Viewpoint: applying pragmatism to stimulate service research and practice – a European perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to apply pragmatism – a philosophy of science on the interplay of human actions and meaning – as a perspective for studying service research and practice, emphasizing the need to deal with dynamics and diversity to cope with service marketplace disruptions. This work focuses on customers (individuals or groups of individuals) as key marketplace stakeholders.

Design/methodology/approach – Pragmatism provides a foundation for theorizing about change by connecting human actors' cognitive belief structures and their actions through a continuous learning process. This paper outlines how the key principles of pragmatism can advance service research and practice.

Findings – Adopting the key principles of pragmatism in service management directs attention to service market dynamics. Understanding customers' everyday lives as the interplay of experiencing, knowing and acting reveals insights about the role of service in dynamic markets for the benefit of service research and practice.

Research limitations/implications – The paper is a viewpoint to stimulate researchers' reflections on often hidden core assumptions about service. Pragmatism provides a perspective on actors' practical rationality and problem solving in dynamic settings. Along with its emphasis on a holistic understanding of customers' lives, this perspective provides direction for future service research and practice. Further, conceptual development and empirical substantiation are encouraged.

Practical implications – By focusing on marketplace changes, this paper addresses management concerns for commercial and non-commercial organizations. Pragmatism encourages critical reflections on what companies are doing and why (the connection between actions and beliefs), revealing underlying beliefs and institutionalized industry practices that require modifications.

Social implications – Pragmatism is an approach to service research and practice, irrespective of aggregation level and sector. Therefore, it can help stimulate societal welfare.

Originality/value – Pragmatism advances service research by delineating a holistic perspective on customers' lives and providing a perspective for exploring and understanding dynamics and diversity in service markets.

Keywords Customer, Pragmatism, Experience, Meaning, Disruption, Action

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

Turbulence in society, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can serve as a catalyst for reflecting on potentially disruptive consequences for service research and practice. The pandemic is just one factor causing changes in service markets; other issues, such as digitalization, polarization and societal sustainability concerns, also create continuous managerial challenges (Grover and Sabherwal, 2020; Weber *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic, however, represents a unique, external force affecting societies, companies and customers alike with its global reach and fast pace. Acting as a mental alarm clock, the pandemic has sensitized market stakeholders to take an interest in change and its consequences (Oehmen *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, it has forced managers in all types of service organizations to fundamentally re-evaluate their strategies and activities (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2020; Kabadayi *et al.*, 2020; Nenonen and Storbacka, 2020) amid changing service markets.

In service research, dynamics – as a topic – has only been addressed tangentially; therefore, theories, models and concepts tend to be indicative of stable conditions (Macinnis *et al.*, 2020). For example, theorizing about the characteristics of customer experience as a phenomenon differs largely from

theorizing about how, when, why and with what consequences customer experiences change. Consequently, the current work attempts to conduct boundary-breaking research (Macinnis *et al.*, 2020) by arguing that new perspectives, approaches and conceptualizations are needed – both in research and practice – "to break away from a frame of reference and to look at what it is *not* capable of saying" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 270).

Disruptions in markets constantly trigger changes of various magnitudes. For example, in Europe, the crisis and major disruptions related to COVID-19 triggered changes in customer behaviors and stimulated them to review their routines and habits (Andersen *et al.*, 2020; Eger *et al.*, 2021; Laato *et al.*, 2020; Pantano *et al.*, 2020). A McKinsey study (Catena *et al.*, 2020) revealed that customers in various European countries react differently in terms of changes to their purchasing patterns, adoption of digital services and activity patterns. These studies reveal a significant insight into service practice: customers not only changed their purchasing patterns but also their service providers (Catena *et al.*, 2020). Similar findings have been reported in a global study of consumer reactions to COVID-19 (Charm *et al.*, 2020). Customers' different reactions to disruptions indicate that they engage in sensemaking and problem-solving in a contextually determined way. For example, there were considerable shifts in customer behavior and attitudes on an aggregate level in the early phase of the pandemic (Catena *et al.*, 2020; Charm *et al.*, 2020). However, changes in industries and categories based on demographic background variables do not reveal the underlying processes or the reasons for the changes on an individual level. For example, Di Crosta *et al.* (2021) found that in the lockdown phase, Italian consumers' behaviors changed with regard to products categorized as necessities vs non-necessities and that such a change could be explained by different psychological factors. More generally, an open question remains: How do customers reason and respond to changes affecting them and how do they create change in their everyday lives? We propose that service theorizing should focus on customers' behavioral changes, which is also important for service practice.

