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**Doctoral Thesis**

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CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINUOUS SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS

PhD Series 02-2018

Helle Haurum

# CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINUOUS SERVICE RELATIONSHIPS

The PhD School in Economics and Management

PhD Series 02.2018

**CBS**  COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL  
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

# **Customer Engagement Behavior in the context of Continuous Service Relationships**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This thesis discusses customers' engagement behaviors (CEB) in the context of continuous service relationships (telecommunication provider and financial services' provider). CEB manifestations are agreed in literature and in business to be a potential source of value for the firm and valuable contributions have been made, mainly focusing at antecedents for CEB, the various CEB behaviors and consequences of CEB. Extant literature adopts mainly a firm-centric perspective and tends to be conceptual.

This research adopts a customer-centric perspective. The methodology is qualitative and is performed via semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals resulting in 40 touch-point histories about their service relationships with their telecommunication provider and financial services provider. Furthermore, are qualitative data collected at the telecommunication firm, in terms of interviews with employees and participant observations at touch-points.

CEB are definitely found to be potential sources for value-creation for the firm. CEB can however at times destroy value or cause lost CEB value (when CEB initiatives by the firm are not returned).

From the perspective of customers are CEB manifestations part of their everyday Life. Customers manifest CEB to obtain a certain goal, sometimes targeted the firm, and sometimes targeted a group external to the firm. Customers manifest CEB by adopting a certain interaction style to facilitate goal achievement, and the way customers manifest CEB are sometimes inconsistent and follows not necessarily pre-figured sequences.

Customers' CEB manifestations co-exist with the experiences customers have in their service relationships. CEB is sometimes manifested by customers to re-experience, reinforce or challenge what the customer is currently / has been experiencing. CEB is as well sometimes embedded in the service relationship to a degree, where customers' experiences and CEB become deeply intertwined or even become one and same construct, and sometimes is a CEB manifestation a consequence of a certain customer experience.

CEB has changed the service relationship, and some of the recognized cornerstones in what constitutes a service relationship are challenged. This thesis suggests that CEB manifestations turn the service relationship into a plethora of (service) events of sometimes conflicting valence, which might disrupt the value creation process intended by the firm. This might be the reality of 'the new service relationship'.

These obvious managerial challenges are best solved by the firm, when the firm adopts a customer-centric approach and understands which situation(s) their customers are most frequently in (revolving around the firm). The firm should investigate which touch-points are relevant contingent the customer situation and finally how the touch-points could be best possible organized to stimulate for favorable CEB. This novel managerial concept is labeled 'customer arenas'.

## RESUME:

Denne afhandling beskriver kundernes engagement adfærd (KEA) i forbindelse med kontinuerede service relationships (indenfor telekommunikation og finansielle tjenester). KEA er i den akademiske litteratur og i erhvervslivet anset som en potentiel værdikilde for virksomheden, og forskning har bidraget til at forstå KEA, hovedsageligt med fokus på 'hvad leder til KEA' 'forskellige typer af KEA' og 'konsekvenserne af KEA'. Den eksisterende litteratur anlægger hovedsageligt et indefra-og ud perspektiv og er fortinsvis konceptuelt orienteret.

Afhandlingen anlægger et kunde-centreret perspektiv. Metoden er kvalitativ og udføres via semi-strukturerede dybdegående interviews med kunder (forbrugere) og resulterer i 40 touch-point historier om disses service relationships med henholdsvis deres telekommunikation udbyder og udbyder af finansielle tjenesteydelser. Derudover er kvalitative data indsamlet i telekommunikations-virksomheden i form af interviews med medarbejdere og observationer i forskellige touch-points.

KEA identificeres i denne afhandling som en potentiel kilde for værdiskabelse i virksomheden. KEA kan dog undertiden ødelægge værdi eller forårsage 'tabt KEA værdi' (når virksomhedens initiativer for at stimulere KEA ikke returneres).

Kunder manifesterer KEA som en del af hverdagen. Kunder manifesterer KEA for at opnå et bestemt mål, undertiden i relation til virksomheden, og undertiden i relation til en gruppe udenfor virksomheden. Kunder anvender en bestemt 'interaction' stil, når de manifesterer KEA, for at nå målet med KEA. Når kunder manifester KEA foregår det ikke nødvendigvis på konsistent vis eller i bestemte sekvenser, men snarere på en dynamisk og til tider kompleks vis.

Kunders KEA manifestationer sameksisterer med de 'customer experiences', som kunder har i deres service relationer. KEA manifesteres under tiden af kunder for at genopleve, styrke eller udfordre hvad kunden i øjeblikket oplever eller har oplevet. KEA er undertiden indlejret i service relationen en grad, hvor kundernes 'experiences' og KEA blive dybt sammenflettet eller endda blive et og samme begreb; og endelig kan kundens KEA manifestation være en direkte konsekvens af en bestemt kundeoplevelse.

KEA har ændret service-relationships på en måde, der udfordrer nogle af de gængse opfattelser af, hvad der udgør hjørnestenene i et service relationship. Denne afhandling foreslår, at KEA manifestationer medfører, at der snarere er tale om et væld af (service) begivenheder af undertiden modstridende værdi. Dette betyder, at værdiskabelses-processen – initieret af virksomheden – bliver disruptet. Dette kunne være virkeligheden for 'Det nye service relationship'.

Disse indlysende ledelsesmæssige udfordringer løses bedst af virksomheden, når den tager en kunde-centreret tilgang til opgaven, og søger at forstå hvilke situationer kunderne oftest er i (i forhold til virksomheden). Virksomheden kan med fordel undersøge, hvilke touch-punkter der er relevante i kunde- situationen, og hvordan touch-points bør være organiseret for at stimulere værdiskabende KEA. Denne nye tilgang præsenteres i denne afhandling som 'customer arenas'.

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This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Helle Haurum

October 2017

## **A guide for the reader**

*This PhD thesis is a ‘paper-based’ PhD thesis at Copenhagen Business School. This type of PhD thesis is oftentimes referred to as a ‘compilation thesis’. The core of the thesis consists of three papers, which each investigates a hitherto not well understood problem in relation to customer engagement behavior (CEB), followed by a meta-discussion of CEB in the context of continuous service relationships.*

The thesis starts out (1) by setting the scene for why CEB is a relevant research domain for academia and business. Then, an overview over key content and contribution of each of the three papers follows (three abstracts).

After setting the scene and establishing an overview over key content and contributions of the three papers, the thesis is organized as follows: (2) Research background, (3) Scientific approach and methodology, (4) ‘The three papers’ and ‘Further reflections on the work done – The three papers’, (5) Meta discussion, (6) Contributions for theory and business, (7) Conclusion and final remarks.

## **Clarification of constructs central to this thesis**

**Customers' engagement behaviors (CEB)** are behaviors that revolve around the firm and/or brand including and going beyond the purchase. Examples of CEB are customers posting at social media, liking a brand at FaceBook, giving feedback to the firm or endorsing the brand or firm to their private sphere (e.g. Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010).

**Touch-points** are the loci where CEB is initiated and manifested and range from for instance interpersonal communication amongst friends, comments on social media, posts at the firm's website, feedback after a service encounter in the firm's call centre or encounters in the physical shop. A touch-point is hence the locus for initiating CEB (by the firm) and manifesting CEB (by the customer). Furthermore, customers can act as endorsers and thereby becoming touch-points themselves (e.g. Hogan, Almquist and Glynn 2005; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004).

**Customer experience** has enjoyed longstanding attention in the literature (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) and Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) have amongst others developed the experience construct in the context of brands and conceptualize brand experience as a composite construct consisting of "sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments" (p.52). Similarly, von Wallpach and Kreuzer (2013, p.1325) refer to brand experiences as "subjective responses to brand-related stimuli consumers experience via multiple senses and introspective states".



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# **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Academic relevance of research in customer engagement behavior**

CEB is a rather novel and immature research domain. The research domain has attracted increased attention in the literature and valuable contributions have been made, mainly emphasizing the antecedents for CEB, the multiple CEB and the consequences of CEB (van Doorn et al. 2010). Due to the novelty of the research domain are definitions of the CEB construct not conclusive and neither is the understanding of how CEB is related to, or connected with other events in the service relationship, such as ‘customer experiences’ or ‘customer involvement’. Attempts have been made to establish nomological networks regarding antecedents for, and consequences of CEB; these are however not conclusive either (Fehrer, Woratschek and Germelmann 2014).

CEB is referred to by the Marketing Science Institute (2010) to be of high priority for both academia and business, and authors writing within the field point out in various ways, how and why the domain is of relevance.

First and foremost authors point out how CEB is a source of value to the firm (e.g. Kumar et al. 2010; Verhoef and Lemon 2013). Value is created for instance inter consumers (Brodie et al. 2011), when consumers partake in word of mouth activities online and offline, and between customers and the firm (Kristensson, Gustafsson and Archer 2004), for instance when customers are giving feedback to the firm regarding products and services, or partaking in new product development. Kumar and colleagues (2010, p.298) discuss no less than four types of value created via CEB manifestations. The authors propose that the value of customer engagement is comprised of four core dimensions” which are realized via four different types of CEBs (p. 299): “Customer purchasing behavior” (corresponding to customer lifetime value), “customer referral behavior” (which is the firm’s acquisition of new customers, for instance, via incentive programs; corresponding to customer referral value), “customer influencer behavior” (for instance, customers’ word of mouth activities; corresponding to customer influencer value), and “customer knowledge behavior” (which is customers giving feedback to the firm or suggestions for service or product development, corresponding to customer knowledge value).

Research into how CEB is related to and connected with other events in the service relationship is as well of high relevance for academia. ‘Customer experience’ is a dominant domain, which by now is rather well understood and probably is considered mature (Lemon

and Verhoef 2016). Since CEB today is central to and considered a vital part of customer management (Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2013) it is relevant to study how this novel construct (CEB) interplay with existing and established constructs in literature. It is for instance relevant to understand how the advent of the novel CEB construct eventually interfere with and change what customers are experiencing in the service relationship. On this note it is as well relevant to academically establish an understanding of CEB in its own right, to understand how it is different from other existing constructs such as ‘customer experience’, ‘customer involvement’ or ‘customer participation’.

Finally, it is of academic relevance to research how to harvest the value of CEB, i.e. the management challenge following the advent of the promising CEB construct (Verhoef and Lemon 2013). Bijmolt and colleagues (2010) set the scene by pointing out six barriers for implementing analytics for CEB. The authors don’t present a solution but are directing the attention also to this prospect theoretical contribution.

Extant literature is predominantly firm-centric and valuable frameworks and conceptualizations have been developed already at this stage. To advance the field and to gain a better understanding of CEB, this thesis adopts a customer centric approach. CEB is highlighted to be driven by motivational forces with the individual and is manifested by individuals, why it is considered relevant to investigate CEB also from this under researched perspective.

CEB is a new landscape, offering several not yet explored scenic routes, relevant for academics with interest in customer-firm relationships.

## **1.2 Practical relevance of research in customer engagement behavior**

The number and nature of media, platforms or situations where a customer (an individual) can interact with the firm can be observed to be ever increasing and more complex than ever (McKinsey&Company 2017). This is mainly due to the technological evolution and customers’ fast adoption of smart-phones, tablets and other devices, offering individuals mobility and easy access to for instance information, entertainment and knowledge 24/7. The current landscape is hence challenging to navigate for business managers.

Many firms have seen the potential in the new technological platforms and it would be an impossible task to mention every aspect of how firms make use of technological platforms for a commercial purpose such as stimulating for CEB. Firms benefit for instance from the new technology in terms of easy access to new markets and by testing new product ideas,

collecting feedback and creating buzz or systematically monitoring PR activities via bloggers. The list of opportunities is abundant.

Customers have at all times, i.e. also before the advent of www and technological platforms, shared information, or endorsed or warned their peers (Rogers 2003) regarding various firms' products or performance. Customers have as well at all times been giving feedback to the firm, either in a formal way via firm initiated surveys, or in an informal or spontaneous manner for instance during a service interaction.

The fast adoption of technology with both customers and firms have resulted in numerous new places, moments or situations where the firm and the customer can get into 'touch' for whatever reason, driven by the individual and/or the firm (McKinsey&Company 2016).

Following this observable reality – that customers and firms interact 24/7 online or offline and via human or technological touch-points have given rise to concepts in business, which assist the firm in managing customers' numerous behaviors, which revolve around the firm or brand and are manifested at and across touch-points. These numerous behaviors are what in literature are coined as 'CEB' (Van Doorn et al. 2010).

The dominant concept in business for managing CEB is the concept of 'Customer journey'. Customer journey is a managerial tool for mapping the customers' possible presence and activities at various touch-points (on-line and off-line; in control of the firm and out of control for the firm) tied to a timeline. Customer journeys are most frequently related to the customers' activities revolving around the purchase situation, hence mapping possible customer presence and activities at touch-points before, during and after the purchase situation. Customer journey as a concept has recently appeared in the academic literature (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). So far are touch-points along the customer journey mapped and discussed in business and academia by adopting the perspective that the customer journey is sequential and linear (Anderl et al. 2016) and Norton and Pine (2013) discuss what customers are experiencing (at singular touch-points) along the customer journey.

CEB is from a practical perspective relevant to research mainly because of the value-perspective. Favorable CEB, such as customers giving feedback to the firm or customers endorsing the firm to their private sphere are very important for firms in terms of value creation. Of course customers can participate in unfavorable CEB (like negative valenced word of mouth activities), which hence is a negative valenced CEB manifestation. In any regard is it relevant for business managers to understand the phenomenon CEB better to improve the CEB management.

Managers tend to focus at the place where CEB is manifested. This means managers tend to focus at the singular touch-points along the customer journey as the places for value creation (McKinsey&Company 2016). From a managerial perspective it would be relevant *also* to research CEB manifestations at and across different types of touch-points. Some CEB manifestations are manifested at a singular touch-point (like a post at a blog) while other CEB manifestations sometimes span at least two touch-points (like customers searching for information for instance at an expert community and at the firm's website).

CEB is probably here to stay and business managers have to deal with this reality. McKinsey&Company (2016) point out how firms that (understand and) manage customers' numerous behaviors (CEB) at and across touch-points along the entire customer journey have higher revenues compared with firms that don't (understand and) manage CEB. The McKinsey&Partners (2016) authors furthermore emphasize the high relevance of adopting a customer-centric perspective and 'to see the world as customers do' (2016, p.1). This finding illustrates at a very practical level, how and why research into CEB from a customer perspective is definitely of relevance to business managers.

Business managers invest considerable amounts in activities, which are not necessarily tied to the core offering of the firm. Quite often these activities are about stimulating for engagement of some sort and the objective is quite often to create 'good customer experiences'. An example could be the telecommunication firm hosting an event of a social character (inviting customers to a concert or soccer match) or initiating engagement via a competition at FaceBook. It is relevant for managers to understand whether such investments are in fact creating value (or eventually the opposite) for the firm.

Overall, it can be observed how there is a tendency amongst practitioners to exploit what is possible (in terms of initiatives for CEB) instead of exploring how to stimulate for CEB, which are in fact creating value for customers, hence the firm. Along with this challenge goes the relevance of understanding better how to manage CEB.

Research into CEB is for these numerous reasons relevant for business managers.

### **1.3 The three papers – key content and contribution**

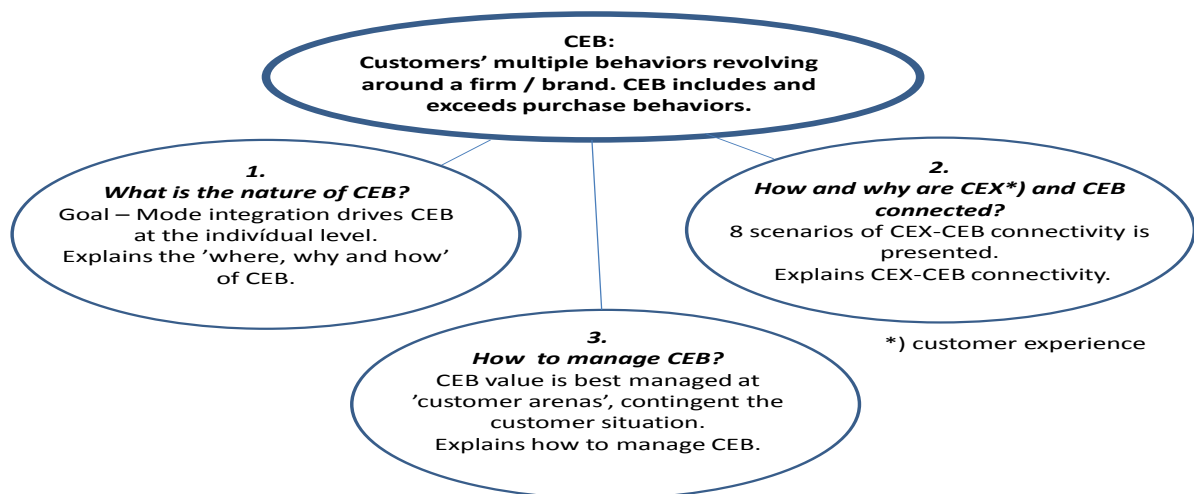
The three papers investigate CEB in the context of continuous service relationships namely customers' service relationships with their telecommunication provider and their financial services' provider (please see section (3.2.1), which concerns reasoning for case selection).

Research into CEB is an important and still nascent research domain and is appointed by the Marketing Science Institute (2010) as a promising and high priority research area. The constructs ‘customer engagement’ and CEB are agreed to be rather complex and authors point out in various ways how further research is needed to understand fully the potential of CEB and how to manage it (Bijmolt et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef and Lemon 2013; Chen et al. 2017). Current literature concentrates predominantly around the possible antecedents for and consequences of CEB. It is however difficult to establish stable relationships between elements (Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014) why the need for alternative approaches and different frameworks are highlighted to develop the status quo.

The existing CEB literature is predominantly firm-centric and conceptual. The three papers in this thesis are underpinned with empiric data and adopt a customer-centric perspective (‘Paper 1’ and ‘Paper 2’) and ‘Paper 3’ compares the firm’s initiatives for CEB with the customers’ CEB manifestations.

Separate and combined, the three papers contribute to the emergent CEB literature with both development of the theoretical reasoning and suggestions for managers. Figure 1. presents an overview over the three papers. Figure 1. ‘Three questions asked and answered’ is inserted beneath. Following the overview are the three abstracts presented, one for each paper. The three papers are inserted in chapter (4) in their full length.

**Figure 1. Three questions asked and answered.**



### ***Paper 1:***

The purpose of the first paper is to take a deep dive into the CEB construct in order to understand best possible the nature of the construct. Extant literature focuses on behavior resulting from motivational drivers but has so far not empirically established the characteristics of these drivers. By adopting a customer-centric approach (40 in-depth touch-point histories with customers) the paper investigates what drives service customers' CEB manifestations at and across touch-points. The key findings are that (I) CEB is motivated by an integration of customers' 'goal-directedness' and their 'interaction mode' when they are active at touch-point(s), (II) customers' goal-directedness determines the touch-points where CEB are manifested, and (III) interaction mode assists goal-achievement and governs why CEB is manifested as it is. The core contribution of this study is an empirically based conceptualization of the integration of customers' goals and their interaction modes at and across touch-points. The conceptualization establishes the nature of CEB by explaining where, why and how CEB is manifested, and contributes to the extant CEB literature by expanding the theoretical reasoning about the nature of CEB.

### ***Paper 2:***

The purpose of the second paper is to understand how and why customers' various experiences in the continuous service relationship are connected to CEB.

The second paper hence investigates the connectivity between customer experience and CEB. This paper contributes to the emergent CEB literature with an improved understanding of how and why certain types of customer experience sometimes lead to certain types of CEB and vice versa. Via a qualitative study of customers' continuous service relationships with their telecommunication provider and their financial services provider this research presents 1) eight scenarios in the service relationship, which contextualize and shape 'customer experience' and CEB; and how and why 2) CEB is sometimes experiential, iterative or educational; 3) CEB is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing, intertwined with or become one with 'customer experience'; and finally how and why 4) 'customer experience' is sometimes an antecedent for CEB. The paper concludes with a conceptualization of 'customer experience' - CEB connectivity and implications for practice and theory. The second paper offers possible solutions to the so far not fully investigated domain of 'customer experience' – CEB connectivity (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). The findings contribute in other words with content to the probably most elaborate but general definition (Brodie 2011, p.260) by



suggesting how and why the dynamics and iterations associated with customer engagement might unfold.

### ***Paper 3:***

The third and final paper aims at a more managerial oriented contribution and sheds light over the customer value management challenge in relation to CEB.

This paper contributes with the concept of ‘customer arenas’ as a novel understanding of how to manage CEB in continuous service relationships. This new perspective contrasts firm-centric and conventional views, where value is managed at singular, sequentially organized touch-points related to the purchase situation. The investigation takes point of departure in a comparative qualitative study conducted with employees of a leading telecommunication firm and their customers. The research revolves around customers’ behaviors including and exceeding the purchase (i.e. CEB) compared with the firm’s initiatives at and across touch-points. The key-finding is that CEB in continuous service relationships are manifested contingent the specific customer situation at groups of touch-points labeled ‘customer arenas’. Following presentation of the concept of customer arenas implications for CEB management are outlined. This new understanding contributes as well to the emergent CEB management literature (cf. Bijmolt et al. 2010) by suggesting a solution to the managerial challenges.

Each paper informs the CEB literature with insights that advance the domain. Combined the three papers provide a hitherto not presented understanding of what constitutes to CEB and how to manage CEB. The papers explain 1) where, why and how CEB is manifested; 2) ‘customer experience’ - CEB connectivity; and finally 3) how to manage CEB in the context of continuous service relationships. The three papers are inserted in their full length respectively, in chapter (4) of this thesis.

The three papers contribute to a research domain, which is agreed to be of high priority and relevance for both literature and business. The results of the thesis furthermore illustrate the potential in gaining a better understanding of CEB via empirically underpinned and not firm-centric research (only).

In summary, this thesis contributes to both the theoretical reasoning underlying the CEB construct and with conceptualizations and frameworks of relevance for literature and business.

## **CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Problematicization and research gaps**

The problem with the current understanding of CEB is multi folded.

First and foremost are definitions of the construct CEB not conclusive, and neither is an understanding of what constitutes to CEB (i.e. an understanding of what CEB consists of). In literature discussions about how to define the construct are centered on whether or not to include the financial transaction. Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) , Verhoef, Reinarts and Krafft (2010) and Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef (2017) suggest that the CEB construct goes beyond the purchase, while Kumar and colleagues (2010) and Pansari and Kumar (2017) argue that the construct would be incomplete without the inclusion of the purchase, since purchase behavior is as well driven by a motivational force.

How, exactly, to define the construct is of interest to scholars. Scholars would most likely aspire to investigate the CEB construct in its own right, and hence be able to specify how the CEB construct is similar to - or different from - other established constructs such as customer experience, customer involvement or customer participation.

Related to the debate about how to define the construct is a so far not empirically established understanding of the nature of CEB, meaning “the ways in which consumers may choose to engage – the dimensions of CEB” (Van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 255). It is a problem area for scholars to really grasp the nature of CEB probably due to the current literature being mainly firm-centric, conceptual and descriptive. Extant literature focuses furthermore mainly at the antecedents for, the multiple CEB behaviors, and the consequences of CEB and there is a tendency to display not empirically underpinned causal concepts like the one presented by van Doorn and colleagues (2010). It might be beneficial to understand better what the construct in itself consists of, i.e. the ways customers may choose to engage, for instance within the borders of a certain type of industry, product or service relationship. Hollebeek (2011) invites to this line of thinking by suggesting that engagement is tied to the individual and to a certain context, and that CEB is the outcome of object-subject interaction. However the authors don’t suggest a solution to the problem indicated regarding the nature of CEB. Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) have developed a valuable, descriptive overview over all possible elements that could aggregate to the nature of CEB: “We propose five dimensions of CEB: valence, form or modality, scope nature of its impact, and customer goals” (p.255). However the authors don’t suggest if some elements are more important or relevant than

others (in various contexts) and neither discuss how the manifold elements are eventually related. The not decided ‘nature of CEB’ is a problem mainly for furthering the theoretical reasoning about CEB.

Authors (Bijmolt et al. 2010) point out how it is a problem to understand possible relationships between antecedents for, the multiple CEB and the consequences of CEB (beyond the obvious, that a satisfied customer is more likely to participate in positive valenced CEB like endorsing the firm, compared to a not satisfied customer). Attempts have been made to establish nomological networks for customer engagement and CEB (Fehrer, Woratschek and Germelmann 2014) and especially for CEB it proved difficult to demonstrate stable relationships between antecedents, the multiple CEB and their consequences. This area is a problem for both academia and practitioners working in the field.

It is definitely a challenge to academically research and identify possible relationships between antecedents for CEB, the multiple CEB manifestations, and consequences of CEB. The challenge pertains both to methodological considerations (Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi 2012) and to the fundamental problem in knowing that elements *do* indeed interplay, but not knowing *how* elements interplay.

In literature related to CEB (such as service management and service relationship), a magnitude of concepts exist. One of the concepts connected with CEB is the concept of ‘customer experience’ as suggested by Brodie and colleagues (2011, p. 253), who amongst other state “This broader relational perspective [customer engagement] recognizes that specific consumer behavior outcomes are generated by customers’ particular interactive, value co-creation experiences with organizations and/or other stakeholders”. However, the connectivity between ‘customer experience’ and CEB is not well understood and it appears as if a ‘hen and the egg’ situation exists: Does a customer engage, because he/she is experiencing something ? or; Is a customer experiencing something because he/she engages? Recently Lemon and Verhoef (2016) have pointed out how the connectivity between customer engagement and experience is under researched. Customer experience has enjoyed longstanding attention in literature (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) and it is probably fair to argue, that ‘customer experience’ is a mature research domain, which is considered to be important in the academic literature. The concept of ‘customer experience’ has since long gained a strong foot hold in business and firms can be observed to for instance employ ‘customer experience managers’ and even ‘chief customer experience officers’ (e.g. ‘CXO’ appointed in Saxo Bank).

The dominant managerial challenges relate as well to the lacking understanding of connectivity between elements (antecedents for CEB, the multiple CEB and the consequences of CEB) and connectivity between ‘customer experience’ and CEB. The value perspective is of great importance to business managers, since they invest resources in initiatives of various sorts to stimulate for CEB and to create favorable ‘customer experiences’ at touch-points. Business managers are of course subject to account for return on investments and must be able to document efficiency and effectiveness of initiatives for CEB. Hence it is a problem that motivational drivers for CEB, connectivity between CEB and customer experience and how to manage CEB are under researched topics.

The next section (2.2) crystallizes the three research questions asked in this thesis. It can be observed how the research questions reflect the above pointed out main problems in relation to the academic literature and to business.

The research questions could have taken different directions, especially considering the nascent stage of CEB. There are multiple questions to be answered in this prosperous domain and this thesis only answers three out of the many questions pointed to in literature (e.g. Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef 2017; Van Doorn et al. 2010).

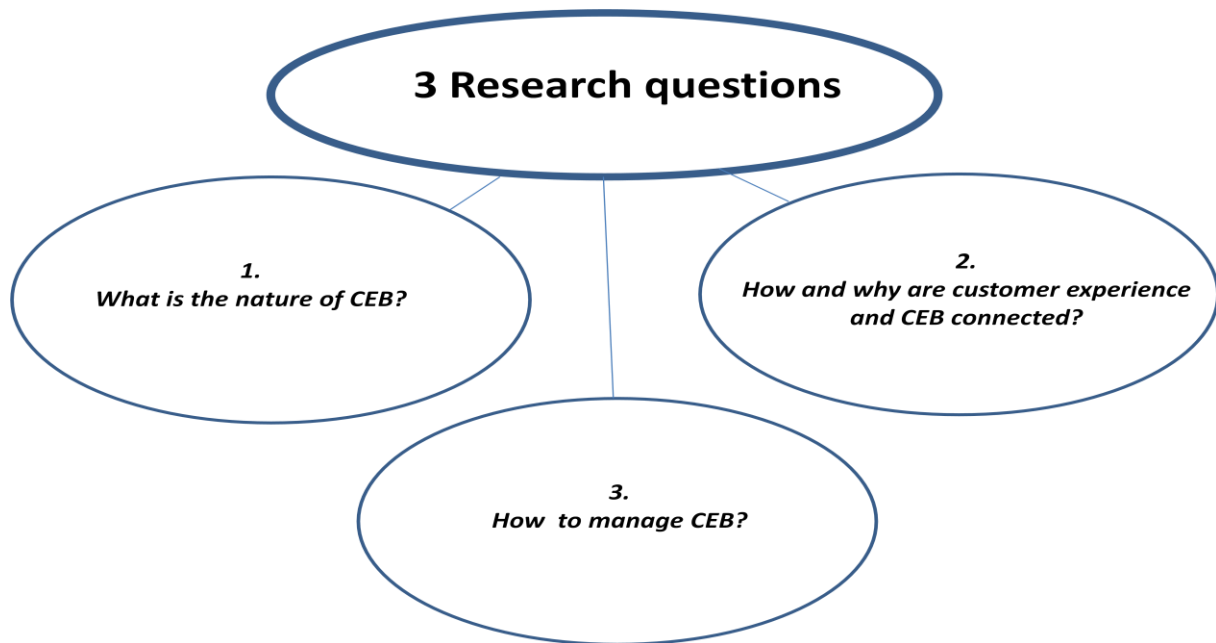
The reason for choosing exactly the beneath mentioned research questions are that they are researchable at this stage of the CEB literature and at the same time are urgent and relevant problems for both academia and business managers;

- It is a problem, that the nature of the CEB construct is not clear
- It is a problem, that connectivity between CEB and the dominant concept ‘customer experience’ is not clear
- It is a problem to stimulate for favorable CEB and harvest the value of CEB at and across touch-points.

Please see Figure 2. ‘3 Research questions’ in section (2.2).

## 2.2 Presentation of research questions

Figure 2. 3 Research questions.



