

# GraphEx: visualizing and managing customer experience in its multidimensionality

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Received 7 March 2023  
Revised 3 July 2023  
20 August 2023  
22 September 2023  
Accepted 8 October 2023

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Customer experience has become a vital premise in service theory and practice. Despite researchers' and managers' growing interest, the customer experience remains a complex and multidimensional concept that is challenging for service providers to understand. This study aims to graph the experience in its multidimensionality by categorizing and proposing matching practices for service marketing managers to channel and foster customer experiences in customer journeys.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To support the predominantly conceptual nature of the study, an abductive approach underpinned by the authors' vast experience in academia and practice, real-life autohermeneutic phenomenological experience tales and theory on customer experience and its management by providers is deployed to craft a model that addresses and highlights the multidimensionality of experience.

**Findings** – This study introduces the “GraphEx” (Graph Experience) hip-pocket model, which expresses customer experience in a simple yet multidimensional fashion and offers managerial practices to foster the customer's experience. The model contains three dimensions (valence, type of experience and visceral intensity) and five managerial practices (urgent patchwork, restoring, activating and stimulating desire, bolstering and safeguarding appreciation).

**Originality/value** – This study contributes to the service literature by creating granularity in the multidimensionality of customer experience. This study advances customer experience management in practice by providing service managers with novel possibilities for understanding and managing customer experiences intelligently. This can help service providers streamline and innovate customer experience strategies during customer journeys and foster customer loyalty.

**Keywords** Customer experience, Multidimensionality, Customer experience management, Practices, GraphEx

**Paper type** Research note

## 1. Introduction

Business leaders and marketing managers argue that creating a relevant and reliable customer experience is fundamental for a company's overall business performance (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020). Managing customer experience and offering compelling experiences



skillfully can reap massive benefits such as enhanced customer satisfaction and reduced churn (Williams *et al.*, 2020; Dhebar, 2013; Rawson *et al.*, 2013), thereby ramping up financial results (Bueno *et al.*, 2019; Silva *et al.*, 2021). Customer experience management has been regarded as a promising approach to, and even the future of, marketing (Newman, 2015; Homburg *et al.*, 2017), given its central position in business landscapes and vast potential for value creation and customer well-being. Hence, understanding and managing the customer experience has become a top priority for service firms (Witell *et al.*, 2020) and a key source of competitive advantage (Keiningham *et al.*, 2020).

Customer experience is the subjective, instinctive and spontaneous response and reaction to particular stimuli (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). The concept is not static but is continuously subject to change over time. For this reason, the nature of the customer experience is often referred to as dynamic, fluid and temporal (Ellway and Dean, 2016; Helkkula, 2011; Helkkula *et al.*, 2012). Accordingly, experience is liable to circumstances across and beyond the phases and touchpoints of customer journeys (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Grönroos, 2017) mediated by advanced and emerging technologies (Teixeira *et al.*, 2016; Kabadayi *et al.*, 2019). To shape customer experience for their favorite ends, marketing managers resort to tools (Table 1 presents an overview) to diagnose and monitor customers' experiences and (re)design their service offerings to improve customer experience across the customer journey.

Despite its prominence in marketing and service discourse, the field of customer experience continues to face difficulties in maturation (Forrester Research, 2019; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) and the concept of customer experience is often managed without proper understanding (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Thompson, 2018). Although customer experience is increasingly understood as multifaceted, the central discourse considers experience on a spectrum between "universally good" and "universally bad" (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020), indicating a preference for a dichotomic rather than multidimensional construct (Williams *et al.*, 2020). This simplification of the concept is problematic because wrong interventions in the customer journey to facilitate favorable experiences may only lead to negative experiences and even value destruction (Sahhar and Loohuis, 2022). In addition, the premise that customer experience results from interventions on behalf of service providers is still prevalent (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020), implying that service providers are the "orchestrators" of customer experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, 2011). We consider this control bias problematic, as it downplays the role of the human agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) of customers, which purports that experience emerges in the customers' lifeworld and revolves around their interpretations, informed by their past, individual, collective and situational filters (Sandström *et al.*, 2008; Heinonen, 2023). Given the customer agency in shaping their own experience, customer experience cannot always be formed as the service provider intends (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Heinonen *et al.*, 2019). In sum, little room is left for customer agency and the emergence of customer experiences in the customer journey. This results in a state that is essentially monolithic or dichotomous, leaving facets of dynamic experience and agency out of the equation. Therefore, marketing and service managers can benefit from a more nuanced picture of what it means to understand and manage customer experience by respecting adequate interventions to recover, anticipate and influence the experience.

To support this managerial quest, a more complete understanding of the concept of customer experience is necessary (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; De Keyser *et al.*, 2020), its multidimensionality must be simplified (Jain *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Williams *et al.*, 2020) and its agentic dimensions highlighted, that is, customer-centric dimensions that define the experience of and by the customer. Thus, *the purpose of this study is to graph experience in its multidimensionality and create fitting practices for marketing managers to anticipate and influence experience for positive outcomes.*

Through an abductive approach involving the integration of empirical observations and extant theory (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Nenonen *et al.*, 2017), we developed the “GraphEx” (Graph Experience) hip-pocket model (see Figure 2) as an approach that addresses and highlights the multidimensionality of experience. We propose three core dimensions that render an intricate view of the customer experience: (1) valence, (2) type and (3) visceral intensity. These dimensions are simultaneously comprehensive, detailed and mutually exclusive, and express experiences in their phenomenological nature from the subject’s point of view. First, *valence* expresses whether experience is perceived on a continuum (i.e. different “shades”) of positive, neutral or negative (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Kranzbühler *et al.*, 2020) across all its qualities – for example, cognitive, behavioral, sensory, emotional and social (Williams *et al.*, 2020; Stead *et al.*, 2022). Second, the *type* of experience is either reflective or unreflective. The former refers to the subject’s aware/conscious experience, whereas the latter invokes the subject’s unaware/unconscious experience (Sahhar and Loohuis, 2022). Finally, *visceral intensity* assesses whether an experience is sensorially perceived as “superficial” or “profound.” These dimensions are illustrated through lively tales (Table 3) and complemented by five managerial practices (Figure 2).

