

Moving the Customer Experience Field Forward: Introducing the Touchpoints, Context, Qualities (TCQ) Nomenclature

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Abstract

In response to initial voices that put the customer experience (management) (CX(M)) movement into question, this article aims to introduce a formal nomenclature to push the CX(M) field toward a more mature state. First, drawing from an inductive analysis of 143 CX(M) papers, the authors identify 12 basic CX components that aggregate into three overarching building blocks—touchpoints (T, i.e., points of interaction between the customer and brand/firm), context (C, i.e., situationally available resources internal and/or external to the customer), and qualities (Q, i.e., attributes that reflect the nature of customer responses and reactions to interactions with the brand/firm). The TCQ nomenclature offers a language to make CX actionable, moving beyond the breadth of the current definition and frameworks by disentangling CX into *small bite-sized chunks* (i.e., the CX components) that any academic and practitioner, regardless of their discipline, may understand and use to discuss and manage CX. Second, using the TCQ nomenclature, the authors assess the current state of the CX(M) literature and identify mature (e.g., firm-controlled touchpoints and cognitive and emotional qualities associated with CX) and underdeveloped (e.g., nonfirm controlled touchpoints and the market and environmental context in which CX emerges) areas ripe for future research. In addition, they also provide a set of recommendations to strengthen the methodological rigor of the field. Third, the TCQ nomenclature may support managers in auditing their current CXM practices and/or serve as a basis for CX design and innovation.

Keywords

customer experience, customer experience management, marketing strategy, touchpoints, experience qualities, experience stages, experience context, customer journey

In little time, customer experience (CX) has become one of the dominant marketing concepts for both practitioners and academics. Ninety-three percent of business leaders today say that delivering a relevant and reliable CX is critical to overall business performance (Harvard Business Review [HBR] Analytic Services 2017). Not surprisingly, academic research on CX and its management (CXM) is flourishing. Well-cited work appeared in popular managerial outlets (e.g., HBR: Meyer and Schwager 2007; Rawson, Duncan, and Jones 2013) and high-ranked academic journals (e.g., *Journal of Marketing*: Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Lemon and Verhoef 2016; *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*: Homburg, Jozic, and Kuehn 2017; Lemke, Clark, and Wilson 2011; *Journal of Retailing*: Gentile, Levy, and Kumar 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009; *Journal of Service Research*: McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019). Equally, CX(M) has been featured a top priority in five consecutive publications of the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) research priorities, covering the 2010–2020 period (MSI 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018).

Despite the widespread conviction of CX(M)'s importance and the various contributions delivered by academic and

practitioner work, we observe a CX(M) field that is struggling to reach a level of maturity that can and should be expected (Forrester Research 2019; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Some reports claim that only one in three CXM initiatives are successful (Thompson 2018), while others contend that the majority of brands/firms that poured significant resources into their CXM programs fail to deliver and see weak returns (Morgan

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2018). Initial voices putting the CX(M) movement into question are slowly growing as exemplified by popular press quotes like “It’s time for CX to put up, or shut up” (Thompson 2018) and “Customer experience will be a fad without a better business case” (Latib 2018). Hence, action is needed if the CX(M) field wants to be more than just the “flavor of the month” in the corporate world.

To date, CX(M) researchers have delineated CX from evaluative concepts such as satisfaction and service quality and motivational concepts such as engagement (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Building upon the most prevalent definitions across different research traditions, Becker and Jaakkola (2020) defined CX as *nondeliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli embedded within a specific context*. The broadness of this CX definition (i.e., CX is everything), however, does not provide much help to scope and develop a manageable CX program (Keiningham et al. 2020; Maklan, Antonetti, and Whitty 2017). Becker and Jaakkola (2020) confirm that an atomistic understanding of the content of CX is needed to delineate what its monitoring, design, and management entails and call for novel research filling this void. Quotes from business press and popular blogs echo similar concerns: “CEOs are giving lip service to CX, without really understanding what it means” (Thompson 2018).

To add granularity to the broad CX definition while also ensuring its actionability, this research aims to disentangle *small bite-sized chunks*—here, labeled as CX components—that any academic and practitioner regardless of their discipline may understand and use to discuss and manage CX. By devising labels for these CX components, this research establishes a much-needed formal CX nomenclature (Klaus 2019). Every mature field necessarily relies on a nomenclature to reduce misunderstandings and support effective research, measurement, design and management practices (MacInnis 2011; Mele, Pels, and Storbacka 2015). Specifically, following an inductive analysis of 143 CX(M) papers, we identify 12 CX components that aggregate into three overarching building blocks: (1) *Touchpoints* (i.e., points of interaction between the customer and brand/firm), (2) *Context* (i.e., situationally available resources internal and/or external to the customer), and (3) *Qualities* (i.e., attributes that reflect the nature of customer responses to interactions with the brand/firm). These building blocks and their components form the basis of the TCQ nomenclature, capturing the essence of CX as a concept in simple and precise terms. Additionally, we complement the development of the TCQ nomenclature with an analysis of the metadata (i.e., research method and research context) distilled from the analyzed CX(M) literature.

The TCQ nomenclature will allow us to contribute to CX(M) research and practice in three meaningful ways. First, the TCQ nomenclature helps reduce misunderstanding and conceptual ambiguity among CX(M) researchers and practitioners through identifying and listing all CX components (as called for by Keiningham et al. 2020). Second, the TCQ nomenclature allows us to assess the current state of academic CX(M) work and identify existing gaps in our knowledge. In

combination with the metadata analysis, we make recommendations to broaden the methodological rigor and inclusiveness of the CX(M) field. Third, the TCQ nomenclature makes CX actionable and enables business practice in their CXM ambitions. Specifically, we discuss how the TCQ nomenclature may be used to audit CXM programs and identify “quick wins” to strengthen current CXM and can also serve as a basis for CX design and innovation practices, enabling fast identification of opportunities for differentiation and excellence. This is in line with calls by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Becker and Jaakkola (2020) for CX(M) research that may assist researchers and managers to define the content of intended CXs—something a nomenclature is well suited for. It is our hope that, armed with this new approach, brands/firms will (finally) be able to make a clear business case for CXM.

This article is organized as follows. First, we identify and describe the overarching CX building blocks and their components by means of an inductive analysis of existing CX definitions and a fine-grained analysis of 143 CX(M) papers. The analysis lays the foundation for the TCQ nomenclature and develops each building block conceptually. Second, we consider how strongly CX(M) literature has focused on each of the building blocks and their components, identifying critical research gaps and opportunities to push the field forward. Third, we discuss methodological challenges that need to be overcome in line with the TCQ nomenclature. Finally, we consider how the TCQ nomenclature may be used by business practice as a language for two particular applications in which the value of the building blocks and their components becomes evident: (1) steering CX audits and (2) improving CX design/innovation efforts.

Method for a Fine-Grained Analysis of CX(M) Literature

Over the past 10 years, CX(M) literature has grown at a tremendous pace (Mahr, Stead, and Odekerken-Schröder 2019). Earlier review studies—summarized in Table 1—have helped to identify different CX(M) research streams and/or theoretical underpinnings (e.g., Helkkula 2011; Lipkin 2016; Mahr, Stead, and Odekerken-Schröder 2019). Additionally, these studies position and distinguish CX in relation to other constructs, with an emphasis on (1) evaluative concepts such as perceived service quality, satisfaction, and value-in-use and (2) motivational concepts such as customer engagement (e.g., Becker and Jaakkola 2020; De Keyser et al. 2015; Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Rose, Hair, and Clark 2011) as two strongly related fields of research. Specifically, this research has shown how CX is crucial to the evaluation of the experience object (i.e., value-in-use), thereby affecting engagement with the experience object (Chandler and Lusch 2015). Finally, some review studies focused on how CX evolves throughout the customer journey, thereby introducing a dynamic perspective on CX (e.g., Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

Although the aforementioned review studies contribute to a holistic understanding of CX, the present research adopts an

Table 1. CX Review Studies.