In summary, the three questions asked and answered in the thesis revolve around the CEB construct and deals with problems relevant to both academia and business managers. The three questions are investigated from the customers' perspective to provide for novel and insights to answer the three research questions respectively. Considering that CEB is driven by motivational forces with the individual and is manifested by individuals this approach appears relevant. The third paper furthermore adopts a comparative approach to understand the current way business managers manage CEB. This appears relevant, when the aim is to improve the current modus operandi in the firm.

## 2.3 Limitations

The research questions are empirically investigated on Danish ground and based on knowledge produced with the assistance of informants and participants embedded in the Danish culture.

This thesis contributes to marketing academics' and business managers' understanding of CEB by answering three different questions, which are all investigated in the context of customers' continuous service relationships. The industries chosen are telecommunication and financial services (please see section 3.2.1 for reasoning for case selection). It is conceivable

that had other industries and a different cultural setting been chosen the results would appear different.

It is finally worth highlighting that CEB is a novel domain in literature and that this thesis aims at informing this novel research stream.

## **2.4 Theoretical background**

### **2.4.1 Engagement**

‘Engagement’ is a rather new concept in the context of marketing, while it has received more attention in organizational studies (Greenwood 2007; Saks 2006), educational research (Bryson and Hand 2007; London, Downey, and Mace 2007) and social psychology (Achtherberg et al. 2003). Extant literature in these disciplines describes engagement as a uni-, two- or multi-dimensional concept (see Brodie et al. 2011 for an overview). Guthrie and Cox (2001) for instance focus on cognitive aspects of engagement, while others emphasize both emotional and behavioral aspects (Catteeuw, Flynn, and Vonderhorst 2007) or cognitive and emotional dimensions (Marks and Printy 2003), cognitive and behavioral (Bejerholm and Eklund 2007) or emotional and behavioral (Norris, Pignal and Lipps 2003). Patterson, Yu, and de Ruyter (2006) suggest that engagement involves physical, emotional and cognitive presence.

The marketing literature has adopted the engagement construct as ‘customer engagement’ (e.g., Bowden 2009; Brodie et al. 2011), ‘consumer engagement’ (Brodie et al. 2013) and ‘customer brand engagement’ (Hollebeek 2011). The most comprehensive definition of consumer/customer engagement is provided by Brodie and colleagues (2011, p. 260): “Customer engagement (CE) is a *psychological state* that occurs by virtue of *interactive, cocreative customer experiences* with a *focal agent/object* (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context-dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a *dynamic, iterative process* within service relationships that cocreate value. CE plays a *central role* in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a *multidimensional concept* subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions.”

#### 2.4.2 Customer engagement behavior

Recently, a focus on behavioral manifestations of customer engagement has emerged in the literature, emphasizing a firm-centric perspective on engagement as customer value management (Verhoef and Lemon 2013) and focusing on non-transactional customer behavior (Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef 2017; Van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010). Kumar and colleagues (2010) and Pansari and Kumar (2017), however, suggest that financial transactions are part of customers' behavioral manifestations. CEB is conceptualized *“as a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders”* (Van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 253). This conceptualization models customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, behaviors manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and “other” consequences (Van Doorn et al. 2010).

The core element of the model focuses on behavior resulting from motivational drivers (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010) instead of attitudes or similar concepts. The motivational drivers are, however, not elaborated on.

Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) suggest that ‘the nature of CEB’ (i.e. the ways customers may choose to manifest CEB) can be described through five dimensions: Valence, Form/Modality, Scope, Nature of impact and Customer goals, all of them described from a firm perspective. ‘Valence’ can be either positive or negative. A positive valenced CEB for instance adds value to the firm when a customer endorses the firm for instance in a private context. ‘Form/Modality’ refers to the different ways CEB can be expressed by customers via the resources they invest in manifesting CEB, for instance time or money invested in participating in firm hosted events. The third dimension ‘scope’ refers to temporal and geographic aspects of CEB and thus describes how CEB manifestations can be either ‘here and now’, ongoing for a while or continued for a long time. The geographical aspect distinguishes between, for instance, an endorsement on a global website and an endorsement to a friend over dinner. ‘Impact’ – the fourth dimension – reflects how very different the impact of CEB can be in terms of immediacy, intensity, breadth and longevity. This aspect also covers the extent to which customers can engage through multiple channels. The fifth dimension describes customers’ goals with manifesting CEB, distinguishing between three different elements: the target of engagement, whether it is unplanned or planned, and the level of alignment between customer goals and firm goals.

The concept of CEB is hence described in terms of customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, customer behaviors manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and “other” consequences of CEB (Van Doorn et al. 2010).

CEB is furthermore decided to revolve around a focal firm or brand and is considered to be an important (potential) source of value to the firm (Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef 2017; Kumar and Pansari 2016; Verhoef and Lemon 2013; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010). Engagement is suggested to be tied to the individual customer as an outcome of a subject-object interaction and therefore determined by the context in which it occurs (Hollebeek 2011). These interactions, hence moments of possible value-(co-)creation, are manifested at numerous and different touch-points, which often are referred to as places, moments, situations, or instances for the just referred to possible value-(co-)creation (Prahalad and Venkatesan 2004; Rust et al. 2004; Vandermerwe 2003).

The extant CEB literature is mainly conceptual and adopts a firm-centric perspective. So far, it is unclear how CEB antecedents, manifestations and outcomes interplay (Bijmolt et al. 2010). Moreover, an understanding of touch-points as loci for CEB manifestations is basically absent, as is an understanding of CEB across touch-points (Ojiako, Chipulu, and Graesser 2012). Finally, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) point out that research into connectivity between customer experience and CEB is absent in extant literature.

High practical relevance of and relatively scarce scientific insights into ‘engagement’ led the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) (2010) to highlight the need to obtain a better understanding of the related constructs (i.e. e.g. CEB) and to stress how such an improved understanding of how and why customers engage in the firm is of importance (Brodie et al. 2013).

In line with research on customer engagement and CEB’s antecedents and consequences (e.g. Bijmolt et al. 2010; Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014; Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010;) this thesis discusses CEB in the context of continuous service relationships and leads to the overall conclusion that relationships cannot be clarified conclusively and are most likely multifaceted and unstable across contexts (cf. Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014; Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi 2012).

#### **2.4.3 The customer experience - customer engagement behavior connectivity**

Early research by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) puts consumption experiences in the spotlight by pointing out how consumers are—in contrast to those days’ conventional views—not only driven by rational motivations but by hedonic, emotive aspects of the



consumption experience which are “directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings and fun” (p.132). In a similar vein, seminal research on experiential marketing highlights the relevance of ‘customer experiences’, which “occur as a result of encountering, undergoing or living through things” and “provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values that replace function values” (Schmitt 1999, p.57).

These early days perspectives on consumption experiences, rooted in romanticism (Caru and Cova 2003) have enjoyed widespread adoption in marketing practice and literature. Several concepts have been discussed as related to consumption experiences, including extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price 1993), peak experiences (Maslow 1964), peak performance (Privette 1983) and flow (Csikszentmihályi 1990). Extraordinary experiences are defined as experiences that stand out and are particularly memorable (Abrahams1983), peak experiences, as powerful and transient moments of intense joy for the individual (Privette 1983), flow experiences are characterized by optimal combination of skills, challenges and high mental focus on an activity (Csikszentmihályi 1990), while peak performance experiences are types of experiences where the individual uses his or her full potential and power (Hansen and Mossberg 2013). Caru and Cova (2003) forward that a better and unified understanding of the experience construct is needed. Specifically the authors suggest to leave the idea that experiences are ‘extraordinary’ and romantic (i.e. solely emotive) and, moreover the authors suggest to understand customers’ experiences as something, which possibly could be related to the society (consumption experiences) or to the market (consumer experiences).

Meyer and Schwager (2007, p.4) provide a generic definition on ‘customer experience’ as “the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs in the course of purchase, use, and service and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representations of a company’s products, services, or brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews, and so forth”.

Research provides in-depth insights into experiences that occur when consumers shop and interact with service environments (e.g. Kerin, Jain, and Howard 2002) or when consumers actually interact with products by examining and evaluating them (e.g. Hoch 2002) or by using and consuming them (e.g. Joy and Sherry 2003).

Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) further develop the experience construct in the context of brands and conceptualize brand experience as a composite construct consisting of “sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”

(p.52). Similarly, von Wallpach and Kreuzer (2013, p.1325) refer to brand experiences as “subjective responses to brand-related stimuli consumers experience via multiple senses and introspective states” and elaborate on the link between brand experiences and embodied brand knowledge. Literature clearly illustrates how “in particular, brand experience differs from evaluative, affective, and associative constructs, such as brand attitudes, brand involvement, brand attachment, customer delight, and brand personality” (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009, p. 53).

Engagement research related to consumption in general and to brands in particular highlights the relevance of the experience construct in relation to consumer and brand engagement. Hollebeek (2011) suggests how ‘engagement’ as such is tied to the individual, is context-dependent and is the outcome of subject – object interaction (i.e. for instance the outcome contingent a certain customer experience). In a similar vein, Brodie and colleagues (2011, p. 260) stress that customer engagement occurs “by the virtue of interactive cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships”. Customers’ interactive situation-specific experiences in the service relationship are accordingly central for how the service relationship evolves in general and for the evolvement of customer engagement in particular (Brodie et al. 2011).

According to Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi (2012, p. 668) “CBE [Consumer brand-engagement] appears as a multi-dimensional concept combining such elements as attention, dialogue, interaction, emotions, sensorial pleasure and immediate activation aimed at creating a total brand experience with consumers”. Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi (p. 681) further contribute to an understanding of the emergence of consumer brand engagement by introducing “brand enacting”, that is, the consumer’s effort to “put the brand into action, participating in the world of the brand; the brand thus gets embedded in consumers’ lives, becoming ‘an enabler of their doings’” (p.669). Brand enacting is a multi-dimensional construct that “goes beyond traditional cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions” (p.681). The authors suggest three drivers for brand enacting which they label “physical and value-based proximity”, “consumer protagonism” and, “brand communication integration” (pp.669-673). Each of the three drivers is influenced by various events or situations the customer experiences or by societal conditions. According to the authors, “emerging experiential and societal dimensions” are thus core aspects of engagement and it is difficult to force these elements “into positivist theoretical assumptions that clearly separate cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions” (p. 681).

In line with more general research on customer engagement and CEB's antecedents and consequences (e.g. Bijmolt et al. 2010; Fehrer, Woratschek and Germelmann 2014; Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010) also this literature review on the relation between various forms of engagement and experience leads to the conclusion that connectivity probably cannot be clarified conclusively and is most likely unstable across contexts (cf. Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014; Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012). Acknowledging the potential limited applicability and relevance of positivist theoretical assumptions (cf. Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012) as well as the fact that engagement and experience co-exist in "a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships" (Brodie et al. 2011, p.260) this thesis adopts a dynamic process perspective and aims to provide unprecedented in-depth insights into the acknowledged but so far under-researched 'customer experience' - CEB connectivity (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Contrary to extant research (which provides mainly conceptual contributions and is predominantly firm oriented), this research applies a customer (individuals) perspective to gain insights into 'customer experience' - CEB connectivity in the context of continuous service relationships.

#### **2.4.4 Touch-points**

Touch-points are the loci where CEB occur (are initiated and manifested) and range from interpersonal communication amongst friends, comments on social media, posts at the firm's website, feedback after a service encounter in the firm's call centre or encounters in the physical shop. A touch-point is hence the locus for initiating CEB (by the firm) and manifesting CEB (by the customer). Furthermore, customers can act as endorsers and thereby becoming touch-points themselves. The sum of touch-points constitutes the sphere where the firm or brand and its customers can interact and thereby the place for CEB value creation. Extant literature often refers to touch-points in a juxtaposed way, such as 'human versus technological', 'active versus passive', 'online versus offline' and 'in- versus outside firm-control' (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn 2005; Vandermerwe 2003).

One of the most important aspects of touch-points is their role as loci for value creation (Grönroos and Voima 2013). Vandermerwe (1999; 2003) suggests to map customers' activities and the places they happen in a 'customer activity cycle (CAC)' that distinguishes between customers' activities before, during and after a possible purchase in a certain product category, thus providing a toolkit for determining the offerings a firm should prioritize and consequently maintain and manage to secure value creation. Davis and Dunn (2002) later

introduce the touch-point wheel, which serves a similar purpose as does the CAC, however updated with technological touch-points pre-dominantly at the internet. Recently has the concept of ‘customer journey’ appeared in the academic literature as a mean to understand customer experience at touch-points (Verhoef and Lemon 2016), to refine the business model (Norton and Pine 2013) and as a mean to reduce complexity particularly in online touch-points (Anderl et al. 2016).

The extant academic literature specifically dealing with touch-points is limited. The existing literature tends to be pragmatic and mainly managerially oriented providing, for instance, a check-list of touch-points to be considered (Davis and Dunn 2002), or simply mentioning the importance of touch-points at a general level (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn 2005) or as the place for value-creation (Grönroos and Voima 2013; Munoz and Kumar 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Vandermerwe 2003).

Building on the assumption that “communication planning tools should correspond reasonably with how human minds actually work” Jenkinson (2007, p.166) focuses on developing an integrative model for touch-point planning by integrating the ‘behavioural school’ with the ‘attitudinal school’ at and across touch-points. The resulting CODAR planning tool exemplifies the value of a customer-centric approach to touch-points. Other authors such as Chattopadhyay and Laborie (2005) also take a customer-centric approach to contact points (i.e. touch-points) when developing and conducting ‘The Market Contact Audit’ (MCA) in the context of managing brand experience. The MCA does, however, not take into consideration how customers interact with brands (firms) driven by different motivations, goals and situations (for instance, to buy a product, to complain or to endorse the brand or firm in the private sphere), which is highly relevant in the case of CEB value at and across touch-points.

The loci for CEB initiatives (initiated by the firm) and CEB manifestations are the touch-points. This thesis hence takes up the challenge to understand CEB manifestations at and across touch-points (cf. the three questions asked and answered; What is the nature of CEB? How and why are customer experience and CEB connected? How to manage CEB?).

## **CHAPTER 3. SCIENTIFIC APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 A social constructivist research approach**

CEB is in several ways pointed out in literature to be complex (Kumar et al. 2010; Little and Little 2006) and difficult to grasp by the use of positivist research methods and the need for other approaches to investigate the domain is being emphasized (Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012).

CEB is in this thesis viewed as a phenomenon, which is brought to live via processing in the human mind, for instance when customers evaluate, categorize, seek to understand or explain what happens (Van Doorn et al. 2010) in service interactions. CEB is furthermore viewed as a phenomenon, which is manifested and loaded with individuals' subjective meanings in social settings (such as customer to customer, or customer to firm or vice versa), and the aim of this thesis is to understand 'how, what and why' of such aspects related to 'CEB'.

This inspires to approach the research of 'CEB' in the light of social constructivism. Creswell (2013, p. 25) suggests; "Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social construction)".

When adopting social constructivism as the interpretive framework for this (and any) research it implies that the knowledge produced is not objective, hence not considered a 'truth' as associated with knowledge production derived from positivist research approaches. The existence of multiple realities is accepted and the aim is to understand how customers have different views and subjective meanings related to various aspects of CEB.

The knowledge produced in this research is derived from qualitative research methodologies (as recommended for instance by Creswell 2013, 2014; and Bryman 2016) in which the researcher(s) plays a vital role both being embedded in the data-collection and interpreting the data.

The knowledge is created when the informants process and give an account of historic events in the service relationship to the researcher, and when the researcher is present and becomes embedded at touch-points to collect participant observations (please see section (3.2.2) and appendixes (B I, II, III) for a full account of the data collection). The interpretation

of the reported events happens in an interaction with the researcher, and finally by the researcher and her co-researchers. This knowledge serves as the data in this thesis.

Any researcher (and research team) brings value to the research (Creswell 2013). Creswell (2013) and Denzin (1989) point out how it is of importance and relevance to clarify the value of the researchers involved in an interpretive study, since for instance their prior experience or positioning in the field unavoidably will bear certain values and biases. It is therefore advised to clearly forward such positioning and values up front in the study.

The author of this thesis is well aware of how her experiences from consultancy within the field (media and service marketing) on one hand might benefit the choice of focus for the research (Corbin and Strauss 2015), but could lead her to overlook certain particulars in the narratives from informants. The members of the research team (three experienced scholars and supervisors for this thesis) have as well brought value to the research coming from three different domains (psychology/consumer behavior, branding and service management). The three experienced scholars have formed a valuable forum for vivid discussions and many stones have been turned to ensure rigor and quality in all steps of the research.

The point of departure for the research in this thesis is to generate understandings inductively. The aim of the thesis is to understand in depth most possible aspects and complexities in the narrated subjective meanings from informants and from the observations made at various touch-points; hence to establish nuanced understandings from the bottom and up. The three papers around which this thesis revolves succeed to a varying degree in honoring a true and fully fledged inductive approach. The process of generating novel knowledge, hence to answer the research questions, are at times guided by existing theory and traits of abduction are recognizable (for instance in ‘Paper 2’).

The extant CEB literature (please see theoretical back ground, chapter 2) adopts predominantly a more positivist inspired approach in the sense that dominant authors (e.g. Bijmolt et al 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010) make use of a terminology which resonates with positivist approaches like ‘antecedents for CEB, CEB and consequences of CEB’ and are looking for causalities between elements. The visual representations of the World of CEB in the dominant, extant contributions are furthermore inviting to think along the lines of causality and stable relationships between elements (see for instance Van Doorn et al. 2010; Fehrer, Woratschek and Germelman 2014 ). The extant CEB literature has (as a valuable point of departure), influenced the writing style in the three papers in this thesis as well as the visual presentations.

The findings are however derived from thick and rich qualitative data and provide for novel understandings of the phenomenon ‘CEB’ contingent the three research questions respectively (What is the nature of CEB? How and why are customer experience and CEB connected? How to manage CEB?).

Beneath, please find an overview over the research conducted and how the three papers are situated in the research (Figure 3. Research overview). The next sections clarify details regarding case selection (3.2.1), data collection (3.2.2), data analysis (3.2.3) and data quality (3.2.4).

**Figure 3. Research overview.**

<b>Theoretical paradigm</b> Social constructivism		
<b>Ontological assumptions</b> Multiple realities exist: Participants’ subjective meanings		
<b>Epistemological assumptions</b> Participants’ subjective meanings count as evidence		
<b>Axiological assumptions</b> It is acknowledged that research is value laden and that biases are present		
<b>Methodological assumptions</b> Qualitative methodology is applied to study the topic within the context – inductive approach is strived for		
<b>PAPER 1</b> Customer perspective	<b>PAPER 2</b> Customer perspective	<b>PAPER 3</b> Customer – Firm / Comparative study
<b>Case and Data (transcripts, visualizations and records)</b> 20 touch-point histories (in-depth interviews) and visual mappings from individuals about their service relationships with their telecommunication provider		
20 touch-point histories (in-depth interviews) and visual mappings from individuals about their service relationships with their financial services provider		12 interviews with employees from telecommunication provider
		Participant observations at touch-points in relation to telecommunication provider
<b>Analysis</b> Memoing of touch-point-histories Mapping of CEB at touch-points Coding of in situ expressions related to dimensions of CEB at touch-points	Color coding Thematic analysis of the connectivity between customer experience and CEB Movement of part to whole and whole to parts.	Mapping of CEB initiatives at touch-points Mapping of CEB manifestations at touch-points Coding of situ expressions and behaviors related to touch-points in a comparative manner

## **3.2 Methodology**

### **3.2.1 Case selection**

It can be derived from the CEB literature that CEB is a contextual construct (Hollebeek 2011). One way to provide a context is to narrow the scope of the research and concentrate the investigation within the boundaries of for instance one or two industries, types of products /services, or types of customers.

In this thesis the focus is at CEB within the boundaries of customers' service relationship with their telecommunication and financial services' provider. Both industries can be observed to make substantial use of engagement initiatives to both attract and sustain service relationships with customers.

The market for telecommunication can be observed to be a price-driven market where the products and services per se are similar (identical). Furthermore, customers have easy access to information about products and services (for instance when they occasionally compare prices for services rendered), and firms are facing difficulties in communicating and explaining how and why their offerings are different (favorable) compared with the competition. Hence, telecommunication firms frequently seek to engage customers via initiatives that have in fact nothing to do with the core product/service, to position themselves in a favorable manner in this harsh market. Examples of such initiatives are telecommunication firms offering tickets for concerts, discounts for fitness memberships or other events of a more social character and often remote from the core offerings (telecommunication) of the firm (e.g. yousee.dk or oister.dk). The initiatives referred to are aiming at engaging customers in the firm.

Financial services' providers are another example of an industry, which seeks to stimulate for CEB. Financial services are for lay persons often considered complex services, and in everyday Life considered low involvement products and services (like telecommunication services). It is furthermore a market where the firms are increasingly occupied with empowering customers to handle as much as possible via various self-service solutions (which is valued by customers due to mobility and flexibility). The self-service solutions are however not a competitive edge for financial services (since the evolution of self service technology is accessible for firms and new technology hence becomes the market standard) (Hogan, Almquist and Glynn 2005). As a consequence of these different parameters, financial service providers can be observed to take initiatives such as asking for feedback, inviting



customers to participate in customer-panels, and to events in the physical bank branch (when such is available), designed to engage customers in the financial service provider.

This thesis could as well have focused at energy supply or other industries, sharing the same characteristics as elaborated above. However, the chosen two industries demonstrated to be feasible in terms of data and there was no apparent need to expand to (customers of) additional industries.

### **3.2.2 Data collection**

The data collection is conducted by the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees (managers and executives) of the telecommunication-firm. Finally, data are collected via participant observations at touch-points, focusing at the firm's behaviors to stimulate for CEB and related to CEB.

A social constructivist research approach calls for methodologies that are able to embrace the context for and content of the phenomenon and qualitative methodologies are pointed to in literature as relevant (Creswell 2013, 2014). Qualitative methodologies range from for instance in-depth interviews, to focus groups to participant observations (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2008). Each qualitative method for data collection has its advantages and disadvantages (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2008 provide a substantial overview over advantages and disadvantages for each method).

The in-depth interview provides rich and elaborate answers and the researcher has the opportunity to probe informants for elaborated answers and explanations to achieve deep insights. The researcher hence plays a key role in the data collection process and various bias are possible such as the researcher's (unknowingly) approval or disapproval of the informants' answers (hence possible impact), listening skills and skills to probe for elaborate answers. Informant bias might occur because the informant wishes to make a good impression by answering politically or socially correct, or in other ways to display the him/herself in a certain way; or simply because the informant's memory and recall is faulty.

To reduce bias it is recommended to establish a comfort zone between the researcher and the informant, which can be done by dedicating the first questions to be of a more social and uncomplicated nature. Furthermore bias could be reduced by considering the location for the interview. The data collection for this research took place mainly at the home-turf of the informant, meaning the home or the workplace of the informant to make the informant feel most possible comfortable (Bush, Hair and Ortinau 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

### ***In-depth interviews with individuals***

20 individuals were interviewed about their service relationship with their telecommunication provider and their financial service provider generating a total of 40 touch-point histories.

The starting point for the in-depth interviews was the concept of touch-point history (Polkinghorn 1988). A touch-point history is a customer's own account of experiences with specific goods, services or companies that covers data on events that are tied to a timeline. The application of a narrative approach allowed retrieving touch-point histories that are "freely told by customers, not just recounted in response to the company's requests for explanations of actions, thoughts, and outcomes" (Gorry and Westbrook 2011, p. 576). Hence, a customer's touch-point history describes singular interactions as well as the aggregate sum of the customer's interactions (touches) with a firm over time. Such a record of 'touches' is important for services that are provided continuously (for instance energy, banking or telecommunication) and is seen as an important 'tactic' to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al. 2004).

Visual mapping (Langley 1999) assisted informants in remembering and retelling their touch-point histories. The visual mapping was executed by the informants' use of inspirational images (each image was printed and available to informants during the interview). The informants could choose to apply the images or make own drawings on a prefabricated timeline on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. This technique helped informants to remember episodes of encounters with the firm and their own behaviors, and thus aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements of events in the service relationship.

The topic CEB is explored by the use of in-depth interviews and not focus-groups. The reason for opting out focus-groups as a methodology for collecting data is primarily that this research is about understanding 'what happened' (CEB) as individual accounts over the course of time in a service relationship and the aim is to collect informants' individual touch-point histories (Gorry and Westbrook 2011) with the firm over the course of time. It is hence an individual account about a topic, which might not be easily accessible or readily explainable by the informant. Hence, it appears relevant to make use of a methodology that allows for time to reflect without any interference by others. One of the advantages of the focus group as a method for data collection is the knowledge elicited in the group conversation, but a major disadvantage is the interference by eventual dominant participants

in the focus group and consequently the risk of shutting down for access to knowledge with for instance more quite participants in the group.

Please see Appendix B I for a detailed account of the development of the questionnaire, the questionnaire, and sampling and composition of group of individuals (informants).

*Reflections:* Some of the informants didn't make use of the images provided by the researcher. It might have been advantageous to test the inspirational images prior to the interview situations to clarify how the images were perceived, and eventually replace some of the images and/or add images.

Informants seemingly found the topics, telecommunication and financial services, to be not so inspiring, which required good probing skills of the researcher. The researcher developed the required probing skills over the course of time, which overall resulted in data of a rich, thick and elaborate nature.

### ***In-depth interviews with employees of the telecommunication firm***

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were performed with 12 employees (managers and executives) of the telecommunication firm. The aim was to elicit knowledge about the firms' behaviors at touch-points (to initiate CEB). The in-depth interviews with the employees however turned out to be rather brief, since little time was allowed in reality.

12 semi-structured interviews with employees of a telecommunication firm were conducted, focusing on the firm's initiatives at and across touch-points. The informants were selected by the firm to represent the greatest possible diversity in terms of experience, work domain, gender and age. Both managers and executives who themselves serve as 'a touch-point' (such as the manager for technicians and the manager for online solutions) and managers and executives in more administrative functions (such as the executive for human resources and a manager in the legal department) were included in the sample.

The interviews were conducted at the firm's premises and the informants were invited to an interview about 'touch-points'. Informants did not receive any other information than they were partaking in a research project about touch-points in service marketing. Interviews lasted on average 30 minutes and followed the same structure, though with the usual flexibility accounting for informants' idiosyncratic experiences. The real net time allowed for collecting data via interviews proved to be limited. Hence, the interviews were supplemented with participant (employees) observations at touch-points, such as the call centre, the shop and firm's website and other online touch-points (accounted for just beneath).

Please see Appendix B II for a detailed account of the development of the questionnaire, the questionnaire, and sampling and composition of group of employees (informants).

### ***Participant observation at touch-points related to the firm***

The data collection with employees of the telecommunication firm was - as a consequence of the rather brief interviews with the employees of the telecommunication firm (hence not sufficient amount of insights following the principle of saturation) - supplemented with participant observations at touch-points. This type of qualitative data collection is subject to the researcher's ability to capture sceneries, details, and events at the various touch-points; and the researcher's ability to become part of the milieu in question in order to ask questions, when doubt or ambiguity occur and to listen to conversations inter participants (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2008; Bryman 2016).

Participant observation is hence in particular fruitful when the researcher blends in and becomes an as natural element in the setting as possible. Bryman (2016, p. 423) explains: “..[the methodology] draws attention to the fact that the participant observer immerses him- or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to what is being said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions.”

Observations were made at the following touch-points: Call centre, website, online-shop, physical shop, and Facebook. The observations were made at the frequent visits at the telecommunication's premises at different geographic locations (Call centre, Hotline, Online solutions) while the remaining touch-points have been visited online (Facebook, online shop and website) and off-line (the physical shop) at an ongoing basis between 2013-2017. The observations, personal comments about for instance the researchers state of mind and current experiences with being present and active at the touch-points; and various ideas for research and business was noted and modeled in a physical research log, following Corbin and Straus (2015). Please see appendix B III for a summary of the research-log.

*Reflections:* The data collection in terms of interviews with the employees of the firm proved to be limited, as described in the previous section. It would have been advantageous if the researcher had realized this earlier in the process, and had corrected this short-coming (for instance by discussing it with the contact person at the firm). That said, the observations at the touch-points proved to be a very productive and effective methodology to collect rich, thick and elaborate data.

### **3.2.3 Data analysis**

The semi-structured interviews with individuals yielded 40 touch-point histories, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 320 pages single-spaced pages of transcripts, from individuals. The physical visual mappings, performed by informants to assist their memory when narrating about events in the service relationship were transformed to digital versions to facilitate analysis.

The semi-structured interviews with employees were recorded and transcribed in part, i.e. introduction by the employee is not included since it entailed personal and sometimes ‘off the record’ information, resulting in 33 pages single-spaced pages of transcripts.

The observations made at touch-points related to the firm were noted and sketched in a detailed research log and discussed in the research team.

Analysis of the data was conducted in three parts contingent the three research questions (What is the nature of CEB? How and why are customer experience and CEB connected? How to manage CEB?). The analysis was in all three instances performed by the researcher in close collaboration with her co-researchers.

To understand the first research question (What is the nature of CEB?) data analysis was undertaken in multiple stages. First, all 40 touch-point history transcripts were analyzed using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Creswell 2013). The first step of the analysis was performed by writing out summaries of all interviews to crystallize what the content of the respective touch-point history ‘is about’ with the purpose to understand the emerging themes. In the second stage, the emerging themes were subjected to selective coding, by grouping data into meaning units. The second stage was completed via mapping of all interactions at touch-points and categorizing elements in the customer-firm interaction from the customer’s perspective. The purpose was to arrive at a textural description of ‘what happened’ and how the phenomenon, CEB, was manifested (Creswell 2013) to facilitate an interpretation of the data. Finally, findings were aggregated across informants and industries. This multiple-stage approach aimed at identifying elements that constitute to the nature of CEB not only based on CEB and engagement conceptualizations in extant literature, but to allow other themes to emerge.

