BRITISH ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

BAM CONFERENCE

3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER
ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

The customer journeys: A systematic review

1. Introduction

In the past few years, the concept of customer journey has been widely adopted by both academics and practitioners. Such an interest has been driven by the emerging prominence of the customer centric philosophy in the marketing field (Crosier and Handford, 2012). Using customer journeys as the driver of business operations differs from traditional approaches, such as service blueprinting, that focus on the corporate perspective and neglect the customer view (Bolton et al., 2014). The concept places customers at its heart, making it a useful framework in assessing and evaluating customer experience within any service context (Mangiaracina et al., 2009). The analysis of customer journeys can highlight critical service moments and touch points that are significant to the relationship between customers and the company. Hence, it can facilitate customer relationship management and resource allocation to reinforce the competitive advantage of a company (Busdieker, 2016, Crosier and Handford, 2012).

Despite the prevalence of the customer journeys, there is a lack in its conceptual clarity. Attempts have been made to review historical roots, terminologies and approaches of the customer journey (Følstad and Kvale, 2018). However, the literature was not sufficiently mature at the time and the understanding in the phenomenon has remained limited and fragmented, evidenced by a diverse set of related marketing aspects and divergent uses of customer journeys in the empirical works (Canfield and Basso, 2017, Fornari et al., 2016, Lim et al., 2015, Panzera et al., 2017, Åkesson et al., 2014, Chen et al., 2008, Klaus, 2013, Muskat et al., 2013). Given that the customer journey literature has quadrupled in size in the past five years, there is a need to revisit this fast-growing body of work and examine the underlying themes.

This review aims to develop a systematic understanding of the customer journey by identifying the underlying themes of the phenomenon, place them in the context and synthesise the current body of knowledge. The attempt to aggregate and integrate the relevant literature up to date provides a theoretical groundwork as well as explores future research avenues of the topic.

2. Methodology

The study followed a systematic approach in reviewing and analysing the relevant previous literature to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the topic (Lightfoot et al., 2013). The review followed three main stages, namely, planning, conducting and reporting, of the systematic approach following the guideline by Tranfield et al. (2003). The first stage involved a discussion among the members of the review team on the process of planning the review and analysis procedure, setting the research protocol and evaluating the literature (Tranfield et al., 2003). A review protocol was produced to draw the scope and boundaries of the work. The precise guidelines facilitated the transparency and the objectivity of the review. The initial set of search keywords was *"CUSTOMER JOURNEY" OR "CONSUMER JOURNEY"*. However, the limited search excluded some key papers, due to the lack of a universal definition and cross-disciplinary perspectives of the term (Følstad and Kvale, 2018). Therefore, *"TOUCHPOINT" OR "TOUCH POINT"*, which was defined as a point of contact between customers and the brand and recognised as a building block of customer journeys (Clatworthy, 2011), was employed as an additional search string. The selected terms

were utilised to locate as many relevant publications as possible (Schibrowsky et al., 2007). The systematic review covered approximately twenty years of research in the customer journey, until January 2018. For an article to be included, it had to be a peer-reviewed paper, related to business and marketing, written in English and available in full text. The exclusion criteria were also set for quality appraisal. Articles not related to customer journeys or focused on either customer behaviour or a specific touchpoint, but not related to a customer journey context were excluded.

When it came to the conducting stage, the literature search covered three electronic databases, namely Scopus, Business Source Complete in EBSCO and Web of Science, for comprehensive coverage (Dangelico, 2016). After removing duplicates, the search yielded a total of 208 studies, 68 and 140 from customer journey and touch point, respectively. The abstract and information of each retrieved studies, including title, authors, publication year, journal title and database source, was extracted to a spreadsheet for the review panel to assess their relevance. Only documents that got an agreement from at least two out of three members were incorporated and analysed. The strict principles induced high quality of the input data for the review (Tranfield et al., 2003). The final set of the review papers comprised of 81 documents (46 and 35 from customer journey and touch point, respectively).