This study contributes to service theory and practice by offering a fine-grained perspective on the multidimensional premises of customer experience based on customer agency and matching interventions on behalf of service providers. The GraphEx hip-pocket model enriches managers with a simple, multidimensional overview of experience. It can guide them in assessing, redesigning and innovating the service process to improve customer experiences both ad hoc and strategically, for instance, in the creation of strategies to boost customer loyalty over time.

## 2. Conceptual foundation: customer experience and its complexities

Customer experience has not only become a dominant key performance indicator for marketing managers but also appears on strategic agendas in the boardroom. Businesses that successfully understand and manage customer experience profit from customer retention, loyalty and above-normal margins (Bueno *et al.*, 2019; Stein and Ramaseshan, 2020). The starting point lies in understanding customer experience, which is not as simple as it may sound. To understand this concept better, we propose an interpretation of the experiences that entail and address their complexities.

### 2.1 Independent character of customer experience

Firms seeing themselves as “orchestrators” of customer experience typically driven by firm-driven stimuli (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Becker and Jaakkola, 2020), adopt a myopic view and fall prey to the complex reality of experience. The phenomenological nature of experience in the customer’s lifeworld underscores customers’ agency and the emergence of their experience in the customer journey over time (Carù and Cova, 2003; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Service providers do not always influence the customer experience and can behave independently (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Heinonen *et al.*, 2010, 2019). Firms can influence interactions that enable customer experience (Zomerdiijk and Voss, 2010). The service provider’s intention for that experience and what customers experience are two different things; customers’ experiences also depend on their circumstances. Sandström *et al.* (2008) called these individual and situational filters, and Heinonen (2023) referred to individual sense making and collective social interactions. Similarly, Kahneman (2011) noted a gap between the experiencing and the remembering selves, pointing to the subjective nature of experience. Thus, customers do not always experience the offering as intended by the firm (Heinonen *et al.*, 2019; Schembri, 2006), but according to their perspective, which is influenced by individual and situational circumstances.

### 2.2 Customer experience as dynamic and temporal

Traditionally, the customer experience has been viewed as a static and stable construct consisting of needs and perceptions known prior to or during any encounter with service providers, services or products. Essentially, perceptions of service quality determine customers' service experiences (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Woodruff, 1997). Such a perspective creates snapshots of what the customer experiences at a specific moment the perception of the experiencing self-consisting of experiences that are continually reshaped and accumulated in memory (Kahneman, 2011). Over time, customer experience has evolved into a more complex dynamic and temporal concept. Customer experience is defined as subjective, nondeliberate and spontaneous responses and reactions to particular stimuli residing in managerial efforts or consumption processes (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). To detail this rather broad definition, experience is fluid in nature, phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary, and accumulated over time in the lifeworld of the subject (i.e. the customer) (Carù and Cova, 2003; Helkkula, 2011) as the perception of the remembering self (Kahneman, 2011). "Ex situ" value can emerge off-site in the subject's lifeworld through individual sense making and collective social interactions (Heinonen, 2023). Experience manifests not only as lived in the "now" but as imaginary in the past and future (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, a customer journey converges with customer experience, enabling us to better understand the temporality of experience in terms of how and what customers experience in the phase of their journey (Jain *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Silva *et al.*, 2021).

### 2.3 Customer experience as seemingly multidimensional yet conceptualized unidimensionally

Experience is often categorized to facilitate efforts to understand and manage it. Current studies have focused on the qualities of customer experience, involving customers' experiences in response to the consumption of products and services. Examples include cognitive (what people think), behavioral (how people (inter)act), sensory (what people experience via their senses), emotional (how people feel) and social (how people share) (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2020; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, experience can be qualified as cognitive, affective, physical, sensorial and social (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Although these dimensions are helpful in bracketing experience (i.e. "how" subjects perceive), they miss out on the nature of experience itself (i.e. "what" experience is composed of) from a customer-centric point of view.

Valence, including its links to other dimensions, is a largely ignored dimension that reflects the nature of the experience. It refers to whether customers perceive the experience as positive, indifferent or negative (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Kranzbühler *et al.*, 2020). This positive, indifferent or negative experience can then be further qualified as cognitive, behavioral, sensory, emotional and social (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2020). Valence is discerned on a continuum (Brakus *et al.*, 2009); that is, it contains different shades and can be useful in comprehending what specific experiences mean to customers. Thus, a detailed view of valence seems to push the multidimensionality of experience against all odds. The dominant narrative postulates experience as something between "universally good" and "universally bad" (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020), which hints at managers' preference for simple unidimensionality (Williams *et al.*, 2020).

These considerations indicate that the monolithic discourse creates serious concerns. Marketing managers' efforts to understand and manage customer experiences often result in poor judgment, as their comprehension does not mirror the complexity of the customer experience in real life. Hence, we call for more nuances in the customer experience debate by exposing and involving customers' agency and the multidimensionality of their experience, which seriously impacts thinking about customer experience.

### 3. Introducing GraphEx: combining multidimensionality with simplicity

#### 3.1 An overview of existing tools and frameworks

Over the past decade, multiple tools have been developed to grasp customer experience or its underlying or adjacent processes. [Table 1](#) delineates these studies according to their focus, functionality and differences from those of the present study. The current tapestry of tools and frameworks, predominantly stemming from service design, offers valuable insights into the diagnosis and tracking of customer experiences when designing service offerings. Overall, the tools offer strong processual insights into customer-provider relationships and service systems, leading to ample potential for improvement in service design and architecture. However, a framework that encapsulates the multidimensionality of the customer experience while ensuring normative guidance for managers is lacking, as has been called for in previous research ([Jain et al., 2017](#)) (see [Table 1](#)).