To understand the second research question (How and why are customer experience and CEB connected?) the analysis had to embrace both constructs (customer experience and CEB)

and hence the data analysis consisted in an iterative process of describing, discussing and describing the essence of what the connectivity between constructs could possibly be developed into statements (Creswell, 2013). This process entailed a continuous movement from “part to whole, both within and across the interviews” (Joy et al. 2010, p.341) and vice versa. This procedure assisted the researchers in grasping the silhouettes of the connectivity between what customers experience and CEB.

Following the initial stages the events reported by informants were mapped and analyzed by the use of thematic network (Attride-Stirling 2001) to provide for an overview over types of customer experience and CEB, and how and why constructs are connected. The iterative three step thematic analysis was discussed by the research team to gain a consensual understanding of the data material (Spiggle 1994) and was guided by existing research in particular within customer experience, to inform the theorizing about customer experience - CEB connectivity. The analysis of the transcripts was enriched by the visual mapping performed by the majority of the informants. The visual mapping aided the researchers in grasping for instance chronological aspects of events and timing of events in the service relationship, hence giving insights about these dimensions of connectivity.

The interpretation focused at refining the essence of the customer experience – CEB connectivity themes (scenarios) identified in the thematic network analysis.

Finally, in order to understand the final research question (How to manage CEB?) the data collection and hence the analysis adopted a comparative approach and focused at the telecommunication firm and individuals’ narratives about their service relationship with their telecommunication provider. Therefore the analysis was done in parallel and finally merged into one analysis.

Data from the interviews with the employees was analyzed by using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998) to allow themes to emerge inductively beyond the semi-structured themes of the interview guide. Then were the firm’s initiatives at (and across) touch-points mapped. The mapping of initiatives was accompanied by informants’ commentaries in situ about for instance organizational challenges and other types of drivers and barriers related to the relevant touch-point as loci for CEB value creation.

Data analysis of interviews with individuals was as well undertaken in two stages. First, interview transcripts were analyzed by using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In the second stage, CEB manifestations at and across touch-points were mapped. The

mapping was accompanied by informants' commentaries in situ about drivers and barriers related to the relevant touch-point as loci for CEB manifestation.

Finally, the two perspectives were merged by mapping both entities' behaviors and in situ commentaries related to the relevant touch-point. Interpretation was completed by breaking down informants' narratives into meaning units, which were described emphasizing what happened and the essence of how what happened could be optimized from a value perspective.

### **3.2.4 Data quality**

Qualitative research should present as reliable and valid data quality as is expected from a well done quantitative study. It is however a challenge to ensure and measure the data quality by the use of quantitative assessment criteria when evaluating data quality of qualitative research (Bryman 2016). The question of reliability refers to whether a study using the same design and methodology conducted at later point in time would yield exactly the same results. This might be difficult to meet in qualitative research, since "it is difficult to freeze a social setting" (Bryman 2016, p. 376). Considering the scope of the research it is conceivable that informants in a different context would express themselves differently about CEB and consequently the results would be toned by the context.

The question of validity, meaning whether the methodology is conducted correctly and follows all steps of the scientific (quantitative) methodology and whether it is possible to exclude other possible (causal) explanations are important in a qualitative research methodology as well. The assessment of qualitative research is suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1994) to be carried out by the use of the criteria of 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity'. These criteria are applied to assess the methodological choices made in this research.

Whether the qualitative research in this thesis is trustworthy is hence measured by the suggested four sub-criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

#### *Credibility*

The criteria of credibility is a question of consistency between the meaning intended of the touch-point histories narrated by the informants, the accounts given by the employees and the observations made at touch-points; and the representation of findings, models and conceptualizations presented in this thesis. In order to ensure and increase the consistency between the two (the meaning intended by informants and participants; and the representations/models/conceptualizations) the analytical process has been iterative involving

the members of the research team. Furthermore, analytical chapters of the thesis have been scrutinized by persons external to the university community, namely experts from the industries involved and the representations/models/conceptualizations have been discussed with 5 of the informants (individuals).

### *Transferability*

Whether findings hold in some other context or even in the same context at another point of time, is in qualitative research understood as an empirical issue (Bryman 2016). The qualitative methodology is used to produce thick descriptions and rich explanations (Hair, Ortinau and Bush 2008) in this case thick and rich accounts of CEB manifestations and initiatives. Bryman (2016, p. 378) suggests how “.. thick descriptions can provide others with a database for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux”. This thesis presents several representations/models/conceptualizations based on empirical thick and rich descriptions from individuals, employees and participants’ behaviors at touch-points. The topic CEB spans behaviors, which are increasingly dominating the marketing literature and business and is ripe for manifold other investigations. The findings in this thesis might have the potential to inspire to some of these further investigations.

### *Dependability*

According to Bryman (2016, p. 150) is the question of dependability related to issues of “inter-observer consistency” and subjective judgments by the researcher(s). Hence this sub-criteria refers to the degree whether we as a research team agree on the meaning derived from the data or – in other words – that we agree on what happens in the touch-point histories narrated by the informants, the interviews with employee of the telecommunication firm and the observations. The main question is whether there is a consistency in the interpretations made separately from one another as we progress during the research?

The research team is in this research composed of the PhD fellow and three different supervisors. As the PhD fellow does not share a common history with neither of the supervisors and since the supervisors have rather different profiles (psychology/consumer behavior, branding and retail/service marketing) the discussions have been vivid and opposing viewpoints have been debated. However, since the denominator of the research is CEB and the process of inferring meaning from data is centered on the behaviors narrated and observed this may have facilitated an overall consistency in our perceptions and ultimately leading to



an agreement of the reliability in the process of arriving at the representations, models and conceptualizations presented in this thesis.

### *Confirmability*

The researchers' individual presumptions, values and opinions may have affected the statements and argumentations of the informants as well as the interpretations hereof. Though complete objectivity is impossible the research is conducted in accordance with guidelines of how to for instance avoid leading questions and ensure a comfortable atmosphere in the interview situation to make the informant tell her or his unbiased version of 'what happened' in the service relationship.

Finally the assessment of qualitative research as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1994) should also cover the criteria of 'authenticity'. Fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytical and tactical authenticity constitute to the overall criteria of authenticity. Considering the nature of this research, fairness is the only criteria accounted for as others are considered redundant or out of the scope.

The criteria of fairness reflects the researcher's (and her team's) ability to adequately ".. and fairly represent the different viewpoints among the members of the social setting (Bryman 2016, p. 379). In this research fairness is aimed for by identifying opposing views amongst informants. This means an ongoing / constant comparison where the 'commonalities' identified in the data are challenged with the 'discrepancies' identified about a certain topic.

# CHAPTER 4. THE THREE PAPERS

## PAPER 1

(Target:) Journal of Service Research

### **A Customer-centric Perspective on the Nature of Customer Engagement Behavior across Touch-points**

**Helle Haurum, Suzanne C. Beckmann and Mogens Bjerre**

#### **Abstract**

Customers and firms interact at many different touch-points that enable customer engagement behavior (CEB). Extant literature focuses on behavior resulting from motivational drivers but has so far not empirically established the characteristics of these drivers. By adopting a customer-centric approach we investigated through 20 in-depth interviews what drives service customers' CEB manifestations at and across touch-points. The key findings are that (I) CEB is motivated by an integration of customers' 'goal-directedness' and their 'interaction mode' when interacting at touch-point(s), (II) customers' goal-directedness determines the touch-points where CEB are manifested, and (III) interaction mode assists goal-achievement and governs why CEB is manifested as it is. The core contribution of this study is an empirically based conceptualization of the integration of customers' goals and their interaction modes as a motivational driver for CEB at and across touch-points. The conceptualization establishes the nature of CEB by explaining where, why and how CEB is manifested, and contributes to the extant CEB literature by expanding the theoretical reasoning about the nature of CEB.

#### **Keywords:**

Customer engagement behaviors, touch-points, goal-directedness, interaction mode, service marketing

## Introduction

Firms often expect and encourage customers to invest time and resources to ‘engage’ in the firm by for instance filling out surveys (like surveys for general customer satisfaction or feedback after a service encounter), endorsing the firm on social media or participating in competitions or events, all of which are not necessarily closely tied to the firm’s core offerings. Particularly for firms that offer mundane products and services such as telecommunication or banking services it is challenging to encourage engagement behavior, since their offerings are commonly regarded as basic necessities that only receive customers’ attention in case of malfunctioning or moment of acquisition.

The concept of customer engagement behavior (CEB) describes customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, customer behaviors manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and “other” consequences (Van Doorn et al. 2010). CEB revolves around a focal firm or brand and is considered to be an important source of value to the firm (Verhoef and Lemon 2013; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010). Engagement is suggested to be tied to the individual customer as an outcome of a subject-object interaction and therefore determined by the context in which it occurs (Hollebeek 2011). These interactions are manifested at numerous and different touch-points, which often are referred to as places, moments, situations, or instances for possible value-(co-)creation (Prahalad and Venkatesan 2004; Rust et al. 2004; Vandermerwe 2003).

The extant CEB literature is mainly conceptual and adopts a firm-centric perspective. So far, it is unclear how CEB antecedents, manifestations and outcomes interplay (Bijmolt et al. 2010). Moreover, an understanding of touch-points as loci for CEB manifestations is basically absent, as is an understanding of CEB across touch-points (Ojiako, Chipulu, and Graesser 2012). Since touch-points are the places for customers to engage with the firm, it seems highly relevant to investigate this topic from a customer-centric perspective.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to *explore what constitutes the nature of CEB and drives CEB at and across various touch-points from the perspective of individual customers in a service marketing context*. We apply the conceptual thinking of what comprises ‘engagement’ (Hollebeek 2011), ‘CEB’ (Brodie et al. 2013; Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef and Lemon 2013; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010) and ‘touch-points’ (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn 2005; Munoz and Kumar 2004) to analyze our data emerging from interviews with individuals about their interactions with their telecommunication provider and bank.

The contribution of this research is two-fold. First, a taxonomy of touch-points is developed to provide a better understanding of how, why and what types of CEB are manifested in customer-firm interactions at which touch-points. Secondly, we provide a novel understanding of what drives CEB not only at singular touch-points but also across touch-points.

The article is organized as follows. First, the relevant literature is reviewed, followed by outlining the methodological approach and explaining the research design. The subsequent sections report the study findings, which then are integrated into a framework for understanding CEB at and across touch-points from a customer-centric perspective. Last but not least, implications for theory and further research are discussed.

## **Theoretical Background**

### *Engagement*

‘Engagement’ is a rather new concept in the context of marketing, while it has received more attention in organizational studies (Greenwood 2007; Saks 2006), educational research (Bryson and Hand 2007; London, Downey, and Mace 2007) and social psychology (Achtherberg et al. 2003). Extant literature in these disciplines describes engagement as a uni-, two- or multi-dimensional concept (see Brodie et al. 2011 for an overview). Guthrie and Cox (2001) for instance focus on cognitive aspects of engagement, while others emphasize both emotional and behavioral aspects (Catteeuw, Flynn, and Vonderhorst 2007) or cognitive and emotional dimensions (Marks and Printy 2003), cognitive and behavioral (Bejerholm and Eklund 2007) or emotional and behavioral (Norris, Pignal and Lipps 2003). Patterson, Yu, and de Ruyter (2006) suggest that engagement involves physical, emotional and cognitive presence.

The marketing literature has adopted the engagement construct as ‘customer engagement’ (e.g., Bowden 2009; Brodie et al. 2011), ‘consumer engagement’ (Brodie et al. 2013) and ‘customer brand engagement’ (Hollebeek 2011). The most comprehensive definition of consumer/customer engagement is provided by Brodie and colleagues (2011, p. 260): “Customer engagement (CE) is a *psychological state* that occurs by virtue of *interactive, cocreative customer experiences* with a *focal agent/object* (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context-dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a *dynamic, iterative process* within service relationships that

cocreate value. CE plays a *central role* in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a *multidimensional concept* subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions.”

### *Customer Engagement Behavior*

Recently, a focus on behavioral manifestations of customer engagement has emerged in the literature, emphasizing a firm-centric perspective on engagement as customer value management (Verhoef and Lemon 2013) and focusing on non-transactional customer behavior (Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010). Kumar and colleagues (2010), however, suggest that financial transactions are part of customers’ behavioral manifestations. CEB is conceptualized “*as a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders*” (Van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 253). This conceptualization models customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, behaviors manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and “other” consequences (Van Doorn et al. 2010).

The core element of the model focuses on behavior resulting from motivational drivers (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010) instead of attitudes or similar concepts. The motivational drivers are, however, not elaborated on. Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) suggest that ‘the nature of CEB’ can be described through five dimensions: Valence, Form/Modality, Scope, Nature of impact and Customer goals, all of them described from a firm perspective. ‘Valence’ can be either positive or negative. A positive valenced CEB for instance adds value to the firm when a customer endorses the firm for instance in a private context. ‘Form/Modality’ refers to the different ways CEB can be expressed by customers via the resources they invest in manifesting CEB, for instance time or money invested in participating in firm hosted events. The third dimension ‘scope’ refers to temporal and geographic aspects of CEB and thus describes how CEB manifestations can be either ‘here and now’, ongoing for a while or continued for a long time. The geographical aspect distinguishes between, for instance, an endorsement on a global website and an endorsement to a friend over dinner. ‘Impact’ – the fourth dimension – reflects how very different the impact of CEB can be in terms of immediacy, intensity, breadth and longevity. This aspect also covers the extent to which customers can engage through multiple channels. The fifth

dimension describes customers' goals with manifesting CEB, distinguishing between three different elements: the target of engagement, whether it is unplanned or planned, and the level of alignment between customer goals and firm goals.

### *Touch-points*

Touch-points are the loci where CEB occurs and range from interpersonal communication amongst friends, comments on social media, posts at the firm's website, feedback after a service encounter in the firm's call centre or encounters in the physical shop. Furthermore, customers can act as endorsers and thereby becoming touch-points themselves. The sum of touch-points constitutes the arena in which the firm or brand and its customers can interact and thereby contribute to value-(co)creation. Extant literature often refers to touch-points in a juxta-posed way, such as 'human versus technological', 'active versus passive', 'online versus offline' and 'in- versus outside firm-control' (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn 2005).

One of the most important consequences of touch-points is their potential for value creation (Grönroos and Voima 2013). Though Vandermerwe (1999; 2003) does not use the term 'touch-points', she refers to the points where (potential) customer-interactions take place and suggests for instance to map customers' activities in a 'customer activity cycle (CAC)' that distinguishes between customers' activities before, during and after a possible purchase in a certain product category, thus providing a toolkit for determining the offerings a firm should prioritize and consequently maintain and manage to secure value creation. Dunn and Davis (2002) later introduced the touch-point wheel, which serves a similar purpose as does the CAC.

Research specifically dealing with touch-points is, however, limited. The existing literature is either pragmatic and managerially oriented providing, for instance, a check-list of touch-points to be considered (Dunn and Davis 2002), or simply mentioning the importance of touch-points at a general level (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn 2005) or as the place for value-creation (Grönroos and Voima 2013; Munoz and Kumar 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Based on this literature and particularly our findings from a pilot interview study with 12 employees from a telecommunication firm, we suggest categorizing touch-points (TP) into four types (see Figure 1). This taxonomy of touch-points and customer-firm interaction options serves the purpose of providing an overview and point of departure for analyzing the customer-firm interactions reported in the interviews with informants.

(1) “TP in firm’s control and offline”: A customer can access and interact synchronously with the firm (via call-centre, physical shop/bank branch and home visits). This TP type enables the firm to both stimulate and respond to CEB, thus actively managing encounters and activities.

(2) “TP out of firm’s control and offline”: A customer interacts synchronously or asynchronously with other individuals (like closed fora and inter-personal communication in the private sphere, i.e. all forms of offline word-of-mouth) and thus displays CEB in a manner that is not observable for the firm. The firm does not initiate these touch-points and can solely try to maneuver between them as an indirect reaction to observable consequences. Customers can as well publish articles/responses to articles in traditional media, which is observable to the firm, however leaving the firm to provide reactive responses only to such CEB manifestations.

(3) “TP in control of the firm and online”: A customer can access and interact synchronously or asynchronously with the firm (via a chat, website, firm’s e-mail, firm-hosted forum/community). This TP type enables the firm to both stimulate and respond to CEB, thus actively monitoring encounters and activities.

(4) “TP out of firm’s control and online”: A customer can access and interact synchronously or asynchronously with other individuals (via social media and open communities at the internet, i.e. all forms of online word-of-mouth) and hence can manifest CEB in a manner that is observable for the firm. The firm does not initiate these touch-points and can solely monitor (launch initiatives, intervene, participate in) but not control the activities.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 1</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP in firm’s control and offline”:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call-centre</li> <li>• Physical shop/bank branch</li> <li>• Home visits</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 2</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP out of firm’s control and offline”:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off-line communities</li> <li>• Inter-personal communication in the individuals’ sphere</li> <li>• Articles/responses to articles in traditional media</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 3</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP in firm’s control and online”:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chat</li> <li>• Website and Web-shop</li> <li>• E-mail</li> <li>• Firm-hosted forum/community</li> <li>• My Page / Homebank</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 4</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP out of firm’s control and online”:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online communities</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>

**Figure1.** Taxonomy of Touch-points and Customer - Firm Interaction Options

## Methodology

### *Research Approach*

Adopting a customer-centric perspective, the main research objective was to understand what drives CEB manifestations, hence constitutes the nature of CEB, at the four types of touch-points. Since customers usually interact with a given firm over time, data collection was framed as an assessment of touch-point histories. The context is continuously delivered products and services in the telecommunication and financial sector. These sectors are, inter alia, characterized by so-called mundane products and services that customers take for granted unless they have an acute need for resolving a service issue, requiring a different product, changing a subscription, and the like.

The research approach was qualitative, using semi-structured interviews with customers who provided their experiences of encounters with and revolving around the focal firms over a longer period of time.



## *Data Collection and Analysis*

The starting point for the customer interviews was the concept of touch-point history (Polkinghorn, 1988). We define touch-point history as a customer's own account of experiences with specific goods, services or companies that covers data on events that are tied to a timeline. The application of a narrative approach allowed retrieving touch-point histories that are "freely told by customers, not just recounted in response to the company's requests for explanations of actions, thoughts, and outcomes" (Gorry and Westbrook 2011, p. 576). Hence, a customer's touch-point history describes singular interactions as well as the aggregate sum of the customer's interactions (touches) with a firm over time. Such a record of 'touches' is important for services that are provided continuously (for instance energy, banking or telecommunication) and is seen as an important 'tactic' to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al. 2004). The touch-point histories are unveiled through semi-structured interviews drawing on narrative techniques and aided by visual mapping (Langley 1999).

Visual mapping assisted informants in remembering and retelling their touch-point histories. The visual mapping was executed by the informants' use of inspirational images (each image was printed and available to informants during the interview). The informants could choose to apply the images or make own drawings on a prefabricated timeline on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. This technique helped informants to remember episodes of encounters with the firm and their own behaviors, and thus aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements of what constitutes the nature of CEB, hence what drives CEB at and across various touch-points.

Informants were selected to represent customers with at least two years of service relationship with the same telecommunication and financial services provider. This criterion was necessary to ensure that indeed histories could be retrieved and not only single encounters (as in previous research, see Ojiako, Chipulu, and Graesser 2012).

The informants were primarily interviewed in their homes and interviews lasted on average 60 minutes. Each informant was interviewed about their touch-point history with both their telecommunication provider and their bank. Interviews followed the same guidelines but allowed for necessary adjustments to the telecommunication and bank-industry. The informants did not receive any information before the interviews, but were simply invited to a 'conversation about service'. 20 interviews were conducted yielding 40 touch-point histories.

The 40 touch-point histories were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 320 single-spaced pages of transcripts.

Data analysis was undertaken in multiple stages. First, all 40 touch-point history transcripts were analyzed using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Creswell 2013). The first step of the analysis was performed by *writing out summaries* of all interviews to crystallize what the content of the respective touch-point history ‘is about’ with the purpose to understand the emerging themes. In the second stage, the emerging themes were subjected to selective coding in order to explore commonalities. The second stage was completed via *mapping* of all interactions at touch-points and categorizing elements in the customer-firm interaction from the customer’s perspective into meaning units. Finally, findings were aggregated across informants and industries. This multiple-stage approach aimed at identifying CEB drivers at the four types of touch-points not only based on CEB and engagement conceptualizations in extant literature, but to allow other themes to emerge.

## Findings

### *Differences between Telecommunication and Financial Services*

Though both sectors are similar in that they continuously provide products and services that are considered to be mundane, their offerings differ in several regards. Hence, we expected and also found several differences between the core characteristics of customers’ touch-point histories (see Table 1).

	<b>Telecommunication</b>	<b>Bank</b>
<b>Characteristics of the service relationship</b>	The service relationship is similar to the ‘relationship’ one has with a non-personal corporation. Anonymity is a keyword. (Pseudo-relationship) (Gutek et al. 1999)	The service relationship is similar to the relationship one has with a medical doctor or trusted advisor. Reciprocity is a keyword. (Fournier 1998)
<b>Perspective of the touch-point history</b>	The perspective is narrow and focuses at singular interactions.	The perspective is holistic and focuses at the sum of interactions.
<b>The object of encounters</b>	Products and services provided by the firm or the firm itself is the counterpart referred to.	An employee often referred to by name or the firm itself is the counterpart referred to.

**Table 1.** Main Differences between the two Industries

### *Characteristics of the Service Relationship*

Many informants used metaphors when describing their overall relationship with their telecommunication firm and bank, respectively. Quite often informants reported how they

regarded their service relationship with their bank similar to a service relationship with their medical doctor or a trusted advisor and how interactions should be and often were characterized by for instance reciprocal privacy, authority and dignity.

Quote Informant D:

*"It is somewhat similar to seeing a medical doctor you don't tell [to other people] why you go and see a medical doctor. The financial institution, the relationship you have regardless whether it is good or bad, is not something you share with others. To me, it is a very personal matter."*

Quote Informant F:

*"Well, in general historically – and it goes for me too – the perception is that they [the bank advisor] are like your medical doctor... that is somebody who is objective and there to help you."*

Quite differently, informants viewed their relationship with their telecommunication firm as difficult to overview. In fact informants in general did not refer to their interaction with the telecommunication firm as 'a relationship' but rather often highlighted the contrast between themselves as 'a customer' and the 'big firm' and the associated trouble by being a customer.

Quote Informant A:

*".. I think the firm has become very large. The distance between you enter [a customer interaction] and it is completed is a little too long. There is no real... I think it is difficult to see the connection. I find the collaboration with 'the firm' troublesome."*

### *Perspectives of the Touch-point History*

Informants reported different perspectives when telling their touch-point histories with the telecommunication firm versus the bank. It became evident that informants in general found it difficult to actually tell a 'history' (meaning for instance maintaining a story line or a chronological approach) when elaborating on their encounters with the telecommunication firm. Informants focused much more on singular interactions linked to specific service interactions at various touch-points.

Quote Informant C:

*"It is rather when something happens [that customer-firm interaction is relevant] ... with the computer, a broken mobile phone or something like that. Then we go to the shop and ask, whether it needs reparation, or we need to buy something new. We have done that 4-5 times."*

Contrary to this, informants took a more holistic approach when telling their touch-point history with the bank, hence giving the impression of a more seamless customer experience across touch-points. Informants often also maintained a story line and related episodes of interactions with the bank over time to one another.

Quote Informant H:

*".. I had an engagement with properties and investments and similar issues, which were not possible to handle over the phone. It required more in-depth meetings and we had on-going issues that demanded a bank professional approach and sometimes also an accountant and a legal expert."*

### *The Object of Encounters*

In the case of the telecommunication firm, informants referred in general to the firm as a provider of services and products, and thus had a much stronger focus on the actual products and services delivered than on the source of the delivery.

Quote Informant H:

*"To me, the firm is a provider. It is not like you call them 'well, I just wanted to check in on things' ... so no... unless I have something specific or concrete I need to know more about or obtain information about... otherwise I haven't been in touch with them, as such."*

By comparison, informants often stressed the importance of a relationship with an employee of the bank, which had developed over time, and that they valued to have direct access to the employee. Informants referred to a great extent to this person by name instead of referring to the bank.

Quote Informant A:

*"well, it has been important for me to have the same contact person (Lars) in the bank. To me it has something to do with trust, because... I am not distrustful, but I am not comfortable*

*with... just as if I had to get a new medical doctor and I had to tell the same story one more time... and then not being sure whether I would get the right treatment. I feel the same with my bank... so that is why."*

The above-mentioned three themes highlight the differences between customer-firm service relationships in the two industries. These differences certainly pertain to the nature of the products and services delivered, where banking products and services often have long term and substantial impact on individuals' life compared with telecommunication products and services, thus leading to a different type of service relationship and therefore touch-point history. Recognizing these differences provides a backcloth for understanding the main findings, which are presented in the following.

### *Key Drivers for CEB at and across Touch-points*

Two constructs emerged as key drivers of CEB, namely individuals' (customers') 'goal-directedness' (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999; Osselaer and Janiszewski 2012) and individuals' 'interaction modes' (Kolbe 1990). Goals define customers' purposive behavior that is directed at striving, achieving, evaluating or choosing something. Customers' interaction mode describes the ways customers act in the very moment of being present in a touch-point. We found how customers' tone of voice (are they for instance using irony, humor or are they factual), what they actually say (do they for instance suggest something, require something, demand something or ask for something), and what they express, either verbally or by gesture (when visible) or both (for instance expressions of relief, frustration, anger or pleasure) assist individual customers in goal-achievement and governs why CEB is manifested as it is.

The two constructs 'goal-directedness' and 'interaction mode' are linked to each other in the sense that goal-directedness is about setting and achieving a certain goal, while interaction mode is about the way the individual interacts with the surrounding world during the process of goal-achievement.

Integrated goal-directedness and interaction mode proved to determine what drives CEB manifestations, both at a singular touch-point and across touch-points. While goals define the touch-point(s) chosen, interaction mode governs how the interaction at different touch-point types unfolds and assists the individual in goal-achievement.

## *The Conative Dimension of CEB*

The above finding of ‘goal-mode integration’ mirrors the constructs of ‘conative dimension’ or ‘conative styles’ (Huitt and Cain 2005; Kolbe1990; Reitan and Wolfson 2000) of CEB. Conation refers to the connection of knowledge and affect to behavioral intention and is associated with the issue of ‘why’. The construct is closely associated with the concepts of intrinsic motivation, volition, agency, self-direction, and self-regulation (Kane 1985). The conative dimension of the engagement construct adds to extant literature by introducing this missing link between ‘cognition and affect’ on the one hand, and ‘behavior’ on the other. The CE literature has focused on emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of engagement and the CEB literature on actual behaviors as a representation of ‘what happened’ or how ‘something is going to happen’ (Van Doorn et al. 2010), yet omits aspect of conation.

Conation is an intentional, purposive state of mind based on the sum of cognition and affect leading to a certain behavior. It is the deliberate, goal-oriented, and planning component of motivation, i.e. the proactive (as opposed to reactive or habitual) aspect of behavior (Baumeister et al. 1998; Emmons 1986). Conation is necessary to explain how knowledge and emotion are translated into behavior in human beings (Bagozzi 1992).

By including the conative dimension in the engagement construct (CEB) we can better understand what drives the actual behavior as an outcome of subject-object interaction tied to an individual, because it explains *why* individuals behave the way they do.

Individuals apply certain ‘modes’ to actually translate their intention into behavior. Kolbe (1990) suggests that human beings have a conative style or a preferred method of putting thought into action and interacting with the environment. Kolbe (1990) identifies four conative modes: (1) Fact Finder (instincts to probe, refine and simplify); (2) Follow Thru (instincts to organize, reform and adapt); (3) Quick Start (instincts to improvise, revise and stabilize); and (4) Implementor (instincts to construct, renovate and envision). According to Kolbe (1990), it is the combination of the striving instinct, reason, and targeted goals that results in different levels of commitment and action.

Our research findings confirm that individuals display various ‘modes’ in order to interact with the surrounding world and to transform intentions into actual behaviors. Hence, the interaction at a certain touch-point and across touch-points is a dynamic and iterative process, which develops during the interaction (along similar lines see Brodie et al., 2013). Goal-achievement is by nature a process where a customer starts out with a goal and aims at achieving this goal through appropriate actions, which can occur singularly at one touch-point

or over time across several touch-points. Interaction modes determine how these goal-directed actions are displayed.

However, the interaction modes revealed in our findings are somewhat different from Kolbe's (1990) four conative modes (see below). This is mainly due to the fact that Kolbe developed her taxonomy based on general behavior, while our findings are derived from the specific and limited context of touch-point histories with two types of service relationships.

In the following section, the findings concerning the two drivers 'goal-directedness' and 'interaction mode' are presented and interpreted in light of the touch-point taxonomy presented above.

### *Driver (A): Goal-directed Behaviors at Touch-points*

Most informants reported that they only interacted with their telecommunication firm and bank because they have a specific goal for the contact such as 'purchasing a product', 'requesting service' or 'obtaining information'. These goals then determine the choice of touch-point best suited for goal-achievement. Table 2 illustrates the dominant and typical goal-directed behaviors at the four touch-point types.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 1</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP in firm’s control and offline”:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The customer wants to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Call-centre:</b> Understand invoice, book technician’s visit, get into contact with bank advisor, complete installation, give feedback for the firm</li> <li>• <b>Physical shop/bank branch:</b> Research / buy products / services, give feedback, meet bank advisor</li> <li>• <b>Home visits:</b> Have products / services installed / repaired</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 2</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP out of firm’s control and offline”:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The customer wants to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Off-line communities:</b> Compare obtained products /services, tell what happened at service interactions</li> <li>• <b>Inter-personal communication in the individuals’ sphere:</b> Tell what happened at service interactions, compare obtained products /services</li> <li>• <b>Articles/responses to articles in traditional media:</b> None</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 3</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP in firm’s control and online”:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The customer wants to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chat:</b> Obtain service on demand 24/7</li> <li>• <b>Website:</b> Find telephone no.,find information</li> <li>• <b>E-mail:</b> Be able to document a process (service interaction), obtain service on demand 24/7</li> <li>• <b>Firm-hosted forum/community:</b> None</li> <li>• <b>My Page / Homebank:</b> Obtain service on demand 24/7, find information</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>TP 4</u></b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>“TP out of firm’s control and online”:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The customer wants to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Online communities:</b> Discuss products / services</li> <li>• <b>Social media:</b> Tell and read stories about service interactions</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Typical Goal-directed Behaviors at the Four Touch-point Types

**TP1 “TP in Firm’s Control and Offline”:**

The goals that are pursued in touch-points, which the firm controls and at the same time are offline (TP1), are commonly linked to the purchase of products and services or to behaviors tied to the already purchased product or service. Informants reported for instance how they would choose to call the call centre in case they had just purchased a certain product and had challenges with the functionality of this product. The reason for choosing the call



centre is related to the perceived urgency of the customer problem as explained by the following informant:

Quote Informant G:

*"Because, when I need the bank, I need the person."*

Quote Informant C:

*"At the website I find the telephone number and then I make the call. I don't find it all there [at the website], I need something physical. A voice makes me calm. The other confuses me."*

The by far most frequent reason for calling the call-centre is customers' interest in and need to *understand the content of* their invoice. Informants did not necessarily refer to this goal as what could be interpreted as a service failure, but simply as a service interaction with the firm. Obviously the firm could avoid this type of calls by improving the format and design of invoices, preferably via online solutions (as elaborated in TP 3).