In this viewpoint paper, we address the effects of disruptions in service markets. The purpose is to introduce and delineate how pragmatism, as a lens for service research and practice, can reveal emerging issues in service markets relating to customer dynamics and diversity, thus complementing and expanding current approaches. We argue that pragmatism – a philosophy of science focused on the interplay of human action and meaning (Dewey, 1929; James and Burkhardt, 1975; Pierce, 1878) – is appropriate for alleviating disruptive challenges of change and complexity. Building on the primacy of customers in markets (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2018), we expound on how pragmatism provides a focus on the dynamics and diversity of customers. These aspects are clearly underrepresented in the service literature but are significant in times of change. "Dynamics" refers to patterns and forces of change in the service market. "Diversity", in turn, highlights variety, differences and dissimilarity – the recognition of individual differences and the notion that everyone is unique. Pragmatism can also support service providers navigating uncharted territories by highlighting the interplay of meaning and action, as well as issues of agency and structure (Farjoun *et al.*, 2015).

The terms "service," "service provider" and "customer" are used in a general sense to include different service contexts and aggregation levels (e.g. families, neighborhoods, organizations and nations). Consequently, service providers comprise organizations and groups of organizations/individuals; customers include individuals, groups of individuals and organizations; and service management covers service providers' interests (commercial, public or not-for-profit) in managing activities conducted in pursuit of their goals. The suggested customer-oriented application of pragmatism in service research is based on the following foundation (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010; Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015, 2018, 2020): First, given that no service can exist in a market without customers or users (Drucker, 1974), we argue that they are more important for service provision than other service stakeholders. In so doing, the complexity of the term "customer" (Plangger *et al.*, 2013) is recognized, and the term is used broadly in this context to denote human actors who acquire and/or use services. Second, external contextual changes and disruptions affect customers' lives, perceptions and actions, generally, and their use of services, specifically. Third, a single provider or a system of providers of a particular service need can only partially influence the market consisting of diverse customer logics. Fourth, service providers must adapt their service provision logics based on how customers' logics and actions change, thus resembling an iterative learning process. Finally, for service research, disruptions highlight opportunities to explore how customers and service providers respond to market changes in practice.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism originated in Pierce's (1878) work and was later developed by philosophers James and Burkhardt (1975) and Dewey (1929). It assumes that reality is not static; rather, it is in a constant state of becoming (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Morgan (2014, p. 1047) concluded that as a philosophy, pragmatism represented a different approach than realism and idealism: "Rather than metaphysical discussions about the nature of reality or truth, Dewey and other pragmatists called for a different starting point that was rooted in life itself – a life that was inherently contextual, emotional, and social." Pragmatism reveals "how individuals and social collectives respond to discontinuities and ambiguity and how they generate change and innovation" (Ansell and Boin, 2019, p. 1081).

According to Farjoun *et al.* (2015, p. 1788), pragmatism highlights "process, time, events, and relations without neglecting structures and entities" and is an "analytical perspective to help humans find their place in a hectic, complex, and often dangerous world" (p. 1789). Furthermore, it is ontologically based on four principles: process, relationships, recursiveness and anti-dualism (Farjoun *et al.*, 2015). In the pragmatist view, the focus should be on processes (i.e. temporal and emergent aspects of social life), with an emphasis on the inherently dynamic relationships among social entities. Recursiveness is another essential assumption: looping processes are iterative and cumulative and enable the study of

connections between individual and collective levels. Finally, pragmatism promotes anti-dualism, which is a key premise to avoid opposite extremes and, instead, connect the essence of each perspective (e.g. stability–change, theory–practice, means–end, self–collective and mind–matter). These four principles distinguish pragmatism from other scientific approaches and represent the foundation of the core elements of human behavior.