Finally, in the analysis and reporting stage, a cluster-based feature selection and document classification was adopted to identify themes and common keywords of the retrieved literature (Chaussabel and Sher, 2002, Yeh et al., 2012). Document classification is a supervised text mining technique to group similar documents together according to a set of pre-defined categories (Zhai and Massung, 2016). However, the literature retrieved was unlabelled for the systematic review purposes. Therefore, a term clustering technique was first utilised to identify the embedded themes and common keywords of the review articles, and thus labelled and prepared them for further content analysis. The labelled documents were then used to train the algorithms. The classifier used in this review was a k-Nearest Neighbour algorithm, validated by a 10-fold cross-validator method.

3. Quantitative Content Analysis

The results of the clustering analysis reflected the use of terminologies in different topics as well as the wording within the same texts (Yeh et al., 2012). The analysis produced a dendrogram of frequently occurring terms (Figure 1). The agglomeration results revealed six major themes, labelled, *customer responses*, *co-creation*, *customer experience*, *channels*, *customer data* and *journey management*. The identified themes reflected the research trends in customer journey studies. The terms within the branches comprise detailed features of the themes. They highlight factors and concepts that are commonly considered in the literature regarding the topics.

Figure 1: Dendrogram of frequently occurring terms
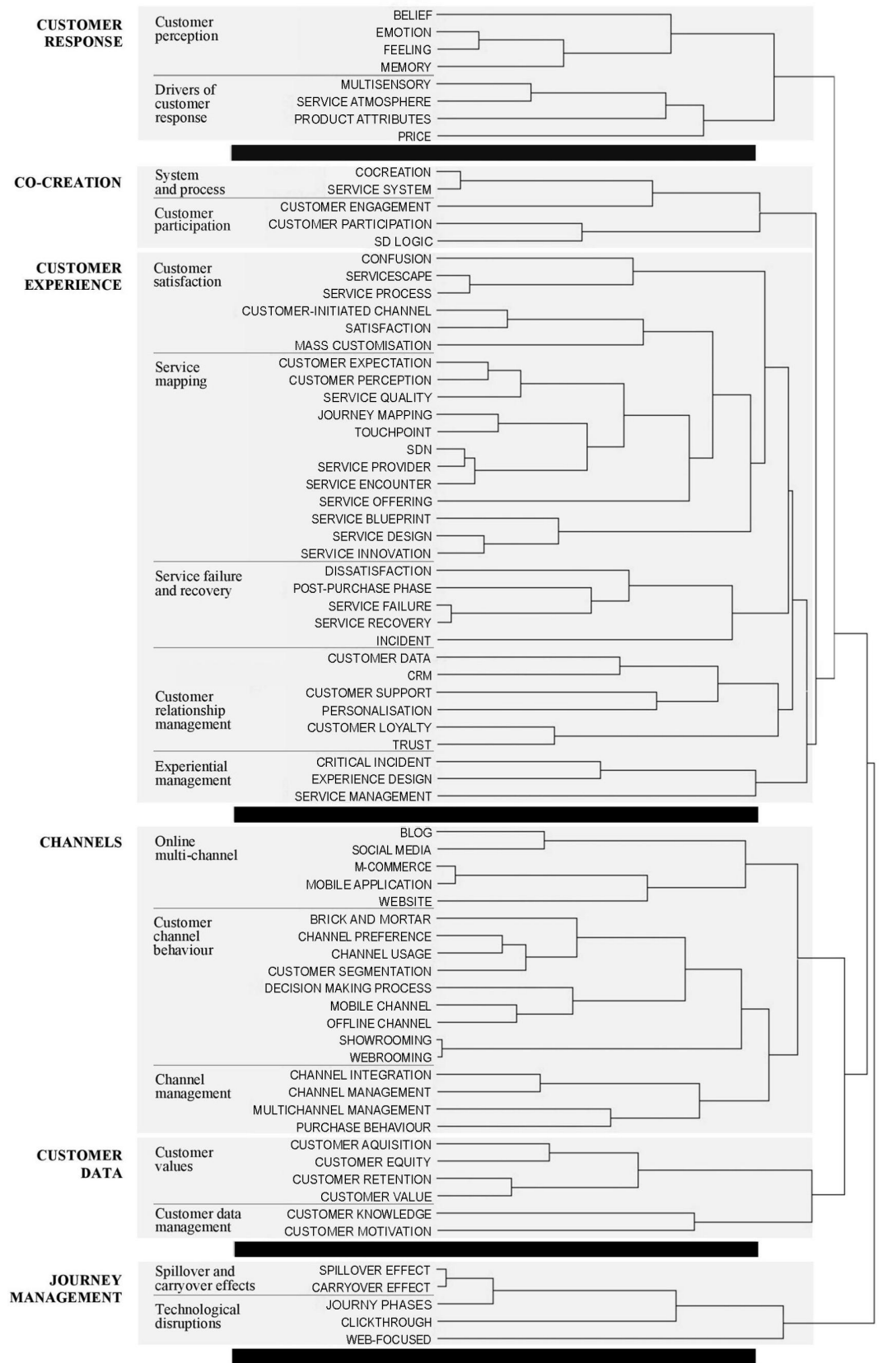
Note: Black rectangles marked the areas where minor clusters were removed from the dendrogram

