and needed resources	
Go through the customer journey	Delivering better customer experiences
Make any necessary changes	

Source: The author for the purposes of this paper

Customer journey maps involve mapping out the different steps a customer makes when trying to complete an activity. Customer journey maps are used to illustrate people's experiences as customers of a particular company. The so called maps typically include choices related to the purchase process, such as a decision to purchase a product or service or a decision to remain a loyal customer. Customer journey maps typically contain different interaction phases, touchpoints, different aspects of the customer experience (such as actions, feelings, goals, and pain points), activities, and some kind of analysis of the customer data collected.

4. Visualizing the customer journey map

The evolution of non-linear customer journeys makes the map look a lot more confusing for brands. Many companies use and have used customer journey mapping, but there are multiple ways to create customer journey maps and they are usually not consistent or mutually compatible. In general, there is no standard for customer journey maps, as they are visual tools that support discussions about improving the different types of journeys customers will experience.

A customer journey map is a visual representation of the touchpoints between a customer and a company throughout the entire relationship. The idea of a customer journey map is to have a simple visualization that can be interpreted by a wide audience. Contrary to business process models, a customer journey map does not include advanced gateways such as choices, parallels, or cycles. Figure 1. shows an example of a customer journey map. This complete picture of the stages a customer will face during their journey helps marketers predict their behavior, anticipate their needs and guide the company's response.

Figure 1. A customer journey map
Source: The author for the purposes of this paper

1) *Purchase process*. Companies want to collect data to map the customer journey from start to finish. Typically, these stages are awareness, consideration, and decision. At this stage, it is important for companies to understand whether their customers are considering a single product that is offered under a particular brand, or whether they are looking for some benefit that may span multiple products and/or services that are sold under a certain brand. Companies should continue raising awareness even during the consideration phase.

2) *User actions* in the figure above refers to the actions customers need to take at each stage of the purchase process. For example, whether or not they should register and what their online shopping cart experience is like. At this phase, companies need to identify how customers move through the journey and how they behave at each stage.

3) *Emotions*. Consumers are emotional creatures and it is good for companies to understand the potential emotional state of customers at each stage of their journey in order to prevent churn.

4) *Pain points.* As mentioned above, minor inconveniences can deter a company's customers from making a purchase. That is the reason why companies need to identify any potential pain points in order to help determine why their customers may be experiencing a certain negative emotion. Companies can do this by simply asking their customers directly or indirectly (for example by the customer service team).

5) *Solutions.* Companies need to look for ways to improve the buying process so that their customers experience fewer pain points along the journey.

Mapping the customer journey allows businesses to find the key moments that create frustration and satisfaction in the customer journey and helps companies chart a course towards better communication with their customers by giving them a complete picture of the process they go through on their way to making a purchase. By defining each step and mapping out the path, companies will find places where the process gets bogged down or some (not always obvious) steps they are missing. Companies can even find ways to create shortcuts to eliminate steps that can increase efficiency and reduce friction. Defining the journey for multiple processes will quickly show how complex things can get. But it will likely help companies identify where paths cross and where they can eliminate duplication.

5. Why is customer journey mapping important?
Mapping the customer journey allows companies to see things from customers point of view and to deliver information, messages and services in the most appropriate time through the most appropriate channels. It helps businesses identify the moments of truth where a service or communication breakdown is most likely and where they are most valued. In addition to providing companies with the customer's perspective, the customer journey allows them to gain valuable insight into the overall consumer experience and how they choose and integrate channels during the purchase process (Følstad *et al*., 2018).

Additionally, customer journey mapping can also be a powerful strategic weapon used to gain competitive advantage. Because a customer journey map is designed based on a company's understanding of customer needs, although competitors may be able to copy some of the touchpoints of their rivals' customer journeys, they will not know the sequence of events or the

reasons underneath the design of that particular sequence, and thus will not be able to achieve the same level of success (Norton, 2013).

Customer journey maps are also useful for studying the type of experience a firm currently provides to its customers and for identifying what can and should be improved (Terragni and Hassani, 2018). This information is then used to design a new and improved experience (Heuchert, 2019).

The team-oriented nature of journey mapping, combined with a visual approach for organized discussion, has *four main advantages*.

1) Collaboration has the potential to create positive team dynamics and strengthen mutual commitment to a project. The visual nature of journey mapping facilitates active participation and listening within a diverse company group where members have different strengths and weaknesses and prefer different communication methods.

2) Creating visualizations also encourages creativity and divergent thinking and promotes productive dialogue and debate.

3) Creating visuals allows companies to address the complex non-linear nature of customer journeys and encourages systems-level thinking. This also demonstrates the importance of context as situations are allowed to intertwine and connect. Arguably, this dynamic is the most important component of customer journey maps.

4) The final visual product allows companies to quickly absorb a systematic overview of a customer's journey.

6. Conclusion

Customer journey mapping creates an overview of the customer experience and maps how customers move through the sales funnel. It is critical for companies to understand and optimize the customer experience across various touchpoints and customer interactions with the business. Customers experience roadblocks, dead ends, and frustration along their journey. Collecting customer feedback at every point of contact or interaction can help companies identify their customers' pain points and take appropriate actions to resolve customer issues and avoid them in the future. The more friction companies put in front of their potential customers, the less likely they are to complete the journey. Customer journey mapping also allows companies to identify opportunities to improve and enhance the overall customer experience.

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