



# THE DANGERS OF FOCUSING ON DIGITAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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**Abstract:** *The focus of this year's MCP-CE is on digital customer experience. From the viewpoint that the conference's target group is in mass customizers, this is an understandable choice. However, a focus on mere digital customer experience may turn out to be a risky path move because customer experience is also dependent on what is experienced at other than only digital touchpoints. In addition, some experts adhere that the digital experience has only little influence on the total customer experience. In this paper we will discuss whether the strategy of a focus on digital experience is beneficial or disadvantageous to a company, which operates online. It will also discuss the conditions a company has to consider, should it want to have the digital customer experience more impact on the total customer experience. The paper introduces a conceptual discussion, based on literature review and evidence from practice.*

**Key Words:** *Customer Experience, Digital Customer Experience*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Customer focus, customer orientation and a perfect customer experience are virtues that many companies desire or aspire. Customers are no longer regarded as rational deciders with mere interest in functional and financial product properties and benefits. A satisfied customer is not a guarantee for loyalty, extra turnover or a larger market share. To increase loyalty and customer advocacy, companies have to consider delivering a positive customer experience. The difficulty, of course, is how to create and manage these unique experiences. To answer this question many scholars and practitioners have focused their research and publications on the concept of customer experience management (CEM) [1]. Nearly all literature, aside from their conceptual nature, however, focus on yielding a 'total customer experience' (TCE), where the end-to-end customer journey, or value chain matters [2].

One of the major developments in business has been the emergence of the Internet as a channel for commerce. The entire process from information search, communication and selection, transaction, delivery to after sales, can nowadays be largely conducted across the digital channel. Many mass customization firms have focused their efforts into optimizing the digital production and customization through product configurators and the ordering process [3], in an effort to increase customers'

process enjoyment and fulfillment [4]. Similarly, many online product or service providers have also made efforts to improve the online experience as a means to increase customer loyalty [5]. The focus of many companies, including supporting academic research, has been on the digital use experience [6]. But the customer experience (CX) or TCE is not determined by such actions alone, because an important part of the MC-process consists of other actions which are of a more physical nature: packaging, storing and delivering the final products to the customer [7], the distribution process. Additive manufacturing technology, also known as Industry 4.0 has made it possible to also digitalize the distribution process [8] extending the digital contribution in the customer's total experience. The TCE, however, is also determined by use, operation, maintenance, support, sustaining, phase-out, retiring, recycling and disposal of the product (or service), which are still of a largely physical nature.

The question is, however, whether it is harmful to focus on the digital customer experience and to neglect the effect in other channels than the digital channel. In this article we will discuss whether the strategy of a focus on digital experience is beneficial or disadvantageous to an online operating company, whether for mass customization or otherwise. We will discuss the conditions a company has to consider, should it want to have the digital customer experience more impact on the total customer experience.

The paper consists of a theoretical discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of a focus on digital customer experience by introducing the several concepts that relate to the customer experience management theory. It is followed by the discussion of two cases of online companies that exemplify our discussion. We will conclude with implications for firms.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REFLECTIONS

### 2.1. Customer experience

Experience has a twofold meaning, referring first to a practice of gaining knowledge by seeing and doing, and secondly, referring to a state of being affected by something or an event (Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus). Our interest lies in the second meaning.

Experience is not tacit and concrete, but refers to the qualification of one's subjective perceptions, and

therefore personal [9, 10]. Experience can manifest itself in many ways, such as physical, mental or thoughts, emotional, and even virtual [11]. When referring to the experience that customers get from interactions with organizations we name it customer experience. Customer experience (CX) is thus defined as "... a personal and subjective response that customers have on direct or indirect contact with an organization. By influencing this customer experience the organization tries to evoke several kinds of perceptions to a customer: emotional, physical, sensorial, rational and relational, where customers and the organization co-create unique, meaningful experiences in order to achieve a profitable, durable and affective relationship that gives value to all stakeholders [1]."

The role and importance of experience in consumption and use of goods and services was first proposed by Holbrook and Hirschman [12], who introduced customer experience as an addendum for the contemporary consumer behavior models, that were mainly based on rational behavior of consumers. Based on this insight, Schmitt advises "to treat consumers as living human beings with experiential needs rather than as rational price- and attribute driven information [13]." Consumers want to experience that their feeling, senses and soul are being "touched" and are in search of authentic and honest treatments by providers. Consumption is no longer a matter for "customers" in the depersonalized sense, but holistic for individuals [13]. According to Pine and Gilmore [14] experiences occur when customers are being involved in such a way that it provides a permanent and unforgettable impression.