Tool or framework	Focus	Functionality	Differences from the present study	Exemplary references
Service (experience) blueprinting	Firm focus on service encounters	Maps front- and backstage processes helping to innovate structured processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service design focus</li> <li>• Process focused</li> <li>• Leaves out multidimensionality and granularity of customer experience</li> <li>• Lacks normative power in terms of managerial practices or interventions</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Bitner et al. (2008)</a> , <a href="#">Patrício et al. (2008)</a>
Customer journey mapping	Primarily customer focus	Maps the service process, typically described in phases, steps, touchpoints and experiences, from the customer's viewpoint – thereby placing the customer at the heart of service system design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maps customer experiences across phases, steps and touchpoints</li> <li>• Places the customer at the heart of service system design</li> <li>• Leaves out multidimensionality and granularity of customer experience</li> <li>• Lacks normative power in terms of managerial practices or interventions</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Lemon and Verhoef (2016)</a> , <a href="#">Rosenbaum et al. (2017)</a>
Management and interaction design for service (MINDS)	Multiple levels of aggregation. (customer, customer-provider, multiple actors)	Integrates understanding the customer experience with designing the service offering at three hierarchical levels: the firm's service concept, the service system and the service encounter. Built further on multilevel service design and interaction design models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service design focus</li> <li>• Involves multiple hierarchical levels and levels of aggregation</li> <li>• Leaves out multidimensionality and granularity of customer experience</li> <li>• Lacks normative power in terms of managerial practices or interventions</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Patrício et al. (2011)</a> , <a href="#">Teixeira et al. (2016)</a>

**Table 1.** Overview of exemplary tools and frameworks related to customer experience

(continued)

Tool or framework	Focus	Functionality	Differences from the present study	Exemplary references
Customer experience modeling	Firm focus based on customer input	Capturing the rich and complex elements (activities, actors, artifacts, technological systems) that shape customer experiences helping service design and orchestration amongst multiple elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrative view of involved activities, actors, artifacts, technological systems</li> <li>• Multilevel activity centric view for service design across three levels: the firm's service concept, the service system and the service encounter</li> <li>• Leaves out multidimensionality and granularity of customer experience</li> <li>• Lacks normative power in terms of managerial practices or interventions</li> </ul>	Teixeira <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Service delivery networks	Dyadic and network focused	Maps actors that are responsible for the provision of a connected overall service experience by taking a holistic view of service delivery networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaves out multidimensionality of customer experience</li> <li>• Focuses mainly on the mapping of actors and their relationships</li> <li>• Focuses on the dyadic customer – provider relationship in a bigger network</li> <li>• Leaves out multidimensionality and granularity of customer experience</li> <li>• Lacks normative power in terms of managerial practices or interventions</li> </ul>	Tax <i>et al.</i> (2013)
GraphEx [present study]	Focus on the customer experience that feed into management practices	Visualizes customer experience in its multidimensionality yet in a simple way, creating insight into (viewing) customer experience and managing it accordingly with concrete practices	N/A	

Table 1.

### 3.2 Abductive approach to the GraphEx development

To meet our objective of visualizing experience in its multidimensionality and providing a managerial grip on customer experience management, we adopt an abductive approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002, 2014) in our design process of the GraphEx hip-pocket model. Abductive thinking is suitable for developing a theory that is simultaneously novel and practical (Nenonen *et al.*, 2017), as it is consistent with the novel fashions of knowledge creation (Dunin-Woyseth and Nilsson, 2011) that aim to tackle real-world problems (Jonas, 2012). The process of abduction involves the systematic combining of multiple resources (Vink and Koskela-Huotari, 2022; Dubois and Gadde, 2002), which in our case were three mutually complementary sources: (1) the broad experience of the three authors, who are

academic experts and have knowledge of customer experience management in practice; (2) the literature on customer experience and its management; and (3) empirical data collected by the first author using an autohermeneutic phenomenological approach, in which the experience as a consumer (and customer) was carefully documented by the author. In line with the abductive approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002, 2014), we went back and forth between the three sources. Eventually, the invention process toward the GraphEx hip-pocket model consisted of an exploratory search over a complex problem space (i.e. customer experience's dimensionality visualization) that required creativity, insight and knowledge of multiple realms of inquiry (i.e. the sensemaking and combination of the three sources used in our study) to find feasible solutions (Gregor and Hevner, 2013).

Autohermeneutic phenomenology is an introspective approach to data collection and interpretation that pierces the essence of a phenomenon. This approach allows one to carry out observant participation in one's life and understand how experience is constituted (Denzin, 2014; Gould, 1995, 2012; Hackley, 2016; Sahhar *et al.*, 2022). Experience tales serving as illustrations for the GraphEx hip-pocket model were gathered through eclectic techniques of systematic self-observation (e.g. interval, event-contingent and free-format narrative recording and *in situ* self-interviews) (Gorichanaz, 2017; Rodriguez and Ryave, 2002) for a period of nine months. As these techniques reduce the distance between occurrence (i.e. experience) and data collection, we enjoyed data that were more accurate, vivid and free from the transformations of faulty memory (Gorichanaz, 2017; Sahhar *et al.*, 2022). All data were gathered according to ethical principles in order to protect the interests of the people involved. For example, in-situ self-interviews were conducted with the service provider when they were not directly involved in our own practice (e.g. working out at a gymnasium independently of an instructor). In addition, with free-format narrative recording, we ensured not to interrupt the actors' practices that were involved in the scene (e.g. walking through a shopping mall and freely recording one's experience). The other techniques were performed in the absence of a service provider.

Data were written in text, recorded in audio or captured in pictures to ensure detail and richness. This resulted in 83 lively tales covering the entire experience spectrum, from mundane to extraordinary experiences and from experiences emerging in interaction with service providers to those arising independently from them. This allowed us to create a broad yet in-depth overview, breach the taken-for-granted and illuminate the everyday intelligibility of the customer experience. For the purposes of this study, we include three rich illustrations that capture a wide array of different experiences across multiple service settings involving intensive provider–customer interaction.