The frequency and discriminative power of each theme are shown in Table 1. The number of cases and the percentage of cases measure the appearance of the theme in the text corpus. The higher numbers are the more frequent keywords of the theme are used in the retrieved articles. The term-frequency - inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) evaluates the relationship between the theme and the customer journey. It assumes that the more frequent a theme appears in a document is the more representative it is to the content, however the more documents that contain the theme is also the less discriminative the theme is (Péladeau and Stovall, 2005). Therefore, the lower the value is the less distinctive the theme is from the customer journey. Keywords in the customer experience cluster appeared in all cases of the retrieved articles with the *TF-IDF* value of zero. The finding conformed to the previous literature (Følstad and Kvale, 2018, Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), which proposed a close linkage between customer experience and customer journey.

Table 1: Discriminative Power of Themes

Themes	TF • IDF
Customer Experience	0.0
Channels	95.2
Customer Responses	74.5
Customer Data	41.4
Co-creation	153.8
Journey Management	112.0

The learning algorithm, was then employed to classify the retrieved articles. The frequency of the predicted classes was displayed in Figure 2. The dominant classes of the customer journey literature were *channels* and *co-creation*, which consisted of 28 and 24 studies, respectively. Sixteen papers investigated *customer responses*. The less explored themes on the subject were *customer data* and *journey management*, of which only seven and six articles focused to matters.

Figure 2: Document Classification Result of the Customer Journey Articles
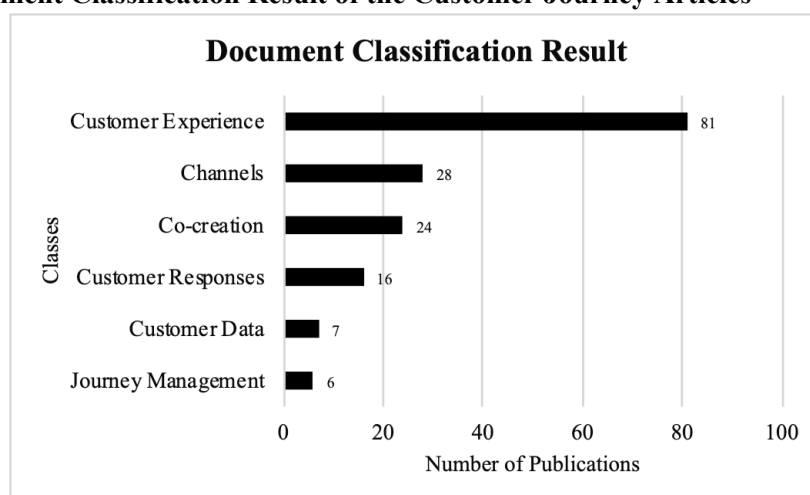
4. The Six Themes of Customer Journey Literature

The section discusses the literature synthesis of the six identified themes of the customer journey literature, including *customer experience, customer responses*, *co-creation*, *channels*, *customer data and journey management*.