Initially CX was considered a hedonic aspiration of customers [15, 16, 12], but this way of thinking has changed over time. Nowadays five types of consumers are observed, based on their different experiential appeals [17]. These groups of consumers are holistic consumers (who are interested in all aspects of experience), hedonistic consumers (who attach importance to sensory and affective dimensions), action-oriented consumers (who focus on physical actions and behaviors), inner-directed consumers (who focus on internal processes which are sensations, emotions and thoughts) and utilitarian consumers (who are low-experiential consumers).

## 2.2. Customer experience management

Creating superior customer experience seems to be one of the central objectives in today's business environments. Firms, retailers in particular, have embraced the concept of customer experience management, ensuring a positive experience for customers by focusing on convenience, value and quality, or the best customer experience in the markets the firm serves [18]. There is now a widespread acceptance about the marketing being no longer sufficient to ensure long-term customer loyalty and, that creating a positive customer experience leads to high levels of customer satisfaction and is an important step towards durable customer relationships [19].

To manage a customer's experience, companies should understand what 'customer experience' actually means. They have to understand that customer

experience is evoked at every point of contact at which the customer interacts with the business, its product, its service, its communication and other utterances made by the organization, including advertising [20]. For instance, retailers have to move from a focus on selling goods and services to enhancing the customer experience [21].

Customer experience management is proposed as the new way to get insight on customers' preferences and needs, which influence behavior and loyalty [22]. Firms realize that relationship based on experiences will aid in the attraction and retention of customers [14, 18]. Customer experience management represents a business strategy designed to manage the customer experience. It represents a strategy that results in a win-win value exchange between the retailer and its customers. Organizations can undertake some actions to manage their customers' experience [11, 23]. To do this, organizations can implement and manage the so called Experience Providers, such as communication, visual and verbal identity, product presence, social media, etc. [11]. Berry, Carbone and Haeckel [24] suggest that organizations should have an eye for all "clues" that customers can detect in a transaction process. Experience providers and clues have to be managed in detail, and should be used in their fullest potential to create great customer experience [11]. Attention has to be given to the spatial environment, the influence of other customers, waiting lines, sounds, visual expressions, and even the weather [18].

Customer experience management is now regarded as a new lever to create value for customers as well as for companies [22, 25, 26]. Customer experience management is now regarded as a way to distinguish the firm from its competitors and to create more value for customers and firms' stakeholders; it has become essential to survive in present competitive environments.

## 2.3. Total customer experience

Marketers of product or service brands need to understand the emotional dynamics involved when a customer selects and decides to continue to use a product or service brand [27]. Connecting emotionally with customers requires an organization to create a cohesive, authentic and sensory-stimulating total customer experience that resonates, pleases, communicates effectively and differentiates the organization from the competition [28]. Total customer experience entails the experience a certain person can get from all his contacts and touch-points with an organization in his life.

With the advance of technological, socializing and globalizing trends companies can get closer to their customers. Firms and customers nowadays focus on collaboration in networks in order to respond quickly to changing needs and to focus on what they are good at. In that respect, customers will look for more meaningful experiences, so they can shape their own existence [29]. According to Pine and Gilmore [14] "experiences are not the final economic offering... When you customize an experience to make it just right for an individual-providing exactly what he needs right now- you cannot help changing that individual. When you customize an experience, you automatically turn it into a transformation (p. 244)", and "once the Experience Economy has run its course in the decades to come, the

Transformation Economy will take over (p. 255)". In a society where self actualization and welfare become central, firms will have to focus on guiding customers in achieving this by providing meaningful and memorable experiences that create transformations in people's lives. To facilitate this firms need to create a platform where customers and firms can jointly create a context for giving more sense and meaning to one's life [26]. The dialogue between firm and individual customer is the foundation for the co-creation of personalized value: "Engaging people to create valuable experiences together, while enhancing network economics [30]."

#### **2.4. Customer journey**

To analyze the experiential world of the customer the Customer Journey approach has been developed [31]. The Customer Journey approach entails a description of all experiences a customer is exposed to; from long before the transaction takes place to long after this moment, depicting all touch-points the customer has with the organization and other stakeholders during that time. The experience during this journey depends on expectations, and the interactions the customer has. Some of these touch-points are considered "moments of truth" since these moments are crucial and of high impact in creating a meaningful and intended customer experience [32]. In managing the moments of truth, organizations should consider the peak-end-rule [33], depicting that experiences are evaluated on the peak and the end experience, and not on what happens in between. The peak or end experience can be either positive or negative, determining the strength and direction of the total experience. The other experiences are not really forgotten, but left out of the evaluation [34].

