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Modern research methods in the field of customer experience

Nowoczesne metody badawcze w obszarze customer experience

Customer experience studies are an important component of research portfolio of every significant research agency. The main goal of this article is to show the key areas for CX and types of research which conducted in the field. The article also features two latest tools examining customer experience developed by Kantar research agency: the qualitative tool based on gamification - "Our City" and the quantitative one called CX+. The underlying premises of both tools and the areas of applications with their unique contribution in the CX research process have been described as well.

Keywords

customer experience, market research, methodology, gamification

Badania customer experience stanowią ważny punkt oferty każdej liczącej się agencji badawczej. Głównym celem artykułu jest pokazanie obszarów kluczowych z punktu widzenia CX i rodzajów badań w nich prowadzonych. Dodatkowo przedstawione zostały dwa najnowsze narzędzia do badania customer experience rozwijane przez agencję badawczą Kantar: oparte na grywalizacji jakościowe „Nasze Miasto” oraz ilościowe CX+. Opisano założenia stojące za obydwoma narzędziami i wskazano obszary zastosowań wraz z zaznaczeniem ich unikalnego wkładu w procesy badania CX.

Słowa kluczowe

customer experience, badania rynku, metodologia, grywalizacja

JEL: M300

Introduction

The decision making process is no longer a linear experience — the traditional AIDA model (attention — interest — desire — action) has transformed into a more complex iterative approach where a customer is seen as skipping some stages and returning to previous experience, active, gathering information, yet simplifying the task at some stages by activating the heuristic reasoning mode (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2016). A consumer living at the end of the second decade of the 21st century actually faces unlimited possibilities to acquire information about products, combined with increasing number and variants of

these products. On one hand, the number of touchpoints increases, yet on the other customers become more resistant to traditional marketing support. The role of emotions in the decision making process is greater, these are feelings which affect not only the repeated purchase intent, but they make consumers eager to promote the brand among friends and family, to identify with the brand in social media and to take part in various brand events. What counts now are selected touchpoints which will offer unique experience and bond consumers with the brand. This is a new form of loyalty modifying and extending the traditional customer journey which also impacts mental availability of a brand — the component which Sharp (2010) considers the priority task of



contemporary marketers. The term denotes willingness to think about a brand in shopping occasions, which is highly influenced by customer experience: their recollections and associations — both sensory: the taste of Magnum ice cream eaten in childhood, the way the new Toyota smells, and emotional ones: like enjoying a visit to the dealer ending with a successful test drive of one's dream car.

The rapid development of complexity in the consumer journeys and the increasing number of different, multichannel touchpoints requires new, advanced research methods. This article presents the approach to the measurement of customer experience in the market research agency. Two new methods are described: qualitative, gamified tool "Our City" designed to help in the deep exploration of customer journeys and quantitative CX+ which measures the relationship of the brand promise and the provided experience.

Customer experience and its measurement

Customer experience (CX) is one of important themes in the contemporary marketing — it is a subject of numerous articles and scientific studies (e.g. Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Cetin & Dincer, 2014; Vasconcelos et al., 2015). It is worth quoting the most general of many definitions of CX proposed by Klaus and Maklan (2013, pp. 228): "the customer's cognitive and affective assessment of all direct and indirect encounters with the firm relating to their purchasing behaviour". Other researchers also emphasize the importance of both cognitive and emotional processes in shaping customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2009). Homburg, Schwemmler and Kuehnl (2015) define CX as a multidimensional consumer trip across various touchpoints, whilst Lemon and Verhoef (2016) point out the role of individual actors of the customer experience shaping process: brand (and its various revelations), products, services and staff.

Customer experience is a wide concept affecting all stages of the decision process and multiple touchpoints. It occurs when people do their pre-purchase research — both offline and online, when they have contact with a brand in store, during the mere process of purchase and finally, when they use the product or the service (e.g. Brakus, Schmitt, and Zhang 2008).

Customer experience affects customers' satisfaction (Anderson & Mittal, 2000), their loyalty towards a brand and creating a more in-depth relationship of participants (Paharia, 2013), and their eagerness to recommend a brand — word-of-mouth (Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy, Andreassen & Weiner,

2007) across the channels — both traditional and digital.