4.1 Customer experience

Customer experience has been gaining prominence as a new competitive edge and a sustainable source of distinguishing features for brands that places customers at the locus of business (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). The term is defined as a multidimensional evaluation of customers on the offerings of the companies during the entire course of interaction (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Customer experience is more than a sum of customer responses with discrete events and involves a development through a series of customer interactions across a customer journey (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015, Norton and Pine II, 2013). A good experience is memorable, extraordinary and meaningful (Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2014).

Customer journeys were not only recognised as a mean to understand customer experience but also a tool to design it (Busdieker, 2016). Customer experience in the customer journey literature can be divided into five distinct dimensions, consisting of customer satisfaction, service mapping, service failure and recovery, customer relationship management and experiential management.

Customer satisfaction: Customer satisfaction has primarily been conceptualised as a consonance between service delivery and customer expectation. The construct has become a standard assessment of customer perceptions and served as building blocks to gain an overall understanding of customer experience in the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). One of the well-recognised antecedents of customer satisfaction is service quality (Bolton et al., 2014, Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Companies improve quality and customise their service delivery, or sequences of activities that they provide to enhance the perceived value of the offering and perceptions of their customers from the first to the last touch point of the journey, to meet or exceed the customer expectations (McKechnie et al., 2011). The prerequisite for such action is the understanding of needs, wants and expectations of customers (Beltagui et al., 2012). Companies need to have an ability in measuring and monitoring customer reactions throughout the customer journey (Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

Service mapping: Service mapping has an important role in improving and managing the service delivery process. The process visually explains steps that are both encountered and unseen by the customer but contribute toward the customer experience (Halvorsrud et al., 2016). The concept of service mapping contributes to the design aspect of the customer journey. It recognises the accumulation of customer experience as a process that consists of various touch points and stages (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The practice not only identifies the contact points utilised by customer but also facilitates the understanding of their attitudes and engagement in the process (Canfield and Basso, 2017). A customer journey mapping is built on customer data, making it a customer-centric approach for service innovation and service improvement (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Service failure and recovery: Service crises can have both temporary and enduring negative effects on customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). A similar adverse incident may post different consequences on various brands, depending on their recovery mechanisms.

Service failure can happen at any stage of a customer journey. The concept of service failure and recovery in the customer journey emerged from the difference between the planned service blueprint by an organisation and the perceived experience of customers while interacting with various service touchpoints or while they are using the service. The customer journey is useful in identifying systematic failures in the incoherent service delivery as well as design recovery mechanisms for service providers (Halvorsrud et al., 2016, Klaus, 2013). A well-design service process pays particular focus on moments in a customer journey that are potentially most responsive to customer experience (Palmer and Bejou, 2016).

Customer relationship management: Customer relationship management (CRM) is a customer-focused action in a business strategy that aims to increase customer satisfaction and customer loyalty by offering a more responsive and personalised service to individual customers (Croteau and Li, 2003). It focuses on the fruitful opportunities derive from the analysis of the data in the customer journey. The customer data collected at each touch point of a journey can be used in developing direct, personalised and interactive marketing strategies (Jenkinson, 2007, Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Customers are more likely to interact with personalised touch points that deliver right content at the right time, which in turn generate more and better quality of data for companies to further tailor their offerings.

