

## Customer Experience Management: Underexplored Instrument for Customer Transformation

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the article:** The purpose of this article is to identify the role the customer experience plays in the transformation of the customer and to develop a theory that brings together related concepts in order to position the phenomenon of customer experience in the macromarketing context.

**Methodology/methods:** The grounded theory development approach is based upon the sequential search and content analysis of the research papers acquired primarily from Scopus and Web of Science databases and by the process of citation chaining.

**Scientific aim:** The aim of this article is to identify customer experience related concepts and relationships between them to lay the foundation for empirical research in the area of customer experience and transformation management.

**Findings:** The research points out to the significant role of the customer experience in the transformation of the customer and therefore to the necessity to approach marketing initiatives to customer experience management thoroughly to achieve the desired marketing results, but also responsibly and ethically to promote growth not the degradation of the society.

**Conclusions:** The cycle of the customer transformation as outlined through the conceptual model contains weak spots which can provide free space for negative effects of the company's outputs on the customer. The trend of digitisation and digital products can significantly amplify this possibility and increase the overall negative effect. From another standpoint, several problematic spots can cause difficulties for companies intentionally trying to transform the customer through their outputs, namely intent-result gap, reality-perception gap, single-part gap, and experience-memory gap.

Scientific research in this area might support the effectiveness of marketing initiatives, increase transparency in the field of customer experience and transformation, and lead to increased customers' well-being, long-term happiness, life satisfaction, and quality of life.

**Keywords:** customer experience, transformation economy, ethics, macromarketing, positive marketing

**JEL Classification:** M31, D91

## 1. Introduction

The marketing concept of the customer experience has been in the academic and managerial spotlight for more than two decades, but its roots can be traced back to the works of Abbott (1955). As one of the milestones in terms of customer experience knowledge development may be considered the research of Holbrook and Hirschman, whose work was focused on the consumption experience (*e.g.* Hirschman, Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook, Hirschman, 1982; Hirschman, Holbrook, 1986). In 1989, Thompson *et al.* (1989) called, directly in the title of the article, for putting the consumer experience back into consumer research. In 1992, Kerin *et al.* (1992) published a paper on the store shopping experience. In 1993, Arnould, Price (1993) published their often-cited paper on extraordinary service experience, while Mano, Oliver (1993) addressed the structure and dimensions of the consumption experience. In 1994, Carbone, Haeckel (1994) published a practically oriented paper called “Engineering Customer Experience”, which is considered as the next significant milestone in the field of customer experience. At the turn of the millennium, Pine, Gilmore (1998) published the paper “Welcome to the Experience Economy” and the book “The Experience Economy” (Pine, Gilmore, 1999), and Holbrook’s colleague Schmitt (1999a) published the paper “Experiential Marketing” and the book with the same name (Schmitt, 1999b). These four influential works published within just two years created a significant milestone for customer experience phenomena starting the two decades of intense research in the field. Twenty years ahead and Becker, Jaakkola (2020, p. 637) come with another revolutionary non-reductionist definition of customer experience: “non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to particular stimuli”, which De Keyser *et al.* (2020) consider practically unhelpful while rephrasing it as “customer experience is everything”.

Just as the increased scientific and managerial focus on the marketing concept of customer experience with the wider acceptance of its name can be dated to the period of the mid and late 1990s (Carbone, Haeckel, 1994; Pine, Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999a), the same applies to the term “user experience” in the field of human-computer interaction (Merholz, 2007). While the customer experience can be rephrased as the experience of the customer of a certain company, the user experience then as the experience of the user of a certain good, therefore the subordinate concept of the superior concept of the customer experience (Salazar, 2019). In this sense, the customer can have different roles depending on the situation and context in which he finds himself during his customer journey, for example, a user having a user experience when he interacts with the good, a buyer having a buyer experience when he buys goods or services, a complainer having a complainer experience when he tries to solve the problem on the customer line, *etc.* (Lemon, Verhoef, 2016). All these subordinate types of experience result from the interaction between the customer and the stimuli that were or were not intentionally designed by the company to influence the customer’s experience and his resulting behaviour (De Keyser *et al.*, 2020).

This research paper builds on the previous research by the author (Havir, 2020) on experience economy and transformation economy (Pine, Gilmore, 1997, 2011), where the links between human perception, human needs fulfilment, human resources, quality of life, design, marketing metrics, and the experience, considered from the perspective of psychology and philosophy, are hypothesized and continues in the multidisciplinary research with the aim to establish the links between other possible concepts related to this topic to present the broader perspective on the customer experience phenomenon, its antecedents, and consequences within the fields of macromarketing and behavioural

economy. Second, this research is based on the direction of positive marketing (Gopaldas, 2015; Mittelstaedt *et al.*, 2015; Scott *et al.*, 2014).