Positioning pragmatism as a perspective for service research and practice

Pragmatism is considered to be particularly well suited for social sciences (Morgan, 2014) and has been adopted in several fields, such as organization theory, international relations, business ethics, strategic crisis management and public administration (Farjoun *et al.*, 2015; Frankel Pratt, 2016; Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009; Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020; Wicks and Freeman, 1998; Ansell and Boin, 2019). It has also been considered an approach to bridge the theory–praxis gap in management research (Fendt *et al.*, 2008). However, it is largely missing in service research. One exception is the study of Wetter-Edman *et al.* (2018), who applied pragmatism in a managerially oriented study as a lens for service design/service innovation connected to a framing based on service-dominant logic. They expanded the micro-level focus of service design by arguing that managers may stage aesthetic disruptions to induce and catalyze service innovation (Wetter-Edman *et al.*, 2018). Another exception is Brodie and Peters's (2020) study, which is built upon pragmatism in arguing for how mid-range theorizing could provide new directions for service research.

The studies followed the predominant use of pragmatism in existing management research as a methodological perspective, guiding the process of *how* to conduct research (Frankel Pratt, 2016). However, reaching the full potential of pragmatism as a philosophy requires going beyond the emphasis on practicality and method; it must incorporate *what* is studied and *why*. Such a broader view has been discussed in organizational research contexts (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Morgan, 2014; Winter, 2013) and is specifically positioned as an alternative to rational actor and structural models (Farjoun *et al.*, 2015).

Figure 1 presents a two-dimensional map that positions pragmatism in relation to different service perspectives based on selected foundational assumptions. It contrasts the providers' and customers' views on service (horizontal axis) and a single-actor agency view with the system of actors' views (vertical axis). The pragmatist position represents a lens that can be used for theorizing about service as a potential integrative framework for understanding dynamics and diversity in the service marketplace. Since the early 1980s, the focus of scholarly service research has shifted from a provider-agency view (lower left-hand corner) to a provider-structure focus (upper left-hand corner), a balanced structure view (upper middle position) and a customer-agency view (lower right-hand corner). In service theorizing, foundational positioning manifests how, for example, value for the customer is created. In the provider-agency position, the service provider assumes that value is predominantly the effect of the provider's efforts. In a balanced structure view, value is the outcome of co-creation processes involving providers and customers, while from the customer-agency perspective, value is the outcome of

Figure 1 Pragmatism positioned in relation to service perspectives
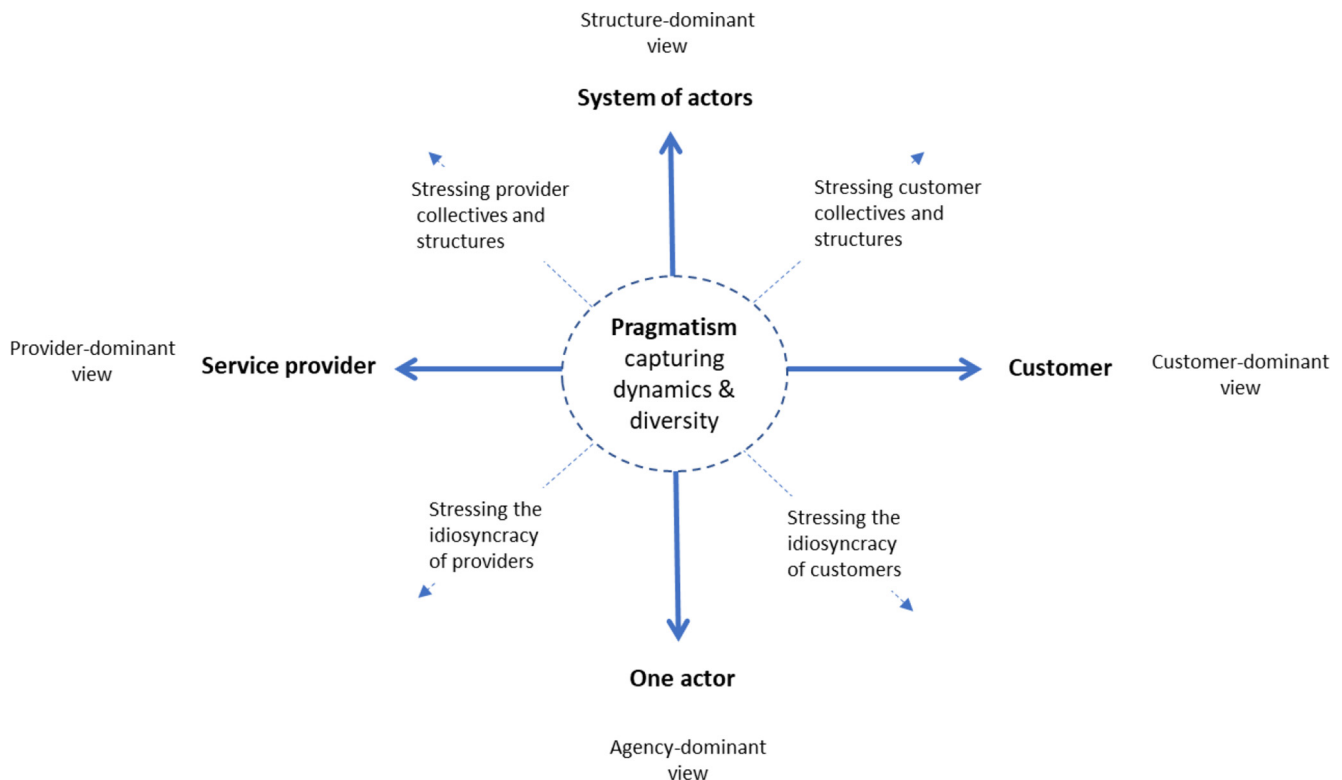
how the customer uses service in the customer's own context. Dynamics and diversity are accounted for only implicitly from different perspectives. Recent service research has emphasized themes largely from a stakeholder system view and to the extent that change is included, it concerns the dynamic interactions and capabilities of stakeholders and service ecosystems (Ostrom *et al.*, 2021; Field *et al.*, 2021). We argue that a more explicit approach to the customer view will prompt a range of additional research priorities related to how customers orchestrate service interactions, offerings and providers to fulfill their goals and aspirations (Heinonen *et al.*, 2010; Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015). This, in turn, generates a need to model and conceptualize such processes, especially in disruptive service markets.