Quote Informant G:

*"What happened was that I did not receive an invoice. Eehmm, and I still don't know how to get them. So, I still call and ask them to send me a copy of the invoice. I don't know whether it appears in my digital mail or other systems, or where it appears... I have never figured it out."*

Quote Informant Q:

*"I checked the invoice and they had something called a paper-fee or mail-fee or something... absurd... and it was DKK 100,- for a quarter or something like that... and then I called their service center."*

Quote Informant H:

*"Yes, their call center, typically... in case it is about an invoice."*

## **TP 2 "TP out of Firm's Control and Offline":**

When it comes to goals pursued by the customer in touch-points, which are outside the firm's control and offline, many informants reported how they manifested CEB driven by comparing either recently acquired products and services or service interactions with the focal

firm. Informants also stated that they would predominantly choose touch-points of a more personal character (i.e. private sphere) for comparing experiences at service interactions with the focal firm (with the expected outcome to for instance obtain comfort or understanding by peers).

Quote Informant B:

*"I have spread the word [experiences related to purchasing mobile phone for B's son] to other parents in the network. " and continues "It is rather to align – did I overlook something? Could one have done it in a better way?"*

Quote Informant H:

*"Well, it might be due to I maybe somehow had the need to ventilate a bit or a regret over the fuzz... and because I want to learn if I am the only one in this country who has experienced such an encounter? And probably also to learn if my peers have experienced similar situations? This means, I did not have to have the feeling that this was a persecution against me personally... now we are dragging it far out... I know it has not been like that. So it is more to let go of pressure and to get some feedback. The same goes of course also for the good experience."*

### **TP 3 "TP in firm's control and online":**

Informants reported how they would choose this type of touch-points when the goals relate to urgency and/or the need to document what happens at service interactions. The exception is CEB at the firm's website, which most often is driven by a goal as basic as finding contact information (most frequently the telephone no.). Informants for instance elaborated how they would choose e-mail since this creates a history in itself by describing the content of the service interaction and thus providing documentation. Surprisingly few of the informants reported about interaction via chat, mainly due to the limited possibilities for explaining for instance challenges with products and services and especially limitations in having an elaborated answer from the firm via chat.

Quote Informant A:

*"I have to a large extend been in contact by writing. I have corresponded with them via e-mail, and by doing so kept a story-line in these mails, then they can follow what has happened."*

Quote Informant N:

*"Yes, well I am regularly in contact with them. Via e-mail if we are discussing... if we have sold some stocks, whatever, if we are discussing prices at banking products or the like... but again... we are the easiest customers at the Planet, we e-mail him and expect an e-mail answer now and then... that is the only contact we have with them."*

#### **TP 4 "TP out of firm's control and online":**

The final type of touch-points is outside the control of the firm and online. Informants reported how they would manifest CEB in this type of touch-points driven mainly by the goal to tell about their experiences with the focal firm (good and bad) and hence to have some 'stories' in return.

Quote Informant L:

*"It is all about framing it at Facebook as well... to animate for a little debate... it is great fun to frame the story, to entertain other people, who then might return with other entertaining stories."*

#### ***Driver (B): Interaction Mode at Touch-points***

The touch-point histories described how informants displayed certain modes when interacting with the firm (customers' tone of voice, what they say and what they express) that contained descriptive and explanatory adjectives of why they behaved as they did at and across touch-points. These modes seemingly assisted the customer in goal-achievement. Four different customer modes emerged: the '*proactive customer*', the '*conscientious customer*', the '*skeptical customer*' and the '*entertaining customer*' (see Table 3 for guiding text and illustrative quotes).

It is important to note that 'interaction mode' is a state, i.e. tied to the interaction at a given touch-point, and not necessarily a trait displayed across different situations. A customer can for instance take up the 'skeptical interaction mode' when calling the call center in the telecommunication firm, and the 'conscientious interaction mode' when being at a meeting in the bank.

The customer's interaction mode	Guiding text	Illustrative quotes
<b>'Pro-active'</b>	<p><u>This mode is:</u> characterized by 'having or showing awareness of and preparation for the future' (Merriam Webster on-line Dictionary)</p> <p><u>Characteristics:</u> Tone of voice: 'Demanding' What they say: 'I want..I do..' What they express: 'Energy'</p>	<p>Informant H: <i>"I did in fact show up with a 5 slides presentation of how to provide good customer service at the new bank.".. "They found it – the bank advisor, who we still have today – to be very positive. He is himself very pro-active."</i></p> <p>Informant B: <i>"I ask him of course which products and services he could offer .. that are relevant for us. .. and now they are aware they need to inform the prices.[because B told him to]"</i></p>
<b>'Conscientious'</b>	<p><u>This mode is:</u> 'guided by or in accordance with one's sense of right and wrong ' (Merriam Webster on-line Dictionary)</p> <p><u>Characteristics:</u> Tone of voice: 'Careful' What they say: 'I am responsible' What they express: 'Balance'</p>	<p>Informant D: <i>"I seem to remember that it was a.. well, what I experienced was very professional input, where my clear impression was that the firm has developed this new market-oriented approach. I have also been collaborating with some former employees, and they are really .. they have good competencies, and I am thinking if that is an expression of today's employees that would be simpatico."</i></p> <p>Informant H:, <i>"I was just about to call them.. as a consumer you of course have a responsibility as well."</i></p>
<b>'Skeptical'</b>	<p><u>This mode is:</u> 'inclined to doubt or question claims ' (Merriam Webster on-line Dictionary)</p> <p><u>Characteristics:</u> Tone of voice: 'Questioning' What they say: 'I keep an eye' What they express: 'Reluctance'</p>	<p>Informant A: <i>"and again one has to keep an eye on 'do I get it at a discount?' You have to refer to previous agreements and specific dates and times – but I don't receive it. That is why I have learned to write down everything, when I call the firm."</i></p> <p>Informant F: <i>"and next thing is, it is not to spread the word 'don't use this firm' because I think it is exactly the same everywhere. It is bullshit everywhere. I don't think he is exceptionally hopeless, I think that's just the way it is."</i></p>
<b>'Entertaining '</b>	<p><u>This mode is:</u> characterized by: "providing amusement or enjoyment" (Merriam Webster on-line Dictionary)</p> <p><u>Characteristics:</u> Tone of voice: 'Exaggerated' 'Ironic' What they say: 'Listen to me..' What they express: 'Distance'</p>	<p>Informant B: <i>"We have a 'bank salesman' – bank advisors don't exist. We have a bank salesman.. that is one of my mantras in Life.. bank advisors don't exist only bank salesmen.. They sell their bank products, right? They call themselves bank advisors, but they are bank – salesmen.."</i></p> <p>Informant L: <i>"[after a service-encounter] there is this funny feed-back session... To me that, is pure entertainment... You don't get the opportunity to evaluate what's relevant to evaluate."</i></p>

**Table 3.** Interaction Modes and Exemplary Quotes

A *'proactive customer'* adopts a mode where he or she takes the lead and for instance suggests a solution to a problem, improvements of the firm's offerings or in other manners takes initiatives that directly supports the customer's goal-achievement. A *'proactive customer'* will for instance not hesitate to provide own 'wisdom' to enlighten the firm via feedback on the encounter (at TP1/TP3) and using own insights regarding the firm's products and services to assist a peer (at TP2/TP4). The *'conscientious customer'* adopts a mode where he or she reflects over his/her contribution during the interaction and negotiation with the firm (for instance TP1). A conscientious customer hence might adjust goals during a service-interaction accordingly, for instance by reflecting over eventual own omissions in relation to the service-relationship. The *'skeptical customer'* adopts a mode where he or she questions activities at the various touch-points and takes a critical approach to the interaction. A *'skeptical customer'* seeks goal-achievement via considering critically for instance the solutions offered or suggested by the firm or by other entities across touch-points. Additionally, the *'skeptical customer'* may manifest CEB that most often will be of a self-promoting character (such as framing him or herself as the expert and goal-achiever typically at touch-point TP2 and TP4). Finally, the *'entertaining customer'* most often plays his/her role at TP2 and / or TP4 by putting him or herself at the centre of an anecdote typically spinning around previous service interactions managed and controlled by the firm.

## Discussion

In the following, the empirical findings are discussed in light of extant CEB literature and are organized into three tenets. These are then summarized into a new conceptual model of 'goal-mode integration' as a motivational driver for CEB in an ongoing service-relationship characterized by mundane products and/or services. This model illustrates the content of the customer-based antecedents and exemplifies *the characteristics of the drivers for CEB* in the CEB dimensional model (van Dorn et al. 2010) and constitutes the 'nature of CEB'.

### *Tenet A: Goals Drive Customers' Choice of Appropriate Touch-points for CEB*

In the context of the two service sectors investigated, our analysis clearly revealed that customers only interact with a focal firm when they pursue a specific goal, such as retrieving information, purchasing a product or service, or solving a problem. These interactions only occur at those touch-points that customers deem relevant and best suited for achieving their

specific goals. This is also the case for touch-points the firm cannot control such as when a customer story-tells about the firm to friends in general (choosing social media) versus to close family (choosing a private setting).

Additionally, some touch-point encounters are tied to a financial transaction or an existing subscription contract between customer and firm, and this finding supports Kumar and colleagues' (2010) suggestion that financial transactions also are a type of CEB (contrary to, for instance, Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft (2010)). Hence, CEB both includes financial transactions and goes beyond financial transactions. We suggest this to be an appropriate boundary condition for the CEB construct at least in settings similar to the present study.

### *Tenet B: Interaction Mode Assists Goal-achievement*

Our study revealed that four different interaction modes determine individual CEB manifestations at and across touch-points, and thereby the outcome of customer-firm interactions. The extant firm-centric literature on CEB does not discuss interaction modes as integral part of CEB manifestations, but suggests that form and modality of customer engagement consist of the different ways in which CEB can be expressed (van Doorn et al. 2010), similar to Bolton and Saxena-Iyer's (2009) distinction between in-role behaviors, extra-role behaviors and elective behaviors. Elective behaviors may consist of customers suggesting improvements for the firm's products and services or calling hot-line to get help, extra-role behaviors refer to, for instance, customers helping other customers in the store or notifying the employees of mistakes in pricing, and in-role behaviors cover actions that occur within parameters set by a firm such as complaint. From our customer-centric perspective we propose instead that these CEB manifestations are not roles but behaviors that occur at appropriate touch-points.

The interaction modes we have identified are similar to the conative modes suggested by Kolbe (1990), defined as general modes a human being chooses for interacting with its surroundings and for achieving a goal. We have chosen the term customers' 'interaction modes' to specifically refer to interactions based on customers' goal-directedness that occurs at and across touch-points in a service context. This concept of customers' interaction modes enriches the CEB literature by clarifying why CEB is manifested as it is. Together with the concept of goal-directedness, our findings illustrate the importance of distinguishing between drivers for CEB in a certain touch-point (i.e. goals) and for helpers / assisters in the process of

goal-achievement (i.e. modes), and explain the outcome of touch-point interactions as the result of goal-mode integration.

### *Tenet C: Customer Goal-mode Integration Constitutes the Nature of CEB*

Finally, we propose based on the above that goals are antecedents interplaying with modes to drive CEB manifestations, while features like valence, form, modality and scope are simply means that customers puts into play to be able to achieve their specific goals. This goal-mode integration and choice of means takes place at touch-point chosen by the customer and can be any one or a combination of several of the four touch-points TP1, TP2, TP3 and TP4.

Bringing these three tenets together, Figure 2 illustrates the Where, Why and How of CEB manifestations.

<p><b>Driver for <u>where</u> CEB is manifested:</b></p> <p>Customers' goal-directedness determines at which touch-point(s) the CEB is manifested.</p>	<p><b>Driver for <u>why</u> CEB is manifested as it is:</b></p> <p>Customers' modes (one out of four) determine why CEB is manifested as it is at touch-point(s).</p>
<p><b>Driver for <u>how</u> CEB is manifested:</b></p> <p>Customer goal-mode integration motivates CEB and unfolds as the nature of CEB.</p>	

**Figure 2.** Conceptualization of Customer goal-mode integration

The 'nature of CEB' has been described as consisting of five dimensions (van Doorn et al. 2010): 'Valence', 'Form/Modality', 'Scope', 'Nature of Impact' and 'Customer Goals.' Our analysis, however, revealed that goals are a core driver (Tenet A) instead of being one out of five CEB dimensions. The second core driver is interaction mode (Tenet B). The customer's interaction mode often assists customers in achieving their goals over time, either during a service-interaction or CEB manifestation at one touch-point or across touch-points. Integrating goal-directedness with interaction mode (Tenet C) reveals that the four remaining dimensions of the Van Doorn et al. model do not constitute the nature of CEB but rather contextual facets and behavioral means to an end of CEB manifestations (along

complementary lines see Chen et al. 2017, however these authors focus at investigating CEB valence as a consequence of state and trait goal orientations).

Customers and firms interact at many different touch-points that enable CEB. Extant literature focuses on behavior resulting from motivational drivers but has so far not empirically established the characteristics of these drivers. This research takes a customer-centric approach and suggests an empirically based conceptualization of the integration of customers' goals and their interaction modes as a motivational driver for CEB at and across touch-points. The conceptualization establishes the motivational component of CEB by explaining where, why and how CEB is manifested.

Interaction mode is about 'why' customers act when interacting in various touch-points. The valence can be either positive or negative, since the way customers act can of course be more or less in favor of the firm. Regardless the valence, customers invest an amount of resources when interacting with the firm or inter-peers. The nature of this resource investment (for instance where it takes place, longevity or impact) is explained by the conceptual model as included in the customer-mode contingent upon goal-directedness, and hence the integration of constructs explains how the resource investment unfolds. The resources customers invest can thus affect both where they choose to manifest CEB and the way they act to achieve their goals. It is for instance more resource demanding to participate in person in an event than posting a 'like' at a website, and it is more impactful to post in a global online community compared to participating in word-of-mouth activities in a limited personal sphere.

The conceptual model explains where, why and how customers manifest CEB in the context of ongoing service relationships. The conceptual model is an expression of how customers mitigate the elements included in any resource investment (CEB manifestation) they make in the moment of interacting with the firm or inter-peers.

## **Conclusion**

This study took a customer-centric perspective to understand what drives CEB as an outcome of customer-firm interactions at and across touch-points. In-depth interviews with customers about their engagement with their telecommunication provider and bank revealed that CEB consists of inextricably linked goal-directed behaviors and exhibition of different interaction modes. The findings can be summarized as follows: (I) CEB is motivated by an integration of customers' 'goal-directedness' and their 'interaction mode' when interacting at



touch-point(s), (II) customers' goal-directedness determines the touch-points where CEB are manifested, and (III) interaction mode assists goal-achievement and governs why CEB is manifested as it is. These findings result in an empirically based conceptualization of CEB that expands the hitherto predominantly firm-centric and descriptive CEB literature, especially by illustrating the where, why and how of CEB manifestations. In this regard, the findings also revealed that the original conceptualization of four of the five CEB dimensions by Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) are rather contextual facets and behavioral means to an end, while goal-mode integration explains the motivational forces behind these behaviors.

As regards limitations, we acknowledge that our findings may be specific in the sense that they are derived from a specific industry context, namely two service sectors characterized by providing rather mundane products and services. It is conceivable that other service sectors, for instance hospitality and tourism, might have revealed other aspects. Yet, this would most certainly not have affected the general model of an integration of goal-directedness and interaction modes, but the choice of touch-points and specific content of CEB at these touch-points.

Further research avenues could therefore pertain to investigating other service contexts that are characterized of high customer involvement, and to applying quantitative methods to study CEB drivers and the results of CEB manifestations for both customers and the focal firm.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research.

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## **PAPER 2**

(Target: ) Journal of Service Research

### **The Customer Experience – Engagement Behavior Connectivity: An Exploratory Analysis of how and why Constructs are Connected**

Helle Haurum, Sylvia von Wallpach and Mogens Bjerre

#### **Abstract**

This paper contributes to the emergent CEB literature with an improved understanding of how and why certain types of customer experience (CEX) sometimes lead to certain types of customer engagement behavior (CEB) and vice versa. Via a qualitative study of customers' continuous service relationships with their telecommunication provider and their financial services provider this research presents 1) eight scenarios in the service relationship, which contextualize and shape CEX and CEB; and how and why 2) CEB is sometimes experiential, iterative or educational; 3) CEB is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing, intertwined with or become one with CEX; and finally how and why 4) CEX is sometimes an antecedent for CEB. The paper concludes with a conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity and implications for practice and theory.

#### **Keywords:**

Customer engagement behavior, customer experience, continuous service relationship, customer engagement behavior management, customer perspective

## Introduction

Providers of low-involvement products and services, such as telecommunication, energy or financial services, invest considerable effort in creating and sustaining long-term service relationships with their customers. Such efforts often focus at providing relevant customer experiences (CEX) with a service provider with the aim to stimulate customer engagement behavior (CEB) (for instance, word of mouth, giving feedback to the firm or spending time surfing the firm's website); ultimately leading to measurable financial, reputational or other consequences for the firm.

High practical relevance of and relatively scarce scientific insights into CEB led the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) (2010) to highlight the need to obtain a better understanding of CEB and to stress how such an improved understanding of how and why customers engage (behavioral focus) in the firm is of importance (Brodie et al. 2013).

Several researchers have contributed to the emerging CEB literature. Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) present, for instance, an extensive framework including types of CEB, their antecedents and consequences, while other authors discuss how CEB creates value for the firm (Bijmolt et al. 2010), or how to manage CEB (Verhoef and Lemon 2013).

In line with research on customer engagement and CEB's antecedents and consequences (e.g. Bijmolt et al. 2010; Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014; Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010) this paper discusses how and why CEX and CEB are connected and leads to the conclusion that connectivity cannot be clarified conclusively and are most likely multifaceted and unstable across contexts (cf. Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014; Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012). Acknowledging the potential limited applicability and relevance of positivist theoretical assumptions (cf. Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012) as well as the fact that engagement and experience co-exist in "a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships" (Brodie et al. 2011, p.260) this paper adopts a dynamic process perspective and aims to provide unprecedented in-depth insights into the acknowledged but so far under-researched CEX and CEB connectivity in the service relationship. Verhoef and Lemon (2016, p. 74) points out that "it is important to consider customer engagement in the development of customer experience theory" and emphasizes how this domain is not yet researched. Contrary to the rare extant CEB studies which predominantly take the perspective of the firm, the present qualitative study is undertaken from the perspective of customers and adopts a qualitative research design, consisting of 20 narrative interviews about consumers' continuous service relationship with their

telecommunication and financial services provider resulting in 40 touch-point histories. This research results in rich insights into various types of CEX in the service relationships, the diverse CEB and into how and why CEX and CEB are connected.

The findings provide empirical evidence for 1) eight scenarios in the service relationship, which contextualize and shape CEX and CEB. Furthermore, the findings explain how and why 2) CEB is sometimes experiential, iterative or educational; 3) CEB is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing, intertwined with or become one with CEX; and finally 4) how and why CEX is sometimes an antecedent for CEB. The paper concludes with a discussion and conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity and implications for practice and theory.

## **Theoretical Background**

### *Customer engagement behavior – Antecedents and consequences*

Following the Marketing Science Institute's (MSI) (2010) call for prioritizing the study of CEB, research has been conducted with the aim to characterize and distinguish the construct from other related constructs such as 'participation' and 'involvement' (Brodie et al. 2011). A core aspect of CEB is 'customer engagement', which has been developed as a separate construct in literature. Brodie and colleagues (2011) provide the most encompassing definition of customer engagement, acknowledging the construct's cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral components as well as its dynamic nature; and considering its applicability across industries, product/service categories and contexts: "Customer engagement (CE) is a *psychological state* that occurs by virtue of *interactive, cocreative customer experiences* with a *focal agent/object* (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and exists as a *dynamic, iterative process* within service relationships that *cocreate value*. CE plays a *central role* in a nomological network governing service relationships in which other relational constructs (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a *multidimensional concept* subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions." (Brodie et al. 2011, p. 260).

Some part of extant research focuses on the behavioral dimension of customer engagement, studying the characteristics, antecedents and consequences, as well as the value of CEB, mostly from a firm perspective (e.g. Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010). Literature approaches the CEB construct from two different angles: First, customers' involvement in the development of the firm's products and/or services in terms of feedback,

ideas or information for the firm (Kumar et al. 2010) or customers participating in design and assembly of products (Hoyer et al. 2010; Kristenson et al. 2004). Second, customers' communication about the firm and/or brand via, for instance, blogs, Word of Mouth and other customer to customer activities (Brodie et al. 2013) or ambassador/referral programs sometimes initiated by the firm (Kumar et al. 2010).

Van Doorn and colleagues (2010, p. 248) provide a widely acknowledged definition of CEB: "We posit that customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". The ultimate scope of the construct is still debated and authors like Kumar and colleagues (2010) do, for instance, advocate for the inclusion of customer purchases as a relevant type of CEB.

A major aim of extant research on CEB consists in identifying the constructs' antecedents and consequences. Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) provide a conceptual framework which presents customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents of CEB, multiple CEB manifestations and their dimensions, as well as CEB's consequences for the customer, the firm, and other consequences. More specifically, Van Doorn and colleagues (2010, p.256) identify, for instance, satisfaction, trust/commitment and consumption goals as customer-based antecedents for CEB while proposing, for instance, cognitive, attitudinal or emotional customer-based consequences. Firm-based antecedents are among others brand characteristics and firm reputation; while financial and reputational outcomes are possible consequences for the firm. Other consequences of CEB can, for instance, include consumer welfare, economic surplus or other external consequences. CEB manifestations can, according to Van Doorn and colleagues (2010), encompass all kinds of possible behaviors ranging from customers' word of mouth activities, feedback for the firm, posts in various blogs, and other types of CEB driven by motivational drivers revolving around the focal firm or brand.

Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) conceptualization offers a valuable overview and indicates the iterative and dynamic nature of CEB by the use of recurrent arrows and loops. Van Doorn and colleagues' conceptual framework has its limitations though since it is not based on and has not been confirmed with empirical data. According to Bijmolt and colleagues (2010), there is a need for improving the understanding of the interconnectivity between elements since it does not develop relationships, beyond the obvious (for instance, a satisfied customer is more likely to manifest positively valenced CEB).

Fehrer, Woratscheck, and Germelmann (2014) advance extant research on antecedents and consequences of CEB by developing a framework that aims to clarify the various degrees



of ‘stableness’ between antecedents and consequences for both customer engagement and CEB. The authors find only few instances for stable relationships around CEB (e.g. commitment and trust are antecedents for CEB) and point mainly to ‘dynamic’ relationships between antecedents and consequences for both customer engagement and CEB. The authors suggest that “based on the previously described, different theoretical understandings of CE [customer engagement], separate scales for CE state and CE behavior seem appropriate for the operationalization of the CE concept” (p.5) and encourage further research within the domain to reduce blurredness in the categorization of antecedents and consequences of customer engagement and CEB.

Adopting a value-focused perspective, Kumar and colleagues (2010, p. 298) “propose that the value of customer engagement is comprised of four core dimensions” which are realized via four different types of CEBs (p. 299): “Customer purchasing behavior” (corresponding to customer lifetime value), “customer referral behavior” (which is the firm’s acquisition of new customers, for instance, via incentive programs; also referred to as customer referral value), “customer influencer behavior” (for instance, customers’ word of mouth activities; corresponding to customer influencer value), and “customer knowledge behavior” (which is customers giving feedback to the firm or suggestions for service or product development, also referred to as customer knowledge value). The challenge for firms consists in harvesting the value of CEB via best possible customer value management.

In line with Kumar and colleagues’ (2010) argumentation, Verhoef and Lemon (2013) identify an emerging trend of perceiving the management of CEB as a relevant aspect of customer value management and additionally highlight the relevance of managing CEX and customer networks. With their study, Verhoef and Lemon (2013) thus direct our focus of attention towards the relevance of the CEX – CEB connectivity in creating value for customers.

The next section sets out to define CEX and reviews how extant literature connects CEX with CEB.

### *The customer experience - customer engagement behavior connectivity*

Early research by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) puts consumption experiences in the spotlight by pointing out how consumers are—in contrast to those days’ conventional views—not only driven by rational motivations but by hedonic, emotive aspects of the consumption experience which are “directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings and fun”

(p.132). In a similar vein, seminal research on experiential marketing highlights the relevance of CEX, which “occur as a result of encountering, undergoing or living through things” and “provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and relational values that replace function values” (Schmitt 1999, p.57).

These early days perspectives on consumption experiences, rooted in romanticism (Caru and Cova 2003) have enjoyed widespread adoption in marketing practice and literature. Several concepts have been discussed as related to consumption experiences, including extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price 1993), peak experiences (Maslow 1964), peak performance (Privette 1983) and flow (Csikszentmihályi 1990). Extraordinary experiences are defined as experiences that stand out and are particularly memorable (Abrahams 1983), peak experiences, as powerful and transient moments of intense joy for the individual (Privette 1983), flow experiences are characterized by optimal combination of skills, challenges and high mental focus on an activity (Csikszentmihályi 1990), while peak performance experiences are types of experiences where the individual uses his or her full potential and power (Hansen and Mossberg 2013). Caru and Cova (2003) forward that a better and unified understanding of the experience construct is needed. Specifically the authors suggest to leave the idea that experiences are ‘extraordinary’ and romantic (i.e. solely emotive) and, moreover the authors suggest to understand customers’ experiences to possibly being related to the society (consumption experiences) or to the market (consumer experiences).

Meyer and Schwager (2007, p.4) provide a generic definition on CEX as “the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs in the course of purchase, use, and service and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representations of a company’s products, services, or brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews, and so forth”.

Research provides in-depth insights into experiences that occur when consumers shop and interact with service environments (e.g. Kerin, Jain, and Howard 2002) or when consumers actually interact with products by examining and evaluating them (e.g. Hoch 2002) or by using and consuming them (e.g. Joy and Sherry 2003).

Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) further develop the experience construct in the context of brands and conceptualize brand experience as a composite construct consisting of “sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (p.52). Similarly, von Wallpach and Kreuzer (2013, p.1325) refer to brand experiences as

“subjective responses to brand-related stimuli consumers experience via multiple senses and introspective states” and elaborate on the link between brand experiences and embodied brand knowledge. Literature clearly illustrates how “in particular, brand experience differs from evaluative, affective, and associative constructs, such as brand attitudes, brand involvement, brand attachment, customer delight, and brand personality” (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009, p. 53).

Engagement research related to consumption in general and to brands in particular highlights the relevance of the experience construct in relation to consumer and brand engagement. Hollebeek (2011) suggests how ‘engagement’ as such is tied to the individual, is context-dependent and is the outcome of subject – object interaction (i.e. CEX). In a similar vein, Brodie and colleagues (2011, p. 260) stress that CE occurs “by the virtue of interactive cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships”. Customers’ interactive situation-specific experiences in the service relationship are accordingly central for how the service relationship evolves in general and for the evolvement of customer engagement in particular (Brodie et al. 2011).

According to Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi (2012, p. 668) “CBE [Consumer brand-engagement] appears as a multi-dimensional concept combining such elements as attention, dialogue, interaction, emotions, sensorial pleasure and immediate activation aimed at creating a total brand experience with consumers”. Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi (2012, p. 681) further contribute to an understanding of the emergence of consumer brand engagement by introducing “brand enacting”, that is, the consumer’s effort to “put the brand into action, participating in the world of the brand; the brand thus gets embedded in consumers’ lives, becoming ‘an enabler of their doings’” (p.669). Brand enacting is a multi-dimensional construct that “goes beyond traditional cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions” (p.681). The authors suggest three drivers for brand enacting which they label “physical and value-based proximity”, “consumer protagonism” and, “brand communication integration” (pp.669-673). Each of the three drivers is influenced by various events or situations the customer experiences or by societal conditions. According to the authors, “emerging experiential and societal dimensions” are thus core aspects of engagement and it is difficult to force these elements “into positivist theoretical assumptions that clearly separate cognitive, emotional and conative dimensions” (p. 681).

In line with more general research on customer engagement and CEB’s antecedents and consequences (e.g. Bijmolt et al. 2010; Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014, Kumar et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010) also this literature review on the relation between various

forms of engagement and experience leads to the conclusion that connectivity cannot be clarified conclusively and are most likely unstable across contexts (cf. Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014; Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012). Acknowledging the potential limited applicability and relevance of positivist theoretical assumptions (cf. Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi 2012) as well as the fact that engagement and experience co-exist in “a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships” (Brodie et al. 2011, p.260) this paper adopts a dynamic process perspective and aims to provide unprecedented in-depth insights into the acknowledged but so far under-researched CEX-CEB connectivity (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Contrary to extant research (which provides mainly conceptual contributions and is predominantly firm oriented), this research applies a consumer perspective to gain insights into CEX-CEB connectivity in the context of continuous service relationships.