Study	Study Goal	Study Method	Key Findings	Differences From Present Study in Terms of Research Process	Differences From Present Study in Terms of Outcome
Helkkula (2011)	Review of the characterization of the concept of service experience	Systematic literature review ($n = 32$)	Three characterizations of service experience: (a) phenomenological, (b) process-based, and (c) outcome-based service experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (2005–2007) • Narrower scope (i.e., focus on service experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., identification of CX research streams) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
Rose, Hair, and Clark (2011)	Review of antecedents and outcomes of online CX	Systematic literature review ($n = 120$)	Identification of online CX antecedents and consequences in the form of a testable, holistic framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (1985–2009) • Narrower scope (i.e., focus on online CX) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., link with drivers and evaluative components of online CX) • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
De Keyser et al. (2015)	Interdisciplinary discussion on (customer) experience and development of foundational premises underlying CX	Selected literature review (philosophy, psychology, sociology, business, and management fields)	Formulation of unified CX definition, identification of four fundamental properties, and delineation of CX to customer value and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No systematic literature review process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., development of theoretical propositions) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
Lemon and Verhoef (2016)	Examination of the roots and origins of CX research	Selected literature review	Formulation of three key research domains in the CX field: (a) CX and the customer journey, (b) CX measurement, and (c) CXM.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No systematic literature review process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., identification of CX origins and development of dynamic CX framework) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX metadata
Lipkin (2016)	Review of customer experience formation and its theoretical grounds	Systematic literature review ($n = 163$)	Three theoretical underpinnings for how individuals realize CX at the individual level (stimulus-, interaction-, and sense-making-based) and three contextual lenses setting the boundaries of CX formation (dyadic, service ecosystem, and customer ecosystem).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (1998–2015) • Narrower scope (i.e., focus on service experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., identification of CX research streams) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Study	Study Goal	Study Method	Key Findings	Differences From Present Study in Terms of Research Process	Differences From Present Study in Terms of Outcome
Jain, Aagja, and Bagdare (2017)	Review of CX literature	Systematic literature review ($n = 82$)	Clarification of the similarities, differences, and relationship between service experience and CX.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (1990–2015) • Narrower scope (i.e., focus on CX and service experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., comparison service experience and CX) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
Kranzbühler et al. (2018)	Classification and examination of CX research from an organization and customer perspective	Systematic literature review ($n = 115$)	Identification of two CX study levels (static vs. dynamic) and theoretical perspectives (organizational and customer).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (1982–2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., comparison of static vs. dynamic perspectives on CX) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
Mahr, Stead, and Odekerken-schröder (2019)	Review of concepts and theories underlying customer service experience and its underlying dimensions (physical, social, cognitive, affective, and sensorial)	Systematic literature review through text mining ($n = 258$)	Identification of three focal research areas (service system architecture, servicescape, and outcome measures).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (1994–2018) • Broader scope (focus on sensory marketing) • Focus on text mining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., identification of CX research streams) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
Becker and Jaakkola (2020)	Development of foundational premises underlying CX	Systematic literature review ($n = 136$)	Identification of eight study fields underlying CX in marketing, grouped by a positivistic versus interpretive research tradition, and the development of four fundamental premises of CX.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrower time frame (1982–2016) • Narrower scope (only B2C papers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct focus (i.e., development of holistic framework with theoretical propositions) • Lack of nomenclature • No clear CXM guidelines • No link with CX meta-data
Present article	Development of nomenclature and method analysis of the CX research to push the empirical and managerial progress of the CX field	Systematic literature review (1982–January 2020; $n = 143$)	Identification of three key CX building blocks—touchpoints, context, and quality, each with a respective set of components that together form the basis of a formal CX nomenclature, and the lack of methodological variety and sophistication preventing further progress in the field.	<p><i>This article:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic literature review process • Extended time frame (1982–January 2020) 	<p><i>This article:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of CX nomenclature built around three key building blocks: touchpoints, context, and qualities • Clear CXM guidelines • Link with CX meta-data • Discussion of methodological challenges for (empirical) CX research

Note. TCQ = touchpoints, context, qualities; CX = customer experience; CXM = customer experience management.

atomistic perspective by introducing a nomenclature in which we specify the basic components from which CX is built up. Both Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Becker and Jaakkola (2020) see this as a necessary complement to the existing review papers. To this end, we engaged in a systematic process to identify and select relevant CX(M) articles and subsequently analyzed and synthesized these articles. Additionally, the present research also complements previous review studies by analyzing the metadata of CX(M) articles (here, research method and research context). Doing so, this research is an important step to assist and support researchers and practitioners to design, measure, and manage CX (practices) backed up by a clear nomenclature that captures the building blocks and key components of CX (MacInnis 2011; Mele, Pels, and Storbacka 2015). In combining the CX nomenclature with insights derived from the metadata analysis, we are able to put forth avenues for future research, provide methodological recommendations for empirical work, and identify opportunities to strengthen the CX(M) space. Table 1 details the key differences between this study and earlier reviews of the CX(M) literature.

Identifying and Selecting Relevant CX(M) Literature

We sourced articles from Web of Science's Social Sciences Citation Index platform as it provides a comprehensive portfolio of business and management journals. To ensure the objectivity, transparency, and replicability of our bibliographic search, we followed a five-step procedure proposed by Kranzbühler et al. (2018). Figure 1 visualizes these steps.

First, we identified the most common keywords from the leading publications in the field (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Verhoef et al. 2009) and previous literature reviews and used these as a basis for our search string. Specifically, we searched for articles containing the words "customer experience," "consumption experience," "service experience," "consumer experience," "customer journey," "consumer journey," or "experiential marketing" in the title, abstract, or author keywords. This resulted in 1,826 articles, covering the 1982–January 2020 time frame.

Second, to increase the relevance and quality of our results set, we limited our selection to peer-reviewed, academic journals in English. Abstracts of published items, books, book chapters, book reviews, discussions, commentaries, editorial material, and proceeding papers were excluded. Also, the results were refined with respect to subject categories "Business" and "Management". Furthermore, we included only articles from journals in the Top 100 of the 2019 Journal Citation Report for the Business and Management fields (Kranzbühler et al. 2018). All this refinement resulted in 680 articles.

Third, we performed a thorough screening of all remaining articles in terms of face validity, considering whether CX(M) was indeed the core topic of the study. This resulted in 156 remaining articles. Fourth, we reviewed the full text of the remaining set of articles, discarding another 54 articles as they did not provide a CX(M) definition and/or description. Fifth,

this process also led to the identification and inclusion of 41 additional papers based on cross-references. Web Appendix A provides the full references of the 143 articles included in our analyses.

Analyzing and Synthesizing Relevant CX(M) Literature

The analysis of the selected articles involved—in line with the approach suggested by Moeller et al. (2013)—five steps: familiarizing with the articles, coding article content, categorizing codes, comparing codes/categorizations, and further analyzing. After importing all articles in NVivo, two members of the research team familiarized with the articles by reading through these articles in chronological order and selected all definitions and descriptions of CX. After in vivo coding (Saldaña 2014) of all components of the CX definitions and descriptions (first-order codes), the two researchers independently grouped these CX components into categories and subsequently compared their second-order codes (see Web Appendix B for more details on coding agreement). All inconsistencies were resolved through discussions in which a third member of the research team was also involved. After grouping the second-order codes in more abstract third-order categories, three common and overarching CX building blocks emerged: (1) touchpoints, (2) context, and (3) experience qualities. Web Appendix B gives an overview of the first-order and second-order categories associated with these building blocks. Following further inquiry of the way in which CX(M) researchers link these three building blocks to one another, we contend that CX is *formed through* "touchpoints" (*T*) which are embedded in a broader "context" (*C*) and marked by a set of "qualities" (*Q*) that, together, result in a value judgment by the customer. Additionally, we explore the metadata (i.e., research method and research context) associated with each of these components and building blocks.

Below, we first detail each of the components of the respective building blocks identified throughout the analyses and synthesis of the CX(M) literature, which provide the foundations of the TCQ nomenclature. Second, we consider future research opportunities building on the TCQ perspective and identified foci in the literature. Third, we zoom in on the methodological challenges the CX(M) field is facing from a TCQ perspective. Finally, we consider the managerial opportunities and value of the TCQ nomenclature.

Moving Toward the TCQ Nomenclature

In this section, we aim to detail the TCQ nomenclature, which allows firms and scholars to discuss, assess, and manage CX in a clear and concise manner. Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the TCQ nomenclature with its building blocks and components. For each of the building blocks in the TCQ nomenclature, we describe the identified components (see Web Appendices C, D, and E for the presence of the components per paper in our sample) and refer to their coverage in CX(M)

