BOOSTING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE VALUE THROUGH CUSTOMER JOURNEY DESIGN

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Abstract: *Customer experience and customer journey design are prominent concepts among academics and practitioners in the field of marketing. The aim of this paper is to develop a clear understanding of customer journey in the context of customer experience. Through a relevant literature review, existing theoretical conceptualizations in a field of customer journey design and customer experience were examined. Most often they refer to customer journey mapping, but the map does not have to focus just on a customer's experience. Moreover, it can be used to analyze and improve even an employee's or student's experience. Based on the examined key aspects of customer journey design and customer experience, a student journey map for the process of enrollment in programme Engineering Management at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, is proposed in order to enhance their experience and to identify critical areas that are crucial for future research on this important topic.*

Key Words: *Customer experience, customer journey design, customer journey mapping, touch points, personalization strategy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Creating a strong customer experience becomes a leading management objective, as well as a key factor of customer personalization strategy. In the labor market, there is an increasing number of job positions for customer or client experience managers, customer experience specialists, associates, digital brand managers etc. Today, more organizations have Chief Experience Officers (CXOs) or Chief Customer Officers (CCOs) or equivalents, and more companies are demonstrating the connection between customer satisfaction and business outcomes [1]. The importance of Customer Experience (CX) arises because customers interact with companies and brands through countless touch points in multiple communication channels and media, thus resulting in more complex customer journeys. Customer journey mapping is a process that can improve customer experience at each touch point and puts the customer perspective at the center.

Gartner's Customer Experience Management Survey [2] shows that CX efforts remain inconsistent in many organizations, but there are signs of greater commitment and execution for 2020. This study indicates that organizations are now devoted to CX with stronger execution, dedicated leaders and more money. Moreover, the survey results [1] highlight how marketing plays a central role in CX, although these initiatives have become increasingly cross-functional activities.

In this paper, we have analyzed student journey design, as a customer journey in a field of higher education, and proposed student journey map for the process of enrollment in programme Engineering Management, at the Faculty of Technical Sciences.

2. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Cambridge dictionary defines CX as the way someone feels at all stages of doing business with a company or organization. Back in the 1980s, experiential theorists [3-5] encouraged a broader view of human and customer behavior, recognizing the importance of the emotional aspects of decision making and experience [6]. The origin of the idea of "experiences" lead from Pine and Gilmore theory [7] that advocates the view that a consumer purchase is an experience where he/she "spends time enjoying a series of memorable events that company provides...and engages him/her in an inherently personal way". Recent literature suggests a more holistic view of CX, incorporating the customer's cognitive, emotional, sensory, social, and spiritual responses to all interactions with a brand or company [6, 8, 9]. Multiple definitions of CX exist in the literature, but in simple terms, customer experience is "the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company" [10]. Direct contact generally occurs during the purchase, use, and service and is usually initiated by the customer, while indirect contact most often imply unplanned and unexpected experience with representations of a brand (eg. company's products, services or any brand's element) and takes the form of word-of-mouth communication, recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews, and so forth. Business practice defines CX from the perspective of comprehensive company's offering (eg. perceived quality, customer care, advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use, communication strategy, reliability and so forth).

Customer Experience Management (CEM) is the practice of designing and reacting to customer interactions to meet or exceed their expectations, leading to greater customer satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy [2]. All authors agree that CX is a multidimensional construct with a holistic nature, and involves: *cognitive (think), emotional (feel), behavioral (act), sensorial (sense), and social (relate) components* [6, 11]; that's what complicates its management. An experience may relate to specific aspects of the offering and it consists of individual contacts between the company and/or a brand and the customer, at distinct points in the experience, called touch points [6]. Hence, the secret to a good experience isn't the variety of offers, but variety and quality of customer's contacts with a brand. An experience is built up through a collection of these touch points in multiple phases of a customer's decision process or purchase journey [6, 11]. Customers instinctively compare each new experience, positive or not, with their previous ones and judge it accordingly. Customers are more likely to extend a relationship with a brand if their interactions with its company are fast and easy. These positive experiences also make them more likely to recommend the company's product to friends or family. In these ways, CX directly impacts business performance.

