

Customer journey

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Abstract: The customer journey concept concerns the process of service provision from the customer perspective. Here, the service process is analyzed in terms of its concrete customer interactions, so called touchpoints, typically with reference to how these impact customer experience. There has been a steep increase in interest in the customer journey concept since its emergence in industry and government practices in the 1990s, and the use of customer journey approaches is considered a core competency in customer experience management across public- and private sector service provisioning. In recent research on customer journeys, emphasis has been put on how to explore and map existing customer journeys, how to understand service failure and recovery, and how customer experience develops across the customer journey. In this entry we provide an overview of the customer journey concept and related terms, current approaches to applying customer journeys, and relevant future research directions.

Key words: customer journey, user journey, service journey, customer experience, service process, customer journey maps.

The customer journey concept refers to a sequence of steps a customer takes to benefit from a service offering. Currently, services are provided over time and across channels. For example, when starting to use a content streaming service, customers may be required to interact with a company website, a smartphone app, email and messaging notifications, and devices for content consumption. A visit to a hairdresser may involve interactions with a booking service, consulting messaging notifications, the appointment at the physical studio, and a follow-up through a loyalty program. As such, service consumption has a processual character, where value is created as the customer progresses across multiple interactions with one or more service providers. The customer journey concept enables service providers to analyze and evaluate the service processes from the perspective of the customer. The customer journey concept is strongly linked to the concept of customer experience, that is, the customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social responses to a company's service offerings. The customer experience is seen as developing throughout the customer journey, and customer experience for a particular step will be dependent on the other stages of the journey.

The customer journey concept has been developed within different service sectors and fields of academic research. In consequence, a fragmented body of knowledge has emerged – constituted in part by industrial use and emerging practice, in part by academic developments. Furthermore, as a reflection of variations in application domain, customer journeys are sometimes also referred to as user journeys or service journeys. Nevertheless, some features and dimensions are universal. The customer journey is always understood as the service process as seen from

the perspective of the customer. The customer journey is typically analyzed in terms of concrete customer interactions, referred to as *touchpoints*. Touchpoints may be initiated by the service provider or the customer, such as when the service provider pushes a notification or when the customer seeks information on a provider website. The granularity and abstraction level of touchpoints are variable. The process in question may have well-defined start and end points, such as that of customer onboarding, or it may be more open, as for customer decision processes spanning pre-purchase and post-purchase.

A range of customer journey approaches have been established to support design, analysis, management, and improvement of customer journeys. Data collection for customer journeys is typically conducted through qualitative methods like customer and stakeholder interviews and workshops, as well as customer observation. The output of the analysis is typically visualized by so-called customer journey *maps*, which chronologically depict the touchpoints and higher-level stages of the journey. These maps may also represent any variation in service providers, customer sentiment, and quotes, as well as challenges and opportunities in the service process.

Customer journeys are sometimes likened to service blueprints. However, whereas the service blueprint also concerns the backstage service process invisible to customers, the customer journey only concerns the touchpoints and steps immediately involving the customer.

Given the increasing importance and complexity of customer experience management as customer interactions are distributed across myriad channels and service offerings, there has been a steep increase in interest in the customer journey concept over the last three decades. The concept emerged within industry and government practices during the 1990s, with white papers and reference material for practitioners available since the first decade of this century.

Academic interest in the concept has lagged somewhat behind, and nearly all research on the customer journey concept and approaches has been published within the last decade. Today, the customer journey concept and approaches are considered core competency in customer experience management across public-and private sector service provisioning.

In existing research and theory on the customer journey concept, much emphasis has been put on how to explore and map existing customer journeys, how to understand service failure and recovery, and how customer experience develops across the customer journey. Initial research and theory arguably aimed at generating awareness regarding the importance of taking on a customer journey perspective on service provision, for example by use of case studies, and supporting service providers in mapping and analyzing their key customer journeys by providing needed frameworks and visual presentation formats. Published research on the customer journey concept has typically involved studies where substantial efforts have been invested in providing maps of key service processes at a given point in the process, rather than establishing the needed frameworks and infrastructure to monitor customer journeys over time.

Key future directions in research, theory, and methodology concerns how to monitor and manage customer journeys over time. The progression of digitalization has opened new doors of human-machine interaction with rapid exchange of data, information, and knowledge. Execution of digital touchpoints leaves digital traces in the back-end systems of the service providers. By way of process mining, the digital traces in back-end systems may be utilized to reconstruct process executions and obtain realistic process models. An important challenge concerns how to connect the various business processes involved in a customer journey and

aggregate heterogeneous data into coherent customer journey models. For technology-intensive services, process mining in combination with artificial intelligence opens possibilities to make predictions in real-time journeys, and even to prescribe solutions to avoid service failure and customer dissatisfaction. Remaining research challenges include how to capture or leverage real-time data from multiple touchpoints across key customer journeys in coherent reports and analyses, and how to structure organizations to manage customer experience for key customer journeys in response to such real-time intelligence. Furthermore, there is a need to establish common metrics for customer experience measurement in the context of customer journeys.

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