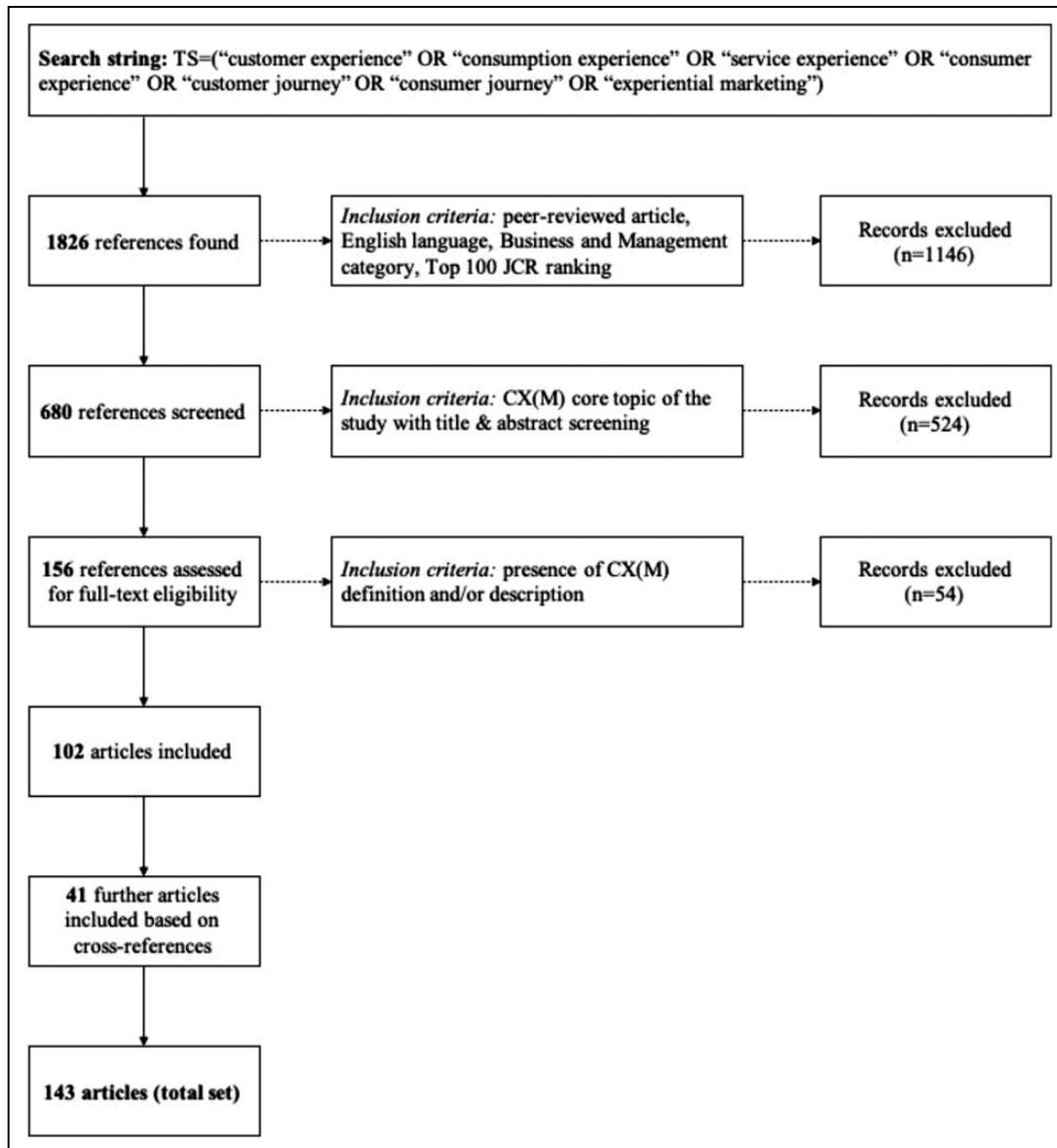


Figure 1. Search strategy, sampling frame, and selection process.

studies. Table 2 gives an overview of the coverage of the different components per building block in CX(M) studies.

Building Block 1: Touchpoints

Touchpoints reflect the array of individual contacts between the brand/firm and customers across the customer journey that serve a purpose such as information gathering, payment, unpacking, and usage (Homburg, Jozic, and Kuehnl 2017; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). These touchpoints are critical to experience formation as without any actual or imagined interaction taking place, there can be no CX (Hoffman and Novak 2018). Touchpoints vary in terms of control, nature, and the stage of the customer journey.

Touchpoint *control* reflects who is in charge of the contact points between customer and the brand/firm. Touchpoints may

be controlled by the brand/firm or not. *Firm-controlled touchpoints* are those predominantly designed and controlled by the brand/firm (Verhoef et al. 2009). These typically include the store environment, corporate website, advertising, employees, and so forth. *Non-firm-controlled touchpoints* are predominantly controlled by the customer, influencers, or other brands or firms (Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, and Verlegh 2019; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). As shown in Table 2, the CX(M) literature is dominantly focused on *firm-controlled* touchpoints (100% of the papers in our sample), but we observe a growing recognition of *non-firm-controlled* touchpoints (46.85%, e.g., Lemon and Verhoef 2016), with especially the role of other customers for CX(M) being recognized (e.g., Brocato, Voorhees, and Baker 2012; Gao, Melero-Polo, and Sese 2020; Grove and Fisk 1997; Verhoef et al. 2009). More recently, there is also an increased interest into the role that other brands/firms play

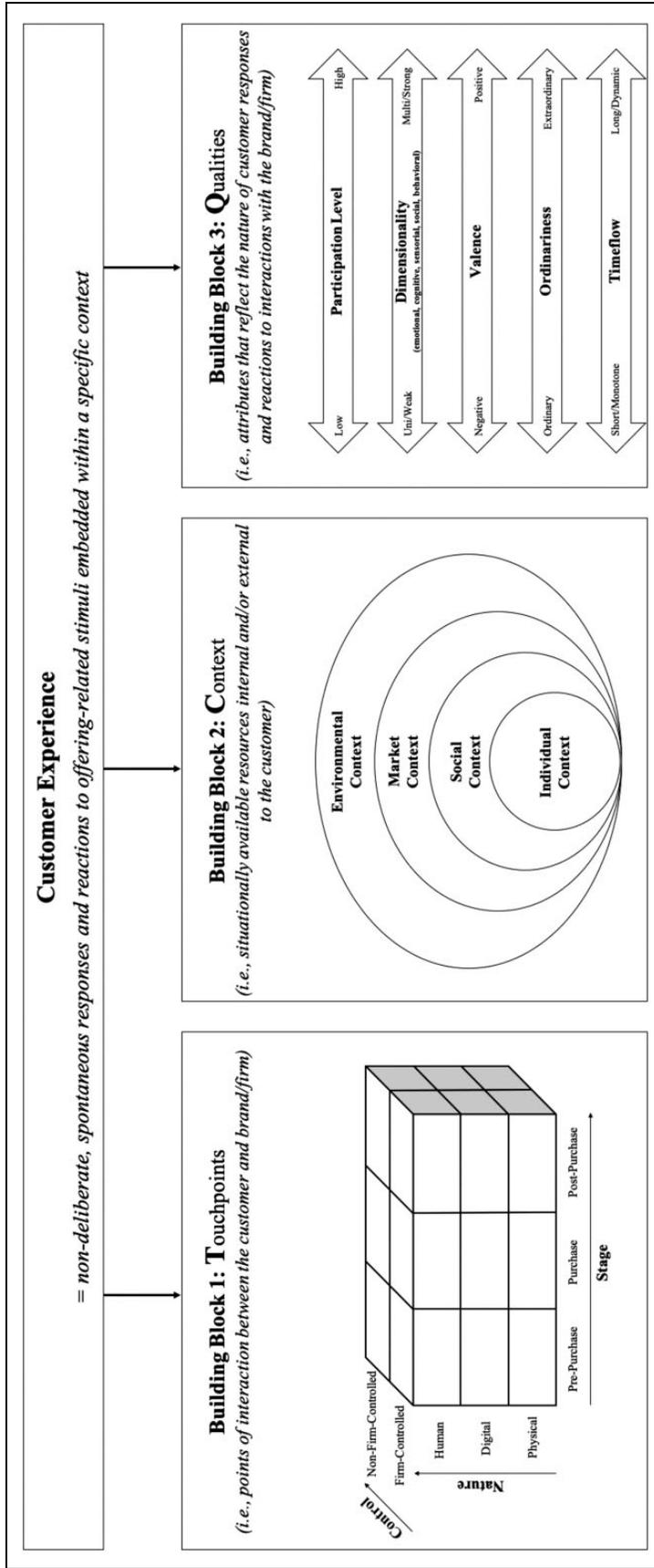


Figure 2. Touchpoints, context, qualities nomenclature.

Table 2. TCQ Coverage in the CX(M) Literature.

Building Block	Component	Coverage in Literature (%)	
Touchpoints	Control	Firm-controlled	100.00
		Non-firm-controlled	46.85
	Nature	Human	41.96
		Physical	40.56
	Stage	Digital	33.57
		Repurchase	36.36
Purchase		37.06	
Context	Post purchase	39.86	
	Individual	62.94	
	Social	22.38	
	Market	10.49	
Qualities	Environmental	6.99	
	Participation		44.76
		Dimensionality	74.13
	Emotional	Cognitive	67.83
		Sensorial	38.46
		Social	27.27
		Behavioral	28.67
	Time flow	Duration	13.29
		Dynamism	16.08
	Valence	Positive	22.38
Negative		17.48	
Indifferent		2.80	
Ordinariness	Ordinary	16.78	
	Extraordinary	19.58	

Note. $n = 143$ articles. CX(M) = customer experience(management).

through the lens of service delivery networks (e.g., Tax, McCutcheon, and Wilkinson 2013) and branded outsourcing activities (e.g., Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, and Verlegh 2019).

Touchpoint *nature* reflects the way in which the brand/firm is represented in the touchpoint. A touchpoint can be human (e.g., frontline employee), digital (e.g., ATM, website), physical (e.g., store environment), or a combination thereof. Early research on touchpoint nature largely concentrates on human and physical touchpoints (e.g., Arnould and Price 1993; Hui and Bateson 1991; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007; human: 41.96%, physical: 40.56%). However, research looking into digital touchpoints (33.57%) is rapidly catching up, with papers focusing on online CX(M) (e.g., Bleier, Harmeling, and Palmatier 2019; Klaus 2013; Mclean, Al-Nabhani, and Wilson 2018; Rose et al. 2012) and more recently the smart service experience (e.g., Hoffman and Novak 2018; Kabadayi et al. 2019).