Table 2 illustrates how the GraphEx hip-pocket model was developed over six cycles. While a full-fledged design process consists of multiple iterations to build a “fuzzy model” to a complete application, our study focuses on building an initial model that provides granularity in service theory and guidance for service managers. This creates a pathway for future research and engagement in practice to validate and refine the GraphEx hip-pocket model in further iterations. To accommodate practical replicability for researchers and practitioners, we used generally accessible visualizing software to plot the customer experience, in our case, a combination of Adobe Illustrator and Microsoft PowerPoint. The cyclical process of visualizing the customer experience involved sketching and refining throughout the six cycles. The so-called thinking and talking sketches were used to connect our individual and collective thinking processes, and prescriptive sketches were wielded to eventually arrive at a design that was understandable to persons outside the development process (van der Lugt, 2005). Throughout, figures evolved from preliminary sketches to refined designs and eventually to a detailed design representing the final artifacts (Seitamaa-Hakkarainen and Hakkarainen, 2000).

Cycles in the abductive process			
<b>Activities</b>	Searching, gathering, and making sense of literature in customer experience. Discussing core literature amongst authors, followed by bracketing the paper's focus.	Co-creating building blocks in multiple interactive sessions, involving thinking and talking sketches.	Sharpening and advancing the GraphEx model, including adjacent charts depicting the experience snippets and the managerial practices, while keeping close track of our fundamentals in literature and empirical data. Multiple iterations of individual work and joint interactive co-creation sessions are used.
<b>Outcomes</b>	Clear overview of core literature; distilled key learnings; definition of research focus.	Principle building blocks of the GraphEx hip-pocket model leading to its preliminary and refined design.	Final – and detailed – GraphEx hip-pocket model and supporting figures and tables.

**Table 2.**  
Description of the development of the GraphEx hip-pocket model through six cycles

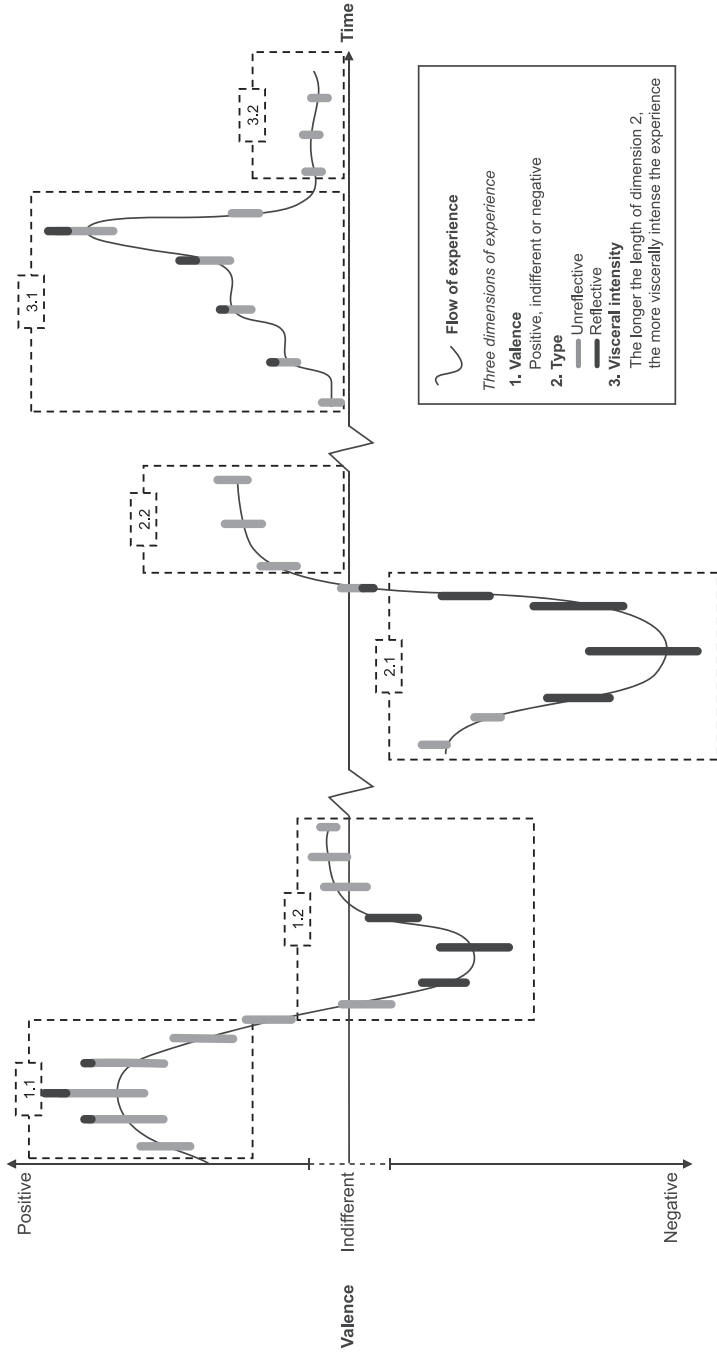
### 3.3 Laying out the GraphEx fundamentals

We created a chart (see Figure 1) of the previously mentioned development cycles to illustrate a simple overview of the multiple dimensions of the customer experience: (1) valence, (2) type and (3) visceral intensity. We briefly elaborate on the dimensions that form the fundamentals of GraphEx.