## 2. Methodology

This research paper follows the grounded theory development approach (Strauss, Corbin, 1990). The initial general question for this research is “what role the customer experience plays in the transformation of the customer“, as Pine, Gilmore, (2011) argue that the customer experience is just the temporary evolutionary step of the economic offering which will be followed by the final step of the economic offering – the transformations and which will be delivered through the transforming experience during the era of the transformation economy.

The theory development is based on the analysis of the secondary sources, specifically scientific articles, whose collection was primarily conducted in the scientific databases Scopus and Web of Science, but not limited to as the citation chaining process was used as well. The literature search and consequent scanning, skimming and content analysis (Erlingsson, Brysiewicz, 2017) were conducted sequentially and iteratively,

until the initial and emergent concepts and their relationships were further supported by the literature or discarded by the lack of support through the process of open, axial (theoretical), selective coding, and concurrent diagramming (Strauss, Corbin, 1990, 1998).

The supported concepts with the list of selected (to keep the paper of reasonable length) supporting sources and paraphrased excerpts can be found in the next chapter Theoretical Framework, while the resulting conceptual model with hypothesised relationships and supporting sources is placed in the following chapter Results. The developed model laid the foundation for the discussion in the chapter Discussions, and the avenues for future research, that can be found by the end of the chapter Conclusions.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This section contains an overview of the individual concepts which emerged from the iterative literature search and analysis together with selected excerpts from the literature sources related to those concepts which were the subject of the process of coding and became a foundation for the resulting conceptual model presented in the next chapter and further discussion.

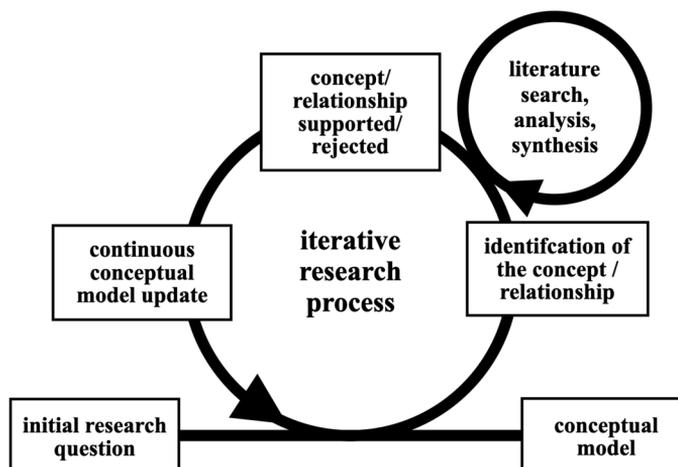


Figure 1. Research process visualisation. Source: Own processing.

Table 1. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of design (C8).

Reference	Excerpt
Parrish (2009, p. 513)	“Immediate qualities are not attended to simply for their immediate rewards – they are designed to lend the experience lasting resonance”
Desmet <i>et al.</i> (2013, p. 1)	“Design is transforming into a more expansive discipline, one that includes the coordinated design of artefacts, services, systems, environments, human action, and many other resources.”
Sääksjärvi, Hellén (2013, p. 33)	“Designers can be argued to play a key role in the success of marketing strategies when creating business concepts: designers plan and execute the function and aesthetics of the product (and sometimes also services).”
Flaherty (2019)	“While it is important to design the longitudinal experience, it’s equally important to design its components.”

Table 2. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of stimulus (C1).

Reference	Excerpt
Mehrabian, Russel (1974, p. 18)	“Physical or social stimuli in the environment directly affect the emotional state of the person”
Mehrabian, Russel (1974, p. 56)	“Evidence that related the proposed emotional dimensions to the more traditional stimulus categories based on sense modalities.”
Gibson (1977, p. 68)	“The affordances of the environment are what it offers animals, what it provides or furnishes, for good or ill.”
Oosterwijk <i>et al.</i> (2012, p. 2111)	“Brain constructs mental states [...] by creating situated conceptualisations [...] that combine three sources of stimulation: sensory stimulation from the world outside the skin [...], sensory signals from within the body [...], and prior experience.”

### 3.1 Design (C8)

The concept of the design, more precisely the design process is the key activity of the customer experience management, the part of the company’s strategic marketing, as is the user interface design inseparable from the user experience design. Through the design of the stimuli, the company is able to influence one of the variables from the customer experience equation. In the final conceptual model, the design represents the smallest part of the process that affects the perceptible form of the stimulus.