Touchpoint *stage* reflects a specific phase in which touchpoints occur along the customer journey (Bolton et al. 2014; Kranzbühler et al. 2018; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2015; Verhoef et al. 2009). Three touchpoint stages are identified: a prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase stage. The prepurchase stage comprises all moments related to a customer's interaction with a specific touchpoint before the purchase decision. It is typically referred to as the sequence of need recognition, information search, and evaluation in the consumer decision process

(Puccinelli et al. 2009). The purchase stage relates to customer interactions with touchpoints during the purchase decision and act. This involves all moments related to consumer choice, ordering, paying, pickup, and delivery (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). The postpurchase stage encompasses touchpoints that relate to actual usage and consumption moments of the products or services, such as brand communities (e.g., Caru and Cova 2015; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007) and product-return points (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Overall, we observe a widespread recognition of all individual stages across CX(M) literature (prepurchase: 36.36%, purchase: 37.06%, and postpurchase: 39.86%).

Building Block 2: Context

Driven by service-dominant logic and consumer culture theory scholars, the importance of context for CX(M) is widely acknowledged in the literature (see Web Appendix C for details). A customer can experience a touchpoint very differently at distinctive moments in time due to the context in which their interaction with the brand/firm is embedded (C. J. Thompson, Locander, and Polio 1989). Broadly speaking, context refers to the conditional state that determines the resources a person can directly and indirectly draw on at some point in time (Bettencourt, Lusch, and Vargo 2014; Chandler and Vargo 2011)—driving the subjective nature of CX in that every CX is unique for every customer (Sandström et al. 2008). In line with Belk (1975), we consider context to comprise all factors that are particular to a certain time and/or place (i.e., situational—McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019) and typically transitory in nature. Although the exact nature of contextual influences is not always specified, 78.32% of the CX(M) studies recognizes the importance of context (see Web Appendix D). Overall, we discern factors related to the individual, social, market, and environmental context. We detail each of these contextual influences and their coverage below.

The *individual context* reflects the transient personal state of the customer at various touchpoints along the customer journey (Sandström et al. 2008). More precisely, extant CX(M) studies suggest that every human being is inherently subjective and informed by their own logic (i.e., way of thinking), a logic that is shaped by more than customer-brand/firm interactions (Helkkula 2011). In 62.94% of the papers in our sample, the importance of the individual context is acknowledged (e.g., Hirschmann and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschmann 1982; Puccinelli et al. 2009; Sandström et al. 2008).

First, several CX(M) researchers point out that one's *emotional* state—such as situational feelings of joy, happiness, and sadness—impacts the customer heavily (e.g., De Keyser et al. 2015). For instance, people in a good mood are typically more open to new products/services, whereas a bad mood often causes individuals to stick with familiar brands and be more receptive to negative clues in the environment (Puccinelli et al. 2009). Second, momentary *cognitive* factors—such as one's recalled previous experiences and memories—can strongly impact the customer journey by activating norms (e.g., things

were better in the past) and/or goals (e.g., I want to relive something from my childhood; e.g., Gentile, Levy, and Kumar 2009; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Puccinelli et al. 2009). For instance, a bad previous encounter might prevent a customer from reengaging with a company's offering (Verhoef et al. 2009). And not only past and current experiences, but even future or imaginary experiences may affect the journey along different touchpoints and stages (e.g., Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). In a similar vein, customers' readiness to engage in different stages along the customer journey will push or impede the progression of the experience (Sandström et al. 2008; Verleye 2015). Third, *normative* factors—internalized institutions, rules, thinking styles, processing strategies, and judgments—will have an important impact on CX as they steer customer attitudes and behaviors in important ways (Akaka, Vargo, and Schau 2015). Finally, individual *physical* and *economic* factors also have an important situational impact. Fatigue and/or illness, for instance, may hinder a customer from pursuing a specific goal, while one's available budget determines consumption choices (De Keyser et al. 2015).

The *social context* is mentioned as an important CX component in around 22.38% of CX(M) studies, mainly considering the importance of social rules and norms activated by social groups (e.g., Bolton et al. 2018; Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlstrom, 2012a, 2012b; Schmitt 1999; Verhoef et al. 2009). In other words, the social context reflects the momentary conditions created by a customer's social relationships (Verhoef et al. 2009). Customers do not act in a social vacuum but largely share reality with their surroundings. They are surrounded by a multitude of other people (e.g., family members and friends) and collectives (e.g., families, cultural groups, or communities), making customers take on differing (social) roles that come with differing behavioral expectations that influence CX (De Keyser et al. 2015). All these people—whether or not included in collectives—have their own overlapping and contradictory goals, preferences, and needs, and the collectives, in turn, have their own overlapping and contradictory institutions (i.e., rules of social conduct; Åkesson Bo, and Tronvoll 2014; Arnould and Price 1993). These latter strongly influence the way customers think and behave and what their socially constructed world looks like (Caru and Cova 2015).

In contrast to the individual and social context, extant CX(M) studies pay less attention to the market context (10.49%) and the environmental context (6.99%). Here, *market context* relates to the conditions created by market-related actors with which the customer interacts, including complements, competitors, substitutes, and future entrants in the market where the focal brand/firm is operating. Today, customers increasingly depend on networks of complementary yet unrelated partners and channels that go beyond one focal brand/firm to find adequate solutions for their needs (e.g., Tax, McCutcheon, and Wilkinson 2013). At the same time, competitors, substitutes, and new entrants may also change

experiences with a focal brand/firm. These actors may, for instance, create excitement (e.g., Payne et al. 2009) and even change customer goals, preferences, and needs by lowering prices (e.g., McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019). The *environmental context*, in turn, is composed of broader externalities that are natural, economic, public, or political in nature or a combination thereof. *Natural* environmental factors refer to factors such as weather and outside temperature (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). *Economic* environmental factors—such as income changes, gasoline prices, real estate value, gross domestic product growth, and the state of the overall economy—also affect the customers' "frame of mind," as illustrated by their impact on customer brand preferences, what stores they visit, customers' willingness to buy products and services, and service purchase frequency (e.g., Kumar et al. 2014). *Public* factors—including road infrastructure, the power grid, and government support programs—may be of equal importance to the customer journey (McColl-Kennedy et al. 2012). Finally, *political* factors also deserve attention, in that political events may influence the value of consuming specific products or services (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

Building Block 3: Qualities

A third key building block of CX relates to qualities. These qualities entail the set of distinctive attributes that reflect the nature of customer responses and reactions to interactions with the brand/firm (De Keyser et al. 2015; Keiningham et al. 2020). We distinguish five such qualities: participation level, dimensionality, timeflow, valence, and ordinariness.

The *participation level* of an experience reflects how active responses to brand/firm stimuli are (Caru and Cova 2015; Pine and Gilmore 1998). Some experiences require significant effort from customers, such as the NikeiD website where customers can design their own shoes. In those situations, customers play a very active role. Contrary, other experiences may require little to no active involvement of the customer, such as attending a classical concert or listening to a lecture. Any experience, however, falls along a continuum from low (i.e., passive responses) to high participation (i.e., active responses; Gentile, Spiller, and Noci 2007; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Following the popularity of the coproduction/co-creation literature and the spread of service-dominant logic, the active role of the customer is increasingly acknowledged in the CX(M) literature (44.76%).

The *dimensionality* of an experience—the most discussed and established CX quality in the literature—is derived from the differing type of responses that may flow from contacts between the brand/firm and customers across the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). While early writings were dominantly focusing on the emotional side of CX in a plea to adopt an experiential instead of an information-processing view in marketing research (e.g., Hirschmann and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschmann 1982; C. J. Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989), CX(M) researchers today recognize both views can coexist by widely acknowledging the

cognitive and *emotional* dimensions of CX (67.83% and 74.13%, respectively, of the papers in our sample). Following the seminal work of Schmitt (1999), the dimensionality view expanded and many CX(M) studies also refer to the *sensorial/physical* (38.46%), *social/relational* (27.27%), and *behavioral/pragmatic* (28.67%) dimensions of CX. Different clues associated with touchpoints may evoke these responses, which vary in strength and presence depending on the encounter (Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel 2002; Gentile, Spiller, and Noci 2007; Patricio, Fisk, and Cunha 2008; Schmitt, Brakus, and Zarantonello 2015). Based upon the CX(M) literature, we discern a continuum from unidimensional to multidimensional responses, with every individual dimension ranging from weak to strong activation.

The *timeflow* of an experience is another inherent quality of CX, relating to how long or short an experience is in the judgment of the customer (Kranzbühler et al. 2018) and reflecting its perceived dynamics (i.e., tempo, speed, rhythm; Woermann and Rokka 2015). As with the other qualities, timeflow depends on the subjective perception of the customer, which is situated on a continuum from short to long and monotone to dynamic. In other words, experiences range from in-the-moment, momentary experiences (e.g., a 30-second roller-coaster ride) to enduring, extended experiences (e.g., a transatlantic flight) that vary in dynamism (e.g., an easy flight vs. a flight bothered by turbulence; Chandler and Lusch 2015; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007). Overall, duration and dynamism are covered in, respectively, 13.29% and 16.08% of the CX(M) papers.