First, valence is differentiated on the y-axis into positive, neutral (or indifferent) and negative experiences (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Kranzbühler *et al.*, 2020). Positive and negative experiences are straightforward: the former “does good” to the customer, while the latter does the opposite and causes customers to undergo destructive experiences. The valence of experience is placed on a continuum and we thereby oppose the view that experience is monolithic, good or bad. This means that, for example, with a positive experience, one can experience “good” experiences or more positive “excellent” or “extraordinary” experiences. In addition, subjects can experience indifference, a state in which they experience neutral feelings (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020). These are typically referred to as ordinary experiences (Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023). Different qualities can be manifested interchangeably within the valence of experience. For example, subjects can undergo cognitive, behavioral, sensory, emotional and social experiences (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2020) that can be positively, indifferently or negatively valenced. For example, subjects pushing themselves to the limits during a gymnasium workout can experience negatively valenced sensorial aspects (e.g. muscular pain or acidification) and positively valenced emotional aspects (e.g. the pleasure of taking care of one’s health). Therefore, different qualities exist interchangeably in how one experiences them (the valence dimension). Although these qualities are valuable for categorizing customer experiences, a managerial perspective primarily provides insights into the valence dimension for two reasons. First, it identifies the appearance of an experience. Second, the valence dimension is clearly linked to the type of experience and visceral intensity.

Second, customers are not always aware of their own experiences. Therefore, in the second dimension, we distinguish between reflective and unreflective experiences (Ellway and Dean, 2016; Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010; Sahhar and Loohuis, 2022; Heinonen, 2023). This entails





**Figure 1.**  
A chart of the dimensions, underpinning the GraphEx hip-pocket model, consisting of snapshots of experiences in a journey

Source(s): Figure created by author

the possibility of living experiences as reflective (i.e. deliberate and conscious) and unreflective (i.e. undeliberate and unconscious). The lines of experience are gray when the experience is unreflective and black when it is reflective. Occasionally, during moments of customer delight, most of the experience is depicted as unreflective, whereas extremes are reflective. In such instances, customers may be aware of certain service provider features (e.g. brand, specific communications or essential service qualities).

To this end, we add a third dimension, visceral intensity, which describes how viscerally intense an experience is for a subject. This occurs on a continuum of visceral intensity ranging from superficial to profound. In [Figure 1](#), the longer the lines on the flow of experience, the more viscerally intense the experience. We identified this additional dimension of experience based on the earlier work of [Merleau-Ponty \(1962\)](#) that pointed to the importance of the body. The body grants us access to (visceral) experiences in the world in which we live in ([Yakhlef, 2015](#); [Kuuru, 2022](#)). We define visceral as the sensations, moods and ways of being that emerge from sensory engagement with the environment ([Longhurst, 2009](#); [Hayes-Conroy, 2010](#); [Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008](#)). Observing our visceral experience encapsulates all of our senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Furthermore, we can experience something on the surface that is short-lived but also very profound and stretched over time ([Longhurst, 2009](#); [Brakus et al., 2009](#)).

These dimensions are established over time. Time is experienced subjectively as a phenomenological concept ([Orlikowski and Yates, 2002](#)). Hence, experience can go by without any reflection and can be short-lived ([Brakus et al., 2009](#)); that is, “time flies.” Other experiences last longer and are experienced more deliberately when one looks at clock ticking. Therefore, time is not merely objectively determined by a fixed numeric scale (i.e. Chronos) but also subjectively experienced (i.e. Kairos) ([Gibbs, 1998](#)). Furthermore, experiences can be temporally fragmented, as shown in the chart. Therefore, experiences are not always directly related. To illustrate this, we graph three distinct illustrative experiences capturing different experiences.

### *3.4 Illustrating and connecting experiences to managerial responses*

The following section illustrates the experiences presented in the GraphEx chart and relates them to the managerial practices. We have purposively selected three real-life distinctive experiences. Every experience uniquely spans the dimensions, demonstrating a variety of experiences across the dimensions. We have included specific parts of these experiences (see brackets in [Figure 1](#)) to illustrate them in further detail. For example, experience snippets 1.1 and 1.2 show a different experience than 2.1 and 2.2. The results are shown in the left column of [Table 3](#). In addition, we have connected the experiences with managerial practices, which are depicted in the right column of the table and discussed in further detail in the next section. Linking experience to managerial practices is valuable, as marketing managers can see what kind of response corresponds to that experience. As shown in [Table 3](#), each managerial practice aligns with a corresponding piece of experience.

## **4. GraphEx hip-pocket model for marketing and service managers**

GraphEx offers ample room in the marketing and service realm to foster managers’ capabilities to understand and manage customer experiences with sensitivity to agency and multidimensionality. As a supplement to the previously detailed illustrations linking experience to managerial practices, we provide business leaders and marketing managers with the GraphEx hip-pocket model as a tool and heuristic to become more sensitive and better equipped to “manage” customer experiences (see [Figure 2](#)). Management practices are built into five layers, which are discussed in further detail.

**Table 3.**  
Illustrative experiences  
with associated  
managerial practices  
that underpin the  
GraphEx model

Tales according to experiences in Figure 1	Managerial practice aligned with experience
<p>1.1 <i>Experience turned around: From delight downwards</i></p> <p>"It has been a day packed with meetings," Yves sighs to his girlfriend, Aude. After a hard day of work, they decide to go to the gym to attend the intensive yoga workout at 20.00. The best yoga master, according to many people who visit the same gym, organizes the session. Dressed in their sports outfits, Yves and Aude are on their way to the gym. Yves listens with curiosity to the positive experiences Aude shares about last week's yoga workout, building his expectations gradually [<i>upward movement of experience</i>]. Upon their arrival, the coach behind the entrance counter hands Yves the new bracelet for checking in. "You're the first client to receive one!" he mentions. Previously, people used to have a credit card-like card, which was easy to slop around. Happily surprised and looking at his new bracelet with the gym logo "Circle of Form" on it, Yves is excited for the workout and quickly descends to the locker room to store his backpack in a locker. Shortly afterwards, he enters the yoga room, in which the yoga master has created an atmospheric vibe. The gentle lighting for the start of the session, typical incense and relaxing music welcome and absorb Yves in the room. Even though his expectation had already accumulated to a certain level in advance, he did not foresee this. Positively surprised and experiencing a feeling of delight with an additional curiosity about what the yoga master has to offer [<i>peak experience</i>], Yves installs himself at the center of the room in such a way that he can monitor the master's movements and positions in the mirror. Two minutes later, the session starts, commencing with some simple warm-up movements. After five minutes, the yoga master increases the volume of the music and brightens the lighting, indication an acceleration in the pace, rhythm, and intensity of the session. Moments afterwards, Yves moves from the Warrior II movement to the Triangle Pose, after which he finds himself in the classical plank position that toughens upper-body muscularity and strength stamina. At that moment, he notices that the woman behind him is disturbing the pleasant flow of movements [<i>decrease in experience</i>].</p>	<p><b>Bolster.</b> The service provider can attempt to engage in the customer's practices and positively influence those practices to solidify and further boost the customer experience.</p> <p><b>Safeguard appreciation.</b> While the service provider facilitated moments of delight for the customer, the service provider should ensure two things. First, the customer should be allowed to appreciate the service and the experience. This can be done through engaging in the customer's practices and creating positive temporal friction. Second, it is vital to continue to support the customer's practices to allow him/her to reach his/her goals.</p> <p><b>Bolster.</b> The service provider should (re)engage in the customer's processes by additional practices to attempt turning the negative direction of experience by again boosting his/her experiences.</p>
	<p>(continued)</p>