### 3.2 Stimulus (C1)

The stimulus concept represents everything a customer consciously and unconsciously perceives and influences his behaviour further affecting the company. This definition respects the non-reductionist approach in the field of customer experience but points to the infinite possibilities for differentiation. The stimulus is the key variable in the customer experience equation and can be found

for example as the key element in the stimulus-organism-response and the other models of perception. All the stimuli are defined by their attributes and from the interaction point of view of their affordances.

### 3.3 Perception (C2)

The concept of the perception represents the most elementary process of the individual’s internalisation of the stimulus within an (inter)action. The perceptual process cannot be described precisely as it is very variable, but in this study, the concept encompasses miscellaneous sequences and cycles consisting of the sensory collection, sensory transduction, cognitive processing, affect generation, and projection into the consciousness and unconsciousness.

### 3.4 Experience (C3)

The experience is the concept based on the cumulatively associated percepts which are the continuous results of the perception process which can be, in other words in this context, called experiencing.

Table 3. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of perception (C2).

Reference	Excerpt
Mehrabian, Russel (1974, p. 29)	“Personality and temporary internal states [...] combine with the situation to determine the overall emotional response.”
Kahneman (2003, p. 1454)	“Perception is reference-dependent: the perceived attributes of a focal stimulus reflect the contrast between that stimulus and a context of prior and concurrent stimuli.”
Marinier, Lard (2004, p. 174)	“Perception processes stimuli from both external and internal sources and sends them to other systems.”
Oosterwijk <i>et al.</i> (2012, p. 2111)	“During every moment of waking life, the brain constructs mental states such as emotions, body states, and thoughts by creating situated conceptualizations [...] that combine three sources of stimulation.”
Klaus (2019, p. 7)	“What are brands but a collection of direct and interactions that is manifested in our brain as an overall perception.”

Table 4. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of experience (C3).

Reference	Excerpt
Carbone, Haeckel (1994, p. 9)	“By, experience’ we mean the, take-away impression formed by people’s encounters with products, services, and businesses – a perception produced when humans consolidate sensory information.”
Forlizzi, Battarbee (2004, p. 261)	“Experience that results from interacting with products”
De Keyser <i>et al.</i> (2015, p. 15)	“Customer experience is comprised of the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, and social elements that mark the customer’s direct or indirect interaction with a (set of) market actor(s).”
Roy (2018, p. 401)	“Definition of customer experience as summarized by the author is as follows: A gestalt of affective and cognitive elements resulting from a service encounter that may lead to attitudinal outcomes such as satisfaction and repeat purchase intention and behavioural outcomes such as loyalty and word of mouth.”
Becker, Jaakkola (2020, p. 637)	“Customer experience should be defined as non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to particular stimuli.”

### 3.5 Memory (C4)

The concept of memory is based on the common distinction between different types of remembering, such as short-term and long-term and it represents the result of the encoding of the experience (percepts) in the brain, as well as non-sensory related memory of the

individual such as genetic memory. This concept thus, besides genetic memory, encompasses concepts such as working memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory (episodic and semantic), explicit and implicit memory, declarative and procedural memory, retrospective, and prospective memory.

Table 5. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of memory (C4).

Reference	Excerpt
Forlizzi, Battarbee (2004, p. 265)	“Each product interaction in an experience can be characterized by a particular fleeting emotional response [...] and is ultimately stored in memory as a particular aspect of an experience.”
Kahneman, Riis (2005, p. 286)	“Memories are what we get to keep from our experience.”
Norman (2009, p. 24)	“What matters is the total experience. Furthermore, the actual experience is not as important as the way in which it is remembered.”
Weidemann <i>et al.</i> (2019, p. 1)	“The ability to remember events and facts depends on separate episodic and semantic memory systems respectively.”

### 3.6 Personality (C5)

The personality in this research is understood broadly as the representation of the individual physical setting, including memory, and its manifestation in their original behaviour, therefore interaction with all kinds of stimuli in a specific time. The concept encompasses traditional components of temperament and character.

### 3.7 Society and Culture (C6, C7)

The society and culture in this study represent an analogy to the personality at the higher level of groupings of individuals that share the same characteristics or resources. This independence from the particular individual allows non-centralised distributed memory and thus storage of the experience and resulting behavioural patterns in the brains of the members, their tools and envi-

ronments, which can be shared and further act as the stimuli for long periods of time far beyond the lifetime of the individual even one generation.