The *valence* of an experience refers to the negative, neutral, or positive nature of customer responses to interactions with the brand/firm, with all three levels potentially holding value to the customer. A continuum may be discerned from negative to positive (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009); however, Schmitt (2010) points out that CXs can simultaneously be positive and negative (e.g., splurging on an expensive dinner, consuming a food indulgence, watching a horror movie). If CX(M) researchers refer to valence, they often refer to its positive nature (22.38%), followed by its negative nature (17.48%), but little attention goes to indifferent or neutral experiences (2.80%).

The *ordinariness* of an experience reflects the level of “commonness” of customer responses to brand/firm interactions (Becker and Jaakkola 2020; Tumbat and Belk 2011). More precisely, any experience can be plotted on a continuum from ordinary to extraordinary. Ordinary experiences—such as weekly grocery shopping—are common, normal, frequent, day-to-day experiences that are low in intensity (mentioned in 16.78% of the papers). CXs of an extraordinary nature, in turn, are uncommon, infrequent, and extend beyond the realm of everyday life (e.g., bungee jumping), hence high in intensity (covered in 19.58% of the CX(M) papers). Extraordinary experiences are often sought for the sake of novelty, surprise, or to break the daily grind (Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017) and have the potential to create memorable and unforgettable

experiences (Arnould and Price 1993; LaTour and Carbone 2014).

The TCQ Nomenclature: Scholarly Implications

The fine-grained analysis of CX(M) literature put forth a nomenclature built around three key building blocks: Touchpoints (T)—differing in control, nature, and stage; Context (C)—individual, social, market, and environmental; Qualities (Q)—participation level, dimensionality, valence, ordinariness, and timeflow. In essence, every customer journey can be dissected into its various touchpoints (T), the context in which they are embedded (C), and the qualities they deliver (Q). Any TCQ combination results in a value judgment that motivates or demotivates customers to pursue the customer journey and their overall relationship with the organization.

The TCQ nomenclature brings granularity to the definition of CX as *nondeliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli embedded within a specific context* by detailing (1) the attributes that reflect the nature of the “responses and reactions” with the qualities (Q) components, (2) the diversity in “offering-related stimuli” with the touchpoint (T) components, and (3) the layered nature of the “specific context” with the context (C) components. From the above discussion and data provided in Table 2, it is clear that extant research has dominantly focused on specific components linked to the TCQ building blocks, while largely omitting others.

In this section, we focus on needed research efforts to push the field forward (see Table 3) and propose the TCQ building blocks and their 12 components as distinct, yet linked research streams, which pave the way for future research. Based on the coverage of the components in the literature (see Table 2) and current trends in the CX(M) and service/marketing literature, we assess the state of research for every CX component and identify where opportunities lie. Note that some components are narrower by nature, explaining their lower coverage overall as there may be less research opportunities. Here, we focus on the areas we believe are most promising and needed to advance the CX(M) field.

Touchpoints: Future Opportunities

In relation to touchpoint *control*, CX(M) researchers increasingly recognize the uncontrollability of CX by a single brand/firm, as exemplified by the growing interest in the role of non-firm-controlled touchpoints—not in the least other customers and other brands/firms in service delivery networks (see also Table 2). This observation supports the notion of an ever-increasing complexity of the customer journey and the various parties—external organizations, customers, social media influencers, and so on—that may impact CX. Indeed, several researchers point out that customers may act as a non-firm-controlled touchpoint by adopting the role of brand ambassadors through referral programs (Dose et al. 2019), influencers

Table 3. Exemplary Research Avenues.

Building Block	Subelement	Sample Research Questions	
Touchpoints	Control	Firm-controlled <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does CX with noncontrolled touchpoints affect CX with firm-controlled touchpoint? Non-firm-controlled <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under what conditions do interactions with noncontrolled touchpoints have negative repercussion for brand/firm CX? 	
	Nature	Human <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How different is CX in multiactor settings, such as sharing platforms? Physical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do touchpoints of different nature work together? Digital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of touchpoints are most effective early/late in the customer journey? • Do different touchpoint type paths result in different outcomes? • How does the increasingly blurred nature of touchpoints impact CX? 	
	Stage	Prepurchase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should brands/firms optimally balance investments and resources across the customer journey stages? Purchase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do rapid automation and microtargeting practices along the customer journey impact CX? Postpurchase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do rapid automation and microtargeting practices along the customer journey impact CX? 	
Context	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can contextual data influence CX strategies and inform new business models? 	
	Social Market Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what way(s) can brands/firms systematically make use of contextual insights to enhance CX? • How can brands/firms prioritize the plethora of contextual data? At what level should they best collect, analyze, and use contextual data? • How far can brands/firms go in using contextual data to personalize CX? • How do major and sudden environmental changes like COVID-19 impact CX(M)? • How do different levels of participation across the customer journey impact CX? 	
Qualities	Participation Level Dimensionality	Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the various dimensions work in combination?
		Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is each dimension to CX? And how does this differ across situations?
	Timeflow	Sensorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How may brands/firms best trigger each dimension?
		Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might culture moderate the impact or importance of each dimension?
Valence	Positive Negative Indifferent	Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there optional levels of a dimension (e.g., emotional, cognitive, social, sensorial, behavioral) for distinct types of CX?
		Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the different time—duration, variation, speed, rhythm—aspects impact CX at various stages of the customer journey?
Ordinariness	Ordinary Extraordinary	Dynamism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does timeflow influence the CX differently depending upon the valence of the experience?
		Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can brands/firms influence other aspects of the CX (other qualities dimensions, or specific touchpoints) to make “negative” experiences—such as health care—less stressful? • Can firms identify types of experiences that consumers/customers prefer to be indifferent?
		Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When do customer prefer ordinary experiences?
		Indifferent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When can the often-hyped extraordinary experiences negatively impact value perceptions?

Note. CX = customer experience.

(Hughes, Swaminathan, and Brooks 2019), or sharing incentivized word-of-mouth through various off-line and online media (Lamberton and Stephen 2016). Finally, brands and firms often engage in partnerships with other brands and firms, thereby giving these actors some control over touchpoints. Further inquiry is needed on the following questions: How does a customer's CX with non-firm-controlled touchpoints affect their experience with firm-controlled touchpoints? Under what conditions do interactions with non-firm-controlled touchpoints have positive/negative repercussions (e.g., the impact other customers and social distancing in retail environments)? How can a brand/firm optimally deal with this complexity? Answering these questions would expand the initial work by Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, and Verlegh (2019) who focus on branded outsourcing as a strategic means to reduce dissatisfying touchpoints' impact on brand evaluations. A lab experiment could

alter the ownership of and experience with various touchpoints and consider the respective impact on customers, while a longitudinal field study may help understand the financial impact of various touchpoint ownership strategies. The hospitality, health care, and travel industries would be particularly relevant study contexts given their dynamic nature and the high prevalence of non-firm-controlled touchpoints here.

The challenge of dealing with non-firm-controlled touchpoints is especially prevalent in a sharing economy (Wirtz et al. 2019)—a setting largely ignored in CX(M) literature so far. A traditional hotel chain like Marriott, for instance, has full control on room design and cleanliness. Airbnb properties, on the other hand, display considerable variance, and much of the CX is left in the hands of the individuals hosting their properties on the platform (Eckhardt et al. 2019). Research by Hazée, Delcourt, and Van Vaerenbergh (2017) shows that customers

make various extra considerations before dealing with sharing platforms and have concerns about the non-firm-controlled nature of aspects of sharing services (e.g., reliability of other users, potential contamination by others, liability due to other users). Research is needed to understand CX formation in these multi-actor settings (Eckhardt et al. 2019). How different is CX in multi-actor settings, such as sharing platforms? How do interactions with various actors impact each other? To what extent do customers distinguish between the sharing platform (e.g., Airbnb) and other providers (e.g., host)? Qualitative research could provide new and deep insights into these questions. Digital technologies that capture multi-actor settings could enable deeper analyses of these settings. Additionally, researchers can develop experiments showcasing scenarios in which sharing platforms employ differential levels of control and measure CX formation. CX researchers may benefit from collaborating with social psychology or sociology researchers, as they may have insight into how actors interact with one another in complex networks.

With regard to touchpoint *nature*, more research is needed to understand the dynamic interplay between touchpoints of different nature (Bolton et al. 2018), looking into what specific type(s) of touchpoints are most effective early/late in the customer journey, what moderates the effectiveness of touchpoints with a different nature, and whether different touchpoint type paths result in distinctly different outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shifted traditionally physical experiences to entirely digital, even if they are not well-suited to a virtual approach. Much research is needed to understand how this shift has changed the CX for both firms and consumers as well as how adaptations to physical (e.g., presence and obliged usage of disinfecting gels) and human (e.g., usage of protective masks) touchpoints impact customers (and employees).