Since customer experience became a focus of attention of the marketing practitioners, the matter of its measurement has been gaining importance. In the literature there are many attempts to identify the CX components. Dziwanowska (2015) presents a thorough review of different approaches towards defining the frames of the customer experience. E.g. Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) created a model consisting of six elements: sensory experiences, emotions, cognitive processes, pragmatic aspects, lifestyle and affiliation. Doubtlessly, such a multidimensional approach creates a great challenge for the designers of the CX measurement methods.

Beside purely theoretical approaches towards customer experience, there are some empirical attempts at measuring CX. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) have developed the Brand Experience Scale a short quantitative tool comprising four experiential dimensions: sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual. One of the important outputs of the application of this scale was the typology of customers including five segments: hedonistic, action-oriented, holistic, inner-directed and utilitarian (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

Also Klaus and Maklan (2013) have created a scale to measure CX. The scale, called EXQ, consists of four dimensions: product experience, outcome focus, moments-of-truth and peace-of-mind. It touches upon numerous aspects related to product competitive advantages, customer experience in the process, how a brand functions and reacts in key moments.

Very interesting approach towards the measurement of CX propose Kim, Cha, Knutson and Beck (2011). Their Customer Experience Index serves as a fully operational tool which can indicate the gap between the customers' expectations and their satisfaction and produce the set of concrete recommendations for the company.

This article will present another more elaborate quantitative approach towards examining customer experience with the inclusion of two aspects: brand promise and the created experience.

Implementation of CX strategies and market research

Brands have developed their strategies and carried out missions for years. Taken the changes described in the previous section, at present brands need to fill their missions with content not only in ATL activities but in all touchpoints as well. The



challenge faced by brands is how to translate values and manifestos into the language of experience. Conscious and consistent customer experience management and creating values and advantages in this area are reflected in growth of business. For instance, Kantar studies on the British market confirm that brands most effective in managing customer experience on the financial market generate double intent to use new products offered by these brands and ten times higher recommendation propensity, which finally leads to higher potential for growth (Kantar, 2018b).

Performance of such brands is described as 'customer centric' — which refers to the philosophy of brand actions with client and their needs being in the centre. The market is aware of benefits of this approach — 91% of presidents of British companies claim they believe in customer centricity. Yet only 19% customers on the British market would describe their brands as "truly customer-centric" (Kantar, 2018a). The data prove there is still room for improvement of the customer experience area.

This is a field where emotions play a significant role. They serve as a kind of conveyor belt transforming individual experience into recollections. If a customer can remember some event after a longer period of time, this is usually possible if they are able to link it to some emotions, for instance, they remember feeling disappointed in that very moment. The more intense are emotions, the better and more durable is the recall. Continued use of brand services, customer's loyalty towards the brand, intention to increase intensity of using, or using a broader range of products and services, are conditioned not just by the sole experiences but by the way consumers recall them (Kahneman, 2010).

The next part of this chapter will discuss the process of implementing customer experience on the example service market, and the implications for market research based on the model used by Kantar agency. Four stages of implementing this approach can be identified in organisations operating on the service market: 1. developing a CX strategy, 2. implementing this strategy by introducing operational changes, 3. promoting customer-centric approach inside the organisation, 4. monitoring impact of the strategy upon business results.

CX strategy development

The stage of developing customer experience strategy should address four factors: customers' needs and expectations, competitive framework and current brand position — experience the brand offers at present, as well as brand positioning. The goal of this stage is to create a vision of how the

brand positioning should translate into customer experience in various touchpoints and where the brand can base its uniqueness in the customer experience field. The role of research is to deliver inspirations in these areas and to run an initial CX audit of the brand. Qualitative and quantitative exploratory studies offer significant support here, and so do relationship surveys.

A detailed scope of study derives from the knowledge of the organisation. Organisations usually have access to data and insights on the main category drivers, customers' profiles, their needs and offered experiences. That is when analysis of such information is recommended with focus on two areas which play the key role in creating customer experience strategies — customer mission and customer experience with the brand. Understanding the mission lets us identify the functional category drivers — the reasons why customers enter interactions, i.e. their brand "journey". The analysis of customer experience with the brand aims at reaching the emotional aspects of their journey and the interactions or touchpoints which are most involving and have a potential to create powerful, positive and engaging experience.