To portray the series of touch points that contribute to customer experiences, some authors use the term *customer corridor* [10], ie. *customer journey* [6]. Of course, what constitutes a meaningful touch point changes over the course of a customer's life, and not all touch points are of equivalent value. However, organizations that have and use *Customer Journey Maps (CJM)* as a strategic tool for monitoring and measuring CX, are twice as likely to outperform competitors that don't, according to the 2019 Gartner Customer Experience Management Survey [12]. That success likely comes from the way maps help identify key opportunities to improve CX, but also to facilitate the agreement across the organization about customer needs. Customer's expectations are set in part by their previous experiences with a company's offerings, and partly by market conditions, the competition, and the customer's personal situation [10].

Delivering a consistent, competitive advantage depends on having a robust collection of inputs to inform journey maps, along with guidance on when and how to use them. CJM only bring value when they're used to inform business priorities, thus it is crucial to create CJM that internal teams will use to make customer experience improvements across the business. A successful brand shapes customers' experiences by embedding the fundamental value proposition in offerings' every feature and every touch point [10].

3. CUSTOMER JOURNEY DESIGN

The authentic roots of customer journey perspective are challenging to follow, because it has shown up in totally different areas. Handout "The Journey to the Interface" written by Parker and Heapy [13] has been crucial for increasing attention in customer journeys [14]. In this handout [13], customer journeys are explained as a focal point for "seeing services as individual client do" (p. 19). Parker and Heapy compellingly contend for the convenience of this point of view, based on viable cases and interviews from case organizations inside the private and open divisions.

According to the papers of Zomerdijk and Voss [15, 16] customer journey perspective and design have emerged as a topic of interest among both practitioners and academics [17]. In the last decade, professionals in marketing field have started assessing a compelling customer journey design as a significantly important value in progressively unpredictable and digitalized consumer markets.

Customer experience can be explained with a customer's "journey" with a firm over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touch points. Organizations focus on how customers "travel" throughout numerous touch points, moving from thought, search, purchase, utilization and future repurchase. The objectives of the analysis are to depict this travel and to understand the customer's alternatives and decisions for touch points in various buy stages [18].

Unfortunately, numerous previous studies have neither explored what establishes the adequacy of customer journey design from a consumer point of view nor observationally tried how it influences significant factors of buyer conduct [19].

3.1. Student journey design

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are confronting challenges which are disturbing the manner by which higher education is conveyed in the last century.

Universities that adopt a proactive strategy which contains planning and managing the student journey design can not just improve their capacity to draw in, hold and guarantee the achievement of the students, yet in addition make lean, proficient associations that are focused on students, as their most important target group. Moreover, productive, student driven Universities are more ready to create and hold income and invest resources into upgrades and improvements.

A student journey map represents a visual analysis of all the phases in the process of university enrollment. The goal is to create a strong bond between the university and potential and current students. Student journey mapping helps university personnel to identify every step that a student takes in the enrollment process and enables them to determine the exact improvements they need to implement to boost the student experience.

Usually, there are five elements of the student journey map [20]:
- **Personas** (set of attributes, traits, demographic and psychographic details which should represent fictional student character)
- **Stages** (phases, steps that a student needs to take when enrolling in the university).
- **Touch points** (every point of contact between a university and student). It could be the university's website, social media accounts, official visits, etc.
- **Mindsets** (analysis of students thoughts and feeling before, during and after enrolling)

- **Opportunities** (possibilities for improving areas where student experience can be better).

The main benefits of student journey mapping for better understanding and improvement of student experience are [21]:
- Increased understanding
- Work practices
- Continuous improvement
- Future planning
- Fresh perspective.

Based on the mentioned elements of student journey mapping, the student journey map for the process of enrollment in programme Engineering Management, at the Faculty of Technical Sciences (FTS) in Novi Sad, Serbia, is proposed to enhance students experience.