Singh et al. (2017) also raise several interesting subaspects of touchpoint nature that largely reflect the intersection between interactions (e.g., complexity) and interfaces (e.g., richness, synchronicity) in the context of organizational front lines. It is especially the interface component (i.e., the characteristics of a touchpoint—hence reflecting its nature) that is ripe for new research as new technologies are rapidly enhancing touchpoint interfaces, making them the new frontiers of “value creation and profit” (Goodwin 2015).

Specifically, with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), new technologies like virtual/augmented reality, and the fast adoption of smart assistants and service robots, the nature of a touchpoint will become increasingly blurred (Lemon 2016). Lowe’s augmented reality solution, for instance, allows customers to add a virtual layer to an in-store physical model kitchen with the help of an employee, Google Assistant is able to make calls as if it were a human, and robots are increasingly being anthropomorphized (De Keyser et al. 2019). Research should consider how the blurred nature of touchpoints impacts CX. When do customers prefer a different touchpoint nature? What aspect—human,

physical, digital—dominates the CX? How do distinct “blurred” combinations impact CX? To what extent do customers want to be aware of the true nature of a touchpoint (e.g., human vs. digital; Robinson et al. 2020). Inspiration for field/lab experiments may be drawn from Luo et al. (2019) as one of the first studies to provide evidence for negative effects of disclosing the true nature of a touchpoint in financial services sales setting. CX research in this area may profit from setting up collaborations with researchers from other fields including AI, information systems, and the robotics area.

With regard to touchpoint *stage*, we note that little research considers the linkage between the various stages of the customer journey (despite recognizing their occurrence) and how firms should spread their efforts to enhance CX to enable customers to successfully bridge these stages (Voorhees et al. 2017). While CX investments in the prepurchase stage may boost awareness and consideration efforts, these may draw managerial attention and resources away from the later stages thereby potentially decreasing eventual repurchase and repeat buyer behavior, and vice versa. Voorhees et al. (2017) raise the examples of Amazon investing strongly in the prepurchase phase through recommendation agents versus Zappos putting emphasis on return policies to ensure happy clients. Insights into the importance of different stages for the overall CX across settings is needed to support firms/brands to optimally balance their investments and resources across the three stages of the customer journey. To investigate, researchers can opt for conjoint analyses where respondents are introduced to choice sets featuring different levels of resource investments across the three stages and explore how this affects their CX.

Zooming in on the individual stages, the emergence of big-data-driven microtargeting is expected to especially change the prepurchase stage, altering the traditional need recognition/consideration set/evaluation funnel into an effortless whole (André et al. 2018). Netflix, for instance, dramatically simplifies content selection by proposing content that any of its individual subscribers are likely to enjoy based on previous behaviors. Similarly, digital advertisers are putting in place ad-scheduling strategies at an individual level (Todri, Ghose, and Singh 2019), while smart assistants such as Amazon’s Alexa and Google’s Assistant have the ability to learn and predict users’ needs and preferences and eventually automate consumption decisions (De Keyser et al. 2019). Such a transformation raises a whole new set of questions related to CX formation: How do rapid automation and microtargeting practices impact CX? How do customers develop trust in agents and smart assistants such that they are willing to give up autonomy and follow these actors? To gain insight, researchers may benefit from observing how customers respond to recommender agents in online retail environments or smart assistants at home through netnographic and/or ethnographic research. Given the availability of big data in this area, researchers can collaborate with firms to develop finely tuned attribution models to examine how smart technologies and AI

influence the entire customer journey, and how to optimize use of new marketing and ad tech opportunities. To anticipate further AI-based advancements, researchers may also benefit from collaborations with operations management and information systems scholars.

Context: Future Opportunities

In contrast to the *individual* and *social* context, the *market* and *environmental* context are largely ignored (see Table 2). Hence, significant opportunities remain to consider how the large set of contextual factors impact CX. These opportunities will continue to expand as big data and new technologies are enabling brands/firms to have more information than ever before about the context in which the customer journey is embedded at each of the four levels (Thomadsen et al. 2018). While practitioner-oriented work increasingly recognizes that brands/firms may profit from contextual insights (e.g., Sigelkow and Terwiesch 2019), much still remains unknown on how and in what way contextual information may transform business practices. More specifically, future research may consider how (new) contextual information can influence CX strategies and may give rise to new business models. Uber, for instance, strongly builds on geo-localization to connect drivers and riders, determine prices and communicate service specifics such as estimated time to pickup to its users. More insights are needed to determine how and in what way(s) brands/firms may systematically make use of contextual insights to enhance CX.

Given the plethora of contextual data that may be relevant, research will also be needed to support brands/firms in selecting the most appropriate contextual data. It is unlikely all contextual factors are equally important across consumption situations. Therefore, we call for more work looking into new ways to rank order and select critical contextual information, what contextual data should be prioritized to use along the customer journey, and at what level of aggregation brands/firms should best collect, analyze, and use contextual data. Gridwise, an application designed to assist rideshare drivers, for instance, has done great work in this area, providing and sorting real-time contextual information to boost driver earnings in a specific area, including airport information (e.g., number of passengers arriving), event listings, and weather data. This prioritization of contextual information helped increase average driver earnings by 39% (Mericle 2018). A multiple case study design (Verleye 2019) may allow insight into how different types of businesses (e.g., online retailers vs. insurance companies) use contextual information to boost CX along with its financial implications.

Similarly, work is needed to understand trade-offs between personalization and privacy considerations (Aguirre et al. 2015; Bleier, De Keyser, and Verleye 2018). Moreover, various legal frameworks, such as Europe's General Data Protection Regulation, that limit data collection and/or usage may change customers' awareness of privacy issues. Various research questions appear: How should companies collect contextual information? What level of transparency is required? How far can

companies go in deploying contextual data taking into the account the personalization-privacy paradox? Here, cross-national comparative case analyses may allow to gain insight into the impact of various legal frameworks on the usability of contextual data and their performance implications from a customer and firm perspective.

Finally, we need more work to understand how major and sudden environmental changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic may alter CX(M). Brands/firms and customers worldwide are facing an unprecedented crisis, changing their spending patterns as they are facing uncertainties related to their health and income. Research will be needed to understand how this alters customer expectations and how brands/firms need to respond to deliver valuable experiences to their customer bases.

Qualities: Future Opportunities

The most established quality is *CX dimensionality*, which is recognized in most CX definitions to date. The dominant CX stream now recognizes five CX dimensions—emotional/affective, cognitive/mental, physical/sensorial, and social/relational, and behavioral/pragmatic (e.g., Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). However, more research is still needed to better detail the social, sensorial, and behavioral aspects of CX and how they work in combination with the cognitive and emotional dimension (Mahr, Stead, and Odekerken-Schröder 2019). In addition, more work is needed to understand the importance of each dimension, how this varies across distinct situations (i.e., is there such a thing as an optimal level?), and how brands/firms may better trigger each individual dimension and/or combination. Experimental work and conjoint analyses may help support research in answering these questions.

With regard to the role of customer *participation*, future work could look into how differing levels of participation across the customer journey impact CX, and the boundary conditions that drive customer preferences for high versus low levels of participation (i.e., how active do customers want to be?). A company like Ikea, for instance, has been rethinking its model in the last few years. Whereas customer participation is still high for many of its customers (i.e., picking up and assembling furniture is done by the customer), they have added design, delivery, and assembly services in partnership with TaskRabbit that allows customers to interact with Ikea in a rather passive manner, broadening the Ikea CX options.

Ordinariness/extraordinariness and *timeflow* received less attention than the other qualities in the CX(M) literature. While both find more traction in fields closely related to CX, including research on flow (Novak, Hoffman, and Yung 2000) and time perceptions (Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999), CX research should devote more attention to both qualities. Interesting research opportunities include: When do consumer prefer ordinary experiences? In light of COVID-19, how do seemingly ordinary experiences like grocery shopping change in nature? When can the often-hyped extraordinary experiences

Table 4. Contexts Used in CX Research.

Contexts	# Articles (%; $n = 212$) ^a
Varied of self-selected ^b	43 (20.28)
Retail	29 (13.68)
Financial services	18 (8.49)
Arts and entertainment	18 (8.49)
Hospitality	17 (8.02)
Technology and IT services	6 (2.83)
Telecommunications	6 (2.83)
Health care	5 (2.36)
Travel	2 (0.94)
Other	24 (11.32)
N/A	44 (20.75)

Note. CX = customer experience; N/A = not applicable.

^aWhile we systematically reviewed 143 articles, the numbers in this table refer to studies within these articles. That is, a single article may contain more than one study. ^bIn self-selected context, the respondents are usually asked to remember a recent CX, whereas varied contexts indicate studies with more than one context (Khamitov, Grégoire, and Suri 2020).

(e.g., Pine and Gilmore 1998) negatively impact value perceptions? How do the different time aspects—duration, variation, speed, rhythm—impact CX at various stages of the customer journey? How is perceived timeflow different depending on the valence of the CX? To answer such questions, researchers can conduct diary studies in a setting where service providers have long-term customer relationships—such as health care—to examine the incidence, duration, and impact of (extra)ordinary experiences on overall service evaluations and behavioral outcomes.