### 3.8 Quality of Life

The concept of the quality of life is often associated with the concepts of well-being, happiness and life satisfaction, and short-term and long-term perspectives. In this paper, the term quality of life is used as the current evaluation of the past life; therefore, the current evaluation of the result of all the perceptions and interactions (experience) from the individual's life, further leading to the states of happiness, life satisfaction, perceived well-being or the opposites. This evaluation is therefore based on the perception of the content of the memory. The quality of life assessment is then understood as the

Table 6. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of personality (C5).

Reference	Excerpt
McAdams (1996, p. 295)	“Three relatively independent levels on which modern persons may be described [...] Personality traits, like those included within the Big Five taxonomy, reside at Level I [...] provide a general, comparative, and non-conditional dispositional signature for the person. Level II subsumes tasks, goals, projects, tactics, defences, values, and other developmental, motivational, and/or strategic concerns that contextualize a person's life in time, place, and role. [...] life stories reside at the third level of personality, as internalized integrative narrations of the personal past, present, and future.”
Robinson (2008, p. 161)	“The personality traits are also partly determined by genetic differences and by the cumulative effects of prior experience.”
Sheldon (2009, p. 271)	Four “tiers” of personality and personality theory Personality = Self/Life-Story + Goals/Intentions + Traits/Individual Differences + Organismic Foundations
Sheldon (2009, p. 272)	“Personality traits emerge in the interaction between basic human nature and the individual person's unique genetics and developmental history.”

Table 7. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of society and culture (C6, C7).

Reference	Excerpt
Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 268)	“Because consumer behaviour is largely driven by the desire to satisfy needs that have been programmed in our minds either by the genes we inherit or the memes we learn from the culture in which we live.”
Ryan, Deci (2000, p. 75)	“Need satisfaction is facilitated by the internalization and integration of culturally endorsed values and behaviour.”
Sheldon (2004, p. vii)	“Social, and cultural factors that each make unique contributions to human behaviour.”
McAdams, Pals (2006, p. 211)	“Culture exerts different effects on different levels of personality: [...] on the phenotypic expression of traits; [...] content and timing of characteristic adaptations; [...] influence on life stories, essentially providing a menu of themes, images, and plots for the psychosocial construction of narrative identity.”

Table 8. Selected example excerpts related to the concept of quality of life.

Reference	Excerpt
Diener (2006, p. 154)	“Quality of life usually refers to the degree to which a person’s life is desirable versus undesirable, often with an emphasis on external components, such as environmental factors and income. In contrast to subjective well-being, which is based on subjective experience, quality of life is often expressed as more “objective” and describes the circumstances of a person’s life rather than his or her reaction to those circumstances. However, some scholars define quality of life more broadly, to include not only the quality of life circumstances, but also the person’s perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and reactions to those circumstances.”
Sirgy, Lee (2006, p. 27)	“Marketing practices that have a negative influence on the well-being of consumers. These marketing practices include the design and manufacture of poor-quality products, failure to ensure product safety, misleading advertising, among others.”
Costanza <i>et al.</i> (2007, p. 268)	“We therefore need a more basic approach to defining quality of life (QOL) that, in turn, can guide our efforts to improve humans’ daily life experience.”
Felce (2007, p. 126)	“Quality of life which integrates objective and subjective indicators and individual values across a broad range of life domains. Life domains issues may be categorized within six areas: physical, material, social, productive, emotional and civic well-being.”
Cloninger, Zohar (2011, p. 24)	“Personality explained nearly half the variance in happiness and more than one-third of the variance in wellness.”

overall result of the state of the all mentioned concepts, in the context of this paper it plays an overarching role and provides a starting point for the further discussion later in the paper.

### 3.9 Related Models

Due to the interdisciplinarity of customer experience, these customer experience related concepts can be identified across disciplines and found in several existing models, for example the multi-store model of memory (Atkinson, Shiffrin, 1968), the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model (Mehrabian, Russel, 1974), the model contrasting information-processing and experiential view (Holbrook, Hirschman, 1982), the cognitive-affective processing system (CAPS) model (Mischel, Shoda, 1995), McAdams’ (1996) three-level framework of personality, Damasio’s (1999) model of consciousness, Soar-Emote model (Marinier, Laird, 2004), the model by Fiore, Kim (2007), Sheldon’s (2009) SLOPIC model, Nagasawa’s models integrating the Japanese concept of Kansei, Schmitt’s (1999a) types of experience and Norman’s (2004) levels of design (Irisawa, Nagasawa, 2010; Nagasawa, 2015), or models proposed by the researchers studying

emotions (overview in Havíř, 2019), therefore proposed model in the following chapter can be, basically, perceived as their high-level conceptual integration from the customer experience and customer transformation perspective.