CX strategies are usually developed during workshops with managers. It involves translating the brand promise into the strategy of creating experience with critical assessment of the direction. Stage 1 is completed by defining the strategic direction and initial diagnosis of brand CX. The outcome of this brand review defines the type of activities to be undertaken in the subsequent stage.

Introducing operational modifications

The next stage is the operational execution of the strategy — development of solutions for individual processes and touchpoints to carry out the customer experience vision of the brand or entire organisation. This is a long process with a funnel construction, consisting of several steps. The first step is time for organisation to define its priorities — select products, processes or target customers for the business. This choice determines the order of steps to follow — namely mapping transaction journey for selected products to identify the moments of truth and so called pain points. They should be further developed — to assess how well the brand or organisation offers attractive experience coherent with the brand vision in these customer journey moments. Based on the diagnosis, the processes may be qualified for further modification to better meet customers' needs and be more coherent with the CX strategy of the brand.



This is the stage where research may result in the most significant changes of the organisation. The studies play a role in actually every of the steps described above. At first right mapping of customer journey with qualitative tools is of utmost importance. The tools recommended for the customer journeys related processes are cognitive interviews. An alternative to cognitive interviews would be focus groups with a preceding online module — participants attending a so called bulletin board, i.e. an online platform used to reconstruct individual journeys and experience in such processes. The outcome of qualitative studies is a mapped customer journey. The mapping involves a possibly deep and precise reconstruction of the processes, including all touchpoints and emotional experience aspects. The moments of truth and pain points of the journey are further assessed with quantitative tools diagnosing the components and quality of experience offered by the brand in meaningful moments. This diagnosis is run during so called transaction studies, i.e. studies where customers are examined during or directly after an interaction or process. The key aspects here include fresh experience that has not been processed or rationalised yet. If the diagnosis of the process is negative, some process optimisation or reconstruction tools are implemented. These would usually include workshop processes carried out in the design thinking approach, i.e. with users and their needs being in the centre.

Stage 2 is completed with a program revising experience offered by the brand across the touchpoints and a selection of so called KPIs (namely key performance indicators) to be monitored at later stages of CX strategy implementation.

Promoting customer-centric approach in organisations

The third stage involves activating customer centric behaviour inside the organisation. This is the time to decide how research findings will be consumed by various departments and teams in the company. The essential condition for success in the process is proper communication of the objectives of implementing the customer centric philosophy inside the company. Organisation changes hardly ever concern merely the product or service consumer has direct contact with. There is usually a demand for thorough modification of processes and working style in the areas customers cannot see (*back office*). Research plays two roles at this stage — tactical and strategic.

The tactical dimension involves mainly all the current management of unsatisfied customer

relationship (*close the loop process*). Hot alerts are frequently used in transactional studies carried out in particular touchpoints, i.e. just after customer's experience with the brand. These are messages sent to respective departments and employees in the organisation to notify them that a given customer is not satisfied with some interaction with the brand. They require an urgent response to solve customer's problems or at least reduce their dissatisfaction. The research activities and *close the loop* process in big organisations with tens or hundreds of thousands of customers concern a high number of customers. Smooth management of hot alerts is the basic retention and loyalty boosting tool following difficult brand experience.

The strategic dimension of working with research outcomes at this stage mainly includes a long term development of selected relevant research findings. If we deal with *insights* from dissatisfied customers, what is required here is introducing some improvements to eliminate problems faced by these customers, and hence to make their experience in given touchpoints more positive. If information delivered by highly satisfied customers (e.g. promoters from NPS segmentation) is analysed, we focus more on development and innovations.

The last meaningful element of the third stage is study on employees. This is important for at least two reasons. First of all this perspective helps to diagnose problems reported by customers. It also lets us verify attitudes and opinions of employees and how customer centric they are. Here four areas should be analysed: staff involvement, leadership assessment, awareness and evaluation of organisation objectives and strategy as well as assessment of available resources. Employee surveys usually give grounds to diagnosing numerous barriers which hinder implementation of the customer centric culture in the organisation.