1.2 **Experience stabilized: From negative to positive indifferent**

Struggling to find her position while her yoga mat slips away, the woman behind Yves bumps into his yoga mat several times. This continuously disturbs him from achieving proper positioning and conducting the movements in the right way. The woman seems to be unaware that she is interrupting Yves. With slight frustration, Yves attempts to move forward but struggles to do so, as the room is packed with people. To the best of his abilities, Yves continues his workout but seems to be distracted and blocked from the pleasant flow he was hoping for. Still, shortly after the yoga session, he decides to finish his workout with his twenty-minute strength workout routine. Even though many people are in the strength room, Yves recovers his rhythm while listening to his favorite workout playlist [*upward motion of experience*]. He finishes off with a recovery in the sauna, and upon arrival at home, Yves prepares a healthy dinner and seems to disregard the annoying experience he lived through during the yoga session [*stabilized experience*].

**Restore.** Although the service provider is not directly responsible for the behavior of other customers that influences the focal customer's experience, the service provider should identify the critical event and attempt to recover the customer's experience through becoming engaged in his/her practice.

**Activate and stimulate desire.** As the customer's experience evolves to a phase of indifference, the service provider should attempt to stimulate or trigger the customer experience without being too opportunistic or interfering with the customer's practices.

2.1 **Experience destructed: Deep parabola opening up**

Anthony has been waiting multiple days for the book he ordered at BookStock & Co. He was disappointed not to receive any updates on his order. At some point, the experience of waiting for the book turned from something at the front of his mind to something numb [*slightly negative indifferent experience*]. From this point of departure, the long wait is over, as the book surprisingly found its end destination in the mailbox. Because of the earlier deceptive delivery process, Anthony maintains his skepticism. When he opens the package, this skepticism becomes a complete destructive experience, as the package does not contain the correct book. Instead of the magnum opus of one of his favorite 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers, it is a book on statistical data models. "As there could not be any bigger difference," Anthony thinks ironically. His predominant feelings are an enormous sense of deception, frustration, and anger [*ultimate depth in experience*]. He blames BookStock & Co first for the faulty delivery and a split-second after for the entire delivery process that was completely out of order. With this feeling, Anthony reaches out via a direct phone call with the customer service of BookStock & Co. to explain the error in delivery. The BookStock & Co. customer service representative does everything in her power to curb this destructive experience through immediate patchwork [*slightly upward negative experience*]. Through being helped out in this way, Anthony's experience recovers slowly but surely.

**Activate and stimulate desire.** The service provider should actively engage in the customer's practices to overcome the negative indifference in experience.

**Restore.** The service provider should take action to recover the customer's experience and turn it into an upward-moving experience.

**Urgently patch.** The service provider must respond with immediate action to lift the customer out of his/her destructive experience. Swift patchwork and soothing are vital.

**Restore.** After having patched the experience, the service provider should ensure the upward motion of experience by remaining engaged and stabilizing the situation

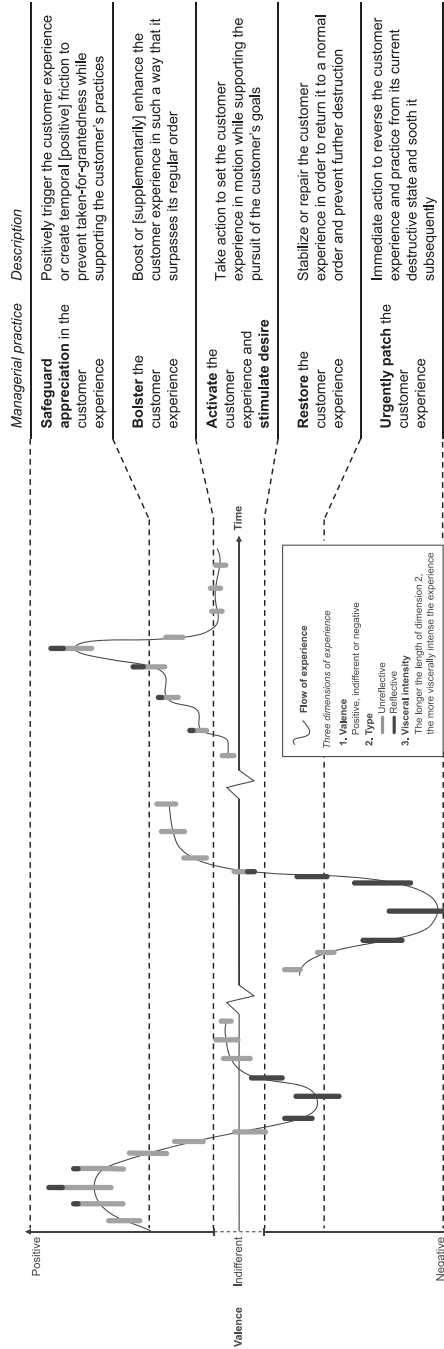
(continued)

Table 3.