#### **2.5. Multichannel or mere digital customer experience – a reflection**

The customer journey approach has recently become popularly used method to analyze the total customer experience creation process through different company offered touch points. The importance of the customer journey approach and customer experience management are closely related to the current nature of marketplace, where technology and technology assisted service encounters have increased the number of delivery channels and touch points. Customers are now interacting with companies through a plethora of channels and touch points, therefore, customer experience and customer behavior in this evolving marketplace are viewed as one of the most important research challenges in general and for the case company [35].

Although some companies may choose a single-channel strategy, many more are developing marketing strategies based on multiple channels. Studies [36] show that multiple channel retail strategies enhance the portfolio of service outputs provided to the customer, thus enhancing customer satisfaction and ultimately customer loyalty.

Implementing an online channel strategy is challenging because of its implications; managers must consider covering an extended period, influencing multiple customer touch-points, implications for face-to-face channels, and functional results. Firms need to have

a clear scope and express an achievable development plan for building dynamic capabilities [37]. With most organizations today operating in a multichannel environment, the channel strategy should seek to ensure that a perfect or outstanding customer experience is created both within channel and across channels [38]. Using different channels, customers want a perfect and consistent shopping experience, and a superior customer value. This requires a total integration of all aspects of the supply chain and to integrate the activities in the different channels. The main benefit and main challenge of the new multi-channel environment is to create immediate access throughout all channels to not only gain insight in the new customer-experience-driven behavior pattern, but to deliver the corresponding experiences.

A multichannel approach not only offers additional opportunity to push products and services but also helps in turning this challenge into an opportunity to connect with customers [39], for instance through social media [37].

A multichannel strategy should seek to ensure that an outstanding and consistent experience is created both within channel and across channels [38]. This requires a total integration of all aspects of the supply chain and all activities in the different channels, which influence the multiple customer touch-points during the customer journey. Research shows that firms with well-integrated channels are more successful than single-channel firms or multiple, but poorly-integrated channels [40]. Companies need to take a holistically integrated approach to creating a memorable experience in which multidimensional value can be delivered through multiple, sequential stages of experience [41], the customer journey.

Mass customization is a route up the progression of economic value, where, whatever the genre of output, more companies wisely leverage digital technology in order to better fuse the real with the virtual [42]. More and more people are bringing their technological devices – iPods, iPhones, iPads and so on – with them wherever they go, with the diverting of their time, attention and money always just a glance away, a warm glowing trance away from remaining in the experience. This is not to say that companies should abandon reality, for it will now and forevermore provide the richest of experiences, but with a migration going on to "virtuality," many experiences increasingly need to integrate the two to create new digitally infused experiences never before envisioned [43]. In some cases, this may require greater integration of the digital into the physical; in other cases, it may mean removing digital devices that merely intrude on the face-to-face experience.

A focus on the digital customer experience may exhale a myopic view, because it has been demonstrated that indirect use experiences in apps play an important role in the holistic service experience. Compared with direct experiences, indirect use experiences do not require the actual use of apps or direct contact with the user [44].

Managers are encouraged not to restrict use experiences to direct use only. Indirect use experiences enable managers to gain deep insights into the everyday use experiences of current and potential customers.

In addition, a case study with the aim to identify customer touchpoints – classified in human, product, service, communication, spatial, and electronic interaction – in a B2B-setting and to determine their importance to customers exhibited that customer touchpoints classified as human interaction were found to be most important and have the highest importance for customer satisfaction, whereas electronic or digital interaction were regarded as significantly less important for customer satisfaction [45].

So even when we also observe Industry 4.0 activities where distribution is also digitalized [8], the end outcome of customer experience does not lie in the digital experience alone, but also in the use, operation, maintenance, support, sustaining, phase-out, retiring, recycling and disposal of the product. Therefore, companies have to optimize the whole customer experience by focusing on both digital and physical channels, the so-called multichannel approach.

### 3. CASES

Thus, literature seems to indicate that a focus on only one channel is not wise for a company to do, even if the complete offering is in the digital channel, because customer experience management has to be aimed to influence the total customer experience.

We will verify this by discussing two practical cases in the Dutch region. The cases both describe online webshops that can be compared with Amazon. They do not produce the products themselves, but deliver third party goods they procure.