## **Methodology**

### *Research approach and procedure*

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the CEX–CEB connectivity, this paper adopts a social constructivist research approach. The customers’ interpretation of their CEX and CEB in the service relationship is central to derive an understanding of how and why constructs are connected. Such interpretation is foremost bound to the individual however it is an outcome of subject-object interaction and context-dependent (Hollebeek 2011), which in this case is the interaction between the customer and the firm and sometimes in between customers in the setting of continuous service relationships. The customer’s interpretation is in other words a construction, resulting from the individual’s interaction with the surrounding World, i.e. the firm, and / or other customers, and / or other actors (Löbner 2011; Creswell 2013).

Since the main aim of this study is to gain insights into how CEX and CEB are connected the chosen research methodology had to stimulate informants to recall and narrate CEX they had accumulated over the course of their service relationship and their various CEB manifestations. A narrative approach appeared most relevant since narratives are “the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful” (Polkinghorn 1988, p.1) and support informants to share former experiences and interpretations of events with others (cf. Shankar et al. 2001; Schindler and Holbrook 2003). Accordingly, this study employed narrative interviewing including open, grand tour questions that stimulate customer (individuals)

storytelling and support customers in reconstructing their service experience (cf. Schindler and Holbrook 2003). The narrative approach allowed gaining experiential accounts “freely told by customers, not just recounted in response to the company’s requests for explanations of actions, thoughts, and outcomes” (Gorry and Westbrook 2011, p. 576). Customers’ narratives describe singular experiences as well as the aggregate sum of experiences over the course of the customer’s service relationship.

In order to support customers in their narrative effort, the interview process was complemented by visual mapping as a preparation for later analysis (Langley 1999). “Visual graphical representations are particularly attractive for the analysis of process data because they allow the simultaneous representation of a large number of dimensions, and they can easily be used to show precedence, parallel processes, and the passage of time.” (Langley 1999, p. 700). The visual mapping was in this initial step carried out by informants who were provided with a blank sheet of paper which contained a timeline. The interviewer encouraged respondents to adapt this timeline to their needs by indicating, for instance, the starting point of the service relationship and concrete events over the course of the service relationship. In addition, researchers provided respondents with the opportunity to choose from a set of inspirational images related to telecommunication or banking services respectively or to make drawings that they could freely assign to concrete CEX and CEB. This technique supported informants in remembering episodes of events, involving experiences with the firm and their own behaviors related to these experiences at various touch-points (Rust et al. 2004).

The final sample consisted of 20 informants. The informants were identified by “purposive sampling” (Hair, Ortinau, and Bush 2008, p. 322) and informants were selected to represent customers with at least two years of service relationship with the same telecommunication and financial services provider. This criterion was necessary to ensure that narratives were regarding continuous service relationships and not only regarding single events and related experiences/behaviors could be retrieved (cf. Ojiako, Chipulu, and Graesser 2012).

Informants were primarily interviewed at their homes and interviews lasted on average 60 minutes. Each informant was interviewed about his/her experiences with both his/her telecommunication provider and financial services provider. Interviews employed the same grand-tour questions but allowed for necessary adjustments to the telecommunication and financial services industry. In order not to bias informants, they did not receive any information before the interviews, but were simply invited to a ‘conversation about service’.

All 20 interviews (40 touch-point histories) were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 320 single-spaced pages of transcripts (Times New Roman, 12pt).

Data analysis consisted in an iterative process of inductive categorization (Spiggle 1994), entailing a continuous movement from “part to whole, both within and across the interviews” (Joy et al. 2010, p.341). First, the data material was analyzed for possible themes and categories, using an open coding approach (Straus and Corbin 1998, Creswell 2013). Second, the concrete events reported by informants were mapped and analyzed by the use of thematic network (Attride-Stirling 2001) to provide for an overview over types of CEX and CEB, and how and why constructs are connected. The iterative three step thematic analysis was discussed by the research team to gain a consensual understanding of the data material (Spiggle 1994) and were compared to existing research to inform the theorizing about CEX-CEB connectivity in a continuous service relationship.

## **Findings**

The findings are twofold. First, the findings present 1) eight scenarios in the service relationship, which contextualize and shape CEX and CEB.

Second, the findings explain how and why 2) CEB is sometimes experiential, iterative or educational; 3) CEB is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing, intertwined with or become one with CEX; and finally 4) how and why CEX is sometimes an antecedent for CEB.

### *Eight scenarios contextualize and shape CEX and CEB*

When the comprehensive and multiple step process of analyzing the data was completed it became clear, that a customer reviews his/her touch-point history depending of the context in which the referred to events occur. In this research eight scenarios emerged, which each contextualizes and shapes CEX and CEB and the connectivity between constructs.

A certain scenario shapes for example the customer’s approach to giving feedback to the firm (is the customer for instance mainly ‘correcting service failures’ or ‘improving the service interaction?); and shapes the nature of word of mouth activities (is the customer for instance story-telling at a meta level about the firm, or is the customer story-telling about certain product-features?). CEB manifestations, which per se are the same (for instance ‘giving feedback’ or ‘word of mouth’) are thus manifested differently and connected to CEX differently depending of the scenario by which the events are shaped

The first section of the findings' chapter is devoted to providing an overview over the eight scenarios, which customers (informants) express contextualize and shape CEX and CEB (Please see 'Table 1. 'Eight scenarios contextualize and shape CEX and CEB').

<b><u>At the level of the overall service relationship</u></b>			
<b>Dominant theme:</b>	<b>Customer's main reason for being in the service relationship</b>		
<b>Scenarios I-III:</b>	<b>I: Out of tradition</b>	<b>II: You &amp; Me</b>	<b>III: Value for money</b>
<b>Dominant situation (exemplary quote):</b>	<i><b>Informant F:</b> To me it is like... there is something comforting in it. Something unchangeable.. something I can't just throw away... Well, I don't know whether it is that feeling that it is somehow this institution, which has always been there, and which.. I for one associate with something comforting and a little.. how can I explain it... I almost just said good taste .. but that is not the right word.. but you know.. something like that. It is Danish. That's what we are.. the DNA in us.</i>	<i><b>Informant A:</b> And I must say, I have experienced that security with my bank. They have – together with me, in the beginning, when I just got divorced.. Lars, my bank advisor, he said, we need to focus on this situation, and help you to find your feet again. And I must say... they have handled the situation to perfection. That is why I am a customer at my bank.</i>	<i><b>Informant M:</b> Then we got an advisor, named Lone Stage, and she thought it was not too bad with that mortgage ... and then we got the loan .. it means, we also got the loan at another bank, but chose our bank because of better interest-rates.</i>
<b><u>At the level of the service-interaction (often spanning several touch-points)</u></b>			
<b>Dominant theme:</b>	<b>Customer's superiority/equality/inferiority in the service interaction (knowledge about the domain/products/services)</b>		
<b>Scenarios IV-VI:</b>	<b>IV: Customer is superior</b>	<b>V: Customer and firm are equal</b>	<b>VI: Customer is inferior</b>
<b>Dominant situation (exemplary quote):</b>	<i><b>Informant B:</b> I ask him to tell me what is 'in stock' and what would be relevant for us.. then of course I tell him, that his fees are too high.. have they informed me about their prices? ... no they haven't!! So, therefore we have some big discussions,</i>	<i><b>Informant J:</b> When they changed their customer-services (prices, terms and conditions) and we, who have a big mortgage for the house, we are in the group of customers where they are really sucking up to us. So we are good, and got a really nice bank</i>	<i><b>Informant A:</b> They have become big/large, they know, what they got – and we don't know what we get. You know, it has become too fancy. They are a little too fast to chop you off or, you know, cut you off. Then the customer must return in case there is something</i>

	<i>for instance, about his fees.. 'you do not provide information – when you don't inform me about prices – it's free'..– 'Well, Klaus, you understand you have a problem.. other firms inform about prices of their goods, why don't you ?'. So, now I have told them, they need to have price tags visible.</i>	<i>advisor, who is rational... it is more like... 'old school' back to the days, where you could be sitting having a cup of coffee and you could discuss real issues.</i>	<i>unsatisfying. Well, you have to watch your steps, they are so fast.</i>
<b><u>At the level of the service-encounter (at a singular touch-point)</u></b>			
<b>Dominant theme:</b>	<b>Customer's mastery or non-mastery of the service encounter (navigation, lingo and functionality)</b>		
<b>Scenarios VII-VIII:</b>	<b>VII: Customer mastery</b>	<b>VIII: Customer non-mastery</b>	
<b>Dominant situation (exemplary quote):</b>	<i><b>Informant Q:</b> They have an app, where you can see/learn/uncover everything R: What do you uncover via the app? My consumption, my invoices.. a status.. whether they are paid.. ehh everything.... it works really good!</i>	<i><b>Informant C:</b> At the website I find the telephone no. and then I call. I don't find out everything at the website.. I need something physical. A voice then I become calm. I get confused otherwise. R: A voice makes you calm ? It works better to guide me through things. And that is because I get confused by the other stuff. I don't understand it. It's not because.. I really care.. I am interested in racing pigeons and stuff like that, that the only thing... the other thing doesn't interest me too much. Then it is much easier for me compared to hustling through (the website) and I don't get half of it.</i>	

**Table 1.** Eight scenarios contextualize and shape CEX and CEB

The next section of the findings chapter elaborates CEX and CEB and CEX-CEB connectivity for each of the eight scenarios presented above.



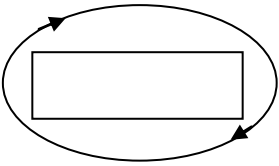

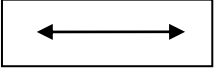


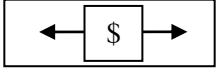


## *CEX, CEB and CEX-CEB connectivity*

This section describes type of CEX and types of CEB and explains how and why CEX and CEB are connected in each of the eight scenarios presented in Table 1. (Table 1. Eight scenarios contextualize and shape CEX and CEB).

Beneath are the findings at the level of the overall service relationship, the service interaction, and at the level of the service encounter presented respectively.

## *CEX-CEB at the level of the service relationship*

<b><u>Customer's main reason for being in the service relationship</u></b>			
<b>Scenarios I-III</b>	<b>I: Out of tradition</b>	<b>II: You &amp; Me</b> (Financial services provider only)	<b>III: Value for money</b>
<b>CEX</b> <b>The customer experiences to...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-be part of something bigger</li> <li>-be in a marriage</li> <li>-be part of history</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer accepts overall the firm as it is. 'Sentimental customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to emotional aspects of CEX (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- bond with one employee</li> <li>- be understood</li> <li>- be taken care of</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is overall devoted to the firm because of the particular employee. 'Sentimental customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to emotional aspects of CEX (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-achieve best offer compared with the market</li> <li>- negotiate improved terms and conditions</li> <li>- obtain optimal price/product quality equation</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is overall on a constant crusade to achieve optimal terms and conditions. 'Crusader customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to rational aspects of CEX (conventional views before 1982 and in part Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009).</p>
<b>CEB</b> <b>The customer manifests CEB via...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participating in WoM*) - anecdotal style, same story on a repeated basis to private sphere</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to CtC*) activities (Brodie et al. 2011).</p> <p>*) Word of mouth *)Customer to Customer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-giving feedback directly to employee</li> <li>-spending time on SST*) encouraged by employee</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to feedback (Kumar et al. 2010) and co-creation activities (Brodie et al. 2011). *) Self service technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-checking and controlling invoices, terms and conditions, often via SST*)</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to co-creation (and co-production) activities (Brodie et al. 2011). *) Self service technology</p>

<p><b>CEX-CEB</b> <b>How and why are constructs connected?</b></p>	<p><b>How:</b> The customer re-experiences CEX via CEB targeted private sphere. <b>Why:</b> The customer feels as part of a larger system when re-experiencing CEX via CEB manifestations.</p>  <p>CEX-CEB re-experience circle, revolving around the firm  and targeted outside the firm</p>	<p><b>How:</b> The customer reinforces CEX via CEB targeted the employee. <b>Why:</b> The customer feels related to an employee and reinforces the relationship via CEB manifestations.</p>  <p>CEX-CEB reinforcement mechanism  targeted the employee, i.e. the firm </p>	<p><b>How:</b> The customer challenges CEX via CEB targeted the firm. <b>Why:</b> The customer focuses at optimizing own situation and challenges current CEX via CEB manifestations.</p>  <p>CEX-CEB challenge mechanism  targeted the firm </p>
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**Table 2.1.** CEX-CEB at the level of the service relationship

The above three scenarios (I-III) are identified at the level of the overall service relationship and relate to why the customer overall is (still) a customer with the firm. Scenarios I, II and III are thus at the aggregated level of the service relationship.

First of all is the customer's experience of being in the service relationship out of tradition (Scenario I) and due to 'You & Me' (Scenario II), both types of CEX that pertains more to early, romantic perspectives (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) where CEX predominantly is understood as a construct related to feelings.

Customers, who are in the service relationship 'out of tradition', have a tendency of focusing at the firm's role in society or how the firm has developed over time and accept the firm as it is today. This focus leads for instance customers to experience the firm as part of national history and thereby as part of the national DNA (and hence perceived as the 'correct' choice by this group of informants). This type of experience is the overall reason for these customers to be in the service relationship (despite eventual disappointing service interactions over the course of time). Informants, who belong to this group of customers, are identified to engage in word of mouth, where they tell same story on a repeated basis targeted private sphere. The word of mouth activity is characterized by being told in an emotional, enthusiastic and detailed manner about the relevant CEX. When customers engage in customer to customer activities (Brodie et al. 2011) of this nature, CEB becomes experiential and customers re-experience CEX when manifesting CEB. Informant F is an example of a

‘Scenario I customer’. Informant F re-experiences frequently a certain CEX, when she manifests CEB (word of mouth):

**Informant F:** *It wasn't your own phone.. my telephone, this I recall clearly. It broke at some point... and then I went on my bike to 'the firm' and went up the stairs and then I entered a room, where telephone technicians – with big bellies – were sitting, each by his desk.. and then I think .. you have probably been waiting in line.. you did not have to book an appointment, you just showed up ..and then you waited. And then one of them was available and then I recall how he examined whether he could get to work.. and then I clearly recall how he took my telephone and threw it into a box, a box with other dead telephones. Then he unwrapped a new telephone and gave it to me.. it was just.. It was an amazing experience. This big house.. today it has been taken over by a lawyers firm and has been renovated. I still visit the building now and then in my professional Life... I have been working there as well. I always think about the dead phone and the big bellied technician, when I enter the door.*

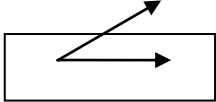

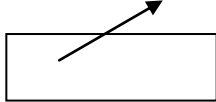
Customers, who are in the service relationship (financial services only) due to ‘You & Me’ scenario, are found to refer to the relevant employee by first name (in fact they substitute firm name with the employees name) and to emphasize the employee’s personal characteristic. ‘Scenario II customers’ state they are in the service relationship because of a certain employee. This devotion is sometimes is so extreme that the customer would follow the employee, in case the employee leaves the bank to work for another bank, i.e. the customer consequently switches financial provider. The customer and the relevant employee develop a relationship, which are sometimes referred to as ‘a friendship’ by informants. Informants, who belong to this group of customers, are identified to manifest CEB by giving feedback (Kumar et al. 2010) as an integrated and informal part of the service relationship with the employee. Feed-back occurs in this scenario mostly on the initiative of the customer. Furthermore are customers found to manifest CEB via co-creation activities (Brodie et al. 2011) such as exploring self-service technology, most often encouraged by the employee. When customers engage in such CEB activities deeply intertwined with the employee, CEB becomes embedded and surrounded by the boundaries of the personal service relationship between the customer and the relevant employee, thus often reinforcing and cementing the personal and emotional dimensions CEX. This is illustrated by the beneath illustrative example from a ‘Scenario II customer’, Informant A:

**Informant A:** *The fact he can observe, I have a job and a steady income.. I get some subsidiaries, I have kids, and then you get a pay raise, and then something extra turns up.. it changes all the time... and that is why we are building this together, which I appreciate. I could not imagine sitting doing this all by myself. Because I want commitment. That is good. That is just the way it should be. In this situation I find it nice to be sitting together with my bank advisor.*

In contrast, is CEX in scenario III (Value for money) related more to rational features as suggested by for instance Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) and early conventional views at CEX. Customers who – overall – are in the service relationship due to ‘value for money’ are identified to have a keen focus on the products and services’ functional aspects and on terms and conditions in the service relationship. These customers challenge the firm on a frequent basis and have a ‘quid pro quo’ attitude towards the firm. ‘Scenario III customers’ refer to their various negotiations with the firm and how they for instance are customers because they have experienced to achieve ‘optimal terms and conditions’. In this scenario are customers found to manifest CEB by checking invoices, comparing prices across providers and terms and conditions in general, which often takes place via technological platforms. The CEB is thus targeted inside the boundaries of the overall service relationship, however with the aim of the customer to optimize own situation. The CEX-CEB equation is of an iterative nature, revolving around the customer’s crusade for optimization for own benefice. The following informant is an example of a ‘Scenario III customer’, who explains how and why she (and her husband) manifests CEB as a constant ‘challenge’ with the firm:

**Respondent M:** *Well sometimes Jimmy, my husband, calls ‘Well Lone, I guess it is time to take a look at this. What is the best deal these days?’ This happens when there has been something in the news... or when they email us.. ‘now the situation is like this – think about it!’*

# CEX-CEB at the level of the service interaction

<u>Customer's superiority/equality/inferiority in the service interaction (keyword: knowledge)</u>			
Scenarios IV-VI	IV: Customer is superior	V: Customer and firm are equal	VI: Customer is inferior
<b>CEX</b> <b>The customer experiences to...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- be more knowledgeable about the domain</li> <li>- be better educated</li> <li>- discover mistakes in the firm's processes and services.</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is an expert. 'Expert customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to extraordinary aspects of CEX (Abrahams 1983).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-respect and be respected for competencies within the domain</li> <li>-be able to contribute to the service interaction</li> <li>-learn from the service interaction</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is constructive. 'Student customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to 'flow' aspects of CEX (Csikszentmihályi 1990).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-be anonymous</li> <li>-be alone</li> <li>-be exploited</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is desperate. 'Desperate customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to extraordinary (Abrahams 1983) emphasizing emotional aspects of CEX (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999).</p>
<b>CEB</b> <b>The customer manifests CEB via...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-giving feedback to correct mistakes</li> <li>-giving feedback to improve products and services</li> <li>-participating in VoM to explain and clarify matters to peers</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to feedback (Kumar et al. 2010) and CtC*) activities (Brodie et al. 2011).</p> <p>*) Customer to customer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-spending time at various touch-points to explore the domain e.g. via SST</li> <li>- giving feedback to improve products, services and processes</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to feedback (Kumar et al. 2010) and co-creation activities (Brodie et al. 2011).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participaing in VoM to seek comfort with peers</li> <li>-participating in VoM to warn peers</li> <li>-participating in VoM to help others</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to CtC*) activities (Brodie et al. 2011).</p> <p>*) Customer to customer</p>
<b>CEX-CEB</b> <b>How and why are constructs connected?</b>	<p><b>How:</b> CEX is an antecedent for CEB targeted the firm and private sphere.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> The customer puts him/herself at the center of CEB as a consequence of extra-ordinary CEX where the customer typically performs as an expert/sets things right.</p> 	<p><b>How:</b> CEX is intertwined with CEB targeted the firm.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Customer experiences to educate him/herself via manifesting CEB and constructs become deeply intertwined. CEB becomes educational.</p> 	<p><b>How:</b> CEX is an antecedent for CEB targeted private sphere.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> The customer gives up interacting with the firm as a consequence of CEX. The customer hence targets CEB to private sphere.</p> 

	CEX is an antecedent for CEB → Targeted both the firm and outside the firm ☐	CEX is intertwined with CEB in a circular manner, and CEB becomes educational, and is targeted the firm ☐	CEX is an antecedent for CEB → targeted outside the firm ☐
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**Table 2.2** CEX-CEB at the level of the service-interaction

The above three scenarios (IV-VI) are identified at the level of the service interaction and revolve around the customer's level of knowledge about the domain in general and about products and services offered by the firm. It should be noted that one service interaction often spans several touch-points from the perspective of customers contrasting a service encounter at a singular touch-point.

Customers, who experience to be more knowledgeable than the firm about the domain in general and often also the products and services offered by the firm, refer typically to how they experience to be better educated (than the average employee) and how they discover mistakes made by the firm. The CEX in service interactions in scenario IV is mainly characterized by being of an extra-ordinary nature (Abrahams 1983), where the customer takes the leading expert role and for instance advises the firm about its service-processes, products and services or suggests improvements for the firm's website. Customers are also likely to take on the expert role targeted outside the boundaries of the service interaction, by participating in word of mouth with the objective to typically explain and clarify matters to peers in their private sphere. The 'Scenario IV customer' thus manifests CEB as a consequence of CEX in that specific service interaction by engaging in feedback (Kumar et al. 2010) and customer to customer activities (Brodie et al. 2011). The following informant, who states to be more knowledgeable than the firm explains:

**Informant B:** *Well, I enjoy entertaining (chipping in.. igniting the conversation) with these stories... Well, because, as said.. I have a mantra in Life regarding how they (financial institutions) have put themselves on a pedestal. And this terribly misleading bank advisor- for show! We need a true reflection of what type of people this is, and what it is they are running around doing.. and... You don't have to be inside the industry to be able to match them – you just have to be sane.. then you are in. And yes, well, they can now and then come with an idea, and have an input, but they should not be patronizing you..*

Sometimes, customers experience to be having an equal service interaction where the customer experiences to both contribute and benefit from the service interaction. This is reported to be the case when the firm's guidance reflects the customer's level of knowledge, for instance when customers are buying a house or installing complicated technology. When customers experience the service interaction as 'seamless' they are in flow (Csikszentmihályi 1990) and events across touch-points appear for instance logic and relevant. 'Scenario V customers' are constructive and concentrated around 'making things work'! These customers are found to manifest CEB predominantly by giving feedback to the firm to improve products/services and processes, and by spending time with self-service technology to expand their knowledge about the domain in question. The 'Scenario V customer' educates themselves via CEB manifestations and is thus an example of how CEB can be both educational and iterative, in this case within the boundaries of the service interaction. Informant J provides an illustrative statement:

**Informant J:** *"I give constructive feedback... [Researcher: About what?] ..Their [the financial service provider] website, how they are perceived by customers, how they are portrayed in media"*

In service interactions, customers sometimes experience to be 'inferior', meaning they are not knowledgeable about the domain in general and neither about the products and services. The firm does not reflect this fact during the service interaction, i.e. the firm does for instance patronize the customer or does not consider that the customer has very limited knowledge. This leaves the customer with a CEX of for instance being anonymous (to the firm), alone or even exploited. These negative valenced CEX are extra-ordinary (Abrahams 1983) and dominated by emotional aspects of CEX (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999) leading the customer to manifest CEB, which is best characterized as 'emotional' word of mouth. The customer, who often becomes rather desperate, targets word of mouth outside the boundaries of the service interaction, with the purpose to typically seek comfort or warn peers within their private sphere. The CEX leads directly to a CEB manifestation i.e. cause and effect is typically evident in the informants' touch-point histories. This type of CEB is elaborated by informant A, who is a representative example of a 'Scenario VI customer':

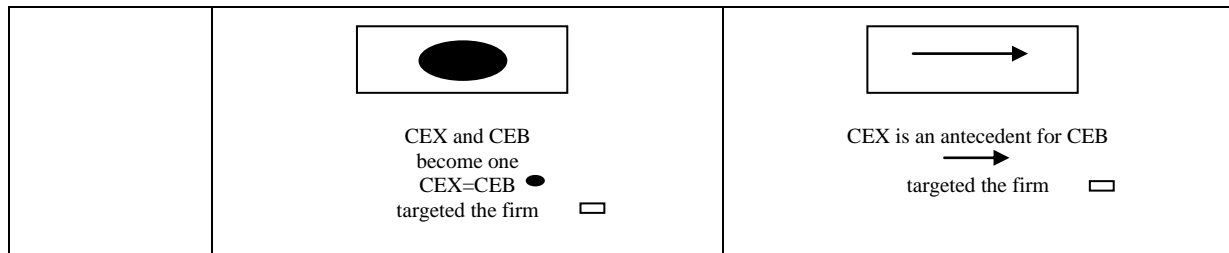
**Informant A:** [Researcher: OK. Thank you for your history. We will move on to the next topic. Has it occurred that you have been talking to others about 'the firm'?] *Oh,*

yes indeed. And unfortunately I have not been telling anything really positive.. I must admit.. [Researcher: What have you been telling ?] Well, I have been telling what I have been telling you. That I get excited and furious because I have to spend time. Time is valuable and scarce. That is the situation for everybody. And then you sit over lunch with your colleagues 'listen.. I called 'the firm', I was waiting on the phone.. and was waiting for 10 minutes .. and then I was kicked off..' and then one of my colleagues add.. 'by the way.. what is your relationship with the firm, and which products do you have ?' ..... and then you become part of sharing of knowledge over lunch..

### CEX-CEB at the level of the service encounter

<b>Customer's mastery or non-mastery of the service encounter</b> (key-word: 'complexity' = navigation, lingo and functionality)		
<b>Scenarios VII-VIII</b>	<b>VII: Customer mastery</b>	<b>VIII: Customer non-mastery</b>
<b>CEX</b> <b>The customer experiences to...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- be in control</li> <li>- be an active participant in the encounter</li> <li>- be capable</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is empowered.</i> <i>'Independent' customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to 'flow' aspects of CEX (Csikszentmihályi 1990).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-be lost</li> <li>-be excluded from the encounter</li> </ul> <p><i>The customer is unable.</i> <i>'Helpless customer'</i></p> <p>The customer refers mainly to 'no flow' and in particular to emotional aspects of CEX (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999).</p>
<b>CEB</b> <b>The customer manifests CEB via ..</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-spending time at various touch-points to explore the functionality in e.g. SST:*)</li> <li>-giving feedback via SST e.g. dial-back (call centre)</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to feedback (Kumar et al. 2010) and co-creation activities (Brodie et al. 2011). ) Self-service technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-participating in WoM*) to .</li> <li>- ventilate frustration (e.g. due to waiting time)</li> <li>- expose the firm's weaknesses</li> <li>- to share knowledge, how to survive</li> </ul> <p>The customer refers mainly to CtC**) activities (Brodie et al. 2011). ) Word of mouth **) Customer to customer</p>
<b>CEX-CEB</b> <b>How and why are constructs connected?</b>	<p><b>How:</b> The customer's experience of being able to master the service encounter is driven by the customer him/herself (and not the firm). It becomes a CEX to manifest CEB.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Complexity of the touch-point is aligned with the customer's ability and CEX and CEB becomes one and same event</p>	<p><b>How:</b> The customer does not experience to be able to master the service encounter. CEX becomes an antecedent for CEB.</p> <p><b>Why:</b> Complexity of the touch-point is not aligned with the customer's ability (or is malfunctioning) and the customer reacts via emotional CEB.</p>





**Table 2.3** CEX-CEB at the level of the service encounter at a touch-point

The final theme identified in the interviews with informants, concerns customers' ability to either 'master' the service encounter or 'not to master' the service encounter and revolves around the customer's ability to navigate, understand the language and the functionality of typically a technological touch-point.

Customers, who master the service encounter, experience to be in control and active and will often be able to achieve their goal with the service encounter while being in flow (Csikszentmihályi 1990). This means for instance that they are able to navigate effortlessly at self-service technology solutions and understands how to benefit from other technological, convenient platforms offered by the firm, such as 'concierge offerings' at the firm's website (like 'call me up' or 'chat assistance'). Customers who master such service encounters are not the most productive with regards to CEB manifestations. 'Scenario VII customers' are identified to improve his/her CEX via 'trial and succeed' at the technological touch-point via investing time and CEX and CEB become one in a very intense co-creation activity driven by the customer. Informant Q is a good example of a 'Scenario VII customer' and Q explains:

**Informant Q:** "[the app] It is a relief, because I can monitor how much I spend per service, I can check whether my subscription format fits my needs, whether I should change the subscription? ... They illustrate the statistics.. info-graphic style.. it gives an impression of quality"

Customers, who at the other hand don't master the service encounter, experience to be excluded from the service encounter and loses faith in own ability to handle the service encounter and sometimes also to the intention of the firm. This leaves the customers in an emotional vacuum, where they drift for a while typically with issues unsolved (because they give up having more service encounters about the matter in question) building frustration. At some point this type of customer most often target CEB outside the boundaries of the firm and

participate in word of mouth activities with the aim of for instance ventilating frustration /seeking comfort/ or helping peers. Informant C is a typical example of a ‘Scenario VIII customer’. C states:

***Informant C:** "If the conversation around me is about IT, then I would contribute. Discussions around me are however rarely about technology, I don't care. But, I would get into the conversation ... [since] I want to help [my peers]."*

## **Discussion**

This chapter sets out by discussing that different scenarios in the service relationship contextualize and shape CEX and CEB.

Then follows a discussion of types of CEX and CEB with an emphasis on how constructs are connected from the perspective of customers. The discussion leads to a conceptualization of how and why CEB is sometimes experiential, iterative or educational and how and why CEB is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing, intertwined with or become one with CEX. Finally, the research also points out how and why CEX in some instances is an antecedent for CEB.

The discussion is summarized in ‘Table 3. Conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity’. The discussions chapter concludes with implications for theory and practice.

### *Different scenarios in the service relationship contextualize and shape CEX and CEB*

Authors have suggested that CEB is shaped by the context in which it occurs (Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010), that CEB is context-dependent and tied to the individual (Hollebeek 2011) and Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) highlight how first order experiences must be identified before discussing the engagement construct. These various views have informed the engagement literature with valuable propositions and findings of what might comprise to the ‘engagement’ construct.

It has been suggested that ‘customer engagement’ is part of a nomological network (Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann 2014). It is however a challenge to identify stable relationships between CEB and the antecedents and consequences, and a need for separate scales for CEB is suggested by the authors.