3.2. Student journey mapping: Case of enrollment in bachelor study program in Engineering management at FTS

The subject of this analysis was the enrollment process in one study program at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, Novi Sad, Serbia. The FTS has 90 study programs of all degrees and this paper focuses on student journey design for enrollment in the study programme in Engineering Management (EM) at the bachelor's level of studies. In order to create student journey map, we used common practice in data collecting for design mapping: an official survey conducted among freshmen of FTS [22], students' feedback, and the observations of admission staff (Table 1).

In order to move up student experience into satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy, customer journey mapping is an insightful tool which enables:
- Enhancing the student experience by assessing the faculty services from the customers' point of view; and
- Collecting information that would allow faculties and universities to prioritize service development.

Table 1 presents one case of the student journey map at the FTS, where we have identified persona as a representative of the EM-FTS population. The largest number of high school graduates enrolling study programme Engineering Management comes from gymnasium (41%), secondary schools of economics (21%) and engineering schools (20%). In addition, the most students committed to this study program are from Novi Sad (79%), Sombor (10%) and Subotica (9%).

Table 1: *Student journey map for freshman at Engineering management, FTS, Novi Sad, Serbia*

Persona:	Freshman journey:	Student goals:	Faculty goals:
Milica, age: 19 high school student Hometown: Novi Sad Secondary school: Gymnasium Interests: technology, scholarships, student exchange, travelling, internships, social media	The process of enrollment at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, programme Engineering Management, Bachelor studies	*"I want to find a best-fit programme that will provide me a successful career"* *"I want to get more information about Engineering Management programme"* *"I want to find a programme that will provide me necessary knowledge and skills for occupations in demand, as well as opportunities for internships, student exchange and scholarships"*	Visibility Awareness Engagement Conversion Establish trust Reputation Satisfaction Recommendation

Stages of experience	Before enrollment	During enrollment	After enrollment
Touch points	Family & Friends High school teachers Social Media - owned media: Facebook group "Biću student FTN" Facebook page IIMFTN Instagram profile IIM_FTN Twitter profile @IIM_FTN YouTube channel IIM_FTN Faculty websites: www.ftn.uns.ac.rs; www.iim.ftn.uns.ac.rs. Owned blogs Website: *Prijemni.Infostud, Fakulteti.edukacija.rs, Roditelji.edukacija.rs, Beleske.com, Mladi,*	Admission staff Faculty websites (UPIS.FTN; www.ftn.uns.ac.rs; www.iim.ftn.uns.ac.rs) Social Media (owned media: Personalized communication through the Facebook group "Biću student FTN" Facebook page IIMFTN Instagram profile IIM_FTN Twitter profile @IIM_FTN YouTube channel IIM_FTN Online chats with students Application platform (*UPIS.FTN*) Campus and faculty visits Entrance exam (classrooms, faculty staff, environment etc.) and official admission	Lectures and teaching staff Admission staff; finance institutions Student reviews and experiences, peer support Scholarship portals (*UNS, www.mpn.gov.rs, ErasmusPlus, NajStudent, Stipendije.rs, Edukacija.rs* and so forth) Mobility portals (*mobility.ftn.uns.ac.rs, www.uns.ac.rs, ErasmusPlus*) Social Media, owned media: Facebook page IIMFTN Instagram profile IIM_FTN Twitter profile @IIM_FTN