In the case description we will first provide the general context of the company, followed by the particular aspects of the digital experience context. We will conclude the case description with our observation regarding the advantage or disadvantage of the focus on digital customer experience.

#### 3.1. case.com

Case.com<sup>1</sup> is a webshop, comparable to Amazon, in the Netherlands and Belgium that was founded in 1999 by a German media group together with, partly under the same name, branches in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy and China. The Dutch company survived the Internet bubble and was sold in 2002 as a result of a change in the company strategy. It made its first profit in 2003. In 2012, a well-known Dutch retailer group acquired case.com for 350 million euros. It has an own distribution center since 2017. Case.com has over 1,000 employees. The turnover has reached a peak of €1.6 billion over 2017, which indicates that case.com is the largest online retailer of the Netherlands. The company on several online shop awards since its existence.

In spite of these achievements, customer satisfaction did not rise throughout the years. Contrary, customer satisfaction showed a slight decline in the last three years. On top of that, customer loyalty seemed to decline as well. The high turnover was more likely generated by new customers than by existing customers.

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<sup>1</sup> The real company's name is kept anonymous on company's request.

The company's staff was surprised by this result, since it had invested a large amount in the digital process. The online process consisted initially of a search engine, product selector with recommendations from other users, an ordering module, a transaction module, with three payment interfaces (iDeal, credit card, or a case.com credit facility). Customers were prompted with a customer satisfaction survey immediately after finishing the payment process. These satisfaction marks were scored with an 8 or higher; customers seem to be very pleased with the online process, indicating a possible high digital experience. Distribution was outsourced to the regular Dutch postal services. The company incorporated a 30-day hassle-free return policy for customers who weren't satisfied with the product quality; customers can return the product free of postal charges in the box they received the delivery.

Later on a track & trace module and a product return confirmation module were added to the online process. Customers can check whether the order has been shipped to and received by the post office, and what day and time window the delivery can be expected. The return of a defect product has to be reported online, referring to the order number and date, packed into the original delivery box and offered to the postal service that provided the customer with a receipt indicating that the product has been returned. One or two days later the customer receives a confirmation email indicating that the returned product has been received by case.com's distribution center. At that moment payment will be reimbursed.

Aside from this stable, high online satisfaction and decreasing loyalty, data showed that customers' calls to the contact center had intensified over the same three year period. Investigation of the data showed that these calls were largely about the delivery or return process, although these processes were digitalized.

So the company decided to investigate the problem more deeply by ordering a qualitative study by a research agency, specialized in customer experience. This study was executed among 16 existing and former customers. This study showed that although they were supported by an online process during delivery or product return, people tend to make a call to the contact center to ensure themselves of executing required actions correctly. Questions and remarks about delivery were usually about delivery time; people wanted to know the exact time of delivery in order to determine when to be at home themselves. The contact center did not know the answer to this question, because the company had outsourced the distribution. Delivery time was determined by the postal services, which use windows of 4 hours, not being able to accurately predict delivery time. As a result customers had to take half or a whole day off from work or to friendly ask a neighbor to be present, in order to receive the package. Packages that couldn't be delivered were taken back to the post office. The customer received a notice that the package couldn't be delivered and that they had to pick it up within six days at the post office; if not done within this time frame, the post office will return the package to the distributing company, case.com. People regarded this policy as a burden because the post office wasn't nearby, has opening hours and required identification in order to receive the

package. This whole process had a negative impact on the total customer experience.

Similarly, the return process wasn't as hassle-free as assumed by case.com. During unpacking the package box was usually damaged, shredded or thrown away, making it impossible to re-use it for the return product. Another finding was that many people order something to give as a gift on a special day to a dear one. Sometimes the first use of the product can also lie days after delivery. This means that the package can lie unopened or the product unused for several days or even weeks, before one realizes it is defect or not operating properly. In order to return the defect product, the customer had to go to the post office, encountering the same obstacles as when getting an undelivered package. And lastly, customers received reimbursement not before the returned good has been received by case.com. So, people make a phone call to case.com hoping that they can arrange a better return deal, usually by suggesting because they wanted a same or an alternative product. This last finding was surprising for case.com because they had never realized that people order goods to give away or to be used at a later moment.

Customers were looking for support, assurance that what they were going to order and receive was going to be a good/excellent choice and were "disappointed" that they were directed to the website, which, by the way, was extremely good from the online experience perspective. There was no attempt from the company's perspective to understand what the reasons were for ordering this product, what the job to be done was. Customers' questions were not acknowledged, leading to defecting customers. They tried asking the question "Why do you need this particular product now?" online, but this did not lead to improvement. People kept calling, so contact center employees were trained in helping the customer this way.