Furthermore, and probably as a consequence of the ‘blurredness’ of the engagement construct (Little and Little 2006) other authors have highlighted how it is of little relevance to adopt positivist approach to the matter and instead approach the research domain in a manner, which embraces the complexity of the engagement construct (Gambetti, Graffigna, and Biraghi 2012).

So far, assumptions have been made in literature primarily from theoretical reasoning and little empirically content has been added to shed light over which specific elements in the service relationship in fact contextualize and shape CEX and CEB and ultimately how CEX and CEB are connected.

This research expands the existing knowledge by presenting elements, which customers refer to as decisive or influential for CEX and CEB over the course of time in a continuous service relationship. The elements are organized into eight different scenarios, which each shape CEX and CEB and ultimately CEX-CEB connectivity in various ways.

The dominant themes identified in the research (the customer’s main reason be in the service relationship, level of knowledge and ability to master at a touch-point) are rather consistent across informants. This might be due to different factors.

First of all, are the products, services and the firm’s processes rather standardized, which by nature might cause thematic similarity across informants’ touch-point histories.

Second, are both types of firms (telecommunication and financial services) everyday conversational topics in general media, which as well might create some thematic similarity across informants’ touch-point histories.

In this research eight scenarios emerged. It is remarkably how each of the eight scenarios contains certain expressions for CEX and the affiliated CEB and thus how each scenario yields a specific CEX-CEB connectivity. On that note it is as well remarkable that a ‘type of CEB’ (for instance ‘giving feedback’ or ‘word of mouth’), which per se is the same CEB manifestation across scenarios, in fact unfolds very differently from one scenario to another. This is hitherto not covered in literature (e.g. Van Doorn et al. 2010).

The findings add content to the existing, generic and hitherto not empirically underpinned proposition of how CEB is indeed shaped by the context in which it occurs (Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010), is specific to the situation (Brodie et al. 2011) and tied to the individual (Hollebeek 2011).

### *CEX, CEB and CEX-CEB connectivity are multifaceted*

The engagement literature is still in its infancy and various propositions and definitions are suggested. Brodie and colleagues (2011, p. 260) have for instance pointed out how an individual's engagement is 'experiential and iterative'. This paper supports this fundamental finding and builds on its magnitude by adding how and why CEX and CEB are far more than experiential and iterative. This paper expands existing knowledge by explaining how and why CEX and CEB are connected in various ways. These new perspectives are discussed and the section concludes by introducing a new conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity in the context of continuous service relationships (Table 3. Conceptualization of CEX – CEB connectivity).

### *Emotional CEX often ignites word of mouth*

First of all, it is relevant to discuss that emotional CEX (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) tends to ignite the 'storyteller' in the individual customer and how CEX and CEB (word of mouth) constructs become connected in the process of customers manifesting CEB. This is the case in scenario I, VI and VIII, where the informants are referring predominantly to emotional aspects of CEX and manifest CEB by engaging in various types of word of mouth.

Customers, who accept the firm as it is, and remain in the service relationship 'mainly out of tradition' (Scenario I), re-experience CEX by engaging in word of mouth, via storytelling about a certain CEX in the service relationship. The customer re-experiences the same CEX over and over again targeted private sphere. The customers often re-experience the CEX in question with great detail and enthusiasm and CEX and CEB (word of mouth) become deeply intertwined from the perspective of the customer. Brodie and colleagues (2011) address how engagement is sometimes experiential. This paper suggests in addition that CEB is assisting customers in re-experiencing a historic event in the service relationship, which leads to a rather impactful engagement behavior (word of mouth unfolded in an 'anecdotal style').

Current CEB literature neglects how word of mouth activities can unfold in an anecdotal style where value-creation is not limited to 'an endorsement' (or the opposite) of the firm or its products and/or services, but is rather contributing to the firm's positioning in the minds of consumers in a historic or cultural context.

Caru and Cova (2003) suggest to discussing ‘consumer experiences’ (related to the market) and consumption experiences (related to the society) instead of for instance solely emotive (or extraordinary) experiences. The just referred to scenario I is an examples of how CEB can become experiential outside the boundaries of the firm and this paper supports the logic of Caru and Cova (2003). CEX is not limited to taking place between the customer and firm only, but is sometimes exported via CEB and takes place in the surrounding society.

Customers who become desperate, because they feel ‘not knowledgeable in the service interaction’ (Scenario VI) or become unable because they are ‘not able to master the service encounter’ (Scenario VIII) are not ‘in flow’ and refer as well by large to emotional aspects of CEX. In these instances customers typically manifest CEB as a consequence of CEX (i.e. CEX becomes an antecedent for CEB).

The two latter scenarios (VI and VIII) are similar in terms of the typically negative valenced word of mouth being the consequence of a service failure (CEX) – the cause and effect is in this case evident in the relevant customer’s touch-point history. The cause, potentially leading to a negative valenced effect, is however rooted in different situations.

It is of course not surprising that a service failure can lead to negative valenced word of mouth. It is however worth noting that for instance a knowledgeable customer (superior customer, Scenario IV) can be unable to master a service encounter at a singular touch-point, resulting in negative word of mouth after an otherwise good service interaction.

Hence, the finding contributes to explaining the sometimes rather unpredictable customer behaviors, such as a successful service interaction leading to negative valenced word of mouth (due to for instance malfunctioning of a technological touch-point). This paper thus supports Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn (2005) who point out the potential greater downside of technological touch-points when they fail (contrasted with a limited upside when they function).

Customers, who are in the continued service relationship because they are devoted to a certain employee (Scenario II), refer as well predominantly to emotional aspects of CEX. This situation only occurs in customers’ service relationships with their financial services’ provider. This type of customers manifest CEB in a constant, iterative fashion targeted the employee in question. The CEB manifestations are dominated by giving feedback and co-creating value at physical meetings integrated with various technological platforms. The CEB unfolds in a manner, where CEB definitely becomes experiential to a degree, where the

constructs (CEX and CEB) become two sides of the same matter: to develop the service relationship.

Only in a few instances did this type of scenario yield word of mouth, or CEB targeted outside the boundaries of the service relationship. The scarce amount of word of mouth is mainly due to the nature of the services being ‘private’ and a topic not suited for general conversations.

### *Rational CEX happens in an exchange with rational CEB*

This subsection focuses at rational CEX (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009 and early conventional views) as reported by ‘Scenario III customers’.

Customers, who overall are on a constant crusade to achieve optimal terms and conditions, and remain in the service-relationship because they experience to achieve ‘value for money’ (Scenario III) manifest CEB in an iterative manner to benefit better from the service relationship typically at a monetary level. The customer experiences a current situation (CEX) and challenges the current CEX via checking terms and conditions at for instance the firm’s website and other informational sites (CEB manifestations in the market and with the firm).

CEX and CEB thus become intertwined in an iterative manner with the purpose to challenge the current CEX. Brodie and colleagues (2011) address how engagement is an iterative and dynamic construct. This paper supports this grand suggestion however the findings suggest how narrow the scope of the iterations sometimes are from the perspective of customers. In a service relationship driven by rational experiences the findings in this paper suggest to label the CEX-CEB connection an iterative ‘challenge mechanism’ targeted the firm.

### *Flow CEX tend to stimulate feedback and co-creation activities at self-service technology solutions*

The third subsection discusses how flow CEX (Csikszentmihályi, 1990) tends to stimulate CEB manifestations such as feedback and customers co-creation activities at various (typical technological) platforms. The emphasis of the discussion is on how CEX and CEB (‘giving feedback’ and co-creation activities’) constructs become connected in the process. The discussion refers to scenario V and VII, where the informants are referring to flow

aspects of CEX and manifest CEB by engaging in giving feedback and co-creation activities at predominantly technological platforms.

Customers, who are constructive, and experience service interactions with the firm where the customer and firm are equal (Scenario V) tend to be rather motivated to educate themselves further within the domain in question via CEB manifestations. Customers who experience to be as knowledgeable as the firm manifest for instance CEB by giving feedback about the products and/or services or processes with the objective to improve and contribute to the service interaction. It can also be observed that this type of customer spends time at self-service technology solutions to explore the domain, which is another example of customers manifesting CEB to educate themselves further within the domain.

This is a new perspective supplementing existing CEB literature. CEX and CEB become intertwined in a circular manner, which from the perspective of the customer happens seamlessly and targeted the firm. The ‘educational’ CEX-CEB connection is similar to Pine and Gilmore (1998) four realms of experiences specifically ‘educational’ of course. Pine and Gilmore (1998) are however addressing the topic from a firm-centric perspective mainly.

Customers, who are empowered at the service encounter and are able at touch-points (Scenario VIII) are as well experiencing events dominated by aspects of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihályi 1990). These customers become even more immersed (Pine and Gilmore 1998) in the CEX-CEB integration and the CEX-CEB connection turns out to be a unified construct (i.e. the two constructs become one) from the perspective of customers.

Scenario VIII most frequently happens at self-service technology solutions, where it by nature are the customers who drive the process (at least from the perspective of customers). From the customer’s perspective is the CEB the CEX (and vice versa). Customers, who for instance conclude their banking business via home-banking manifest (per se) CEB at the firm’s website, and are at the same time experiencing a service encounter with their financial services provider.

Brodie and colleagues (2011) grand definition includes indeed that engagement can be experiential, and this paper points out how this is particularly the case at self-service solutions or at various technological touch-points. The customer is by nature the driving force at this type of touch-points and the customer experiences via engaging and vice versa.

Customers expect self-service technology and other technological platforms to function and tend to become immersed in the process when the self-service technology solution is well

functioning. CEX-CEB is thus targeted the firm, however in a silent fashion by customers. This finding is in line with Hogan and colleagues (2005) who suggest how self-service technology and other technological platforms are at the risk of leading to for instance negatively valenced word of mouth activities in case of malfunctioning, but not vice versa.

### *Extra-ordinary experiences often lead to feedback and word of mouth*

The final sub-section discusses that extra-ordinary experiences (Abrahams 1983) often lead customers to manifest CEB via giving feedback to the firm and/or to word of mouth activities, and how CEX and CEB become connected in the process. In scenario IV are customers referring to various extra-ordinary CEX, which performs as an antecedent for the CEB manifestations.

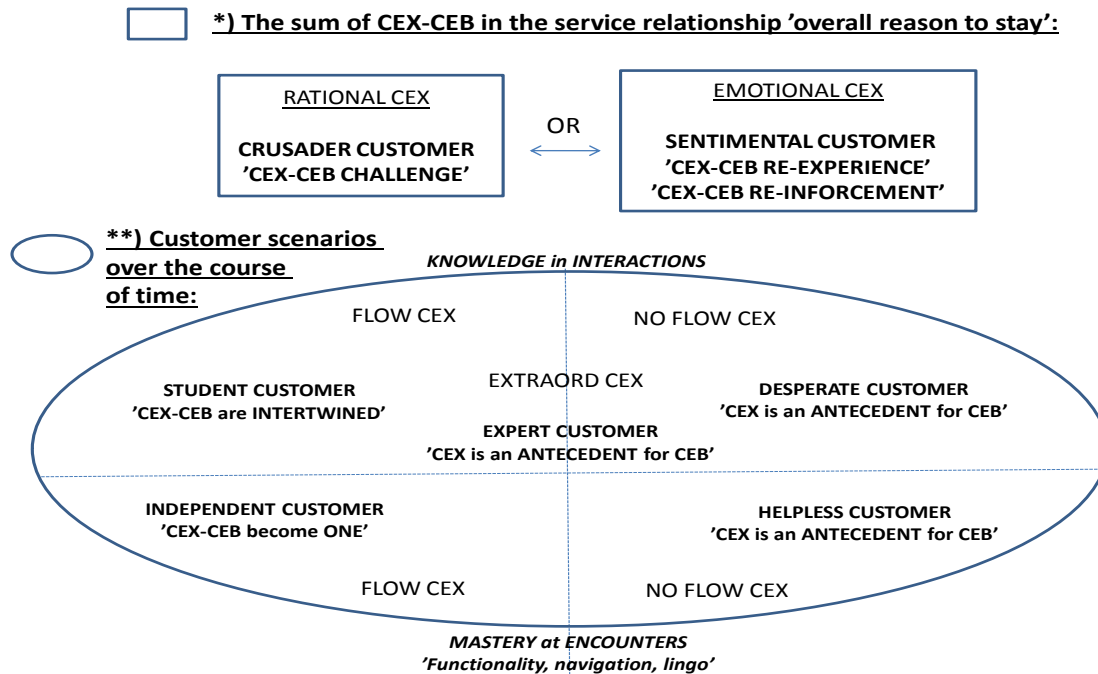
Customers, who are ‘experts’ and experience to be more knowledgeable than the firm (Scenario IV) are found to manifest CEB as a consequence of one or several extra-ordinary service interaction(s). The customer manifests CEB typically by giving feedback to the firm (often to correct detected mistakes in products/services/processes) or by engaging in word of mouth activities. In both instances is the customer typically playing the leading expert role, putting him/herself at the center of both the CEX and the CEB.

CEX performs in this case as an antecedent for CEB and provides a novel perspective on how situational elements shape CEB. Customer based antecedents are thus more than for instance ‘attitude’ or ‘satisfaction’ as suggested by van Doorn and colleagues (2010) but rather situation-specific (as suggested by Brodie et al. 2011) - it becomes clear that CEB sometimes is a simple a reaction to a certain (extra-ordinary) experience in the service relationship.

The discussion concludes by forwarding that CEB is a construct, which in a continuous service relationship is unfolded by the individual customer, dependent of the situation and co-existing with other customer related constructs such as CEX. CEB is living and breathing in co-existence with other events in the continued service relationship and is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing or challenging CEX. CEB is as well sometimes embedded in the service relationship to a degree, where CEX and CEB become deeply intertwined or even become one. Finally, CEX is sometimes an antecedent for CEB.



The discussion is summarized in ‘Figure 1. Conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity in continuous service relationships’.



**Figure 1.** Conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity in continuous service relationships

\*) A customer remains in the service relationship out of mainly emotional or rational reasons.

\*\*) A customer can be present in various scenarios over the course of time in the service relationship.

## *Implications for practice and theory*

### *Implications for practice*

This paper suggests a number of guidelines to managers for how to understand and manage better the CEX – CEB connectivity in the context of continuous service relationships.

*a. Identify the relevant scenarios in the service relationship from the perspective of customers.*

First of all, the findings illustrate the relevance of identifying which elements in the service relationship customers inform to be decisive and influential for CEX and CEB and how CEX and CEB are connected. In this paper eight scenarios are derived. It is conceivable had the context been different (energy supply or news paper subscription) had the number of scenarios and content of each scenario been different.

The point is that both CEX and CEB and the way the constructs are connected, are not stable nor conclusive across scenarios. By investigating which scenarios customers face at various levels in the continuous service relationship, managers would gain insights into which elements that shape different types of CEB, CEX and how the two constructs are connected.

*b. Benefit from anecdotal word of mouth*

Customers, who overall accept the firm as it is and are customers mainly out of tradition ('sentimental customers') are possible value sources for word of mouth activities of a rich, story-telling nature, often focusing at the firm's role in society and history. CEB becomes a value for the firm in terms of share of voice and in best cases managers might learn from, and eventual use content from customers' narratives, when managers initiate various marketing or communication activities (insights from customers' narratives might increase relevance and authenticity of the activities).

*c. Train absorptive and motivational capabilities with front-end employees*

Customers, who are devoted to a certain employee ('sentimental customer'), and often report to be in the service relationship because of this employee, tend to be valuable sources for CEB in terms of feedback as an integrated part of the service relationship. The employee's absorptive capability is hence crucial, since the customer's feedback is typically not given via formal surveys and the like. This type of customer is furthermore rather easy to motivate to explore (i.e. manifest CEB) at the firms technological platforms, when they are introduced by the employee. Managers, who understand to absorb informal feedback and have a keen focus at integrating technological service solutions in for instance physical service interactions, have great potential for value creation for both the customer and the firm.

*d. Appreciate relevant criticism*

Customers, who experience to be more knowledgeable ('expert customer') about the products and services (than the average employee) and sometimes perform as experts within the domain, are particular likely to manifest CEB to a large degree via 'giving feedback'. The feedback is typically not given via formal surveys, but rather when the customer experiences service failures. From the firm's perspective it is of potential value, having a customer who is not silent, but voices his/her feedback regarding service failures. The 'expert customer' is however also likely to engage in word of mouth, sometimes to perform as 'the expert' in private sphere, and at other times to expose the firm's service failure to peers. For managers,

it is of great importance to show this type of customers their appreciation for the feed-back regarding service failures, to avoid negative or harsh word of mouth.

*e. Understand that technological platforms are conditioning customers to be selective and silent (as long the platforms are well functioning)*

Customers, who experience to be equal with the firm (student customer) (or treated as such in the service interaction), and customers, who master encounters at touch-points effortlessly ('independent customer') are typically not 'time-consuming' or 'loud' customers. These customers' CEB manifestations are concentrated around silent CEB such as exploring the firm's website or other sites for self-education or immersion. The customer might occasionally give feedback to the firm with the aim to improve products, services and processes. This type of customer might be the 'dream' customer for for instance a telecommunication firm, who seeks to reduce calls and deflect expensive human service interaction to technological platforms. The downside is a limited amount of CEB, and a selective and silent customer behavior since the customers become used to not being in contact with the firm. As a result (of the firm-initiated 'no-contact conditioning'); the firm's pro-active initiatives to engage customers in various ways become not relevant from the customer's perspective.

*f. Understand the power of simplicity and empathy - and the consequences if you fail*

Customers, who experience to be not knowledgeable ('desperate customer') at all about the products and services and experience to be inferior in service interactions with the firm are, together with customers who are not able to master the service encounter at singular touch-points ('helpless customers') the 'black box for CEB'. This type of customers often gives up to interact or to encounter the firm proactively. These customers tend to target – often negatively valenced – word of mouth to private sphere and peers.

An otherwise successful service interaction can result in negatively valenced word of mouth in case a singular touch-point (encounter) included in the service interaction is disappointing (and vice versa).

'Complicated invoices' or 'up-selling while waiting in line to the firm's call center' are for instance often referred to interactions and encounters, which creates desperation and inability with customers. It appears likely that firms could improve these undesired moments without major investments.

### *Implications for theory, conclusion and suggestions for further research*

The findings in this paper have several implications for theory. First of all, the findings fill content into the hitherto suggested contextual and shaping elements for CEB. By the use of a multi-step research approach, this paper identifies concrete contextual elements and situations in customers' continuous service relationships, which leads to the introduction of eight dominant scenarios. Each of these scenarios yields certain CEX, CEB and CEX-CEB connectivity.

Second, the findings expand existing knowledge by introducing an empirically underpinned conceptualization of how CEX and CEB are connected in each of the eight scenarios. It is a new approach to investigate CEB in the light of CEX literature. In this research the rather mature CEX literature contributes with various understandings of how and why customers experience events in their service relationships and in the market-place.

CEB is a multifaceted construct, which is difficult to understand by the use of positivist research methodology. CEB is furthermore complex and probably not suitable for stable nomological networks.

This paper suggests that CEB is a multifaceted construct, which in a continued service relationship is unfolded by the individual customer, dependent of the situation and co-existing with other customer related constructs such as CEX. CEB is living and breathing in co-existence with other events in the continued service relationship and is sometimes re-experiencing, reinforcing or challenging CEX. CEB is as well sometimes embedded in the service relationship to a degree, where CEX and CEB become deeply intertwined or even become one and same construct. Finally, CEX is sometimes an antecedent for CEB.

There are further avenues open for research. It is conceivable had the industries chosen been others than mundane products and services providers the findings would appear differently.

It would be relevant to repeat the study in other industries, types of product-categories or other cultures as well as in other various contexts.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research.

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## PAPER 3

(Target: ) Journal of Business Research

# **Goodbye ‘Customer journey’ and hello ‘Customer arenas’: Managing customers’ dynamic engagement behaviors**

**Helle Haurum**

### ABSTRACT

This paper contributes with the concept of ‘customer arenas’ as a novel understanding of how to manage value creation at touch-points in continuous service relationships. This new perspective contrasts firm-centric and conventional views, where value is managed at singular, sequentially organized touch-points related to the purchase situation. The investigation takes point of departure in a comparative qualitative study conducted with managers of a leading telecommunication firm and their customers. The research revolves around customers’ behaviors including and exceeding the purchase (i.e. customers’ engagement behaviors (CEB)) compared with the firm’s initiatives at and across touch-points. The key-finding is that CEB in continuous service relationships are manifested contingent the specific customer situation at groups of touch-points labeled customer arenas. Following presentation of the concept of customer arenas implications for CEB value management are outlined. This new understanding contributes to the emergent CEB literature.

### *Keywords:*

- Customer engagement behavior*
- Customer value management*
- Customer arenas*
- Customer journey*
- Continuous service relationships*



## 1. Introduction

Firms initiate activities at various touch-points to generate value for the customer with the objective to create value for the firm. It can be observed from business media, business blogs and forums that firms focus at concepts such as ‘customer journey’ and ‘touch-point wheel’, when mapping touch-points for value-creation. This business focus goes hand in hand with dominant literature regarding value creation at touch-points (Davis and Dunn, 2002; Vandermerwe, 1999, 2003) where single touch-points are mapped linearly or in sequences and are related to the customer’s purchase situation.

Firms, such as telecommunication firms or energy supply enter into subscription based contracts with their customers, and the financial transaction or the purchase situation hence becomes discrete for the customer (compared to buying for instance a car or everyday products in the super-market). The idea of ‘customer journey’ (Anderl et al., 2016; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Norton and Pine, 2013) does however enjoy widespread attention, also with firms that enter into subscription based contracts with their customers.

Today’s customers’ behaviors at touch-points include and exceed purchase behavior (the financial transaction). In fact, customers manifest multiple behaviors revolving around the firm and/or the brand. These multiple customer behaviors are in literature referred to as customers’ engagement behaviors (CEB). CEB is a rather nascent construct and is suggested by Van Doorn and colleagues (2010, p. 253) to be “a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders”. CEB is in literature conceptualized to be driven by different motivations and are performed through, for instance, a post in a community on the Internet, a suggestion for new product development, or word-of-mouth (WoM) activities online or offline (Verhoef and Lemon, 2013; Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010). Kumar and colleagues (2010) emphasize that also financial transactions are customers’ behavioral manifestations revolving around a focal firm. Finally, Hollebeek (2011) suggests that ‘engagement’ is tied to the individual as an outcome of a subject-object interaction and is therefore determined by the context in which it occurs.

Hence, the firm plays the role of initiating CEB at and across various touch-points and the customer the role of manifesting CEB at and across touch-points.

Extant literature on CEB is mainly conceptual and adopts a firm-centric perspective. Moreover, an understanding of touch-points as loci for CEB manifestations is basically absent. Touch-points are the places or situations where the customer and the firm have opportunities for interactions and encounters, hence value-creation. Touch-points are thus

from a managerial point of view crucial to relate to CEB, since they perform as the loci for various CEB initiatives and manifestations.

In a World with an ever increasing number of online and offline platforms it is a challenge to manage and harvest the value of CEB. Customer engagement has been pointed out by the Marketing Science Institute (2010-2012) to represent great potential for both academia and practice and forward the need for empirically underpinned research to advance the understanding of the construct. Authors (e.g. Verhoef and Lemon, 2013) as well point out how it is of relevance to investigate further CEB value management.

This paper contributes with the concept of ‘customer arenas’ as a novel understanding of how to manage value creation at touch-points in continuous service relationships. This new perspective contrasts firm-centric and conventional views, where value is managed at singular, sequentially organized touch-points (Anderl et al., 2016; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Norton and Pine, 2013) related to the purchase situation. The investigation takes point of departure in a comparative qualitative study conducted with managers of a leading telecommunication firm and their customers. The research revolves around customers’ behaviors including and exceeding the purchase (i.e. CEB) compared with the firm’s initiatives at and across touch-points. The key-finding is that CEB in continuous service relationships are manifested contingent the specific customer situation at groups of touch-points labeled ‘customer arenas’. Following presentation of the concept of customer arenas implications for CEB value management are outlined. This new understanding contributes to the emergent CEB literature.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Customer engagement behavior*

Recently, a focus on behavioral manifestations of customer engagement has emerged in the literature, emphasizing a firm-centric perspective on engagement as a source for customer value (e.g. Verhoef and Lemon, 2013) focusing on non-transactional customer behavior (Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft, 2010).

Kumar and colleagues (2010, p. 298), however, suggest that financial transactions are part of customers’ behavioral manifestations. “When one envisions the different ways in which a customer can interact or “engage” with the firm, purchasing from the firm naturally arises. Furthermore, purchase is a behavioral manifestation that can result from similar motivational drivers [motivational drivers suggested by Van Doorn et al., 2010])”.

CEB is conceptualized “as a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders” (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253). This conceptualization models customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, behaviors manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and “other” consequences (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) suggest that ‘the nature of CEB’ is characterized (limited to descriptive level) by five dimensions: Valence, Form/Modality, Scope, Nature of impact and Customer goals, all of them described from a firm perspective. ‘Valence’ can be either positive or negative. A positive valenced CEB for instance adds value to the firm when a customer endorses the firm in a private or similar context. ‘Form/Modality’ refers to the different ways CEB can be expressed by customers via the resources they invest in manifesting CEB, for instance time or money invested in participating in firm hosted events. The third dimension ‘scope’ refers to temporal and geographic aspects of CEB and thus describes how CEB manifestations can be either ‘here and now’, ‘ongoing for a while’ or ‘continued for a long time’. The geographical aspect distinguishes between, for instance, an endorsement on a global website and an endorsement to a friend over dinner. ‘Impact’ – the fourth dimension – reflects how very different the impact of CEB can be in terms of immediacy, intensity, breadth and longevity. This aspect also covers the extent to which customers can engage through multiple channels. The fifth dimension describes customers’ goals with manifesting CEB, distinguishing between three different elements: the target of engagement, whether it is unplanned or planned, and the level of alignment between customer goals and firm goals.

It has been pointed out in literature how CEB is a possible source of value for the firm (Verhoef and Lemon, 2013; Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft, 2010) and authors have developed valuable firm-centric conceptualizations of the construct as a source for value. Authors however point out the need for further research of how to manage and harvest the value of CEB.

Adopting a value-focused perspective, Kumar and colleagues (2010, p. 298) “define and propose that the value of customer engagement is comprised of four core dimensions” which are realized via four different types of CEBs (p. 299): “Customer purchasing behavior” (corresponding to customer lifetime value), “customer referral behavior” (which is the firm’s acquisition of new customers, for instance, via incentive programs; also referred to as customer referral value), “customer influencer behavior” (for instance, customers’ VoM activities; corresponding to customer influencer value), and “customer knowledge behavior”

(which is customers giving feedback to the firm or suggestions for service or product development, also referred to as customer knowledge value). The challenge for firms consists in harvesting the value of CEB via best possible customer value management. The authors provide a valuable overview, but don't explain how to stimulate for CEB or how to integrate the four dimensions in order to harvest the value of CEB.

Bijmolt and colleagues (2010) address the challenge of analyzing customer engagement data and emphasize in particular the challenges for the firm, when it comes to implementing customer engagement analytics in the organization. The authors take a firm centric perspective and relate customer engagement data and analytics to the stage of customer acquisition, development and retention respectively. The authors have a focus at existing (quantitative) models and their core contribution is a listing of the six main barriers for implementation in practice (p. 350-351). The six barriers are pointed out to be "Data Quality, Size of Databases", "Data Ownership", "Complexity of the Models", "Ownership of the Modeling Tools", "Usability of the Results" and "Integration in Company Processes". The dispersed and multifaceted nature of the six barriers pointed out by Bijmolt and colleagues (2010) indicate that firms have challenges with handling CEB in several ways resulting in not optimal CEB value management.

This paper takes up the challenge to investigate CEB in a comparative manner by comparing the firm's CEB initiatives with customers' CEB manifestations at and across touch-points. The objective is to improve CEB value management at and across touch-points.

## *2.2 Touch-points in customer journeys*

Touch-points are the loci where CEB occur (are initiated and manifested) and range from interpersonal communication amongst friends, comments on social media, posts at the firm's website, feedback after a service encounter in the firm's call centre or encounters in the physical shop. A touch-point is hence the locus for initiating CEB (by the firm) and manifesting CEB (by the customer). Furthermore, customers can act as endorsers and thereby becoming touch-points themselves. The sum of touch-points constitutes the sphere where the firm or brand and its customers can interact and thereby the place for CEB value creation. Extant literature often refers to touch points in a juxtaposed way, such as 'human versus technological', 'active versus passive', 'online versus offline' and 'in- versus outside firm-control' (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn, 2005; Vandermerwe, 2003).

One of the most important aspects of touch-points is their role as loci for value creation (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). Vandermerwe (1999; 2003) suggests to map customers'

activities and the places they happen in a ‘customer activity cycle (CAC)’ that distinguishes between customers’ activities before, during and after a possible purchase in a certain product category, thus providing a toolkit for determining the offerings a firm should prioritize and consequently maintain and manage to secure value creation. Davis and Dunn (2002) later introduce the touch-point wheel, which serves a similar purpose as does the CAC, however updated with technological touch-points pre-dominantly at the internet. Recently has the concept of ‘customer journey’ appeared in the academic literature as a mean to understand customer experience at touch-points (Verhoef and Lemon, 2016), to refine the business model (Norton and Pine, 2013) and as a mean to reduce complexity particularly in online touch-points (Anderl et al., 2016).

The extant academic literature specifically dealing with touch-points is limited. The existing literature tends to be pragmatic and mainly managerially oriented providing, for instance, a check-list of touch-points to be considered (Davis and Dunn, 2002), or simply mentioning the importance of touch-points at a general level (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn, 2005) or as the place for value-creation (Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Munoz and Kumar, 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vandermerwe, 2003).