## 4. Results

The synthesis of the knowledge acquired during the theoretical development and based on the links between the concepts related to the customer experience resulted in the circular model describing the interconnected influences and transformations of the customers’ internal and external environments. From the high-level perspective, this model covers the process of evolution in the context of marketing from the perspective of a) the customer, and b) the company in a neutral way.

The customer’s journey in this model is represented by a cycle of the subjective (personality dependent, C5) perception (H1, C2) of the stimuli (C1), accumulation (H2) of experience (C3), encoding (H3) of the experience into the brain (memorizing) (C4), transformation (H4) of the personality (C5).

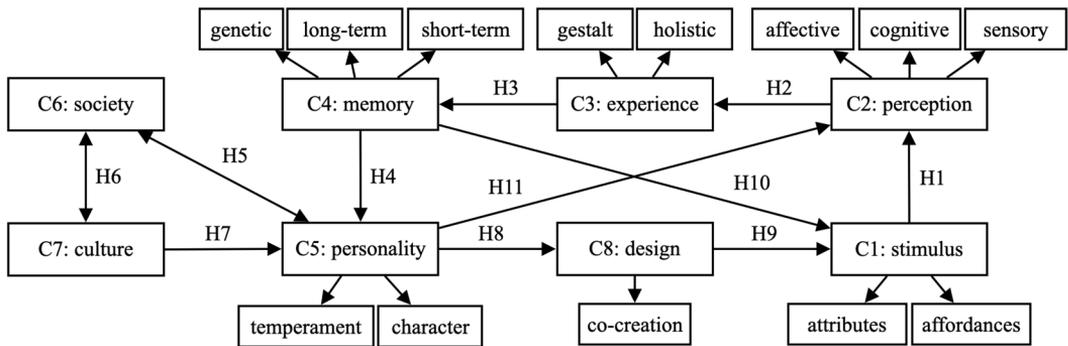


Figure 2. Holistic circular model of customer experience and the related topics. Source: Own processing.

Table 9. Overview of the hypothesized relationships.

Relationship	Statement	Selected foundational sources
H1	(Inter)action with a stimulus leads to its perception by the individual	Mehrabian, Russel (1974); Lazarus (1982); Holbrook, Hirschman (1982); Ulrich (1983); Mayer <i>et al.</i> (1997); Damasio (1999); Hassenzahl <i>et al.</i> (2013); Sääksjärvi, Hellén (2013)
H2	Sum of partial individual’s perceptions creates the gestalt experience	Holbrook, Hirschman (1982); Hirschman, Holbrook (1986); Carbone, Haeckel (1994); Gentile <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassenzahl (2008); Verhoef <i>et al.</i> (2009); Schmitt (2011); Woodward, Holbrook (2013); De Keyser <i>et al.</i> (2015); Lemon, Verhoef (2016); Roy (2018); Becker, Jaakkola (2020); ISO (2019); De Keyser <i>et al.</i> (2020)
H3	Individual’s experience is stored in the memory	Herrmann (1982); Kahneman, Riss (2005); Duncan, Barrett (2007); Miron-Shatz <i>et al.</i> (2009); Roediger <i>et al.</i> (2017); Levine <i>et al.</i> (2018); Weidemann <i>et al.</i> (2019)
H4	Content of the individual’s memory influences his personality	McAdams (1995); Mischel, Shoda (1995); Csikszentmihalyi (2000); Sheldon, Hoon (2006); Robinson (2008); Sheldon (2009); Petrican <i>et al.</i> (2020)
H5	Individual’s personality translates into the nature of the society he is part of; the nature of the society the individual is part of has the effect on his personality	Max-Neef (1992); Csikszentmihalyi (2000); Ryan, Deci (2000); Zaltman (2000); Sheldon (2004); Arnould, Thomson (2005); McAdams, Pals (2006); Sheldon, Hoon (2006); Levine <i>et al.</i> (2009); Sheldon (2009); Schwartz (2012); Becker, Jaakkola (2020)
H6	Nature of the society translates into the nature of the culture; culture has the effect on the nature of the society	Bruner (1986); Sheldon, Hoon (2006); Sheldon (2009)
H7	Culture has the effect on the individual’s personality	Max-Neef (1992); Zaltman (2000); Arnould, Thomson (2005); Levine <i>et al.</i> (2009); Kozinets <i>et al.</i> (2010); Schwartz (2012); Scherer (2016); Becker, Jaakkola (2020)
H8	Individual’s personality has an effect on his design process	Hassenzahl <i>et al.</i> (2013); Sääksjärvi, Hellén (2013); Lenz <i>et al.</i> (2017)
H9	Design process leads to the new/ modified stimulus	Ma <i>et al.</i> (2012); Hassenzahl <i>et al.</i> (2013); Sääksjärvi, Hellén (2013); Lenz <i>et al.</i> (2017)
H10	Individual’s memory of past experiences provides stimulus through the recollection or imagination	Conway (2001); Levine <i>et al.</i> (2009); Miron-Shatz <i>et al.</i> (2009); Nadel, Hardt (2011); Hill, Emery (2013); Van Damme <i>et al.</i> (2016)
H11	Individual’s/customer’s personality has the effect on his perception	Diener, Lucas (1999); Kahneman, Thaler (2006); Sheldon (2009); Verhoef <i>et al.</i> (2009); Cloninger, Zohar (2011); Ma <i>et al.</i> (2012); Mehmetoglu (2012); Marbach <i>et al.</i> (2016)