It is not surprising that the findings of the qualitative study indicated a bad total customer experience, although customers were highly satisfied with the online process.

### 3.2. Coolblue

Coolblue is a Dutch e-commerce company that was founded in 1999 by Pieter Zwart (CEO), Paul de Jong and Bart Kuijpers (see for a history in Dutch: <https://www.coolblue.nl/geschiedenis>). The company operates over 300 individual webshops and 8 physical shops under the Coolblue brand. In 2016 Coolblue reported it sold €857 million worth of goods, a 55% increase compared to the previous year [46].



Fig. 1. A Coolblue store in Groningen

Coolblue is a store formula mainly for consumer electronics, which has the trademark that it sets up a separate webshop for each product group, with a .nl and a .be variant of each store. The company uses a niche strategy in this. In 2016, Coolblue had 319 specialized webshops in the Benelux, as well as nine physical stores. Coolblue is active in the Netherlands and Belgium. The company has started with webshops such as MP3man.nl, PDAshop.nl and Laptopshop.nl. Coolblue now has dozens of web shops and six physical stores in the Netherlands (Rotterdam, Eindhoven, Groningen, Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague) and three in Belgium (Antwerp, Zaventem and Lochristi). The main office is located in Rotterdam. In addition to the distribution center in Capelle aan den IJssel, Coolblue opened a new distribution center (13,000 m<sup>2</sup>) in Tilburg in 2013. In 2015, a larger distribution center (22,000 m<sup>2</sup>) was added in Tilburg. A further 6 halls were added in 2016 and 2017. In total, the distribution center in Tilburg is 88,000 m<sup>2</sup> excluding 3 out-of-the-ordinary offices. In both 2012 and 2013, Coolblue was voted the best webshop in the Netherlands in the consumer electronics category during the Thuiswinkel Awards, a yearly event to award online-operating retailers in the Netherlands.

The online process is lean and simple. One can order in four steps: selection of product, placement in a digital shopping basket, choosing between delivery or pick up, ordering via a Coolblue account, checking the order and paying. Aside of the online channel the company uses several other channels to interact with its customers in all stages of the process, even during use or even any other event in the customer's life.

For the fulfillment, Coolblue has its own delivery service. In order to make the customer really happy with the delivery, Coolblue has taken the customer journey as the starting point for this goal. This explicitly regarded the last kilometers of the delivery ride to the customer. For this moment-of-truth, the delivery, the company promises its customers: "We will come, no matter what." An hour from arrival, the delivery van can be followed real-time via an online link that is sent to the customer in advance. Thirty minutes before delivery, the delivery staff will make a phone call to the receiving customer, in order to report the exact arrival time, simultaneously introducing themselves, so the customer knows whom to expect on their arrival. If the customer is not already waiting at the door when they arrive, the staff rings the doorbell, and surprises the customer with a present at the door while the new (washing) machine is removed from the truck. The (washing) machine is carried to the quarter intended for its use and is installed by Coolblue's staff. They then provide spoken and written use and maintenance instructions about the new machine to the customer and the old device is taken along when leaving.

Products are delivered in a box, which is configured like a relevant and appropriate present, decorated with friendly and funny communication (Fig. 2). Should the customer not be at home when the package is delivered, the staff leaves a funny card telling what can be done to receive the product at a more convenient moment.





Fig. 2. Two examples of how Coolblue makes package reception and unpacking an experience.

How does this affect the TCE? Coolblue seems to respond to all questions and concerns in the non-digital customer journey such as: will the delivery be in time, I don't like strangers in my house, installation, and how to dispose of the old device or machine. In addition, the delivery is also fast and hedonic.

However, Coolblue does not neglect the digital experience at all. At the start of the company, the founders have written two goals on a wall in the main office: 'to strive for the highest possible customer satisfaction and profit contribution'. To this day, these two objectives apply to every department, including the customer service, brand and online marketing department. Together they go for the optimal result for Coolblue. These goals are equally important and affect the entire business. This includes social media.

Many posts for social media come from different departments to social media marketers. The social media marketer has an advisory role on which network the posts are placed, depending on the target group one wants to reach (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+ or Youtube). The social advertising marketer then determines for which objective which budget and on which network the mail is used to achieve this objective. All in all, the social media approach is service driven. This of course has everything to do with the customer promise "anything for a smile", the slogan the company uses in all of its communication, and which can be seen as its most important brand promise: "We will do anything for a smile".