Stages of experience	Before enrollment	During enrollment	After enrollment
	NajStudent.com etc. Study brochure FTS Educational fair "Putokazi", Novi Sad Official visits in high schools Event "Open days of FTS" Webinar "Online coffee with professors", on CiscoWebex platform	Freshmen reception ceremony	YouTube channel IIM_FTN Faculty websites: www.ftn.uns.ac.rs; www.iim.ftn.uns.ac.rs. Local and international student organizations (*ESTIEM; Savez studenata, Studentsko preduzeće*) Special events with guest lectures, campus events, seminars, webinars, workshops, student competitions, internships and so forth.
Mindsets (thoughts and feelings)	*"Is this my true calling; is this my true interest; Am I going to make it?"* Negative feelings: Confused, worried, scared, insecure, doubtful *"I can't wait to be a student, an adult who have an academic degree"* Positive feelings: Enthusiastic, Curious, Excited, Ambitious	*"I can't do this, this is too complicated"* Negative feelings: Frightful, impatient, stressed, concerned *"I am a member of this great community, how cool is that?"* Positive feelings: proud, accomplished	*"Oh, I don't know how faculty activities work, I don't even know what is a campus and where the classrooms are, I'm so nervous!"* Negative feelings: anxious, unconfident *"Finally, I will study what I want; I will be an expert in engineering management"* Positive feelings: proud, accomplished
Opportunities (Possible improvement solutions)	Influencer marketing PR texts on online and offline magazine and portals Event *"Open days"* for parents of high school students Cooperation with companies where FTS ex-students work; Program *"One workday"* with ex-students of FTS Chatbots	Simple and transparent information, adjusted for freshmen; open and two-way communication with faculty staff; creation of one unique, comprehensive platform (or app) with regular daily updates about enrollment. Chatbots	Student buddies, Campus map, Faculty map application (based on new technologies, eg. VR/AR) Extracurricular activities Faculty terminology dictionary for freshmen (welcome toolkit) Chatbots

According to the research of the marketing service of FTS [22], the most significant reasons for enrollment in this study program are: quality of studies, employment opportunities, accredited study programme, faculty reputation, and possibility of student exchange. The demographic structure of the students enrolled in this study programme consists of about 60% female and 40% male students. Therefore, our identified persona is *Milica* (female freshman, aged 19, from Novi Sad) who finished gymnasium.

Table 1 shows the scenario of enrollment, with students and faculty goals. For most institutions, there are six stages of enrollment: discovery, evaluation, application, enrollment, retention, and loyalty, but in the context of customer (ie. student) experience, we divided analyzed process into three main phases: before, during and after enrollment. For each stage, touch points and mindset were identified. Based on collected data, table 1 proposed the opportunities for student experience improvements for each stage of the analyzed process.

4. CONCLUSION

Albeit numerous studies discuss about customer journey mapping and design, both academics and practitioners still question the most ideal approaches to create the consumer decision journey. The most customer journey maps are incomplete. They believe that all customers are experiencing the comparable authoritative touch points and view these touch points as similarly meaningful. Moreover, it seems the executives do not show much comprehension of how to utilize customer journey design as a cross-useful, essential instrument that drives administration development and notably improves customer experience.

For instance, universities have not yet realized that they need to personalize the student experience and to create student journey design that will help them to understand the stress points, mindset, and students' feelings during the enrollment process. Therefore, one case of a student journey map for the process of

enrollment is presented in this paper, that also highlights the key elements that can contribute to the overall student experience. Detailed insight and analysis of touch points and mindsets of representative customer (in this case, of a student) provides qualitative information for defining possible improvement solutions and implementation of new activities in order to boost customer experience value.

Student journey mapping gives university professionals amazing insight into their prospective students. In order to create more personalized strategies, faculty members can use this insight to improve the student experience and increase enrolments. With this knowledge and student (ie. customer) perspective, the university marketing team is able to adjust their marketing communication, reach more qualified prospects, and win more enrolments.

Although this research is empirically limited to only one branch of application of the concept of CJM, a review of the relevant literature as well as a practical presentation of the application of the CJM significantly contributes to the volume of studies dealing with customer experience. Because of that, this paper opens new fields for further research on the potentials of the application of CJM and its impact on CX.

Both theory and practice impose a common conclusion: managing the customer experience and customize each experience can be seen as a daunting task. Considering the volume and complexity of activities involved in customer journey mapping, as well as recent research dealing with this topic, customer experience management clearly represents a very difficult and responsible process and a challenging topic in the context of creating a personalized experience.

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