Despite some notable exceptions (e.g., Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017), *valence* and its role in CX formation is also largely ignored in CX research. Meanwhile, the link between the valence of experiences and a number of evaluative outcomes such as satisfaction and value-in-use deserves further investigation. Of particular interest could be the identification of experiences that customers prefer to be indifferent as not every CX may need to be highly positive (Becker and Jaakkola 2020). Following the possible coactivation of positive, negative, and/or neutral feelings (Andrade and Cohen 2007), future research can also explore the ambivalent nature of experiences and its implications for evaluative customer outcomes. The latter type of research is especially interesting in contexts where brands or firms invest in generating positive experiences while the core product or service triggers negative experiences (e.g., pain in hospitals and fear in horror movies). The extent to which brand/firms can manage these ambivalent experiences might contribute to a better understanding of CX.

The TCQ Nomenclature: Methodological Challenges

From a TCQ perspective, the field faces some methodological challenges linked to each building block individually, and to their connections. In this section, we seek to provide guidance on how CX researchers may match their efforts with the TCQ

Table 5. Methodologies Used in CX Research (Based on the Number of Studies Within Articles).

Method	# Articles (%; $n = 212$) ^a
Conceptual	43 (20.28%)
Experiment	28 (13.21%)
Lab experiment (scenario-based)	11 (5.19%)
Online experiment (scenario-based)	6 (2.83%)
Field experiment	2 (0.94%)
Experiment (not specified)	4 (1.89%)
Experiment (other)	5 (2.36%)
Survey	66 (31.13%)
Field survey	17 (8.02%)
Online survey	22 (10.38%)
Lab survey	11 (5.19%)
Mail survey	1 (0.47%)
Survey (not specified)	7 (3.30%)
Survey (other)	8 (3.77%)
Case study	17 (8.02%)
Ethnography	8 (3.77%)
Other qualitative ^b	35 (16.51%)
Service design techniques	6 (2.83%)
Literature review	9 (4.25%)

^aWhile we systematically reviewed 143 articles, the numbers in this table refer to studies within these articles. That is, a single article may contain more than one study. ^bCombination of various qualitative methods such as interviewing, focus groups, and so on.

nomenclature, while also building on an analysis of the meta-data found in CX(M) literature.

In relation to CX touchpoints and the customer journey in general, we observe that much service and marketing research currently focuses on individual touchpoints in a retail setting (see Table 4). However, there is a lack of longitudinal research designs to create insights across different touchpoints and journey stages (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). The use of (mobile) diary studies (Macdonald, Wilson, and Konus 2012) and attribution modeling techniques (Kannan, Reinartz, and Verhoef 2016) in conjunction with journey mapping and service blueprinting (Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan 2008) efforts can be highly beneficial to overcome the dominant static view, allowing to capture CX dynamics across touchpoints of different nature, control, and stage. Case study research, in turn, may offer insight into how and why companies change touchpoints along customer journeys over time, thereby taking its implications for customers, firms, and other stakeholders into consideration (Verleye 2019).

Significant opportunities for context-related CX work may lie in adopting a design thinking approach (currently under-represented in CX research—see Table 5), by which researchers and practitioners gather information about the four distinct contextual levels and use this information to design new CX practices. Further, while qualitative research pointed at contextual influences (see Table 5), these influences are not well-understood. New technologies are opening many possibilities for data fusion from various offline and online sources (Thomadsen et al. 2018). Mobile and smart technologies enable the capture and collection of contextual data through myriad

Table 6. B2C Versus B2B Focus in CX Research.

Setting	# Articles (%; $n = 212$) ^a
B2C	195 (91.98)
B2B	6 (2.83)
B2C and B2B	11 (5.19)

Note. CX = customer experience; B2C = business to consumer; B2B = business to business.

^aWhile we systematically reviewed 143 articles, the numbers in this table refer to studies within these articles. That is, a single article may contain more than one study.

sensors and trackers, which enables firms to gain insight into the individual, social, environmental, and market context in a reliable and objective manner (Verhulst et al. 2019). The rise of wearable devices offers ample opportunities to collect individual context data such as one's daily activity rating (i.e., number of steps, calories, sleep hours, pulse rate) and health condition. Smartphones enable data collection on multiple levels including the individual (e.g., personal calendar), social (e.g., social connections), and environmental (e.g., geo-localization) levels—or context combinations, such as Apple's new partnerships with local gyms to enable consumers to track workouts and earn rewards (Haselton 2020). People themselves also reveal context-related information through their social media accounts, including likes, shares, posts, and comments that they often grant brands/firms access to through usage of specific apps. Finally, other tools like eye trackers, haptic devices, motion sensors, and microphones allow researchers to develop an understanding of what contextual elements are actually experienced in an objective manner (Verhulst et al. 2019). In this area, it may also be helpful to build on insights from environmental and social psychology, behavioral economics, and management literature, which have a tradition of looking at broader contextual influences.

Looking at CX qualities, the dominant focus has been on measuring the dimensionality component (Gahler, Klein, and Paul 2019), while other qualities received less research and measurement attention. Moreover, measuring of CX dimensionality typically relies on one of the CX scales developed in the literature focusing mostly on brands (e.g., Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig 2007) and services (e.g., Klaus and Maklan 2012; Verleye 2015). To our knowledge, no paper exists trying to develop an all-encompassing measurement tool to grasp all CX qualities in a holistic manner, as well a tool that allows CX to be captured in a dynamic manner across the customer journey. We believe that any tool to capture CX should be tailored to the specific context (as called for by Hamilton 2016; Houston 2016). It is time to move beyond the dominant focus on survey research (see Table 6). Potential lies in new techniques like text mining (e.g., McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019), image mining (e.g., Ordenes and Zhang 2019) and neuroscience (e.g., Verhulst et al. 2019), in addition to conjoint analysis, econometric modeling, big data analysis (e.g., Kumar et al. 2014), and established qualitative research methods—like

Table 7. Country Focus in CX Research.

Country	# Articles (%; $n = 212$) ^a
United States	52 (24.53)
Multicountry	18 (8.49)
Portugal	14 (6.60)
UK	12 (5.66)
India	9 (4.25)
Australia	4 (1.89)
France	4 (1.89)
Kuwait	4 (1.89)
Sweden	4 (1.89)
Canada	3 (1.42)
Finland	3 (1.42)
Japan	3 (1.42)
China	1 (0.47)
Egypt	1 (0.47)
Germany	1 (0.47)
Malaysia	1 (0.47)
Norway	1 (0.47)
Spain	1 (0.47)
Not specified	24 (11.32)
N/A	52 (24.53)

Note. CX = customer experience.

^aWhile we systematically reviewed 143 articles, the numbers in this table refer to studies within these articles. That is, a single article may contain more than one study.

phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study research (Verleye 2019).

In addition, business to consumer (B2C) research is dominant (see Table 6) with over 91% of research solely focusing on individual customers. While the authors believe that the insights generated from this stream of research may apply in business to business (B2B) settings (indeed, the B2B-only articles in our sample largely build on B2C work), there is a need for research to consider how CX differs in a B2B environment (notable exceptions include McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019; Roy, Sreejesh, and Bhatia 2019; Zolkiewski et al. 2017), and to what extent the TCQ nomenclature is fully applicable to B2B settings and/or needs to be extended. While most of the TCQ components were identified by the B2B-specific papers (except timeflow, valence, and ordinariness), more research is needed in this area to further develop knowledge on B2B CX specifically.

Finally, the CX(M) literature is largely restricted to Western cultures (e.g., United States, UK, Portugal), while limited research focuses on non-Western cultures (e.g., China, India; see Table 7). Moreover, no study in our sample looked at the impact of cultural differences on CX. This is surprising as culture as a contextual variable is a strong determinant of the values customers hold, the goals they pursue, and the ways customers perceive and interpret their environment (Shavitt and Barnes 2019). As such, CX research in a larger variety of cultures is necessary to gain a better understanding of how different cultures appreciate various components of CX. For example, what dimensions of CX do people from Western

versus non-Western cultures attach more importance to? Does culture predict how customers react to changes in touchpoint nature? Does culture impact how various other contextual influences like the weather, competitor actions, and economic climate impact CX? Providing an answer to these and other questions would be of great importance to companies seeking to expand their business to different cultural regions and/or adapt their offering to various ethnic groups (Shavitt and Barnes 2020), while also expanding the cultural richness and inclusivity of the CX field.

The TCQ Nomenclature: Managerial Opportunities

Experience design is not new and has been promoted since the early 1990s (Carbone and Haeckel 1994). The idea generally boils down to creating a setting in which experiences are created in a favorable way to close the gap between intended and perceived CX (Ponsignon, Durrieu, and Bouzdine-Chameeva 2017). As more data becomes available, a new world opens to companies to design experiences. However, a large majority of CX professionals struggle to develop clear CX practices (HBR Analytic Services 2017), and CX performance has been plateauing (Forrester 2019). One key reason is lack of knowledge about CX and the subsequent lack of support from top management (Davey 2019). We posit that the introduction of the TCQ nomenclature may provide a path forward as it provides practitioners with a new, simple lens to view CX. A key advantage of the TCQ nomenclature is its ability to make CX *actionable* and to help define the content of intended CXs (Becker and Jaakkola 2020). Here we discuss two specific aspects of CXM that would significantly benefit from our approach: the CX audit process and CX design and innovation.