Experiential management: Customer journey mapping can be used to strengthen customer experience by identifying critical moments, service gaps and unfulfilled customer needs in the present state of the service delivery process (Beltagui et al., 2012, Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016, Voorhees et al., 2017). The approach is less about leveraging dispersed touch points, but more on integrating right platforms into the process (Kozinets, 2014). Touch points may have different impacts on different customers in varied situations and become meaningless when disintegrated (Åkesson et al., 2014, Bolton et al., 2014). Therefore, customer knowledge and understanding in the components of the customer journey are critical enablers for companies to manage overall service delivery process and customer experience (Clatworthy, 2011, Ponsignon et al., 2017, Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010).

4.2 Customer responses

Customer response is a reaction of an individual to a single or multiple touch points in a customer journey. The assessment involves both static and immediate customer feedback and the dynamic and holistic customer experience. The customer journey can capture in-depth reactions of customers by monitoring their feelings and emotions in response to the retail environment at different stages of a journey (Beltagui et al., 2012, Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). The approach has a distinctive advantage of depicting insightful information that may firstly appear to be unimportant to customer experience in a structured and systematic way (Crosier and Handford, 2012, Panzera et al., 2017).

Customer perceptions: Customer responses comprise of cognitive and emotional assessment of customer experiences (Crosier and Handford, 2012, Klaus, 2013). The cognitive aspect refers to customer awareness on the content being delivered while emotions measure customer feelings toward the consumption (Jenkinson, 2007). The assessment shapes customer beliefs about performance and attractiveness of the brand, and consequently influences their attitudes and purchase intentions (Khanna et al., 2014). The cognitive and emotional aspects are interdependent and affecting each other.

The formation of customer experience requires customers to recall their past experiences from memory and integrate with perceptions of the current journey (Jenkinson, 2007, Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2014). Memories are easier to retrieve when customers have strong feelings and intentions towards a product or service (Chen et al., 2008). A strong and holistic customer journey evokes attention, encourages involvement and maintains the interest of the customers (Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2014). Committed customers, who have strong emotional connections and sense of belonging to the brand, are likely to stay loyal and re-enter the purchase phase of the customer journey. Moreover, they are also willing to spread positive word-of-mouth, ignore negative information, and they may be prepared to pay a price premium (Farah and Ramadan, 2017, Jenkinson, 2007).

Drivers of customer responses: The five senses are recognized as critical information transmitters for customers (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Customer encounters various atmospheric elements in all phases of the course (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). The shopping atmosphere should be designed to support brand identity and customer perceptions (Botschen and Wegerer, 2017, Clarke et al., 2012). The right and individually tailored set of multi-sensory touch points make the customer feels special, and amplifies their experiences and loyalty (Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., 2014, Clarke and Oxman, 2000). All atmospheric attributes have to be coherent and communicate consistent values, as customers use them to evaluate and seek confirmation about the benefits of the offering (Jenkinson, 2007, Klaus, 2013). Fragmented touch points are less meaningful and may cause confusion for the customers (Botschen and Wegerer, 2017, Kozinets, 2014).

Additional critical drivers of customer responses are the spatial and temporal elements. Customers need space to promptly navigate around the service process with some hint of direction to avoid possible confusion and frustration (Clarke and Oxman, 2000, Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). The design of the service platform or user interface should facilitate the transactional and informational exchange process to be easy, convenient and comfortable for customers (Klaus, 2013, Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016, Botschen and Wegerer, 2017).

4.3 Co-creation

Co-creation is interaction-based. It emerges from the exchange process and interrelationship among members in the service environment. Each interaction in the course can either create or destroy values, depending on its effects on the customer experience (Åkesson et al., 2014). The understanding in the co-creation process reveals significant elements of the customer journey that make a memorable customer experience (Piccoli et al., 2009, Trischler and Zehrer, 2012).

System and process of value co-creation: The customer journey comprises of mutually dependent touch points that serve as interaction platforms between a company and its customers (Breidbach et al., 2014). The well-designed touch points jointly facilitate the exchange and integration of resources to stimulate value co-creation within the service system (Åkesson et al., 2014, Bolton et al., 2014).