Table 3.

<p>2.2 <b>Experience revamped: From negative to positive</b> After the patchwork, Anthony's experience is neutralized. Next, the customer service representative organizes a new delivery and promises a discount voucher as a compensation for the faulty delivery, turning Anthony's previous negative experience into a positive one. Simultaneously, he remains slightly insecure. The fact that the customer service representative ensures and verifies the dispatch of the book herself reassures Anthony. His experience is revamped and over time stabilizes on a positive continuum.</p>	<p><b>Bolster.</b> Due to the previous experience on behalf of the customer, it is vital that the service provider continues to strengthen the customer's experience to fully regain the customer's confidence and trust.</p>
<p>3.1 <b>Experience increased step-by-step: From positive indifferent to delight</b> Jim orders a meal via food and delivery platform Deliveroo. Based on previous experiences, he chooses one of his favorite Asian fried chicken restaurants, "Fry Brothers." The ordering process goes fluently, and within a couple of minutes, Jim receives a notification via the Deliveroo app: "Your order will be delivered by Kamel" [<i>first increase in experience</i>]. This (re)activates Jim's experience and creates the feeling of looking forward to receiving the meal. Soon, Jim is notified that Kamel is on his way to deliver the meal and that he will be notified when the delivery is nearby. [<i>second increase in experience</i>]. In the meantime, Jim returns to watching his documentary on YouTube. As expected, a few minutes later, the Deliveroo app notifies Jim that Kamel is nearby and instructs him to keep an eye his mobile phone for any further instructions. The doorbell rings, bolstering Jim's experience, and fully in line with COVID-19 regulations, Kamel leaves the meal in the elevator. Happily, Jim collects the meal as the scent of fried chicken welcomes him to start his dinner. Confirming his previous experiences with Fry Brothers, the correct meal is delivered. Complementary to this, the employees left a personal handwritten message on the bag: "Enjoy your meal! The Fry Brothers." Jim is happy with this gesture [<i>third stretched steep increase in experience</i>], rewards Kamel with a small tip and enjoys his meal while immersing himself in the documentary on YouTube.</p>	<p><b>Activate and stimulate desire.</b> The service provider can trigger the customer's experience by mobilizing the customer's practice.</p> <p><b>Bolster.</b> The service provider should continue to facilitate the customer in the upward-moving experience to surpass the regular order. In this case, repetitively triggering the customer helps to achieve customer delight.</p> <p><b>Safeguard appreciation.</b> The service provider can attempt to deliver an extraordinary experience by surpassing previous efforts by, for example, positively surprising the customer to exceed his/her expectations. Simultaneously, the service provider should be aware of any taken-for-grantedness on the customer's part. Positive friction would breach this.</p>
<p>3.2 <b>Experience settled down: Landing in positive indifference</b> Shortly after the feeling of delight in the meal delivery, enjoying the meal and satisfying his appetite, Jim continues to watch the documentary on YouTube. He finds himself in the rudimentary situation of continuing his evening of watching the documentary without recalling the meal from Fry Brothers.</p>	<p><b>Activate and stimulate desire.</b> The service provider can trigger the customer in a positive way to set the customer's experience in motion while supporting the customer's jobs to be done.</p>

*Note: The tales depict real-life experiences in the daily life of a consumer (and customer) that were collected in an autohermeneutic phenomenological study by the first author.*



Source(s): Figure created by author

Figure 2.  
The GraphEx  
hip-pocket model

When the experience is most harmful, we propose an urgent patchwork to reverse the destructive state of the customer's experience and practice. Ideally, this should be followed by soothing the customer. Second, when the experience is in a more generally negative state, marketing managers should restore the customer's experience to prevent further destruction and return it to normal (Sahhar *et al.*, 2021; Van Vaerenbergh *et al.*, 2019). Third, when the customer experience is indifferent, we propose activating customer experience and stimulating desire. Service providers can (proactively) take action to positively set the customer's experience while supporting their goals. Fourth, when the customer experience is generally positive, a marketing manager can consider bolstering the customer experience to enhance it (Sahhar *et al.*, 2021). Subsequently, customers may experience a sensation of delight (Ball and Barnes, 2017; Guidice *et al.*, 2020). In this situation, we propose a fifth managerial practice that safeguards appreciation. Marketing managers can positively trigger a customer's experience with a practice that can act as a positive temporal friction (Sahhar and Loohuis, 2022) facilitating customers' curiosity and involvement (Siebert *et al.*, 2020). This is useful to prevent any taken-for-grantedness and make customers aware of the service provider's service quality in novel ways.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Implications for service researchers and managers

Customer experience is a popular topic and a promising driver of sustainable competitive business advantage. The central premise is strategically differentiating customer experiences (Dhebar, 2013) to ensure that customers want to return (Williams *et al.*, 2021). In doing so, companies are increasingly investing in managing touchpoints through omnichannel services facilitated by emerging technologies (Silva *et al.*, 2021; Teixeira *et al.*, 2016). However, customer experience remains a complex concept that is, for its majority, understood and managed in a myopic and unidimensional way. In response, this study delivers a comprehensive and multidimensional visualization of customer experience while safeguarding sufficient simplicity for managerial practice. The GraphEx hip-pocket model, supported by charts and illustrations, expresses customer experience over time in three dimensions (valence, type of experience and visceral intensity).

We contribute to service theory (Heinonen, 2023; Helkkula *et al.*, 2012; Silva *et al.*, 2021) by disclosing the multidimensional premises of customer experience and adding granularity to this complex yet topical phenomenon. In addition, we open avenues for further research into formalizing the nature of the customer experience and advancing epistemological and methodological approaches to comprehend it. In practice, managers can visualize experiences in three comprehensive dimensions throughout customer journeys through the adoption of the GraphEx hip-pocket model. This feeds marketing and service managers with novel insights into their task of understanding what and how customers experience, both in interactions with offerings and outside, in the customer domain in which *ex situ* value can emerge (Heinonen *et al.*, 2019; Heinonen, 2023). It is essential to include the role of emerging technologies in service innovation(s), enabling seamless customer experiences (Teixeira *et al.*, 2016). The GraphEx hip-pocket model provides five concrete managerial practices to foster a marketing manager's capability to anticipate customer experiences in innovative ways.