In addition to that, the marketer's journey contains the personality (C5) dependent (H8) process of the design (C8, H9) of the stimuli (C1). The difference between these two roles or journeys reflects the difference between the absolute roles of a consumer and a producer. In the context of this model, the producer might be equated to the role of the creator, the one who through the increasing entropy uses and transforms the resources of the world to stimulate the subjectively desirable changes in the world.

This model is therefore also compatible with the concept of co-creation, where the customer is not only the passive consumer of the company's output (stimuli) but the co-creator who participates in the creation of the output (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004). All of the co-creators then bring to the design process their personal characteristics (personality) and resources to personalize the stimuli according to their own needs and wants and therefore to improve the ratio between entropy costs and resulting positive changes while minimizing the negative changes for each of them.

## 5. Discussions

The circular model of change provides a foundation for further discussion on the topic of customer experience and customer transformation. The view from the macro perspective provides many questions to be answered, in particular in relation to the hypothesised relationship (H8) between the concept of the personality (C5) and design (C8). As the design process is based on the use of limited resources and their transformation to potentially influential stimuli, the topics of rights, laws, and ethics arise in the context of strategic marketing.

Each new stimulus created means less simple resources available in the world and more stimuli stimulating change in the world. All the companies are then in the

position where they can through their purchase power acquire the valuable resources and start a change considered valuable for the key stakeholders and its operation (e.g. purchase, use, engagement, loyalty, or word-of-mouth). The equation of the costs and revenues then affects the evaluation of the change.

On the opposite part of the model, in the hypothesised relationship (H1) between stimulus (C1) and perception (C2) influenced (H11) by the personality (C5), the value (C2) of the stimulus perceived (H1) by the customer is affected (H10) by his personality (C5), therefore customer's memory system (C4) which encompasses evolutionarily older codes. The company, through its marketing activities, therefore can (intentional or unintentionally) create outputs which stimulate the customer's more primitive self (or in the words of Freud the ID) and promote the degradative change in customer's personality (C5) when the super-ego is not supported enough by other stimuli (C1) and the individual's system is not sufficiently balanced.

The problem stems from the fact that the company's creation (H9) of the output (C1) stimulating negative/degradative change can still be rewarded by the customer, as it may be perceived valuable (C2) as promoting positive emotions (C2) when the insufficient capacity of the individual's cognitive system (as part of C5) does not allow the change (H11) in the perception (H1) or even the awareness of it. Such false-positive experience (C3) is then stored (H3) in the memory system (C4) and influences (H4) the personality (C5) of the customer and therefore his future perceptions (H11, C2), which, without enough intervention from other (positive evolution promoting) stimuli (C1), creates the cycle of possible degradation of the personality of the individual (C5) that further translates (H8) (directly or indirectly) into the design process (C8) and through the creation (H9) of the stimuli (C1) produced in scale can influence (H5, H6) society (C6)

and even culture (C7) with subsequent influence on future generations. However, it is important to note that the same applies to positive change.

In this day and age, individuals are surrounded by an enormous number of objects (stimuli, C1) and are drawn into the scenarios that were designed (C8, H9) by the various groups of individuals (C5, C6) (companies) and were under various circumstances with various intentions brought to the individuals' presence even without their direct involvement or knowledge and sometimes without an option to not perceive (H1) them or participate. An individual's transformation then reflects the qualities and affordances of the designed (C8, H9) objects or scenarios (providing C1) that are subjectively perceived (C2) by this individual (C5).

While there are mechanisms which control the market and the entry of the outputs of the companies to the public, it is also true that many of the products that enter the public are undoubtedly providing stimuli for the degradation/negative transformation of the customers. In the better case, these products are adequately marked. The allowance of the potentially harmful products transfers the decision-making responsibility to the customers, assuming they have enough resources for the right decision and always a balanced personality system to not succumb to their more primitive selves.