CX Audit

In order to identify specific opportunities to strengthen the current CX or to identify critical pain points, many firms periodically audit their customer journey and delivered CX (Kuehnl, Jozic, and Homburg 2019). The TCQ nomenclature may help to improve the CX audit process, provide a common language to underlie such efforts, and move firms more quickly to actionable improvement.

1. *Streamline the touchpoint overview.* A initial step of a TCQ-informed audit would have managers making an inventory of the touchpoints (i.e., nature? control? stage?) that the brand/firm has with their customers as well as an assessment of their connectivity (i.e., how easy is it to move from one touchpoint to another?) and consistency (i.e., do experiences match across touchpoints?; Homburg, Jozic, and Kuehnl 2017). Specifically, CX managers should list all human, physical, and digital touchpoints—whether or not controlled by the firm—in the prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase stage of the customer journey. Tools like customer

journey mapping (Rosenbaum, Otalora, and Ramírez 2017) and service blueprinting (Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan, 2008) provide the basis to kick-start the TCQ audit.

2. *Recognize context.* Subsequently, an assessment is needed as to what contextual influences are at play across the various touchpoints, the extent to which current touchpoints are context-adaptive, and what sources the brand/firm currently uses to capture contextual data.
3. *Assess all delivered qualities.* Third, the various touchpoints along the customer journey need to be assessed in terms of their qualities and the value they provide. Tools like customer surveys and real-time experience tracking (Macdonald, Wilson, and Konus 2012) may help in this effort. By linking data about CX qualities to data associated with the evaluative judgments (such as measures of customer satisfaction and NPS scores), CX managers can further assess the relative importance of CX qualities and the potential for improvement across touchpoints (i.e., driver analysis; Keiningham et al. 2020).
4. *Evaluate, benchmark and move to action.* By combining the information gathered across these three steps, the TCQ nomenclature allows a common vocabulary to analyze, evaluate, and discuss existing CX practices, while also providing a starting point to develop competitor benchmarks. The audit will most likely reveal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that exist in the current CX. Mere identification, though, is insufficient. The value of the TCQ approach is that it provides a sufficient level of detail and specificity—what touchpoint, what specific quality within that touchpoint, and in what context—to enable managers to quickly “fix,” “improve,” or “remove” that particular aspect of the touchpoint that will result in an improved CX. It is the identification of the TCQ combinations which offers the best opportunities for action. For example, a customer pain point may be identified at a specific touchpoint that takes too long (timeflow quality) or is too mentally taxing (cognitive quality). This issue can quickly be rectified by clear operational changes, or an improvement opportunity may be identified to make a specific touchpoint experience more positive (valence quality) when it occurs in a specific (e.g., social) context.

CX Innovation and Design

The TCQ nomenclature will also strengthen CX design, whether innovating existing CX, designing new touchpoints, or designing entire new customer journeys. Traditional customer journey work typically starts with the existing or desired customer touchpoints. However, recognizing that touchpoints are only one building block of CX, this approach enables firms to start with qualities or context. Specifically, rather than starting from existing *touchpoints* and evaluating how customers value the delivered *qualities* (what is currently done most often), managers may consider

Table 8. TCQ Checklist for CX Management.

CX Audit

-
- (1) Streamline touchpoint overview
- List distinct touchpoints along the customer journey
 - *What is their nature?*
 - *What level of control does the brand/firm have?*
 - *At what stage do they occur (i.e., what goal is the customer trying to achieve?)?*
 - Assess touchpoint connectivity and consistency
 - *How easy is it to move from one touchpoint to another?*
 - *Does CX match across touchpoints?*
- (2) Recognize context
- What contextual influences are at play?
 - To what extent are touchpoints context sensitive by design?
 - Does the brand/firm have data to capture/assess contextual influences?
- (3) Assess all delivered qualities
- What qualities are experienced at the various touchpoints?
 - To what extent do touchpoints create value for the customer? In what way(s)?
- (4) Evaluate, benchmark, and move to action
- What strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats exist in the current CX?
 - How does our CX compare to that of our competitors?
 - Where do we need to fix, improve, or remove touchpoints to improve the CX?
 - Outline current pain points and improvement opportunities that can be characterized through existing TCQ combinations and make operational changes
-

CX Innovation and Design

-
- (1) Determine desired experience qualities
- What qualities are customers looking for/expecting at the various touchpoints?
 - To what extent is each quality—level of participation, multidimensionality, timeflow, valence, and ordinariness—potentially important (or unimportant) along the customer journey?
- (2) Assess the need for contextual information
- What contextual data can and/or should be collected to enhance touchpoints so that they allow specific qualities to occur?
 - How can we best integrate this type of information into the brand/firm's touchpoints?
- (3) Determine the needed touchpoint constellation
- What type of touchpoint constellation is best to promote sought-after qualities?
 - To what extent do existing touchpoints need to be adapted or removed? Are new touchpoints required?
- (4) Move to action: Experiment, assess, and iterate
- What are the most likely opportunities to innovate and differentiate CX?
 - To what extent do adapted touchpoints enhance CX?
-

Note. CX = customer experience; TCQ = touchpoints, context, qualities.

what experience *qualities* customers are looking for and then gather the necessary *contextual* data to enable these *qualities* at appropriate *touchpoints*.

1. *Determine desired experience qualities.* More concretely, in a first step, managers may assess the desired experience qualities of customer responses at various points along the customer journey. Tools such as customer surveys, ethnography, netnography, and depth interviews may help gain insights into the desired qualities, identifying the extent to which each quality—level of participation, multidimensionality, timeflow, valence, and ordinariness—is potentially important (or unimportant) at each journey stage and valued by the customer (Keiningham et al. 2020). An example is the beauty firm, Glossier. Prior to selling products, the firm (through its blog and Instagram) got feedback from customers

regarding the specific qualities desired in their products and service processes. Only once the firm had sufficient insight from customers did they begin selling their products to consumers and designing the overall CX. With over \$100 million in sales in 2018, they continue to innovate and refine their products' qualities and their overall CX by seeking customer feedback through their "Into the Gloss" website and their Instagram account.

2. *Assess need for contextual information.* Second, an assessment is needed as to what *contextual data* can and/or should be collected to be able to create those touchpoints that allow specific qualities to occur. Managers are now confronted with an abundance of possibilities to grow their contextual understanding and may build on the earlier identified plethora of context-aware technologies. The challenge broadly lies in selecting the most relevant contextual information. These data

provide a rich source of information that can help enhance the value of the firms' actions and offerings through increased personalization and contextualization.

3. *Determine touchpoint constellation.* In a third step, managers need to assess what type of touchpoint constellation (i.e., combination of touchpoints) is best to promote the sought-after qualities and check whether existing touchpoints may be adapted or whether new touchpoints need to be introduced. Here, the trade-off between having touchpoint control or not is also critical, considering the inherent nature—dissatisfying, neutral, satisfying—of the touchpoint and the impact it may have on the brand/firm (Kranzbühler, Kleijnen, and Verlegh 2019).
4. *Move to action: Experiment, assess, iterate.* This iterative process leads to a list of potential opportunities to innovate and differentiate CX. From this, managers must select the actions that are most likely to be successful given their setting and customer base. Experimentation, prototyping, and choice modeling can assist managers in making the selection (Almquist, Senior, and Bloch 2016). The simple, clear TCQ nomenclature quickly enables firms to design unique combinations of TCQ that solve customer problems and differentiate firms from the competition.

Taken together, we believe the TCQ nomenclature may hold significant value for practitioners in providing a common language to discuss CX management, design and innovation. It is critical for managers to understand their customers and what they desire. A TCQ-informed vision may help to see the forest for the trees. Table 8 provides a TCQ-inspired checklist for CX managers.

Conclusion

In this article, the TCQ nomenclature is introduced as a standardized lens to view CX. Its main contribution lies in moving from a focus on individual aspects of CX to integrating all key components of CX (MacInnis 2011). Specifically, following an inductive analysis of the CX(M) literature, this investigation finds that CX is comprised of three building blocks: touchpoints, context, and experience qualities. The value of the nomenclature lies in enabling brands/firms and researchers to link the building blocks and their components in ways that have not been considered before. In this sense, a dialectical integration takes place that may help move the field forward and reduce the misunderstanding and difficulties in managing CX.

In addition, the TCQ nomenclature helped identify gaps in the existing literature and points to various (methodological) ways forward. As a result, CX scholars can accelerate empirical research that addresses the various challenges managers face (by connecting with other fields/disciplines, using novel methodologies, and linking the TCQ elements with behavioral and financial outcomes).

Finally, the TCQ framework may support managers in their efforts to develop a better understanding of CX through

TCQ-informed brand/firm audits and approaches to innovation. Applying TCQ to identify novel combinations of touchpoints, contexts, and qualities will provide new opportunities for firms to differentiate their offerings and to improve the experience of customers.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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