Figure 1 reflects the potential of a pragmatism perspective that inherently avoids dualism and is located in the middle and problematizes the interplay between agency and structure, as well that between providers and customers. The principles of pragmatism about human nature provide the tools to capture this interplay. Given the foundational assertion that human actors – whether they are service providers or customers – are living their (idiosyncratic) lives, the research focus should be on human life holistically rather than on correlations of concepts describing life on an aggregate level. Human actors navigating service settings are embedded in their own contexts and are influenced by their own strategies and goals, as well as by external influences from other actors. According to the pragmatist view, this implies a continuous, iterative loop designed to connect the actor's past, present and future, as well as their idiosyncratic processes and contexts. In this way, pragmatism has the potential to offer new directions for service research in cases of societal disruption, such as in the extreme case of the pandemic. A focus on dynamics highlights change rather than stability; for example, it views a shift in focus from how value-in-use is formed for customers to how such a formation changes. Pragmatism argues that the past influences such a change.

Another potential and interesting service research topic is the recognition of diversity, implying that actors behave and change differently. Scholarly theorizing has had an underlying tendency to focus on unity and similarity rather than diversity. A diversity focus directs attention to, for example, differences in how customers' goals, logics, activities and service contexts change, as well as how both the use of services and choice of service providers change.

The theoretical nuances are continually evolving, but the primary role of individuals as customers in markets remains at the core of service research and practice (Drucker, 1974; Heinonen *et al.*, 2010; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Levitt, 1960; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2020), now often viewed from the perspective of technological or societal change (Bolton, 2020; Malter *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, the core marketing research objective is still the same: "to understand the motivations, thought processes, and experiences of individuals as they consume goods, services, information, and other offerings, and to use these insights to develop interventions to improve both marketing strategy for firms and consumer welfare for individuals and groups" (Malter *et al.*, 2020, p. 146).

Pragmatism: core themes and principles

According to pragmatism, human behavior is the function of experience, beliefs and actions (Dewey, 2011), which can never be studied in isolation. These three concepts should be understood on a generic level and applicable to research and practice (Morgan, 2014; Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). Each core concept has been adopted in the literature with slightly different labels and meanings.