Companies are responsible in equipping prerequisites such as information and engagement platforms to enable the co-creation process (Barile et al., 2017, Ponsignon et al., 2017, Zomerdijk and Voss, 2011). The strong role of companies in the service delivery process can reduce uncertainty and provide comfort to customers (Bolton et al., 2014). Employees have a duty to provide authentic knowledge and support to customers, while collecting insightful customer information during the course of interactions (Tseng et al., 1999). The quality of the customer-employee relationship affects brand image, intentions and overall customer experience of customers (Aichner and Gruber, 2017). Furthermore, companies have to widen

their perspective and consider other actors in the service system when making a decision, as they are no longer operating in isolation (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015, Voorhees et al., 2017).

Customer participation in value co-creation process: Customers utilise multiple branded and non-branded touch points to personalise their experience along the journey and generate data in response (Tax et al., 2013). Each interaction in the service deliver process can encourage or deter the co-creative behaviours of other actors in the system (Braidford and Stone, 2016, Ponsignon et al., 2017, Canfield and Basso, 2017). Customers are driven to participate in the co-creation process by their goals, while their expectations are shaped by social norms (Åkesson et al., 2014, Tseng et al., 1999).

The strong and sensory-rich experiences drive affective commitment and participation of customers to go beyond transactions and co-create value (Ellway, 2014, Canfield and Basso, 2017). The extent of customer co-creating behaviours greatly depends on their trust, loyalty and prior experiences with the company (Åkesson et al., 2014, Palmer and Bejou, 2016, Voorhees et al., 2017). Self-control is also valued as a prominent driver of their co-creative intention. Customers feel comfortable when they can decide on their pace, direction and privacy (Åkesson et al., 2014, Ponsignon et al., 2017). Customer engagement is the constituent of the customer journey that emerges from the interactive touch points (Barile et al., 2017, Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

4.4 Channels

Customer experience accumulates through multiple touch points that coincide across various channels in the customer journey (Kaczorowskaspychalska, 2017). Channels are carriers of touch points that mediate communications and interactions between customers and companies. The technological advancement has expanded the spectrum of the interactive mediums and increased complexity in the service environment (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). The emerging touch points and channels have offered more flexibility to customers while reducing control of companies in the customer journey (van der Veen and van Ossenbruggen, 2015, Nunes et al., 2013). The thorough understanding in the emerging engagement platforms and changing customer channel behaviours is valuable for companies in managing the customer journey and creating the holistic customer experience (Melero et al., 2016).

Customer channel behaviour: Customers channel preference is dynamic across the course of the journey. Customers continuously assess their experience and revaluate values of the touch points (Anderl et al., 2016b, Meyer and Schwager, 2007). They select channel that offer the highest perceived values and allow them to navigate through a journey in the way that is best corresponding to their goal (Dhebar, 2013, Hall and Towers, 2017, Straker et al., 2015).

Customers start their journey anywhere, anytime, from any device and expect consistent experience across all channels (Melero et al., 2016). The omni-channel customers utilise multiple touch points from different platforms through their journey, making a presence of one channel reinforces the probability of interacting with the other channel. A mere presence of the non-chosen channels can increase brand awareness and brand reputation of the company (Fornari et al., 2016). Therefore, companies should not restrict their sales and communications to digital platforms, as it may hinder opportunities to engage with certain customer segmentations (Blackie, 2015, Yumurtacı Hüseyinoğlu et al., 2017).

Online multi-channel*:* The upsurge of the Internet has resulted in abundant online channels that customers can use to personalise their journey (Huré et al., 2017, Mangiaracina et al., 2009). The extreme range of options being offered through the Internet enables customers to achieve desired results faster and easier comparing to the traditional store visit (van der Veen and van Ossenbruggen, 2015). The online platforms facilitate both transactional and non-transactional interactions in the customer journey to be more accurate and efficient (Ahuja and Medury, 2011, Kaczorowskaspychalska, 2017).