In the era of big data, powerful computational systems, artificial intelligence, and globally connected scientists, one should ask if there is more that could be done than marking some products with labels such as „an cause illness”, “not suitable for children” or “possible side effects are”. On the other side, should everything be allowed to be mass-created from the limited resources without clear proof of its benefits?

There is information about allergens on the food to let everybody know if the product is harmful or not for him/her; the one who has the confirmed allergy has all the information

to prevent the harm to themselves, one who does not have a confirmed allergy has the information to make the decision themselves.

As the marketing research got from the age of goods to services, and now to experiences, it is time to look beyond the material composition of the products towards the experiences and not only physical but also psychological transformations they cause. It should be considered to go beyond the nutrition labels, beyond age-related recommendations, to personality dependent recommendations and information, to clearly provide information about the impact of the experience.

The marketing departments have detailed information about the customers' personalities and manage how the experience will influence the customers in their interest; customers do not know themselves to this level of detail and even if they did, they do not have enough information about the impact of such experience. As the customer often does not have a chance to find out if the processed food contains harmful allergen for them, one is not able to predict the experiential impact.

With the accelerating process of creation and mass production, the resources are being used faster, and without proper investigation, the products may enable more harmful experiences. Moreover, the impact of digital products is not in the speed and scale limited by the matter.

Believing that all the companies thoroughly investigate the design of their products to provide the best experience in terms of quality of life would be ignorant, and believing that customers could be educated enough to make a proper decision without sufficient information is ignorant, therefore the provision of such experience related information should be required and self-knowledge highly promoted or there must be a more thorough supervisory mechanism which takes into account customer experience, its impact on the personal transformation and which controls the interaction (H1) between the individual and the stimuli created by the company.

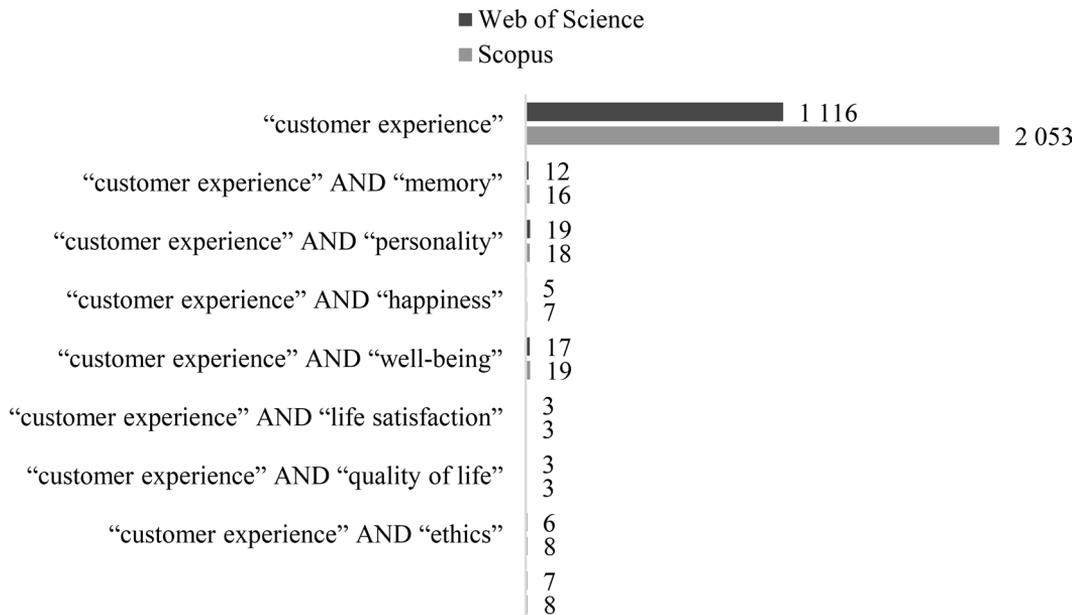


Figure 3. The number of the articles on the customer experience and related concepts indexed in the scientific databases. Source: Own processing.

However, from another standpoint, to a large extent, there are processes with not so clear or predictable outputs, which can bring considerable ambiguity to the process of transformation making it difficult to assess, by both companies and legal authorities. These are the discrepancies or gaps between, for example, the designers’ intent (H8, C8) and the actual result of the design process (C1) (intent-result gap), the overall real form of the company’s output (C1), and the customer’s subjective perception of it (C2) (reality-perception gap), single subjective perception (C2) and its role as the part of the whole experience episode (C3) (single-part gap), or between an experience (C3) and memory of it (C4) (experience-memory gap) (Miron-Shatz, 2009).