The company has no social media command center like most companies have. Social media use is a joint responsibility of all employees. However, customer service representatives handle customer requests. The crew of this team is organized according to specializations. If someone calls with a question about sports watches, you get a member of staff who is knowledgeable on the subject. If you call with a question about a new laptop you will be aided by someone technically knowledgeable about the latest laptops. The customer service has a dedicated team that handles the handling of questions via social media. Rule is that all customer requests placed within the customer service opening hours will be answered within 30 minutes. The platforms in use for interaction are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and Youtube. The same service level applies to all these channels. Questions are answered in order of arrival; no use is made of influencer scoring.

Every customer is of equal importance to Coolblue. The aim is to do "anything for a smile".

IT developers are also involved in the social interactions with the customers. An example illustrates this. At a certain moment a customer requested via Twitter to implement a Paypal option. The developer who developed this option, contacted the customer after the option was introduced, with the question: "Can you announce the Paypal option to others via Twitter?"

Coolblue also invests heavily in physical stores. Many customers like to feel, touch and hold a product for a moment and get face-to-face advice about which product is best for them when it comes to the more expensive products. Coolblue therefore also provides in this customer need. An effect is that in the cities where Coolblue opened physical stores, online sales and customer satisfaction show a strong increase. That has everything to do with trust.

Customer satisfaction and many other processes are measured almost obsessively through different metrics. The NPS (Net Promoter Score) [47] is central to this. This is calculated on the basis of the question: "Would you recommend Coolblue to someone else?" The quality of the customer service staff is also measured. If there has been contact with an employee, Coolblue will ask the customer if he would theoretically employ the employee in question. Vice versa, customer service representatives are given the time to interact with customers by sending five handwritten tickets to those they have had contact with that day. For example, a card can be sent to wish a customer success in writing his thesis on the newly acquired laptop. The NPS is also measured per channel and per product supplier. Once a year there is even a supplier's drink in which the NPS of the various suppliers are presented per product category. Coolblue wants suppliers to also contribute to an even higher customer satisfaction.

Continuous improvement is embedded in all business processes. One does not settle for the status quo. "Every day a little better" is written on the walls as a motto. Putting the customer first is not only a motto, but is also used by the employees as a goal.

Through active social media marketing and customer service through these channels (with ample opening hours) Coolblue knows how to serve the customer. On the external channels, the Coolblue strategy deserves compliments, especially because it ties in with the business objectives. Social business makes it possible to build up a relationship with the customer again. Customers who recently made a purchase, get the feeling (because of the extreme retargeting) that they are included in a customer group with a certain profile entailing that experience goes beyond touch point levels. With the culture at Coolblue absolutely everything is in place to better discover the needs of their customers.

As a result, Coolblue has the ability to make the 'flat' remarketing campaigns that are still widely used now part of the past. Customers want to be treated as an individual and not as a customer group. All the data and intelligence that Coolblue collects on a daily basis is the right prelude to this.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Customers are nowadays interacting with companies through a plethora of channels and touch points. Customer experience and customer behavior in this evolving marketplace are viewed as one of the most important research challenges in general and for companies. Some companies may choose to focus on a single-channel strategy, i.e. the digital channel, to accomplish a memorable total customer experience. This, in spite of research demonstrating that a multichannel strategy, that integrates all aspects of the supply chain and all activities in the different channels, can result in an outstanding customer experience, both within channel and across channels [40].

This focus on the digital channel seems to be the case with many mass customization enterprises, since these seem to form the majority of touch points the company has with its customers. As a result, there is growing interest from such companies, and other online operating retailers, for the construct of digital customer experience.

We have argued, however, that a focus on the digital customer experience may exhale a myopic view, because it has been demonstrated by several studies [44, 45] that indirect use of digital appliances and human interaction are of more importance for the total customer experience than the digital interaction.

In two cases we further demonstrate – in the first case – that a mere focus on digital experience can lead to counter-productive results, like a lower customer satisfaction and decreasing loyalty, and that – in the second case – the customer experience in non-digital stages of an offering or service play an important, if not vital, role in the holistic service experience. Compared with online or digital experiences, these non-digital experiences do not require the actual use of online appliances or direct contact with the user [44].

Managers are encouraged not to restrict the customer experiences to direct digital use only. Indirect and non-digital customer experiences enable managers to gain deep insights into the everyday total customer experiences of current and potential customers. Therefore, companies have to optimize the whole customer experience by focusing on both digital and physical channels, the so-called multichannel approach.

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