Experience
In pragmatism, experience represents individuals' sensemaking, reasoning and learning. According to Morgan (2014), the essence of Dewey's argument about the central role of the experience concept is that:
- philosophy should focus on human experience rather than abstract concerns;
- experience involves a process of interpretation;
- experience can either be formed based on habits (mainly automated) or based on inquiry (deliberation); and
- experience always has emotional, social and contextual elements.

Pragmatism fosters a contextualized understanding of individuals' perceptions of relevance within dynamic settings. However, experience, as defined in pragmatism, is distinct from how the same term is used in service theory.

Beliefs
Cognitive and sensory knowledge guides prediction, problem solving and action (Bode, 1906), but requires active and sensible interpretation and reinterpretation to become meaningful (Dewey, 1905). There is a constant recursive process in which beliefs influence actions and actions influence beliefs (Morgan, 2014). "Meaning" is another term used to denote beliefs as reflections of what we know (Weick, 1965; Dewey, 2011).

Actions
Beliefs develop by means of doing (Dewey, 1929); thus, making sense of everyday life involves exploring how it is enacted and how this *in situ* action changes one's life (Riga, 2020; Ansell and Boin, 2019). In this sense, actions are always ongoing, and completed actions are only indicative of potential consequences or "a sign of what may come" (Dewey, 2011, p. 115). The possession of actionable knowledge thus becomes an element of a recursive process.

The core of pragmatism (the triad of human experience, beliefs and actions) holistically and dynamically captures the concept of everyday life. The core ideas of pragmatism, however, must be interpreted and applied to service settings, and this demands a reflection on how pragmatism corresponds at a higher abstraction level to service phenomena and service theorizing. Some adaptations are required to adopt pragmatism in the field of service management. Importantly, to emphasize the processual and recursive nature of the term "experience" in pragmatism, we here use "experiencing." This also prevents confusion with the concepts of "service experience" and "customer experience" in the service literature. "Experiencing" covers various concepts, such as sensemaking, reflecting, learning and decision-making. Similarly, we use the concept

"knowing" to represent actors' beliefs and meanings, as well as concepts like knowledge, mental models and mindsets. To highlight the dynamic aspect of "actions," it is denoted in the current work as "acting." Therefore, the core concepts of pragmatism for service management are *experiencing, knowing and acting.*

Experiencing, knowing and acting are dependent on one another. As they are omnipresent and entwined, separate explorations of these elements can lead to a superficial account of the customer's everyday life. Moreover, three permeative principles in pragmatism represent foundational mechanisms for experiencing, knowing and acting: actionability, recursiveness and duality.

Actionability

Actionability refers to the "future responses which an object requires of us or commits us to" (Dewey, 1908, p. 88), similar to what Weick (1988) referred to as enactment. In other words, actions require a practical direction and intellectual anticipation of what consequences and purposes are sought (Boodin, 1909; Dewey, 1929, 1938): "Anticipation is, therefore, more primary than recollection; projection than summoning of the past; the prospective than the retrospective" (Dewey, 2011, p. 115). Actionability can be achieved through:

- observation of surrounding conditions;
- recollection and external direction of what has happened in similar past situations; and
- aggregate judgment of what the observations and recollections signify (Dewey, 1938).

In this sense, humans are inherently driven by the potential of "new and more complex ends" (Dewey, 2011, p. 138).

Recursiveness

Actions, experiences and meaning involve a circular interpretation process and are continuously reconstructed and remade (Dewey, 1938; Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020; Morgan, 2014). Given that individuals continuously adapt and alter their behaviors in response to their circumstances, recursiveness highlights the human ability to promote change and life as a dynamic process.

Duality

Experiencing, knowing and acting do not occur in isolation, but are always embedded in the individual's everyday life: how they act *in situ*, live their lives and make sense of the world. Individuals apply different "configurations of objects/events that make meaning possible" (Riga, 2020, p. 232). Therefore, pragmatism clearly opposes dichotomies (e.g. thought vs actions) and sees them as interdependent and constant rather than independent and oppositional (Ansell and Boin, 2019). Duality denotes "the twofold character of an object of study without separation" (Farjoun, 2010, p. 203).

Pragmatism in service: a holistic view of customers' everyday lives

We argue that the scope of existing service research has so far been largely silent on the holistic nature of customers' lives. Therefore, instead of focusing on changes, such as the purchase

of a particular service category, attention could be directed to the root causes of these changes by holistically viewing issues that enable customers to achieve quality of life. In the service context, this holistic account of daily experiences includes the factors that influence customers and what they deem valuable and relevant. Table 1 interprets the application of pragmatism to service research and practice by highlighting the holistic view of customers' everyday lives. It also delineates the implications of pragmatism for service research and practice.

