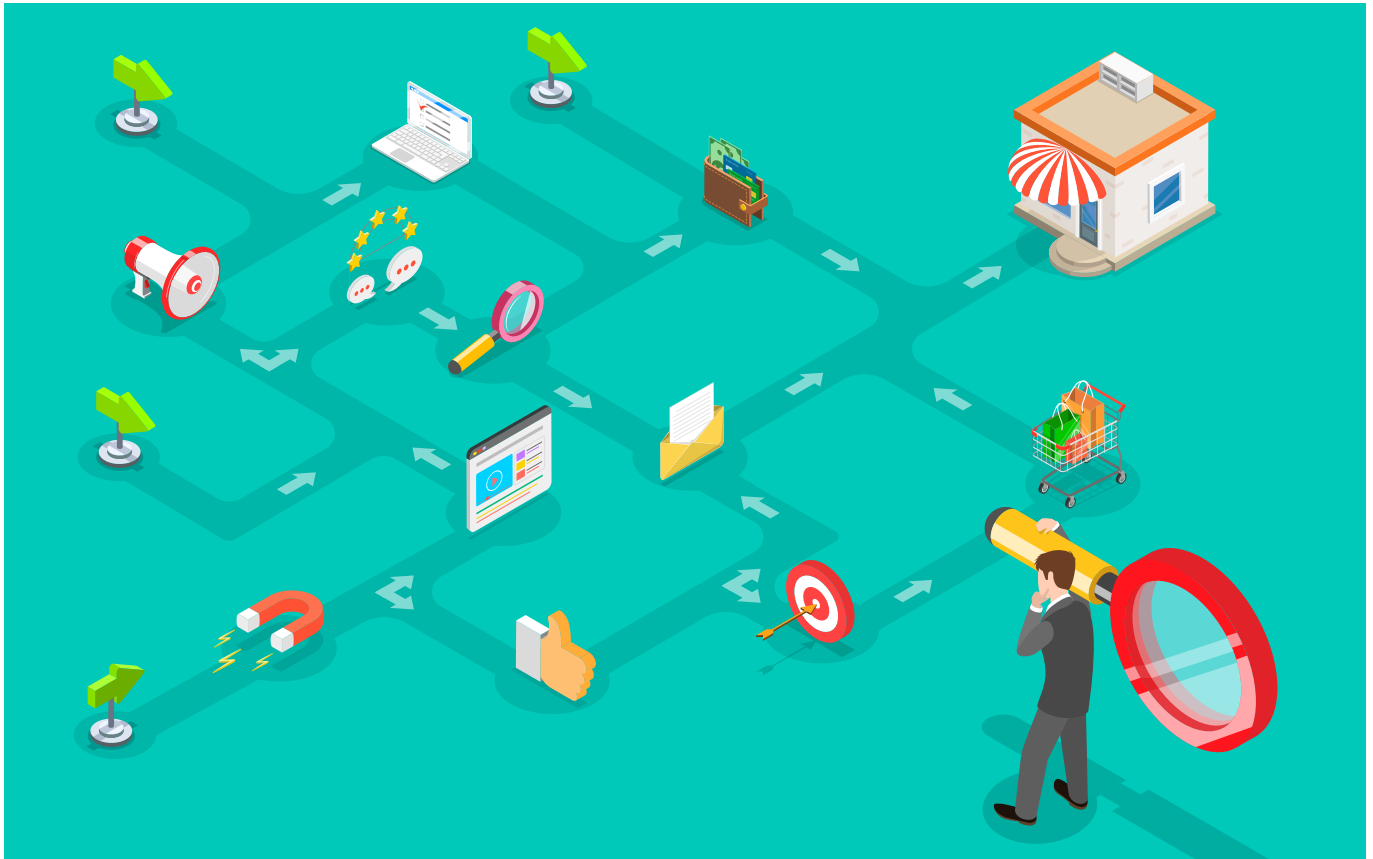


The Customer Experience and Insight (CXI) Research Group presents

Orchestrating experience

A holistic look at
the customer journey

CXI RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES: VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1
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Orchestrating experience: A detailed look at the customer journey

For a long time, companies have emphasised maximising customer satisfaction in the moment of purchase, shifting their attention away from the bigger and more important challenge of designing and optimising the end-to-end customer journey.

By *Eslam Afifi*

Establishing a strong customer experience is now a leading management objective for many firms. According to a recent study in which executives were asked about their top priorities for the next 12 months, improving customer experience is the main agenda for businesses today.¹ When customer experience is mentioned, all too often the focus is on individual transactions in which customers interact with brands and their offerings. Many firms invest in achieving high satisfaction at individual touchpoints, when customers are connecting with their products or frontline staff. However, a focus on individual touchpoints misses the bigger – and more important – picture: the customer’s end-to-end journey.²

Customers nowadays interact with firms through myriad touchpoints across multiple channels and media, resulting in more complex customer journeys. The customer journey may include several touchpoints that happen before, during and after the experience of a service or a product.³ Journeys can be long, often lasting days or weeks depending on the nature of the product or service.