Monitoring business impact of the introduced strategy

Stage 4 is the test time — business verification of effectiveness of CX strategy implementation. It is based on financial analyses checking return of investment, comparing the implementation cost and effectiveness. Market research plays a great role here — relationship research data is treated as an additional context to interpret financial results. Its aim is to deliver knowledge for more in-depth analysis of strategy effectiveness. Customer information contributes the following elements to the data base (CRM): satisfaction, some demographic, behaviour or psychography variables. One should note that profitability analysis should



take into account the market context, competition changes and activities, as it is market dynamics that drives implementation of customer experience processes in organisations, and development of tools supporting these processes by research agencies.

So far we have presented an overview of research solutions used at different stages of CX strategy implementation in organisations, using the example of service industry, focusing on the common solutions. The next chapters will be devoted to two new tools based on the premises of the gaming role in the research processes (the tool: Our City) and the role of brand promise in implementing CX strategy (the tool: CX Plus) — the approaches created in response to the growing interest in the processes concerning emotions and experience.

Qualitative approach towards CX studies — "Our City" game

The chapter will describe the latest tool to examine customer experience — "Our City". This is a board game designed in Kantar Polska to add more in-depth component to the standard qualitative research processes on online platforms and in cognitive interviews.

Gamification in market research improves involvement of participants and lets us obtain information which is not available in traditional approaches — it can also serve as an advanced projection technique. The experiments show that tasks based on gaming mechanics are more effective than the traditional ones, and research participants consider the process more enjoyable (e.g. Harrison, 2011; Puleston & Sleep, 2011; Puleston & Rintoul, 2012; Ścibor-Rylski, 2018; 2019).

Designing "Our City" we hoped to create a tool which would let us enter the decision making process, explore its stages and get to know the importance of all the relevant touchpoints, as well as enable interaction of participants and which could be used during focus group interviews.

"Our City" consists of a board, a set of elements required for the game mechanics and the set of rules. The tool may be used to carry out various research goals:

1. Reconstructing a complex decision making process/ customer journey — it is used when we want to follow individual steps leading to purchase of a product or service: e.g. a car, a TV set, a bike, a mortgage or a trip abroad. In this version players move across the board recalling subsequent stages of their decision making

process. The form of the board game increases involvement and helps them remember more details and recall their customer experience in particular touchpoints.

2. Identifying and exploring the Category Entry Points (Sharp, 2010). These include reasons or occasions related to buying a product from a given category. "Our City" may be used to define CEP related to any category — then the game serves as a tool to reconstruct all possible touchpoints and to explore them. We learn how a given CEP appeared, what were the circumstances, needs, who respondent was with, what respondent was doing at the time and, finally what brands were present at this stage, i.e. were mentally available (Sharp, op. cit.).
3. Exploring any occasion/ situation which could take place in respondent's city. Our City then serves as a narrative technique — we do not use the rules but only the board where respondents move and tell us about e.g. their last social activity: where it started, what was the flow of the meeting, which places were visited, which brands occurred at respective stages. In this approach the game is used to facilitate structuring experience and recalling some details related to particular moments.

The strength of Our City lies in the combination of a board game involving participants with an elaborate narrative technique which lets a researcher understand individual customer experience: pain points, success points, moments of truth etc. With right moderation of consumers' narrative, every response may be probed and we finally arrive at a detailed experience map for a given category: with both functional (where, how and how often?) and emotional aspects (how I felt then, what was irritating?).

Qualitative validation of "Our City" game

In August 2019 a qualitative validation of "Our City" tool effectiveness was run. The main goal was to verify the mechanics of the game, the obtained figures and opinions expressed by participants of studies — a focus group interview with the game lasts up to 3h, so comfort of respondents is an issue which needed to check.

The theme of validation study was customer experience related to buying a new car. 18 residents of Warsaw and the suburbs participated in this study: both men and women, aged 24-58. All of them bought a new car in the past 6 months. The process consisted of two stages. In the first one all respondents took part in an online study (a bulletin



board on Krealinks platform). The goal of this stage was to get to know participants, to get an initial view of decision making processes and to eliminate less involved respondents. At the second stage three focus group interviews were run, each with four participants and lasting 3h. During the FGI participants played "Our City" game reconstructing all the stages of their decision making processes and thoroughly describing customer experience in individual touchpoints. After each session was completed an additional interview was held with all the participants.