Building on the assumption that “communication planning tools should correspond reasonably with how human minds actually work” Jenkinson (2007, p.166) focuses on developing an integrative model for touch-point planning by integrating the ‘behavioural school’ with the ‘attitudinal school’ at and across touch-points. The resulting CODAR planning tool exemplifies the value of a customer-centric approach to touch-points. Other authors such as Chattopadhyay and Laborie (2005) also take a customer-centric approach to contact points (i.e. touch-points) when developing and conducting ‘The Market Contact Audit’ (MCA) in the context of managing brand experience. The MCA does, however, not take into consideration how customers interact with brands (firms) driven by different motivations, goals and situations (for instance, to buy a product, to complain or to endorse the brand or firm in the private sphere), which is highly relevant in the case of CEB value at and across touch-points.

Based on the above, this paper contributes to and extends extant literature by taking a comparative perspective on touch-points as loci for CEB value creation. Moreover, the research is not only focusing at behaviors at singular touch-points in relation to a purchase (like for instance the CAC or updated perspectives at the concept of customer journey) but investigate how customers manifest CEB at and across touch-points in the context of

continuous service relationships. The objective is to improve CEB value management at and across touch-points.

### **3. Research Approach**

This research covers 1) the firm's initiatives and 2) the customers' behaviors at and across touch-points.

The objective is to improve the firm's CEB value management at and across touch-points in the context of continuous service relationships. The research adopts a qualitative, comparative approach in order to inform the firm with the customer-centric findings. Yet, to improve the firm's CEB value management it is necessary to understand their current initiatives.

#### *3.1. Data Collection and analysis*

##### *1) The firm's initiatives at and across touch-points:*

12 semi-structured interviews with employees of a telecommunication firm were conducted, focusing on the firm's initiatives at and across touch-points. The informants were selected by the firm to represent the greatest possible diversity in terms of experience, work domain, gender and age. Both managers and executives who themselves serve as 'a touch-point' (such as the manager for technicians and the manager for online solutions) and managers and executives in more administrative functions (such as the executive for human resources and a manager in the legal department) were included in the sample.

The interviews were conducted at the firm premises and the informants were invited to an interview about 'touch-points'. Informants did not receive any other information than they were partaking in a research project about touch-points in service marketing. Interviews lasted on average 30 minutes and followed the same structure, though with the usual flexibility accounting for informants' idiosyncratic experiences. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in 33 single spaced pages of transcripts. The real net time allowed for collecting data via interviews proved to be limited. Hence, the interviews were supplemented with observations at touch-points, such as the call centre, the shop and firm's website and other online touch-points. Data analysis was undertaken with an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998) to allow themes to emerge inductively beyond the semi-structured themes of the interview guide. Then were the firm's initiatives at (and across) touch-points mapped. The mapping of initiatives was accompanied by informants'

commentaries in situ about for instance organizational challenges and other types of drivers and barriers related to the relevant touch-point as loci for CEB value creation.

## *2) Customers' behaviors at and across touch-points:*

The starting point for the customer interviews was the concept of touch-point history (Polkinghorn, 1988). A touch-point history is a customer's own account of experiences with specific goods, services or companies that covers data on events that are tied to a timeline. The application of a narrative approach allowed retrieving touch-point histories that are "freely told by customers, not just recounted in response to the company's requests for explanations of actions, thoughts, and outcomes" (Gorry and Westbrook 2011, p. 576). Hence, a customer's touch-point history describes singular interactions as well as the aggregate sum of the customer's interactions (touches) with a firm over time. Such a record of 'touches' is important for services that are provided continuously (for instance energy, banking or telecommunication) and is seen as an important 'tactic' to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al. 2004). The touch-points histories are unveiled through semi-structured interviews drawing on narrative techniques and aided by visual mapping (Langley, 1999).

Visual mapping assisted informants in remembering and retelling their touch-point histories. The visual mapping was executed by the informants' use of inspirational images (printed and physical presence) and the informants could choose to apply images or make own drawings on a prefabricated timeline on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. This technique helped informants to remember episodes of encounters with the firm and their own behaviors, and thus aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements of their CEB.

Informants were selected to represent customers with at least two years of service relationship with the same telecommunication provider. This criterion was necessary to ensure that indeed histories could be retrieved and not only single encounters (as in previous research, see Ojiako, Chipulu, and Graesser, 2012).

Each informant was interviewed about his/her touch-point history with their telecommunication provider. Interviews followed the same guide-lines but allowed for necessary adjustments contingent the informant's focus. The informants did not receive any information before the interviews, but were simply invited to a 'conversation about service'. 20 interviews were conducted. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 165 single-spaced pages of transcripts.

Data analysis was undertaken in two stages. First, all 20 interview transcripts were analyzed by using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In the second stage, the initially emerging themes were subjected to selective coding in order to explore differences and commonalities. Finally, CEB manifestations at and across touch-points were mapped. The mapping was accompanied by informants' commentaries in situ about drivers and barriers related to the relevant touch-point as loci for CEB manifestation.

**Table 1**

Highlights from the comparative study: The firm's view versus the customers' view

	<b><u>The firm's view:</u></b>	<b><u>The customer's view:</u></b>
<b>Touch-points</b> 'places, options, situations for interacting with customers' 'loci for value creation'	Managers pre-dominantly refer to 'sales and service channels' when referring to touch-points. Managers acknowledge the relevance and importance of integrating online with offline touch-points (pre-dominantly to generate sales). Managers point out how the silo organization of the firm is a hindrance for for instance integrating online with offline touch-points. Agenda: To deflect customers from offline to online touch-points.	Customers often refer to 'combinations of touch-points' via which they are active in relation to the firm. Customers value when touch-points are integrated or connected when interacting with the firm. Customers value to be recognized and recalled at and across touch-points. Customers point out how service interactions are distorted because customers have to combine touch-points. Agenda: To complete service-interactions at and across touch-points.
<b>CEB</b> 'behaviors at touch-points - including and going beyond financial transactions'	Managers predominantly refer to CEB initiatives at social media (to generate participation) and initiatives at the website and web-shop (to generate sales). Managers refer repeatedly to the relevance and importance of facilitating a 'good customer experience' (to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty) at singular touch-points. Managers point out how their offerings are 'low involvement products and services' for customers. Agenda: To manage initiatives at singular touch-points	Customers predominantly refer to the following CEB manifestations: Giving feedback, VoM, and purchasing products and services. Customers' CEB manifestations are informed to span often several touch-points. Customers point out how they are often highly involved in the service interaction due to the nature of the product or service (internet and telecommunication infrastructure and/or the physical products). Agenda: To manifest CEB where it makes sense at and across touch-points

#### 4. Findings

The understanding of CEB as depicted by Kumar and colleagues (2010, p.298), where CEB as a source for value includes and goes beyond purchases underpins the analysis. CEB is in literature referred to as customers' multiple behaviors revolving around the brand/firm (e.g. Van Doorn et al., 2010), hence the analysis in this paper includes customers' behaviors in the broadest sense to understand their multiple behaviors at and across touch-points.



Furthermore is the analysis guided by the understanding that touch-points are places and instances for possible value-creation (Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Munoz and Kumar, 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vandermerwe, 2003).

The first sub-section (4.1) of the findings chapter presents the firm's initiatives contrasted with the customers' behaviors at relevant touch-points. (Appendix A supplements the findings with the firm's and the customers' manifold expressions in situ related to the relevant touch-points).

The second sub-section (4.2) summarizes the findings and visualize how customers a) manifest CEB contingent the specific situation they are in (in relation to the service provider) and b) that customers manifest CEB at groups of touch-points (labeled customer arenas) contingent the specific situation; and c) what is found to stimulate CEB in the customer arena. These customer-centric findings are contrasted with the firm's initiatives.

#### *4.1 The firm's initiatives versus the customers' behaviors*

The first sub-section starts out by providing an overview over the firm's initiatives contrasted with the customers' CEB manifestations at and across touch-points. The findings are elaborated and underpinned just beneath Table 2.

**Table 2.** The firm's initiatives versus the customers' CEB manifestations at touch-points

<b>STIMULATION for CEB</b> The firm informs: We are...	<b>TOUCH-POINT</b>	<b>CEB MANIFESTATIONS</b> The customer informs: I am...
Sales channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displaying offers</li> <li>• Introducing the firm's universe</li> </ul>	<b>WEBSITE</b>	Situation: 'Overview' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching for telephone number to call centre</li> <li>• Searching for general information about telecommunication-infrastructure</li> <li>• Searching for information about subscription</li> <li>• Searching for products and services</li> </ul>
Sales channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling / Up-selling</li> <li>• Providing information regarding functionality of products and services</li> </ul>	<b>CALL CENTRE</b>	Situation: 'Multiple-reasons' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Booking technicians visit</li> <li>• Understanding the invoice</li> <li>• Adjusting my subscription</li> <li>• Giving feedback</li> </ul>
Service channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing information about subscription</li> </ul>	<b>MY-PAGE</b>	Situation: 'Micro-management' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring subscription</li> </ul>

Service channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing information about consumption</li> <li>• Providing information about legal issues related to subscription</li> </ul>	<b>INVOICE</b>	Situation: ‘Micro-management’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring consumption</li> <li>• Monitoring expenses</li> </ul>
Sales channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling products and services</li> </ul>	<b>ONLINE SHOP</b>	Situation: ‘(Potential) Purchase’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching for products and services</li> <li>• Buying a product and/or service</li> </ul>
Sales channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selling</li> <li>• Providing an experience</li> </ul>	<b>PHYSICAL SHOP</b>	Situation: ‘Potential’ Purchase’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying out products</li> <li>• Talking to employees</li> <li>• Making a decision</li> <li>• On a shopping-mission often accompanied by a relative/peer</li> </ul>
Service channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installing products and services</li> <li>• Providing guidance</li> </ul>	<b>TECHNICIAN</b>	Situation: ‘Installation’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring technician</li> </ul>
Retention and recovery channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring conversation</li> <li>• Intervening to solve potential problems for customers</li> <li>• Engaging customers via for instance competitions</li> </ul>	<b>FACEBOOK and other social media</b>	Situation: ‘Conversation’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchanging information about products and services</li> <li>• Exchanging histories about the firm</li> </ul>
Black-box/no channel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to understand the sentiment</li> </ul>	<b>CUSTOMERS’ PRIVATE SPHERE</b>	Situation: ‘Conversation’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchanging information about products and services</li> <li>• Exchanging histories about the firm</li> </ul>

(Supporting findings are presented in appendix A: ‘Comparative analysis. Expressions in situ at touch-points. Themes: Drivers and barriers, Situations in the service relationship, Related touch-points’).

The overall finding is that the firm by large inform touch-points to be sales and/or service channels, and stimulation for CEB is found to be related mainly to the (potential) purchase (the financial transaction). The firm furthermore informs to measure activities at singular touch-points. This approach resembles the basic idea of ‘customer journey’ which in literature is similar to the ‘customer activity cycle’ (Vandermerwe, 1993, 2003) and touch-point wheel (Davis and Dunn, 2002) and updated perspectives at the concept of customer journey (Verhoef and Lemon, 2016; Nortone and Pine, 2013).

Customers in this research are however found to be occupied with six different customer situations where they manifest various CEB. Each customer situation involves a

group of touch-points, where the customer is active in a dynamic and not sequential manner. Such a group of touch-points is labeled a 'customer arena'.

The customer's situation is most often not related (directly) to the purchase. The customer's situations range from for instance 'I need installation of a product/service' to 'I micro manage my subscription' and other situations not always (directly) linked to the purchase situation. Beneath, the findings are elaborated and underpinned with illustrative quotes.

#### Customer situation I: 'I establish an overview over...'

*The firm's website* is a touch-point frequently referred to by both entities. The executives and managers (hereafter referred to as 'employees') explain how the website is where the firm's universe is introduced to the customers. The website is however referred to as a sales channel and is de facto dominated by commercial messages. Some of the employees reflect critically over this inconsistency. The following employee's statement illustrates this observation:

"The online department has to think at the website as 'a brand' - not as a shop. They are very tactical and are only focusing at generating sales... The website is a space in between..[for the customer] more than anything else."

The customers inform that they visit the website because they would like to establish an overview of some sort. The desired overview is sometimes of a general character (such as information about recent development in telecommunication infrastructure or information about products available in the online shop), and other times of a specific character (such as searching for the telephone number to the call centre or for access to self service technology (SST) such as the 'MyPage' solution. Customers are active at the mentioned touch-points and sometimes also at touch-points, outside the control of the firm, such as expert communities, when searching for a general overview. Overall, the informants found it difficult to navigate at the firm's website and to establish the desired overview. The touch-points are not connected (by the firm), nor easy to combine (by customers). The following informant provides an illustrative quote:

”I have looked at their website. I have tried but not succeeded in finding information about a country code and various other numbers. It proved difficult to find, what you need at the website, so I ended google-ing it. The website is not well functioning.”

An ‘ideal stimulation’ for CEB manifestation at and across the involved touch-points can be summarized to be ‘connectedness’ of touch-points.

#### Customer situation II: ‘I have an issue I can’t solve my-self... multiple reasons’

*The firm’s call-centre* is the most often referred to touch-point by both the firm and by customers.

The firm’s employees refer repeatedly to the call centre as a sales channel and hence the initiatives spin around the customer purchase situation. The call centre is informed to have a strong sales culture and employs typically younger employees who thrive in a competitive environment. The focus at the customer purchase situation is amongst others exemplified by internal competitions (between two call centre departments in the firm and also between the individual employees).

The call centre is supporting the online department but there is no real integration between online and off line initiatives, or between departments in general. The following employee contributes with illustrative statements of the finding:

”They [the firm] try to make stuff like ‘clear and collect’ – but nope.. We don’t have collaboration as such across departments... only a lot of initiatives all the time about talking nicely about our colleagues in the physical shop, and recommending customers to visit the physical shop.”

”In case a customer calls having trouble concluding a purchase online, we can guide the customer, but no more than that.”

The customers inform much greater variety in behaviors at the call centre. The main activities informed (out of a rather diverse list) concern ‘technician’s visit’, ‘understand the invoice’ and ‘adjustment of the subscription’. In general customers only call the call centre after having tried to solve the issue via self-service solutions (MyPage, the Online shop or the website).

Customers inform that the interactive voice response system is generic and provides irrelevant messages (such as commercial messages and deflection attempts to the firm's website and self-service solutions).

About every customer interviewed commented on the feedback option given by the firm, after having concluded the service interaction at the call centre. Since customers' have very diverse reasons to call the call centre, the questions in the feedback survey are often times informed to be irrelevant for the specific service interaction just concluded. Beneath illustrative examples of the findings:

"The information you are able to find at their website is limited... they [the firm] are very careful with what they choose to display. And finally, when you call an employee, they are not able to answer your question. I just want clarification."

"These evaluations afterwards [after a service interaction]... I find them entertaining. I participated in all of them in the beginning.. I saw it as a chance to voice my opinion. But then I realized that it isn't possible to evaluate the issues I find relevant to evaluate."

An 'ideal stimulation' for CEB manifestation at and across the involved touch-points could be summarized to be 'effectiveness' at touch-points.

#### Customer situation III: 'I micro-manage my subscription'

'My page' self-service solution is not a platform many employees have top of mind when reflecting over touch-points between the firm and its customers. When probed employees point out how the 'My page' solution is where all information relevant for customers (such as invoices and details about the subscription) is presented to customers. The self-service solution is informed to suffer from bad design, and is not prioritized in the firm, since it is not a sales channel:

"Our design of self service technology ...it is an outdated system.. but we [the firm] don't make any money on self service technology.... The consequence is that it looks like I don't know what.."

Customers inform that they from time to time would like to micro manage their or their child's subscription, but in general have limited knowledge about the existence (hence content) of the 'My page' self-service solution. The few customers who are aware are at the other hand rather constructive towards the solution and enjoy micro-managing their subscription, for instance due to graphic presentations of the consumption. These customers typically have the 'My page' solution as an app at the smart phone.

[Do you have a 'MyPage' self service solution?] "Possibly... (?) I don't know.."

[What do you use the app for?] "My consumption, my invoices... I keep track .. whether they are paid... ehm.. everything.. It works very well. There are some statistics, which I assume they [the firm] use. It has been made accessible to the customer as well.. it is very interesting. It is presented in an info-graphic style.. I find it value adding."

*The invoice* proved to be a touch-point, which the employees of the firm don't consider at all. The one employee, who refers to the invoice as a touch-point however points out how invoices are a major touch-point:

"Invoices are a really important touch-point.... Especially in the case of a service failure."

In contrast, practically every customer interviewed refers to the invoice in some way. The majority of the customers inform that they find it difficult to understand the invoice mainly due to the lay-out. Furthermore a substantial amount of the informants refer how they don't know where to find the invoice. The following informants are illustrative examples of the customers' main issues with the invoice when the micro-management situation occurs:

"The invoice is 5 pages long. Then you have to scroll down.. I don't get an overview and I am not able to tell, which telephone number it concerns at which page of the invoice... it is not clear.. the invoice is not user friendly. It annoys me every time. I notice it every time."

”What happened was that I did not receive an invoice. Eehmm, and I still don’t know how to get them. So, I still call and ask them to send me a copy of the invoice. I don’t know whether it appears in my digital mail or other systems, or where it appears... I have never figured it out.”

The customer ‘micro-management situation’ hence includes MyPage and the Invoice, which customers seek to access typically via the website or the call centre. An ‘ideal stimulation’ for CEB manifestation at and across the involved touch-points could be summarized to be ‘clarity regarding how to access the self-service solution and its content.

#### Customer situation IV: ‘I need installation of a product/service ‘

The firm’s *technicians* are recognized across the firm as a type of touch-point with certain qualities and possibilities for making an impact at the customer, due to the nature of the service provided by the technician (often requiring the customer to be present with the technician).

The following employee summarizes how and why the firm’s technicians each are a potentially impactful touch-point:

”The technicians give the firm a human appearance and they are doing a lot of extra efforts. The technicians are very important. I guess we have 3000 technicians in total.. that is a lot, right ? They get really close to the customer.. the fact that they are present in the customer’s home makes a huge impact [at the customer].”

Every single of the customers interviewed in this research reflected over or told a story about one or several of the firm’s technicians. Customers have in general pre-justices and/or pre-conceptions about the technicians from the firm and don’t expect much. Informants reported how the technician’s visit is often a positive surprise (simply when the technician does what he is supposed to do). Furthermore it was striking how customers inform to supervise the processes surrounding the technician’s visit as well as the installation in itself. The following informants sum up the findings:

”An employee showed up, installed my modem and made sure everything worked.... This guy showed up at the time agreed (surprise), he was very service oriented and he was doing a good job.”

”They [technicians] have paid a visit to my house to install products. The technician has probably instructions from the firm.. But it is far from always that ‘what is sold?’ has been coordinated with ‘what is expected from the technician?’.”

The customer’s ‘installation situation’ includes technicians and the call centre (where the technicians’ visits are booked, changed and re-booked). An ideal ‘stimulation for CEB manifestation’ regarding the technicians and the related touch-point could be summarized to be ‘coordination’ between touch-points involved and the customer.

#### Customer situation V: ‘I purchase products and services ‘

*The physical shop* is a touch-point, which the employees by large express to be a financial burden to the firm and irrelevant in the future. The rather few employees, who comment on the physical shop, emphasize mainly design and in particular management of customer traffic in the physical shop as drivers for sales. The following employees explain the findings:

”The new shops have proved to convert better than the old ones. And that was of course the whole point. The question is the capacity we have in the shops.. we are working on it.. but it can be a show stopper in peak hours that a single transaction takes up to 30 minutes.. because of this, we miss out on sales.. but from a staffing perspective it doesn’t make sense to ask employees to come in for the two peak hours.”

“We have the new shops... and we have been investigating ‘what does it take to deliver the best possible customer experience?’ We have designed the shop accordingly to the results of this investigation... ehm and the consequence is... well, sales has not really lived up to expectations, but customer traffic has more or less..”

Most of the customers interviewed had at some point paid a visit to one of the firm’s physical shops. The informants’ main focus is the employees in the physical shop. Informants express in various ways how the employees in the physical shop represent a male, hip and young universe. A universe, which the informants (male and female and from various age-groups) in general don’t find relevant.



The customers interviewed often refer to shopping missions where the purpose is to make a decision for a certain purchase (which they very well might complete elsewhere). The following informants illustrate the findings:

"Funny enough.. they [the firm] hire young men who are – you know – ‘up to it’... sometimes they are a little too young and hip in the shop.. Imagine mixing ‘Joe and the Juice’ [a trendy juice bar, hiring good looking young men only] with a telecommunication shop... it has something to do with the type of people they hire."

"Occasionally I have been forced into a shop like that.. but I really don't care at all..... To me, it is a boys' universe... no doubt about that."

*The online shop* is prioritized as the future most important sales channel for the firm and enjoys attention across employees at all levels of the firm. The 'Online sales' department is organized vertically side by side other departments with separate sales objectives (call centre and physical shops). The newly appointed head of online sales explains some of the challenges the firm faces online, which is mainly about visually integrating platforms:

"Our design process and design of online platforms is not optimal. It is a mess and not prioritized [internally] – we are working on it. We need to focus more at displaying the relevant content and hide less relevant content. Our conversion rate online is very low."

"It is a silo organization. The platforms are not integrated"

From the perspective of customers the firm's online shop is just like any other online shop in a 'purchase situation'. The informants didn't refer to the firm's online shop but rather to 'online' in general.

The customer 'purchase situation' hence includes the physical and an (any) online shop and quite often the firm's website and call centre. An 'ideal stimulation' for CEB manifestations across the firm's shops and the related touch-point can be summarized to be 'integration' of online and offline touch-points to facilitate a seamless service interaction.

#### Customer situation VI: ‘I participate in a conversation ‘

*FaceBook and other social media* enjoy great attention in the firm. The firm’s employees refer to the customer power at this type of platforms. The firm has a department devoted to monitoring the firm’s Face Book and other social media. The employees are over-viewing internet sentiment revolving around the firm and are prepared to participate in conversations with the objective to recover possible service failures (i.e. the firm is in the defense). The finding is illustrated as follows:

”We spend a lot of resources at FaceBook. We have two employees who are looking at FaceBook.. they are having a dialogue with the customer. It is the step right before complaining... there is a tendency in society that it is OK to bad mouth someone and anyone... it is a very dangerous tendency, which demands a lot of the employees.”

From the perspective of customers are FaceBook and other social media types of touch-points for engaging in conversations with peers/likeminded persons (also at offline private sphere touch-points) foremost about interactions with the firm’s employees to circulate ‘stories’. It is worth highlighting how several of the customers interviewed emphasize circulating positive valenced stories as a counterweight to negative word of mouth. The following informants provide good examples of the finding:

”It is all about finding the right angel, also at FaceBook... to stimulate debate.. and it is as well funny to find the right angel for the story, to entertain people and make them return with other entertaining stories.”

“It [a technician’s visit] was really good. It was perfect. And I have shared that story several times. There is a tendency in society that telecommunication firms are the work of the Devil. Therefore, when the experience has been really positive, I share it. As a counterweight to bad word of mouth.”

The customer ‘conversation situation’ hence includes social media/private sphere where the customers inform to discuss service interactions (completed at human touch-points mainly) such as the technicians and call centre. An ideal ‘stimulation for CEB’ at social media and the related touch-point could be summarized to be ‘circulation’ preferably of positive valenced WoM.

#### 4.2 CEB manifestations at customer arenas contrasted with the firm's approach

The findings are summarized beneath in **Table 3**. CEB manifestations at customer arenas contrasted with the firm's initiatives.

**Table 3.** CEB manifestations at customer arenas versus the firm's initiatives.

CEB MANIFESTATIONS	<div>CUSTOMER SITUATION</div> <div>CUSTOMER ARENA</div>	THE FIRM's INITIATIVES
<p>When customers seek to establish an overview they often start with the website and expand the search to other touch-points in the arena. Examples of CEB: Post online, Search information, VoM.</p>	<div>OVERVIEW</div> <div> Web-site  Call Centre  MyPage  OnlineShop  Expert Communities </div> <p><b>Connectedness</b> of touch-points would stimulate CEB manifestations</p>	<p>The firm's initiatives at for instance the website and the call centre are centered on the purchase situation. Silo thinking (e.g. online / offline) and low internal awareness of MyPage (SST) and absence of link to the surrounding online world hinder connectedness across touch-points in the customer's overview arena.</p>
<p>When customers have an issue they can't solve themselves they often (finally) turn to the call centre. Related touch-points in the arena are quite diverse. Examples of CEB: Purchase, Search information, Post online, Give feedback</p>	<div>MULTIPLE REASONS</div> <div> Call centre  Website  Invoice  Technician  MyPage  OnlineShop </div> <p><b>Effectiveness</b> of touch-points would stimulate CEB manifestations</p>	<p>The firm's initiatives are centered on optimizing each touch-point and deflecting customers to online and SST solutions for FAQs. At the same time the firm neglects to develop SST solutions since they are not sales channels, hence not enjoying attention from the firm's employees. Feedback at the call centre and IVR prolong the service interaction.. Neglect of SST development and prolonged service interactions don't improve effectiveness.</p>
<p>When customers need to micro manage their subscription they investigate their invoice (if they can find it) via MyPage or website access.</p>	<div>MICRO MANAGEMENT</div> <div> Invoice  MyPage  Website </div> <p><b>Clarity</b> of touch-points might stimulate CEB manifestations (which are absent today)</p>	<p>The invoice and MyPage are not top-of mind touch-points with employees (see above). Sales focus at website and lack of development of SST / design of invoice hinders clarity.</p>
<p>When customers need installation of a product/service they turn to the technician, who they need to book via the call centre. Both touch-points are rich sources of CEB: Feedback, WoM</p>	<div>INSTALLATION</div> <div> Technician  Call Centre </div> <p><b>Coordination</b> between touch-points would stimulate CEB manifestations</p>	<p>Technicians are referred to as a service channel. A grey-zone exists regarding them acting as a sales channel. Lack of coordination between touch-points is a challenge.</p>

When customers are searching for products/services it takes place either online (could be anywhere!) or offline, and results in CEB: Purchase, WoM, Feedback online /offline	<div style="text-align: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">PURCHASE</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> Online shop Physical shop Website Call Centre </div> <p><b>Integration of touch-points</b> would stimulate CEB manifestations</p> </div>	All touch-points in the customer purchase arena are sales channels. The online shop is acclaimed the future most important sales channel. Silo thinking and emphasis at design elements in singular touch-points hinder integration across touch-points.
When customers participate in conversations about the firm they typically turn to their private sphere or social media. Favourite topics for WoM are technicians and call centre interactions.	<div style="text-align: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">CONVERSATION</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> Social Media / Private Sphere Technician Call centre </div> <p><b>Circulation of content</b> would stimulate CEB manifestations</p> </div>	Facebook and other social media are monitored by the firm in a reactive manner and the firm is in a defense situation. The defensive position might prevent proactive participation in circulation of positive valenced VoM.

## 5. Discussion

A customer in a continuous service relationship is found to face a range of situations specific for the type of service/product/firm (for instance ‘I micromanage my subscription’ or ‘I need installation of a product/service’) and the purchase situation is thus one situation out of several customer situations. Each customer situation involves a group of touch-points, which is labeled a customer arena. Customers manifest various CEB in the relevant customer arena at and across touch-points in a dynamic manner. Customers are in other words active in a manner, which is not necessarily sequential or circular.

This paper suggests replacing the idea of ‘customer journey’ (Anderl et al., 2016; Norton and Pine, 2013; Verhoef and Lemon, 2016), ‘touch-point wheel’ (Davis and Dunn, 2002) or ‘customer activity cycle’ (Vandermerwe, 1999, 2003) with the concept of customer arenas to improve the firm’s ability to manage CEB value in the context of continuous service relationships.

The discussion section concludes with guidelines for managers who wish to improve CEB value management in the firm.

### 5.1 CEB value is generated at each customer arena

This paper presents various customer arenas contingent the various situations customers face over the course of time in the continuous service relationship. Furthermore, the ideal stimulation for CEB per customer arena is pointed out.

Customers manifest CEB (i.e. create value) when being active at and across touch-points in the customer arena. Kumar and colleagues (2010) adopt a value-focused perspective and discuss four core dimensions of the value of customer engagement (Customer purchasing behavior, Customer referral behavior, Customer influencer behavior and Customer knowledge behavior). The authors present a valuable overview over the types of value generated via CEB but don't explain how to stimulate for or manage CEB value at and across touch-points.

The findings in this paper suggest that the concept of customer arenas and identification of ideal stimulation per customer arena is helpful in understanding how to stimulate for and manage CEB value better.

Customers' CEB manifestations are often integrated by nature and manifested at and across touch-points (for instance when the customer purchases a service and afterwards gives feedback (knowledge value) or participates in word of mouth (influencer value)). The problem arises when the firm has a focus at singular touch-points in relation to CEB (Ojiako, Chipulu and, Graesser, 2012), and pursue sequential, firm-centric mapping of customers' behaviors at singular touch-points as can be observed in the concept of 'customer journey' (Anderl et al., 2016; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Norton and Pine, 2013) and similar approaches such as the touch-point wheel (Davis and Dunn, 2002) or customer activity cycle (Vandermerwe, 1999, 2003).

The concept of customer arenas is integrative and assists the firm in stimulating and managing CEB at and across touch-points.

## *5.2 Customer arenas are manageable*

Authors (for instance Verhoef and Lemon, 2013) point out how managers must understand CEB better to be able to harvest the value of CEB, but don't outline how to accomplish CEB management at and across touch-points. Other authors (Bijmolt et al., 2010) discuss barriers to implementing customer engagement analytics as a management tool and presents no less than six barriers to the firm, but no solutions for how to deal with these barriers.

It is widely acknowledged in the engagement literature, that the engagement construct is rather complex and that difficulties exist in generating stable relationships between for instance antecedents for CEB and consequences of CEB at a generic level (Feherer, Woratschek, and Germelmann, 2014). The pointed out complexity complicates as well the task of managing CEB.