Disruptions and change have diverse effects with complex patterns, and a pragmatic view of service can reconcile the past and the new reality. Adopting pragmatism for service management directs attention to customers' everyday lives as a continuous, triadic interplay of experiencing, knowing and acting. As a result, the focus shifts away from what the company (or service system) does for customers (on an individual and aggregate level) to what customers are doing in their own lives and how they are using such services for their own purposes and in their own contexts.

Pragmatists argue that various events happening in customers' lives have profound implications for what service providers must do to achieve success. Equally, for service research, there is a need to better understand the diversity of customer thinking and acting in their own contexts to create concepts, frameworks and theories that capture holistic views of customers' use of service.

Conclusion

Recent disruptions in the surrounding environment, such as sociopolitical and environmental forces, including the COVID 19-pandemic, have sensitized service scholars and practitioners to the need to understand changes in service markets. Yet, identifying changes in customers' attitudes and behaviors on an aggregate level reveals only partial knowledge of such changes. Studies have shown that European consumers react differently to the pandemic based on their personal characteristics and contexts, indicating the necessity of accounting for this variety of reactions. This viewpoint paper advocates that pragmatism reinvigorates service research by delineating a holistic perspective on customers' everyday lives. This includes a comprehensive consideration of their knowing, experiencing and acting within their distinct contexts. It also provides a perspective for exploring and understanding dynamics and diversity in service markets.

Moreover, pragmatism is generally applicable to all types of disruptions (Ansell and Boin, 2019). It not only helps in studying the shifts caused by the pandemic but also in exploring service providers' strategies and service activities. Following Farjoun et al. (2015), pragmatism provides service researchers with an alternative – a middle ground between the rational actor and structural service theories. Implications for service research and practice (summarized in Table 2) highlight the necessity of adopting a comprehensive perspective on what customers think and do within the realms of their lives rather than merely focusing on how they experience and interact with firms and brands.

While the complexity of disruptive markets is recognized, the primary role of customers is still at the core of service research and practice (Drucker, 1974; Heinonen et al., 2010; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Levitt, 1960; Zeithaml et al., 2020), which is often viewed from the perspective of

Table 1 Implications of applying pragmatism to inform a holistic account of customers' in everyday life

Pragmatism	Pragmatism for service management	Implications for service research and practice	
		Researchers should pay attention to:	Practitioners should pay attention to:
Focus on the connection between knowledge and action in context	The customer's everyday life represents a holistic gestalt— a triadic constellation of experiencing, knowing, and acting in everyday life. Customers are different and holistically unique. Subjective time plays a role: past, present, and future are omnipresent	Customers as holistic entities and how they orchestrate their life and service use The complexities of service use, and its value as determined by customers' holistic contexts Service as a practical support for and resource in everyday life Diversity, not commonality Change and dynamics in customers' experiencing, knowing, and acting	*Customer relevance:* Any service is always related to elements in customers' lives, and these elements are not necessarily evident nor visible but may be significant *Customer differences:* Customers are fundamentally different from one another and do not live only in the present but also in their subjective past and future
Core processes of pragmatism			
<u>Experiencing</u>: **Experiencing accumulates continuously from internal conditions and external sources of the environment.**	Experiencing connects customers' knowing and acting holistically and dynamically in their everyday life contexts in a continuous recursive process. The elements of the experiencing process should be identified, including triggers and modes of sensemaking	Contextual factors influencing customers, e.g., loneliness, illness, unemployment, economic problems, love, hobbies, and political and religious convictions Customers' sensemaking processes	Understanding customers' sensemaking process – as it relates to what services are relevant and how service providers are selected – as the result of customers' consideration of beliefs and outcomes of actions
<u>Knowing</u>: **Customers' beliefs and how and why these beliefs are changing are based on ongoing actions.**	Meaning emerges from the practical interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences and actions Customers are subjectively rational; that is, they follow their own reasoning	The relevance and meaning of service offerings, brands, experiences, and value-in-use for customers	Exploring customers' meaning formation and what is relevant and meaningful for the customer
<u>Acting</u>: **Actions have problem-solving capacity and are future-oriented.**	Customers' activities become idiosyncratic patterns adapted to their lives and contexts. These activities may change due to external disruptions in the environment or internal changes	Everyday life as dependent on past action and indication of future action Behaviors and value-in-use do not occur in a vacuum but are guided by what customers want to achieve in life	Exploring how the service provider may become selected by customers as a resource and actor in their lives
Permeative principles of pragmatism			
<u>Actionability</u>: **Capable of being put to use**	Customers envision the consequences of acting in a certain way and under the given observed conditions. Their aspirations, resources, and contexts drive their behaviors and choices	Future consequences and what customers want to achieve, rather than their perceptions, experiences, and actions in relation to offerings, companies, or brands	Supporting customers' aspirations beyond use of specific offerings and brands
<u>Recursiveness</u>: **Continuously adapting, enacting, and reconstructing everyday life**	Everyday life and, consequently, the rest of society are changing as a function of accumulated and prospective actions, reflexivity, and sensemaking	Dynamism and change in customers and everyday life	The ability to respond to emergent and changing behavior and demands
<u>Duality</u>: **Interdependence of means and ends**	Everyday life is diverse and complex, and customers use subjective reference points that guide their behaviors	Customers' lens of their own subjective reasoning: they cannot be studied based on theoretical or provider's logic	The diversity among customers that is related to their holistic identity and aspirations