The outcome of qualitative validation is positive — we have achieved highly detailed data combined with involvement of participants of the study. The group process (e.g. Brown, 1988) helped to increase self-awareness of respondents during the FGI — they referred to opinions expressed by other participants, confronting them with personal experience, and finally recalling some elements of own processes they could not remember during the online stage. The obtained qualitative data seems fairly in-depth. Additionally, the story structure imposed by "Our City" game mechanics has led to adding structure to individual narratives and to arriving at a more in-depth customer experience analysis in particular touchpoints.

Participants of the validation process expressed very positive opinions about their experience with the "Our City" game and found it more interesting than the standard research approach (these were respondents who previously participated both in focus group interviews and individual interviews). The respondents also admitted that during the game they managed to recall experience they could not remember at the preceding online stage. Competition being an element of the game mechanics generated a favourable response as well. These observations are confirmed by the quotations from the interviews held after completing the "Our City" game:

"This is a fairly interesting type of experience, I have figured out what my decisions were like, what the process was like, here the process of buying a car, and I discovered that it was not so simple at all" (Katarzyna, 50).

"Competition in this game was motivating. It was such a trigger to get even more involved" (Mateusz, 24).

"The game structured the whole process which was long, and in normal conditions, if we were talking about it without the game, I would present it in a much more chaotic manner, I would get back to some plots, I would skip some things, and here I was able to order it and to focus on what mattered most in fact" (Agnieszka, 54).

"I guess this is a tool which helps us really say all we meant, and these may often be things we would simply not say because we would skip them" (Adam, 30).

The qualitative validation of "Our City" tool seems a success. At present more validation studies are planned — now quantitative ones. Their goal will be to verify the hypothesis that respondents give more information during studies involving gamification in the decision making process than in the traditional approach.

Quantitative approach towards CX studies — CX+ tool

CX+ is a quantitative tool created in response to the growing importance of customer experience and its role in the brand strategy implementation. Contrary to traditional research methods which treat brand aspects and satisfaction studies (customer experience) separately, this tool focuses on the relationship of the brand promise and the experience created by the brand, merging these two areas. CX+ is founded on the assumption that one of the key factors of brand success in the present market context is guaranteed coherence of the clearly verbalised brand promise and the created experience.

The measurement of CX brand performance is based on five pillars: 1. Clear brand promise (it is clear to consumers what a company stands for). 2. Empowered employees (we use two to three attributes to measure the operational excellence). 3. Empowered customers (great experience on digital channels and whether it is easy for customers to switch between different service channels). 4. Lasting moments (how customers felt about recent experience with the company). 5. Exceptional delivery (level of preference of one brand over another).

The analysis outcome is the index called *experience advantage* (CX+ Index) which, as assumed above, derives from the CX brand performance and the gap between the brand promise and real customer experience with the brand. These indicators are calculated for all brands present on the market. Afterwards ranking of brands is created with standardisation procedures. The figures assigned to individual components are relative and highly correlated. What's worth noting, brand promise is reconstructed based on perceptions of consumers who do not use the brand, whilst brand experience is analysed among brand users.

From a very general perspective, three possible scenarios of customer experience and brand promise relationship may be observed: 1. Positive gap (experience exceeds brand promise). 2. Negative gap (experience underdelivered vs brand promise). 3. Brand experience in line with



brand promise (no gap). These different scenarios have different implications for brands. If a positive gap is identified, the experience area most likely gives a potential to strengthen the brand promise. If the gap is negative, the brand should undertake some steps to fix customer experience in the area identified as the weakest, or to reconsider the brand promise. The situation when the brand promise is coherent with experience is comfortable for the brand, yet not sufficient — one should assume that the market may force a change or some additional action. This is one of the reasons why the gap should be analysed in the entire market context and brand position in the ranking.