### 5.2 Future research agenda for customer experience

Although there is wide agreement among service researchers and managers regarding the importance of customer experience, a more comprehensive understanding of customer experience, including its multidimensionality, is necessary (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Jain *et al.*, 2017). This study contributes to resolving this omission by developing GraphEx, a

helpful tool and heuristic that ties customer experience and managerial interventions. However, the GraphEx hip-pocket model must be considered the start of a journey to enhance our understanding of the relationship between customer experience and managerial intervention. Therefore, future empirical research is required to expand and deepen knowledge about the multidimensionality of customer experience in various business (service) contexts involving a plenitude of actors. To help promote this quest, we propose a research agenda for future research on the priorities of *understanding, measuring, testing and validating, designing* and *managing* customer experience (see Table 4).

Priorities for customer experience	Possible subthemes/topics	Questions
Understanding	Multidimensionality	What other dimensions of customer experience tap into the nature of the phenomenon? Which dimensions of customer experience are more dominant over others? How do the dimensions of customer experience relate to value co-creation and co-destruction? What role does the customer's agency play in interplay with the dimensions of customer experience? How does unreflective and reflective customer experience relate to customer delight? What underlying mechanisms exist between the multidimensionality of customer experience? What role do customer emotions play in the multidimensionality of customer experience? How can techniques, such as autohermeneutic phenomenology, be implemented in practice in a feasible way?
	Omnichannel	How do different channels shape customer experience? What distinction can be made between on- and offline channels in shaping dimensions of customer experience? How do human and nonhuman-driven channels impact customer experience? What role does the anthropomorphizing of nonhuman channels play in facilitating customer experience?
	Touchpoints	How is customer experience formed in provider-owned touchpoints? How is customer experience formed in customer-owned touchpoints? How is customer experience socially constructed? How does the service encounter of the future shape customer experience? How do the dimensions of customer experience relate to service encounters across service scapes?
	Technology	How does emerging technology (e.g. robots, AI, or smart technologies) impact customer experience? What role does technology play in shaping the valence of customer experience? What ethical considerations should be made in the interplay between technology and customer experience? What role does the customer's agency play in self-service technologies (SSTs)? How do SSTs impact customer experience, both positively and negatively? How do emerging technologies impact customer expectations and experiences? What is the interplay between emerging technologies and the individual and collective customer experience? What are the unintended consequences of emerging technologies in relation to customer experience? What bright and dark sides of emerging technologies can be identified for customer experience? How does digitalization impact the customer experience?

(continued)

**Table 4.**  
Future research  
agenda for customer  
experience initiated by  
GraphEx



Priorities for customer experience	Possible subthemes/topics	Questions
Measuring		How can multiple dimensions of customer experience be measured? How can multiple dimensions of customer experience be measured over time? How does customer experience dimensions impact customer loyalty and customer lifetime value? What measurement indicators can be linked to the dimensions of customer experience? How to measure unreflective or mundane customer experience across the customer journey? What is the effect of unreflective experiences on customer loyalty? What metrics can be identified that link the multidimensionality of customer experience and the firm's (financial) performance? How can subjective dimensions, such as visceral intensity, be measured effectively?
Testing and validating	Multiple service settings	To what extent do the multiple dimensions apply across service settings? How do the dimensions of customer experience fit different levels of customer-provider interaction? In which service settings are the dimensions most applicable and which are not?
	Efficacy of practices	How do the management practices impact customer experience? What effect do management practices have on the multiple dimensions of customer experience?
Designing		What complementary service design techniques can be developed to the extant literature? How can service design techniques be successfully implemented within complex organizations? How can service design help in service system transformation?
Managing	Practices	What other management practices can be identified across dimensions of customer experience? How do practices amongst each other differ? What nexus of practices can be identified? What underlying mechanisms can be identified? How do these mechanisms impact customer experience? What typologies of customer experience management can be identified in accordance with customer experience's multidimensionality? How do managerial practices relate to service recovery practices? How can managerial practices expand the body of service recovery literature?
		Pathways
	Organizational capabilities	What organization capabilities are necessary for managing customer experience effectively? What (service) transformation is necessary for organizations to manage customer experience effectively? How should service proposition, service innovation and service strategies be adapted for customer experience? How can organizations, in a systemic way, align their service operations with the facilitation of customer experience?
	Service culture	What service culture should be in place to effectively facilitate customer experience? What elements foster and restrain successful 'customer-centric' service cultures? How can service cultures be transformed for the well-being of customers and the enhancement of their experience?

Table 4.

### 5.3 Research limitations

Although this study sparks the potential for setting a future research agenda, we also identify three main limitations. First, while the autohermeneutic phenomenological approach possesses great potential to uncover in-depth insights into customer experience, we acknowledge several inherent challenges. For example, the approach cannot be outlined in a strict stepwise process; therefore, it requires the researcher's skills (Sahhar, 2022; Gorichanaz, 2017; Dibley *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, autohermeneutic phenomenological approaches may be accused of being subjective. The challenge for managers willing to use GraphEx is to translate their experience and interventions based on their own business context and understanding of customer experience. Second, while this study offers conceptual clarity on the multidimensionality of the customer experience and solidifies managerial footholds for managing it, it lacks evidence-based research that can further refine and formalize the dimensions and managerial practices. A similar argument is that managers work iteratively through interventions, thereby making the GraphEx model sensitive to managerial practices in its own business context. Finally, we argue that this study omits the inclusion of multiple service settings, which are especially relevant in today's increasingly digitalized landscapes (Silva *et al.*, 2021).

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