Customers are increasingly using social media and online platforms to share their experience throughout the course of the journey. The simple, simultaneous and interactive feature of the platforms induce customer engagement by enabling them to generate content, voice their thoughts and connect with other actors in the service system (Blackie, 2015, Stockwell, 2015). The customer-generated content on online platforms provides additional information and creates opportunities for companies to acquire customer responses and extract customer knowledge for relationship management, service recovery and strategic planning (Busdieker, 2016, Fauser et al., 2011). The development of mobile devices has stimulated growth of the virtual platforms and digital journeys (Wolny and Charoensuksai, 2014).

Channel management*:* The lack of understanding in roles and effects of new channels may cause duplications and channel cannibalisation in the service delivery process (Fornari et al., 2016, Romaniuk et al., 2013). Companies also should not deliberately migrate customers from one channel to another by increasing difficulty in accessing the traditional option. The narrow focus omits possible synergies between channels and understating in the evolving omni-channel customer behaviours. Companies should recognise that channels are interdependent and can have either positive or negative effects on the performance of another (van der Veen and van Ossenbruggen, 2015).

The integrated customer data from various channels yield invaluable knowledge about customers. The behavioural patterns help companies to predict customer purchase propensities, design their business strategies, and allocate their resources more effectively and efficiently (Anderl et al., 2016a, Mangiaracina et al., 2009). However, if the companies fail to see and manage the service delivery process as a whole, the continuing growth of channels would do more harms than benefits(Barker, 2011, Kaczorowskaspychalska, 2017).

4.5 Customer data

Customer data refers to individual-level of behavioural and motivational information that is emerged in the customer journey. In response to the experiential economy, companies have to shift their competitive focus from discrete sales to holistic customer experience management (Bhide et al., 2009). The customer data extracted from the different stages of the customer journey can be used to tailor their service delivery process to enhance customer experience and create competitive advantages (Peltier et al., 2013, Peterson et al., 2010). Competitors may replicate touch points, but without knowledge in the sequence of incidents, it is not possible to reproduce the experience (Norton and Pine II, 2013).

Customer value: The value of customer knowledge management can be perceived as operational benefits or strategic benefits. The operational value consider cost savings from more efficient internal processes, while the strategic aspects provide an improved and accurate understanding of the customers (Croteau and Li, 2003). The perceived value depend on the extent which companies able to integrate the customer database and provide quality relationships (Peltier et al., 2013, McKechnie et al., 2011). The customer knowledge has predictive power of future customer satisfaction and behaviours, which allow companies to tailor touch points and channels for each segment while reducing costs, increasing sales and

promoting customer retention (Croteau and Li, 2003, Peterson et al., 2010, Peltier et al., 2013).

The effective customer database management involves data collection on customer behaviours and psycho-demographic profile at every touch point throughout the entire customer journey to enable higher-level evaluation and gain a richer understanding of the interactions (Peltier et al., 2013, Peterson et al., 2010). These capabilities would also help the company to gain a competitive edge over its competitors (Croteau and Li, 2003).

Customer data management: The ubiquitous customer touch point data has presented challenges for companies in managing and integrating the unstructured data to their customer database, while customers are increasingly demanding a complete and consistent content and offering across all channels (Peltier et al., 2013, Peterson et al., 2010). The challenges call for a transition in organisation structures and processes to diminish data fragmentation and promote an aggregated customer-centric framework to appreciate the communication synergies, which thus encourage customer engagement and stimulate customer value generation (Peterson et al., 2010, Norton and Pine II, 2013, Manser Payne et al., 2017).

The customer journey mapping serves as an approach to unify cross-functional departments within the companies to overcome bureaucracy and inertia (Liedtka, 2014, Manser Payne et al., 2017). An open and flexible information system facilitates a flow of customer knowledge across all channels to ensure data completion and integration for delivery of personalised, seamless experiences (Peterson et al., 2010, Croteau and Li, 2003). The practice has become a strategic necessity and companies will pay a performance price if they fail to embrace an efficient and effective customer data management (Peterson et al., 2010, Peltier et al., 2013).