The validation of the tool was performed on 11 markets (Brazil, France, Spain, Netherlands, India, Germany, Poland, Republic of South Africa, USA, Great Britain, Italy). In Poland it was carried out in the financial sector and was completed in August 2019. The local validation was conducted among the clients of retail banks and on the sample of 2751 respondents. The sample profile was as follows: aged 18–65, representative mix of male and female, the clients of 13 biggest brands (constituting over 90% of market share of retail banks market). It took the form of an online questionnaire designed for 18-minute-long completion. The measurement was standardised separately for five areas of CX+ model, based on the five pillars described above: clear brand promise, empowered employees, empowered customers, lasting moments, exceptional delivery.

The outcome of the Polish validation study was presented during the Experience Advantage conference in Warsaw in October 2019. The study can be applied to various markets. It gives access to knowledge about the market leaders, position of a brand and its Experience Advantage index (CX+ Index) and it defines the direction for the organisation to follow.

Closing note

Brand activities and tools used to connect with consumers are created in response to various factors which may not be directly linked to marketing, but more to consumer trends in lifestyle, media consumption or shifts in financial

status. A growing demand of experience is observed on the Polish market — already one in three Poles (34%) claims that they would rather spend money on experiences than on material things (Kantar, 2019), the index is lower than seen in the western markets, which may imply that local interest in experience is likely to grow. Presumably then, the importance of experience marketing will increase as well, leading to development of research tools which may even better adjust to goals set for customer experience with various brands, being even more effective in blending different areas of brand activities.

The tools described above already indicate a certain change in the measurement of customer experience. CX+ is a research methodology covering two areas which were separated in traditional approaches, namely: customer experience and brand strategy. For this reason the tool is particularly useful at the early stage of creating customer experience strategy. Apart from the strategic stage, it can also be used at later steps of customer experience implementation in order to verify CX strategy and its correlation with brand promise. In such cases its role is to evaluate the brand in focus and its competitors and provide the organisations with operational recommendations.

"Our City" game is a tool which combines the benefits of two standard qualitative methodologies traditionally applied to map customer journeys — cognitive interviews and focus group interviews. On the one hand — similarly to cognitive interviews — it allows for in-depth understanding of individual customer journeys and identification of its key stages and touch points. It helps the game participants to reconstruct their processes in detail and focus on the experiences of strategic importance. At the same time, it stimulates respondents' interaction and group dynamics, which allows to include the elements which go beyond customer journeys mapping and, for example, indicate how customer experience can be improved in order to better suit the current market needs. It is particularly useful at the operational stage of launching customer experience strategy in an organization.

In this context, both solutions complement each other by finding different places in the process of creating and implementing CX strategies in the organization.

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PWE poleca

Każda organizacja funkcjonująca w globalnej gospodarce jest zmuszona nieustannie podejmować wyzwania dotyczące m.in. wdrożeń nowych produktów i procesów, aby móc utrzymać się w konkurencyjnym i ciągle zmieniającym się otoczeniu. Powszechną praktyką staje się więc powoływanie w przedsiębiorstwach jednostek organizacyjnych zarówno planujących, organizujących, jak i nadzorujących realizowane przedsięwzięcia.

Do zadań biura zarządzania projektami (Project Management Office – PMO) należą: wspieranie i realizowanie planów strategicznych przedsiębiorstwa; utrzymanie kapitału intelektualnego; planowanie i nadzór nad wykorzystaniem zasobów; koordynacja i centralizacja podległych projektów; zarządzanie środowiskiem projektowym, w tym planowanie, standaryzacja i synchronizacja, szkolenia, kontrola; doskonalenie praktyk i rezultatów zarządzania projektami; likwidacja lub łagodzenie problemów; raportowanie projektów do wyższego szczebla zarządzania.

Biuro zarządzania projektami (PMO) to publikacja wypełniająca dotychczasową lukę na polskim rynku wydawniczym. Autor przedstawia aktualny stan wiedzy i najnowsze wyniki badań w zakresie PMO. Znakomitym uzupełnieniem podjętej tematyki są zagadnienia portfela projektów, zarządzania wiedzą projektową oraz dojrzałości biur zarządzania projektami.

Księgarnia internetowa www.pwe.com.pl