Mapping customer experiences: An examination of touchpoints and opportunities for enhancement

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the customer experience concept within the context of a food and wine festival. Drawing on service design literature, this paper uses customer journey mapping as a tool to examine key touchpoints and the subsequent opportunities for enhancement of customer experience. This is particularly important, as customer experience has become a key factor for businesses to build customer satisfaction and loyalty, yet relatively limited research has sought to measure the in-situ momentary experiences of customers. The paper presents a customer journey map applied to a recent food and wine event. The touchpoints identified in the study are incorporated into a customer journey mapping approach to illustrate the service processes and identify opportunities for creating enhanced customer experiences. Implications of the customer journey mapping approach are reported.

Keywords: Customer journey mapping, customer experience, service design, food and wine festivals.
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Businesses have long recognized the importance of customer experience for customer satisfaction and loyalty (Badgett, Moyce, & Kleinberger, 2007). As a result, experience management has been widely investigated and employed in the service industries (Scott, Laws, & Boksberger, 2009). Customer experience is holistic in nature and encompasses the total experience, including the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience (Verhoef et al., 2009). In addition, customer experience is created not only by those elements which the service providers can control, but also by elements that are outside of the service providers’ control (e.g., customer’s mood, other customers). However, previous service marketing and service quality literature mainly focus on elements which are under the control of the service providers and how these elements influence customer responses when examining and evaluating customer experiences (Verhoef et al., 2009). Emerging service design tools have been identified as an alternative to conventional approaches for analysing and visualizing customer experiences in a holistic and dynamic manner (Stickdorn & Zehrer, 2009; Trischler & Zehrer, 2012). Importantly, some of these tools provide considerable insights into how customers experience the service and enable a visualization of the processes that may be effective for handling the complexity and variety of customer experiences (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010). This is especially relevant for tourism services, as overall evaluations of satisfaction or loyalty are likely to be dependent upon multiple experiences occurring at various points in the service delivery process. From an organisation viewpoint, customer experiences are likely to occur when there are points of interaction with the organisation; these are referred to as touchpoints.

Touchpoints occur whenever a customer “touches” an organization, across multiple channels and at various points in time. A customer is likely to experience a service process consisting of multiple touchpoints prior to, during and after the service consumption. An organization’s first step towards managing customer experience is recognizing every single touchpoint that a customer has with the company. Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) illustrate that experience touchpoints influence customers’ thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and offer a framework for understanding what “customer experience” actually means and what needs to be improved. Organizations can identify “touchpoint gaps” within the customer experience by mapping out every single existing touchpoint, which enables the company to deliver superior customer experience and helps customers to connect with the service in a personal, memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Pullman & Gross, 2004). As a service design tool, customer journey mapping offers a framework for mapping human experiences across multiple situations and interactions, helping to ensure that every interaction where an organization touches or connects with a customer is appropriate, relevant, meaningful, and enduring.

This paper illustrates the use of customer journey mapping for analysing and visualizing customer experiences. While there are many service contexts that may serve as a research ground for this study, a decision has been made to utilise food and wine festivals as these events provide an opportunity to map a customer journey across time and are likely to elicit some memorable customer experiences. Food and wine festivals link food and wine, together with local culture and landscape, and create the essential atmosphere to a memorable experience for festival visitors (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Festival visitors experience facilities, amenities, equipment, various service providers, and other customers, with many opportunities for the visitors to be pleased, disappointed, frustrated, or infuriated (Toffler, 1970). In short, a festival experience involves a torrent of service “touchpoints” (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010) that need to be managed. Thus, the identification of these touchpoints and the overall customer journey in the festival or other tourism experience is a necessary prerequisite to enhancing customer experience.
Importantly, as recent research highlights (Kuppens, Champagne, & Tuerlinckx, 2012), there is likely to be interplay between the appraisals people make and affective responses. Customers will appraise situations or touchpoints and evaluate how they feel. For example, a customer may appraise the touchpoint of entry to an event. The appraisal may include sensory elements such as lighting, sounds, temperature, other customers or the service provided by event staff/volunteers. Customers are also likely to have feelings about the experience such as pleasant/unpleasant. These appraisals and feelings are likely to interact linking to other emotional states. Sparks (2001) argues that complexity and uncertainty play a major role within service experiences because they consist of interactions between customers and employees, employees and employees, and customers and other customers, making it difficult to maintain consistency in processes. Gronroos (2007) and Lovelock, Patterson, and Walker (2004) further point out that these difficulties are reinforced by the subjectively perceived manner of service experiences, which creates one of the major challenges in service management. Hence, a case study focussing on customer experience in-situ may help generate new knowledge and provide in depth understanding of specific research problems (Perry & Gummesson, 2004).

In order to understand visitors’ experiences and identify all the touchpoints, an analysis of an existing food and wine festival was undertaken. Using a holistic approach that recognises customer experiences occur during the event stage (Verhoef et al., 2009), a comprehensive journey mapping approach was applied and a range of strategies designed to enhance customer experience were generated (see Figure 1). This analysis suggests that customer experience is multifaceted and dynamic. Customer experiences are influenced by associated services (e.g. ticketing agencies, parking facilities), social media (Facebook, Twitter), other consumers, extent of training of personnel and core product quality. This journey mapping process and its implications will be elaborated in the conference presentation.

The in depth analysis of customer experience including the integration of appraisal theories has the potential to contribute to both academia and industrial marketers. Theoretically, this study will identify a series of experience touchpoints that constitute customers’ service experience. Better understanding of customer experience may result in an accumulation and multiplication of perceived value by customers. High customer satisfaction and loyalty leading to repeat visits will be the outcome of value multiplication through valuable customer experiences. The
mapping of customer experience touchpoints could inform the development of new marketing tools and systems for understanding and operationalizing the delivery of superior service experience for both service businesses and their customers.

REFERENCES