They are also iterative and dynamic, shifting across new channels, devices, applications and more. This complexity makes creating a consistent customer experience a very challenging task, unless the firm takes a holistic view by managing the journey rather than individual touchpoints.

PRE-EXPERIENCE

The first stage encompasses all aspects of the customer’s interaction with the brand, category and environment before a transaction or consumption experience. Research has shown that clear and consistent communications are one of the most important elements of this stage; the customer journey should start with messages that are compelling and easy to relate to, connecting with customers.² In this sense, the customer journey can be thought of in terms of storytelling. For example, the marketing campaign for Jay-Z’s book *Decoded* began by advertising pages of the book in the locations where those parts of the story were set, with the locations mapped online using Bing.⁴ This helped customers start their journey with the

book through storytelling embedded in digital *and* physical space.

EXPERIENCE

The second stage covers all customer interactions with the brand and its environment during the transaction or consumption experience itself. For example, in consumption and services research, much emphasis has been placed on the role of the shopping experience (including the environment and atmospherics of this experience) in the customer journey.⁵ More innovative examples can be found in the domain of entertainment, such as the Secret Cinema concept.⁶

This is a unique way to experience movies immersively, going beyond plays, cinema screenings and studio tours to create an experiential site that allows consumers to become part of the story and witness the most memorable moments spill out of the screen and unfold around them. This experience is created, in part, through careful communication in the pre-experience stage, which educates and immerses the consumer in the experience before it even begins.⁷

POST-EXPERIENCE

The third stage encompasses customer interactions with the brand and its environment following the actual transaction or consumption experience. This stage includes behaviours such as usage and consumption, post-purchase engagement, and service

requests. Research on this stage of the customer journey has so far focused on the 'loyalty loop' as part of the overall customer decision journey; during this stage, a trigger may occur that either leads to customer loyalty (through repurchase and further engagement) or pushes the customer to begin the decision-making journey anew.⁸

Zappos is an online shoe and clothing retailer with a strategy centred on the post-experience stage; they decided to put most of the money which might ordinarily have been spent on advertising into customer service instead, so that their customers would do the marketing for them through word of mouth.⁹ However, Zappos still faced the challenge of competing directly with online behemoths such as Amazon.

While Amazon's website is set up for customers who want the fewest clicks and the most streamlined experience, Zappos targets customers who like some backstory with their merchandise and who have a bit more interest in the people selling it to them.¹⁰ Therefore, Zappos saw the thousands of phone calls and e-mails coming in every day as an opportunity to build their brand by achieving world-class customer service through their shipping, usage and delivery policies.

In particular, Zappos learned that customers will buy more and be happier in the long run if they can remove most of the risk from shopping at Zappos. For example, in the United States they offer a 365-day returns

policy, with free shipping both ways to make transactions risk-free and as easy as possible for their customers; Zappos also allows customers to order five different pairs of shoes and then send back the ones that don't fit or that they simply don't like – free of charge. All of this has allowed Zappos to gain a third of their gross revenue from repeat customers.⁹ Australian-based online fashion retailer The Iconic takes a similar approach, with free shipping and generous return policies.



ORCHESTRATING THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

While it's important to conceptualise customer experience holistically in terms of an end-to-end customer journey, it's not an easy thing to operationalise. However, academic and industry research does provide some insight into how companies can manage the challenges of doing so:¹³

1. **Analyse.** Customer journey analysis should be used to map the journey from the customer perspective – naturally, this requires customer input.
2. **Understand.** This analysis can help organisations understand how customers navigate across touchpoints as they move through the journey.
3. **Anticipate.** Armed with this knowledge, organisations will be better placed to anticipate the customer's needs, expectations and desires at each stage of the journey.
4. **Segment.** Customers differ in their preferences and usage of channels across different journey stages, and specific multichannel segments can be identified on the basis of consumer characteristics.
5. **Measure.** Build an understanding of what is working and what is not, not only across different stages but also across different channels.
6. **Optimise.** Any changes to the customer journey should be done for a better end-to-end experience, rather than focusing on a single stage.



Secret Cinema presents *Back to the Future* (2014) © Camilla Greenwell. This image is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported licence.

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About CXI Research Group

The Customer Experience and Insight (CXI) Research Group is part of Swinburne Business School.

CXI is a full-service research group that conducts leading-edge research centred on experience to build customer-led strategy and innovation.

The CXI team is specialised in a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods and frameworks. Our four pillars of expertise span the fields of retail and consumer behaviour, sport and wellbeing, service innovation, and employee experience.

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