Table 2 Illustrative directions for service research inspired by pragmatism

Research themes	Research directions
Customer experience	How and why do customer experiences of a service or service provider change? What are the triggers for such a change? What kind of sensemaking process is invoked, and what is the outcome?
	Given the diversity of customers, are there customers who are more sensitive to external changes than others?
	How is the customer experience, which is dependent on a specific customer's context, formed recursively over time?
	What represents meaningful customer experiences?
Value formation	How is the use value of a service formed in a customer's holistic ecosystem, and which factors cause a change in use value?
	How do customers orchestrate their lives and service use? How is the past influencing the present and paving the way for future behavior?
	What characterizes "use" in use value?
Customer brand relationships	How are brand images formed?
	How are brand relationships related to customers' goals and aspirations?
	Why and how do brand relationships change over time?
Customer relationships and ecosystems	What roles do customer relationships play for the customer?
	Why do customers initiate new relationships, sustain existing ones, and end current relationships?
	How do changes in customers' lives change their relationships?
	What are the roles of different actors in the realm of customers' lives?
	How are customers connecting with other actors (e.g., other providers and other customers), and how are these actors influencing customers?
Service and market innovation	What represents a service innovation from a customer's point of view?
	What are customers prepared to pay for, and can that be understood by applying a holistic perspective on the customers?
	Can latent or emerging markets be revealed by studying changes in customers' belief structures and actions?
Customer sensemaking	How do customers make sense of everyday life?
	Which different customer logics can be identified as related to the choice and use of specific services?
	How do such customer logics change with internal or external forces?
	How can service providers influence customers' logics?
Digitalization and service technologies	How do technological advancements influence customer beliefs and actions?
	How do customers interact with technological artifacts to achieve their goals?

technological or societal change (Bolton, 2020; Malter *et al.*, 2020). The core marketing research objective remains: "to understand the motivations, thought processes, and experiences of individuals as they consume goods, services, information, and other offerings, and to use these insights to develop interventions to improve both marketing strategy for firms and consumer welfare for individuals and groups" (Malter *et al.*, 2020, p. 146).

Managers in service organizations can use pragmatism as an inspiration to holistically make sense of customer diversity and changes in their behaviors. It does not only apply to exploring customers, but also to developing organizations and analytically scrutinizing sensemaking processes, belief structures and actions as ongoing recursive processes. Furthermore, in line with pragmatism, we subscribe to the view that both researchers and practitioners are in a state of "theorizing" (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2020). For service practice, such theorizing can encourage critical reflections on what companies are doing and why (the connection between actions and beliefs), thereby revealing underlying beliefs and institutionalized industry practices that must be modified. Finally, pragmatism can be adopted by any type of organization and for transformative endeavors beyond the European context. By so doing, it lays the groundwork for more resilient and sustainable service markets.

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Further reading

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