4.6 Journey Management

The introduction of new channels, devices and customer interaction modes has significantly transformed customer behaviour, and thus customer journey (De Keyser et al., 2015). The emerged platforms and technologies facilitate the communication and connectivity among actors in the service system. Companies have to be aware of the new roles and interdependency between distinct touch points and their contributions toward the customer experience in order to manage customer journey effectively (Li and Kannan, 2014). The success of the companies lays on their abilities to track and comprehend the service situation as a whole and be responsive in their value creation and delivery process (Kannan and Li, 2017).

Carryover and spillover effect: Customers are more likely to use channels that are more familiar with to reduce associated effort and perceived risk (Anderl et al., 2016a, Nakano and Kondo, 2018). The influences indicate impacts of previous experiences on their subsequence usage in both same and different channels, which are known as carryover and spillover effect, respectively (Li and Kannan, 2014, Anderl et al., 2016a).

The knowledge and familiarity of customers are carried over from prior visits of the similar channels and reduce costs of the current visit as a result of cognitive lock-in effect, exposure effects, learning effects and risk reduction (Li and Kannan, 2014, Nakano and Kondo, 2018). In the meantime, customers who utilise different channels to compare information and seek opinions may enjoy the spillover effect that reduce costs of the current visit to the extent of the usefulness and coherence of the new information to the latent information stock (Nakano and Kondo, 2018). However, if the channels are highly divergent or offer contradicting information, customers may perceive an increased overall cost due to unfamiliarity and confusion (Li and Kannan, 2014). The customer dropout rate is also increase if transitions between channels are not smooth (Anderl et al., 2016a).

Technological Disruptions: The channel and technological development has assisted companies to provide value, connect with customers and deliver experiences in a new fundamental way, for example, the Internet of Things, that infuses innovation into products to enhance interactions and communication between customers and companies (Kannan and Li, 2017). The changes in the service environment affect customer behaviours, which consequently impact sequences and structure of the customer journey.

The growth of the digital technologies has also increased the interconnectivity and reduced information asymmetries among different actors in the service system (De Keyser et al., 2015). Companied are required to actively assess the presence of others and consider possible mutual benefits from collaborations (Kannan and Li, 2017). The complete understanding of the customer journey assists companies in the decision making process (Nakano and Kondo, 2018, Kannan et al., 2016). The successful strategies enable companies to leverage on the multi-sided market for revenue generation and ensure and the seamless customer experiences (Li and Kannan, 2014, Kannan and Li, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The customer journey has been gaining attention from both academia and practitioners within the past five years when almost three-quarters of the retrieved literature are published. The framework is proposed as an alternative service design tool that reflects the customer perspective rather than what companies think they know about them (Halvorsrud et al., 2016). The customer journey is differed from traditional concepts due to its design thinking, customer-centric, holistic and time-based nature. Each customer journey is built with different touch points and phrases that describe the movement of customers in fulfilling their goals. The concept is valuable for both service improvement and new offering development (Panzera et al., 2017, Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). The quantitative content analysis reveals six underlying themes of the customer journey literature, which customer experience is identified as the central theme. The results provide a deeper understanding and a systematic foundation for future research and practical applications. Researchers and practitioners may focus on individual identified themes to register particular concerns or address all dimensions to gain a better understanding of the customer journey as a whole. Furthermore, despite an increasing number of studies on the customer journey domain, the existing research has been predominantly focused on the core service delivery system and neglected the pre-purchase and post-purchase phase. Future research should explore all three phases of the customer journey to gain a holistic and integrated understanding of the concept. In addition, the primary focus on the core-phase also results in the dominant emphasis on sales and disregards other functions of the companies, which makes it difficult to understand the holistic process and limits opportunities to retain customers (Blackie, 2015; Nunes *et al.*, 2013; Vaghela, 2014). Therefore, researchers could extend their view and also consider other functions of the companies in their future studies.

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