Vargo, Lusch (2017) point to the insufficient coverage of the field of macromarketing by the leading journals as well as to the doctoral students’ lack of interest in this topic. At the same time, they find the use of service-dominant logic, therefore customer

experience too, beneficial for bridging business practice and ethical principles.

The search, with the aim to explore the degree to which the topic of customer experience is researched alongside the selected macromarketing topics related to the customer transformation, performed on 22 December 2020, in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, shows that the customer experience as the marketing concept is almost not recognised in the research with topics of memory and personality, nor it is used in the research on the quality of life (and related topics) and researched in the context of ethics or corporate social responsibility. The search was focused on the research articles published through the years 2000–2020, whose title, abstract, or keywords contain a combination of the phrase “customer experience” and “memory”, “personality”, “happiness”, “well-being”, “life satisfaction”, “quality of life”, “ethics”, or “corporate social responsibility”, as shown in the following Figure 3.

## 6. Conclusion

The research paper presents a circular model of change, conceptually presenting the process of customer transformation through customer experience and experience design. The model provides a basis for the discussions on customer experience management, the recent marketing phenomena, and presents it as the imaginary free market for customer transformation, where there are very small barriers for companies to change the people according to their own needs.

The conceptual model is composed of the eight concepts that are part of the transformational lemniscate representing an infinite cycle of change in the world from the higher-level perspective and marketing process of customer transformation from the lower-level perspective. The cycle is composed of the design process of the stimuli, the perception of the stimuli by the individual (former influenced by the personality of the designer or another co-creator, latter influenced by the personality of the perceiver), the experience cumulatively composed of such perceptions, the memory of all experiences of the perceiver as their ancestors, and the personality resulting from the memory and the society and the culture with their mutual influences. The model universally represents both the transformational cycle of the customer and the designer, any other employee or entrepreneur, and further company, society, and culture.

The model also points to the weak spots of the transformational cycle in terms of customer/human growth/development in the recent business context, specifically the freedom and power the organisations have to transform the customers according to their business needs. This freedom and power stems, for example, from the open global market, fast distribution and mass production, moreover fundamentally enhanced and simplified when supported by the digitisation, when there are only insignificant limits

of the capacity, transformation, and transport of the matter; or the big data collection and analysis enabled by the digitisation; and last but not least the obsolete legal systems. Such freedom and power are a great achievement of mankind, but only if it is utilised ethically and/or legally supervised to prevent its mass deprivation.

Subsequently, the literature search in the Scopus and Web of Science databases was performed to analyse the current approach to the customer experience research in the context of its ethical side and its effect on the quality of life. The search revealed minimal to non-existent scientific interest in the intersection of these topics through the years resulting in the need and space for future research; the possible avenues for future research follow. The outlined concepts and hypothetical relationships should be further validated, both on a theoretical and empirical level, and should be refined and supplemented on the basis of new knowledge.

Future research in the field of customer experience should be focused on the ethical approaches to its management, its integration within corporate social responsibility, and its effects on the customers' well-being, long-term happiness, life satisfaction, and quality of life. Such research could balance the still increasing popularity of the customer experience management works, which can build on the latest psychological and neuroscience knowledge and therefore provide powerful tools to control and transform customers. Another possible direction of future research could be devoted to the development of the legal instruments and measures for the evaluation of customer experience and its consequences. In relation to that, the research capacity could also be directed to the development of the business customer experience codex. It would be also beneficial to deepen knowledge related to the discrepancies and gaps between the designers intent and the actual result (intent-result gap), the overall real form of the output and customer's subjective

perception of it (reality-perception gap), single subjective perception and its role as the part of the whole experience episode (single-part gap), and experience and memory of it (experience-memory gap) to support the effectiveness of marketing initiatives to reduce the use of resources as well as to increase transparency in the field of customer experience and transformation to support and enable their meaningful assessment.

In line with these avenues for further research, the proposed conceptual model will be initially used as the integrating framework for the future research by the author, while the hypothesised relationships between individual pairs of concepts and the concepts themselves will be, in order to manageably approach such a complex issue, gradually further decomposed, analysed and

empirically tested in the following research works to develop a suitable research instrument for its overall validation to enable its further application in the areas such as marketing, management, or the law.

The limitations of this research lie in the potential subjectivity as it was performed by only one researcher, the scope as only key works were considered for the analysis and synthesis, and thoroughness as the main objective was to create a general conceptual model as the foundation for future research.

### Acknowledgment

This research is a part of a project Comparison of the Marketing Approaches in the Areas of B2B and B2C led by Ing. Jan Machala (FP-J-20-6415).

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**Received: 6. 11. 2020**

**Reviewed: 14. 1. 2021**

**Accepted: 30. 6. 2021**

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