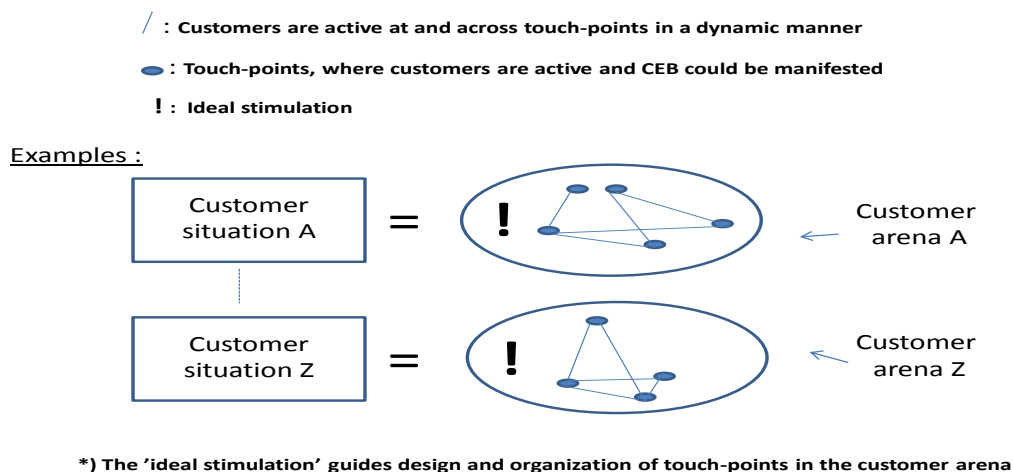
The concept of customer arenas is a rather mundane, yet suitable concept for stimulating for and managing CEB. The main reason is that complexity is reduced by grouping touch-points into customer arenas contingent the customer's various situations. Instead of trying to manage a full customer journey (involving every possible touch-point related to the purchase situation), customer arenas focus at a certain relevant customer situation, the related touch-points, and the ideal stimulation i.e. the key to what facilitates (favorable) CEB manifestation in that particular customer arena.

Concept of customer arenas is probably particularly relevant for continuous service relationships, where the purchase situation (financial transaction) is discrete and automatic due to the subscription format. The purchase situation is in other words not top of mind for customers.

The concept of customer arenas is manageable and facilitates CEB manifestations, particularly when the purchase situation is not the only or most central customer situation, but when there are in fact several and different customer situations. Customer arenas might for instance be relevant in the context of continuous service relationships, such as customers' service relationships with their telecommunication provider.

Beneath, please find the conceptualization of 'customer arenas' in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1. Conceptualization of 'Customer arenas'.**



### *5.3 Managerial implications*

Before managing anything, managers should investigate which situations their customers face in the continuous service relationship and the ‘ideal stimulation’ facilitating CEB manifestations at and across touch-points constituting the customer arena.

Guidelines for managers are outlined beneath.

#### *5.3.1 Guidelines for managers*

##### *Connect the website to touch-points in and outside the firm’s control*

Customers, who pay at visit to for instance the telecommunication firm’s website are typically trying to establish some sort of overview, and the website is quite often only one out of several touch-points the customer will be active at whilst establishing such an overview.

To stimulate favorable CEB (such as referral or influencer value) it is beneficial when the website connects to relevant other sites or platforms also outside the control of the firm, for instance expert communities. Likewise, it is of course beneficial when the firm connects own platforms, for instance MyPage and the Online shop and the website, to stimulate purchasing behavior.

##### *Collect feedback from customers where it makes sense for customers*

Customers appreciate to provide feedback (customer knowledge value) when the feedback survey reflects the just conducted service interaction in as great detail as possible. Generic questions are not stimulating customers to provide feedback. This means that feedback should be collected at customer arenas related to for instance ‘Micro Management’, ‘Installation’ and ‘Purchase’, since these customer situations are well defined. Feedback could be collected for instance via the invoice, the technician and the shop.

##### *Consider: Customers only call the firm because they have to*

With the point made just above goes that it is not optimal to collect feedback (knowledge value) after the service interaction at the call centre. Customers have multiple, unpredictable reasons for calling the call centre, and are most often depleted when initiating contact at the call centre.

Customers typically call the call centre after having been active at other touch-points. The Interactive Voice Response system should hence not seek to deflect customers to the

website or other self-service technology solutions, since customers have most likely just been active at exactly these touch-points.

It is advisable for managers to investigate the most frequent reasons for customers to call and hence to adjust the Interactive Voice Response system accordingly (and of course to act on the underlying reasons, such as ‘difficult to understand format of invoice’).

#### *Understand the origin of word of mouth and distinguish between expert and social word of mouth*

Customers participate typically in word of mouth at social media (Facebook a.o) about technicians’ visits and service interactions with employees in the physical shop (and to some extend the call centre). Managers should recognize the origin of social word of mouth to prepare these human touch-points as sources for influencer value and build on the tendency with customers to share also positive valenced word of mouth as a counterweight to otherwise negative word of mouth at social media.

Self-service technology and the functional aspects of the products and services are sources for expert word of mouth activities and hence influencer value in expert communities or other concentrations with peers.

#### *5.5 Limitations and further research*

It would be relevant to repeat the study in other industries, types of product-categories and types of customers, and in other cultures.

There are further avenues open for research. It is conceivable had the industries chosen been others than mundane products and services providers the findings would appear differently.

Furthermore, it would be relevant to develop further the concept of customer arenas in the light of multi and omni-channel literature as well as literature regarding integrated marketing communication, to fully capture the channel and touch-point optimization challenge for the firm. It might furthermore be relevant to study how to implement CEB management solutions in the firm.



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Appendix A: 'Comparative analysis. Expressions in situ at touch-points. Themes: Drivers and barriers, Situations in the service relationship, Related touch-points'.

The firm's expressions:	TOUCH-POINT (TP)	The customers' expressions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KPI's revolve around sales and effectiveness</li> <li>Strong sales-culture in CC</li> <li>CC is connected with the online shop ( but not vice versa)</li> <li>CC management is responsible for CC sales</li> <li>CC is the most important TP for overall sales</li> <li>Overall firm strategy is to deflect customers to online TPs</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Culture in CC Main barrier: KPI related to sale per employee</p>	<b>CALL CENTRE (CC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive voice response system while waiting is not helpful</li> <li>Feedback option does not reflect service interaction</li> <li>I try to avoid calling the CC</li> <li>'Multiple situations' lead me to call the CC typically because I can't solve the situation via SST</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: 'A human being' (the employee) can solve 'the situation' Main barrier: Technology before and after the conversation with the employee</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portal to the firm</li> <li>Success is dependent of user</li> <li>Is it a good idea to sell at the website?</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Connects the firm with the customer Main barrier: Too many (commercial) messages at the WS</p>	<b>WEBSITE (WS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is a hub for the CC, OS and the MP</li> <li>'A need for over-view situation' leads me to the WS</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Convenience 24/7 in 'the over-view situation' Main barrier: Difficult to navigate at the WS</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too complicated for customers to access</li> <li>No internal awareness</li> <li>Is part of overall firm strategy to deflect customers to SST</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Overall firm strategy Main barrier: No internal awareness</p>	<b>MY-PAGE (MP)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I don't have a MP</li> <li>I find MP via the WS</li> <li>'A need for micro-management situation' leads me to MP</li> </ul> <p>Main-driver: Convenience 24/7 in 'the situation' Main barrier: Lack of knowledge about</p>

		MP existence and functionality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need to include legal information at the I</li> <li>The I is a recurrent event</li> <li>We have a department where they explain the I to customers</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Fixed and predictable format Main barrier: Legal information must be displayed at the I</p>	<b>INVOICE (I)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I don't know where to find the I</li> <li>I find it difficult to understand the I because of the format</li> <li>I like to receive the I at my phone</li> <li>'A need for micro-management situation' leads me to the I</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: An app at the phone displaying the I Main barrier: Difficulties with the format</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future most important TP for sales</li> <li>OS management is responsible for online sales</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Awareness from C-level management Main barrier: Internal resistance because of silo-thinking</p>	<b>ONLINE SHOP (OS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I find OS via the website</li> <li>A 'Research &amp; Purchase-situation' leads me to a OS (any OS)</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Convenience 24/7 in the Research &amp; Purchase situation Main barrier: Could be any web-shop (i.e. not necessarily the firm's) in the situation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design of interior is important for the customer experience</li> <li>People management (traffic) is crucial</li> <li>PS management is responsible for PS sales</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: The customer experience Main barrier: Traffic</p>	<b>PHYSICAL SHOP (PS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees are young and male</li> <li>Male universe</li> <li>Waiting in line is fair</li> <li>A 'Research &amp; Purchase situation' leads me to the PS</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: The employee can help me in the situation Main barrier: The nature of the employees</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T is the most important TP at all in the firm</li> <li>T enters the private sphere of customers</li> <li>T's premises are geographically separated from the rest of the firm</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Ts have specialist status in the firm Main barrier: Ts are organized in a satellite premise</p>	<b>TECHNICIAN (T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I request T's visit via CC</li> <li>I spend a lot of time before, during and after T's visit supervising the T</li> <li>'An installation situation' leads me to request a T</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: Necessity to have T's visit (specialist) Main barrier: Time spent in the process</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have a department (8 pax) over viewing social media</li> <li>FB is where the customer sentiment is created</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: We have the technology to overview the www Main barrier: Reactive firm behavior mainly</p>	<b>FACEBOOK (FB) and social media in general</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am considering how to frame stories at FB</li> <li>I entertain at FB and expect others to entertain me with other stories</li> <li>'A conversation situation' leads me to FB</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: To exchange stories with peers Main barrier: I have had enough bad</p>

		VoM (customers want good stories)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I wish customers would complain to us instead of just leaving the firm / partaking in bad VoM</li> </ul> <p>N/A</p>	<p><b>CUSTOMERS' PRIVATE SPHERE (CPS)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I tell everybody who wants to listen</li> <li>I never talk about the firm, why should I?</li> <li>'A conversation situation' leads me to CPS</li> </ul> <p>Main driver: I get to tell my story to somebody who cares</p> <p>Main barrier: Boring topic, unless 'a situation' occurs</p>

#### **4.1 Further reflections on the work done – The three papers**

The purpose of this section (4.1) is to point out eventual alternative directions for the three papers respectively and to forward a few reflections over the research presented in the three papers.

##### ***Paper 1. Question: What is the nature of CEB?***

The findings in the first paper have important implications for the hitherto dominant presentation of what constitutes to the nature of CEB (Van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 255). Van Doorn and colleagues 2010 provide a valuable and detailed descriptive overview over all possible elements related to the nature of CEB (for instance; the place CEB is manifested, the target group for the CEB manifestation or the valence of the CEB manifestation).

Such a descriptive list (Van Doorn et al. 2010) is of value, when one aspires to familiarize oneself with the topic CEB, but it doesn't provide insights into whether some of the pointed out elements are more or less dominant or whether some of the pointed out elements are inter-related, or how the elements could be contextually determined. Furthermore, despite the list provided by the authors is comprehensive, it is not necessarily exhaustive. Hence, there might be other elements, which are of relevance when discussing the nature of CEB. >> It might be relevant to investigate 'the nature of CEB' by adopting 'a true' grounded theory approach to unveil hitherto not identified issues and elements somehow related to CEB. The approach adopted in 'Paper 1' does indeed lead to novel insights of relevance, when one aspires to understand 'the nature of CEB better', but still it is recognized that the current approach to some degree is guided by the existing literature. It is conceivable that further insights would appear by completely detaching the approach from for instance the framework suggested by Van Doorn and colleagues (2010).

The findings in 'Paper 1' point out how a customer's interaction mode assists him or her in achieving the goal with being active at a certain touch-point. 'Customers' interaction modes' is a novel element in the discussion of what constitutes to the nature of CEB. A customer's interaction mode is however not always stable across touch-points (and service providers) because the customer's goal with being active at a touch-point often varies. A customer who for instance wants to give feedback to the firm and decides to call the call centre might take up an interaction mode, which is pro-active. At a later instance the same customer wants to tell his/her friends about the interaction with the firm and takes up an

entertaining interaction mode when participating in word of mouth (because he/she wants to entertain at a dinner-party or other social event). >> It might be worth investigating the issue of customers' unstable behaviors further both across touch-points and across types of service providers. Furthermore, it might be worth investigating the nature of CEB in a manner, not linked to a certain touch-point or across touch-points. This would probably yield even more subjective meanings to the understanding of the phenomenon CEB and hence provide an elaborated understanding of the nature of CEB.

The key finding in 'Paper 1' revolves around customers' goal-mode integration. Customers' goal oriented behaviors determine the touch-point in which they manifest CEB and interaction mode assists customers in achieving their goals when being active at the touch-point. This finding entails that the various other elements (valence, modality, scope, impact and target of CEB ) in the hitherto dominant presentation of the nature of CEB (Van Doorn and colleagues 2010) become implicit in the 'customer goal-mode integration' and in various ways are means to an end when customers manifest CEB. >> It might be fruitful and an alternative approach to deduce the existing model suggested by Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) in the light of the findings in paper 1.

Finally, it might be relevant to consider how the notion of 'the nature of CEB' fits into the larger system of what is recognized to describe and surround CEB. Several authors (Bijmolt et al. 2010; Van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft 2010;) writing about CEB are focusing at the antecedents for CEB, the CEB behaviors and consequences of CEB. The findings in 'Paper 1' and the reflections addressed above, might however suggest that CEB could be understood also from other point of departures, than 'before, during and after' CEB.

The nature of CEB and the system in which it lives is probably not a matter of linearity or pre-figured sequences, but rather a matter of inconsistency and no pre-figuration of sequences. Putting it at the edge; the linearity suggested in the dominant CEB literature might be counter-productive for obtaining an understanding of CEB. The linear model suggests that 'something' precedes CEB, and that 'something' is a consequence of CEB. It is obvious that a satisfied customer is more likely to manifest positive valenced CEB, and that the consequence for the firm would be favorable. The problem is however, that the nature of CEB is not stable across touch-points why the linear way of thinking about CEB is far too simplified to be of

real value when one wants to understand what the nature of CEB is really about (beyond the obvious).

***Paper 2. Question: How and why are CEX and CEB connected?***

The second paper investigates the rather novel research domain ‘CEB’ in the light of a mature research domain ‘customer experience’. Customer experience as a research domain has enjoyed longstanding attention in literature (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) and customer experience has over time been discussed in multiple ways (cf. for instance the review section in ‘Paper 2’). However, customer experience – CEB connectivity has hitherto not been investigated.

‘Paper 2’ takes up the challenge to investigate the connectivity between customer experience and CEB and presents eight scenarios where customers are experiencing something and manifesting CEB in various ways. Each scenario hence presents a type of customer experience – CEB connectivity.

It can be observed that the conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity ( Figure 1. ‘Conceptualization of CEX-CEB connectivity in continuous service relationships’ in ‘Paper 2’) is based on dominant concepts in the extant customer experience literature (Rational, Emotional, Flow and Extra-ordinary experiences). Here, it becomes evident that ‘Paper 2’ is crafted with the aim to contribute to the CEB literature in the light of (existing concepts in) the mature customer experience literature. It furthermore becomes evident that the experiences reported by the informants are organized into the existing customer experience concepts based on an evaluation by the research team. The evaluation was carried out with the greatest caution and alternatives (other customer experience concepts like Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Caru and Cova (2003)) were discussed. >> It is conceivable that had the interviews with informants been based on a fully fledged inductive approach and/or made use of other techniques such as projective techniques to facilitate informants’ narratives about their inner world, the findings would have pointed towards other types of customer experiences (of a less functional nature) reflecting for instance the customers’ introspective accounts of their feeling and emotions when manifesting CEB, as well as the feelings and emotions before and after a certain CEB manifestation. It is possible findings would for instance reveal mediating effects of CEB at the individual level; such as stress-reducing effects of word of mouth manifestations with individuals, who feels neglected by the firm; or

relief of cognitive dissonance via feedback from individuals to correct a perceived mistake by the firm.

***Paper 3. Question: How to manage CEB?***

The third paper takes up the challenge to provide a managerial solution suitable to business managers who want to improve the management of the potentially valuable CEB manifestations. ‘Paper 3’ adopts a comparative approach with the aim to become informed of the firm’s current modus operandi for initiating CEB, and to understand how customers manifest CEB, ultimately to clarify drivers and barriers for favorable CEB on both sides. The objective is to arrive at a managerial solution, which reduces barriers and builds upon drivers for favorable CEB to enhance mutual value creation via CEB.

The third paper is the result of a comparative study focusing at a telecommunication firm and its customers. CEB manifestations are in this thesis relaxed to include also the financial transactions (following Kumar and colleagues 2010), which could make good sense in a business environment characterized by an emphasis upon transactional exchange (in particular by the firm). The crafting of ‘Paper 3’ furthermore takes point of departure in a currently widely adopted framework for managing customers’ numerous behaviors, namely the concept of ‘customer journey’ revolving around the financial exchange. These building blocks in ‘Paper 3’ provide for a realistic and managerial rooted approach to the topic. ‘How to manage CEB?’. >> It is however conceivable that the findings could be developed further by investigating also the implementation challenge inside the organization. Furthermore it might be relevant to discuss CEB management and the implementation challenge also in the light of multi-channel literature (e.g. Neslin and Shankar 2009) and literature concerning integrated marketing communication (e.g. Rakic and Rakic 2014) to put CEB management into a broader managerial perspective within the firm’s challenges related to marketing and channel optimization.



## **CHAPTER 5. META DISCUSSION**

This thesis focuses at CEB in the context of continuous service relationships, why the meta-discussion seeks to focus at element of particular relevance for exactly this context.

This is done by revisiting findings across the three papers, and by supplementing with further findings and additional relevant literature, still to inform CEB literature and business managers about the phenomenon CEB in a service relationship context.

### **5.1 How are the three papers inter-linked and how do they supplement each other?**

This thesis investigates CEB in the context of continuous service relationships and the three papers, around which the thesis revolves, shed light over carefully selected topics relevant for academia and business managers who are interested in customer engagement and CEB (cf. Chapter I).

#### **5.1.1 The three papers are inter-linked from a value-creation perspective**

The three papers are inter-linked since they in different ways pertain to the challenges repeatedly pointed out in literature and by business managers; that CEB is dynamic, iterative, experiential, unstable and difficult to manage (e.g. Brodie et al. 2011; Bijmolt et al. 2010; Fehrer, Woratschek and Germelmann 2014). The three papers contribute with improved understandings of some of the underlying mechanisms for these challenges. The agenda is to inform academia and business managers of aspects related to CEB - ultimately to improve value creation via CEB.

The three papers present improved understandings of some of the mechanisms underlying ‘what happens’ in relation to CEB initiatives and CEB manifestations. The findings across the three papers also illustrate how the value creation process via CEB is sometimes inconsistent and non-sequential (for instance when a satisfied customer gives constructive feedback, but refrains from partaking in positive valenced word of mouth; or simply in the case of a silent (towards the firm) customer partaking in negatively valenced word of mouth). Hence, it seems that there is a ‘dark side of CEB’, when it comes to the notion that ‘CEB is a source of value to the firm’; Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef (2017, online) state: “we recognize that customer engagement behaviors can also have a dark side”.

CEB as a potential source of value to the firm could probably be agreed in literature and by business managers to be a relevant and dominant reason for investing resources into investigating CEB (cf. Chapter 1) further.

The findings in this thesis are discussed in a value-creation perspective in section (5.2), emphasizing the potential negative valence, and the sometimes inconsistent and non-sequential CEB manifestations, which is coined ‘The dark side of CEB I and II’.

### **5.1.2 The three papers supplement each other from a service relationship perspective**

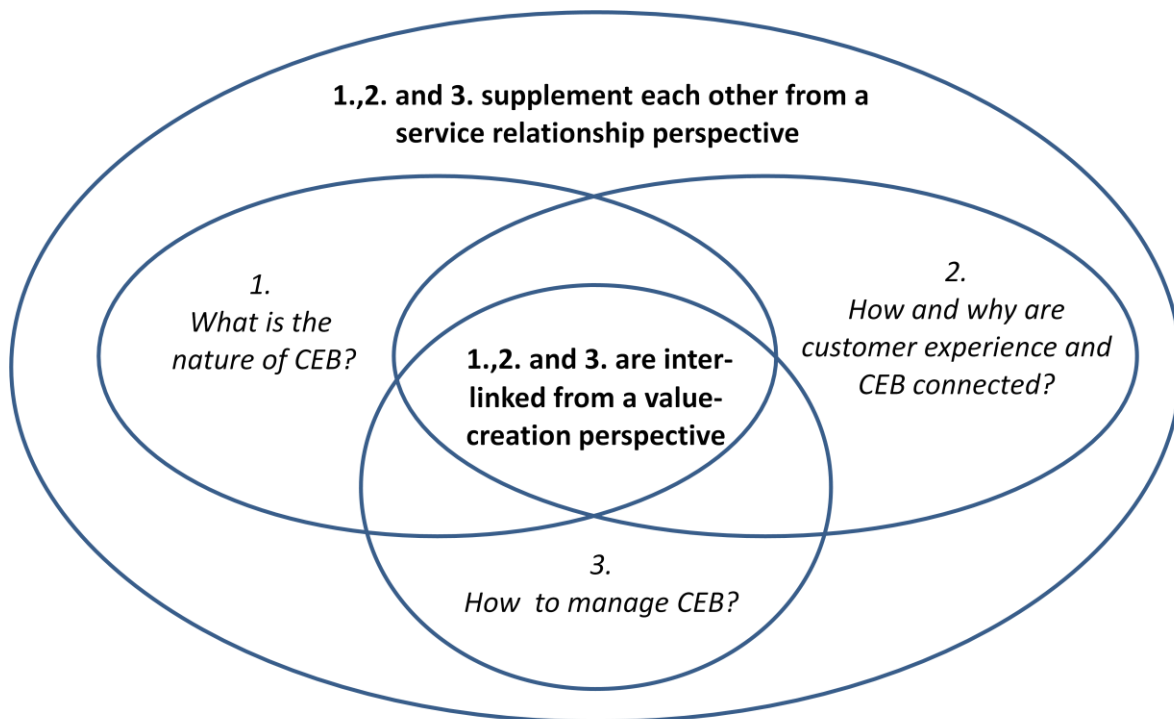
The three papers supplement each other when discussed in the light of the service relationship literature and from the managerial perspective of service providers.

‘Paper 1’ clarifies the ‘where, why and how of CEB’ (the nature of CEB), which provides for a foundational understanding of CEB in the context of service relationships. ‘Paper 2’ investigates how CEB is connected with ‘customer experience’, the latter recognized as a both long standing and influential concept in literature (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) as well as in practice. The second paper presents a conceptualization of ‘customer experience’ - CEB connectivity and presents various elements in the service relationship, which shape this connectivity. The second paper hence provides an understanding of ‘what happens’ and ‘why CEB happens’ investigated in the light of the mature ‘customer experience’ domain, which is of high relevance for service providers. ‘Paper 3’ takes up the challenge of ‘Then what? Or how to?’ by investigating how CEB could be managed better. The third paper informs literature and service providers with a possible solution to the managerial challenges pointed out in literature (for instance by Bijmolt et al. 2010; Verhoef and Lemon 2013).

The findings in this thesis are discussed in the light of the service relationship literature and from the perspective of service providers across the three papers in section (5.3), ‘The new service relationship’; and in section (5.4) ‘(How) could the firm manage the unmanageable?’.

An overview over how the three papers are inter-linked and supplement each other is provided in the Figure 4. ‘How are the three papers inter-linked and how do they supplement each other?’ (inserted beneath).

**Figure 4. How are the three papers inter-linked and how do they supplement each other?**



## **5.2 Customer engagement behavior from a value-creation perspective**

First and foremost is CEB considered a potential source of value to the firm. This is being pointed out repeatedly both by scholars (e.g. Kumar et al. 2010; Verhoef and Lemon 2013) and by practitioners (McKinsey&Company 2012). That CEB is a potential source of value for the firm, could hence probably be agreed to be a relevant suggestion.

Customers, who endorse and recommend the firm (influencer value), customers who give constructive feedback and/or participate in new product development (customer knowledge value) and customers who buy the products and services offered (customer lifetime value), and customers who assist the firm in acquiring new customers (customer referral value) (Kumar et al. 2010, p. 299) are indeed of tremendous value to the firm. CEB manifestations are a treasure throve of both value-co-creation and co-production activities (Hoyer et al. 2010; Kristensson, Gustafsson and Archer 2004; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Vargo and Lusch 2004) such as customers co-creating value for themselves and the firm by the use of various self-service solutions, and customers co-producing of value activities when they partake in product development alongside with the firm or give detailed feedback to the firm typically about process and service optimization.

When CEB is being discussed in the academic literature as a potential source of value to the firm, there appears to be a common assumption that the value created via CEB is mainly favorable for the firm (e.g. Kumar and Pansari 2016; Babic Rosario et al. 2016). It is noticed (but not elaborated) that some CEB initiatives and manifestations (beyond the purchase) (e.g. Van Doorn et al 2010; Verhoef and Lemon 2013) are not always a source of value to the firm or that CEB might be even harmful to the firm (for instance negatively valenced word of mouth activities or hostile postings at blogs).

Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef (2017 may, online) state “Academic research on the firm value consequences of firm-initiated customer engagement campaigns is limited to date”, and later the authors state “So far, many studies have highlighted only positive effects of customer engagement”. Beckers, Van Doorn, and Verhoef (2017) investigate the link between a company’ marketing and financial performance and state “We clearly show that there might be negative effects of firm-initiated customer engagement initiatives”.

The authors investigate the potential ‘dark side of CEB’ (Beckers, Van Doorn, and Verhoef 2017, online) by taking point of departure in three different financial performance measures: impact on efficiency and effectiveness of value creation (cash flows); building of relationships (residual cash flows) and; increase or decrease of risk (Srivasta el al. 1998). Beckers and colleagues (2017) arrive at the conclusion that CEB initiatives are perceived risky (by shareholders) and as a consequence destroy value in terms of shareholder value (while positive effects of CEB initiatives are found for both value creation and relationship building). It should be noted that the study emphasizes online initiatives (from the firm) which by nature directs the focus upon word of mouth and the recognized risk of negativity spirals (Hewett et al. 2016).

This thesis forwards improved understandings of some of the underlying mechanisms for how, why where customers manifest CEB, and for the connectivity between what customers experience in the service relationship and CEB manifestations. Furthermore this thesis suggests to understand customers’ frequent situations (in relation to the firm) and the affiliated touch-points, which leads to the suggestion of ‘customer arenas’, as a managerial framework business managers could consider in order to manage CEB better.

Based on the findings in this thesis and across the three papers this author agrees with Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef (2017) that CEB should be discussed also in the light of ‘the dark side of CEB’, since CEB indeed is not always a source of value to the firm.

This thesis addresses the dark side of CEB by forwarding that *CEB initiatives and manifestations are not always favorable for the firm* (Section 5.2.1); and that *CEB is not always manifested in a consistent or sequential manner by the customer* (Section 5.2.2).

### **5.2.1 Dark side of CEB I:**

#### **CEB initiatives and manifestations are not always favorable for the firm**

Firms initiate CEB for instance to stimulate customers to give feedback, partake in word of mouth or leave posts at firm's blog with the end goal to create value in terms of for instance knowledge value or referral value (Kumar et al. 2010).

That the intention from the firm, which initiates CEB, is to create value of some sort is probably a fair statement.

The problem is that customers do not always (co-)create and produce value the way the firm intends. Sometimes, the firm realizes that the resources invested in a CEB initiative are not returned and maybe even that the customer flips to the dark side and partakes in unfavorable CEB. This scenario is amongst others described by Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef (2017, online) as 'back-firing' (the authors refer to a McDonald campaign at Twitter, which went into a negativity spiral).

This thesis provides as well for scenarios that illustrate how CEB initiatives and manifestations are not always favorable for the firm. An example of such a scenario is the firm, which offers tickets for a concert to the customer, who then concludes that the firm's prices are too high (since the firm can afford to offer tickets) and hence partakes in negatively valenced word of mouth activities revolving around the firm.

*Informant O explains:*

*"When I got the tickets, I thought it was sympathetic of the firm. But, then I reasoned 'well, I have paid the tickets myself' and got angry at the firm and that the firm makes economic decisions at my behalf. This is a story I have been sharing with my friends."*

Another example is the firm, which invites the customer to leave feedback / participate in a customer panel (and sometimes the firm even gives a monetary/prize incentive to stimulate CEB). The problem is that the customer concludes that the topics chosen by the firm (topics to be evaluated in a feedback format) are irrelevant and hence terminates the feedback process. Beneath one example out of several informants, who reported this issue of lost CEB initiative value:

*Informant L explains:*

*“I used to be a member of their customer panel. But I am not a member anymore. The topics I was supposed to evaluate were not relevant”.*

The above findings and reflections might suggest that the firm’s initiatives for CEB and customers’ CEB manifestations are indeed not always favorable for the firm. The findings point to unfavorable CEB (like bad word of mouth or negative valenced blog posts, which would destroy value), and in terms of lost resources for the firm which initiates irrelevant CEB (like irrelevant feedback formats or concert tickets, which would lead to lost CEB value).

### **5.2.2 Dark side of CEB II:**

#### **CEB is not always manifested in a consistent or sequential manner by the customer**

Another challenging issue related to value co-creation and -production via CEB is the fact that customers are not necessarily stable in their behaviors across touch-points. The absence of consistency and pre-figured order of sequences are likely to complicate the co-creation of value process (from the perspective of the firm).

It might be worth highlighting that a satisfied customer – overall – would more likely partake in positive valenced word of mouth or other CEB manifestations compared with a not satisfied customer. The discussion in this section of the thesis seeks to go beyond this rather obvious knowledge and assumption (Bijmolt et al. 2010).

This thesis contributes with insights about how CEB is not always manifested in a consistent or sequential manner, as follows;

‘Paper 1’ presents findings that illustrate how customers display a certain interaction style to achieve a certain goal with being active in relation to the firm at a certain touch-point. A customer’s interaction style is found to sometimes change dependent of the context (a customer could for instance be pro-active and give objective feedback to the firm and later entertain his/her friends with a story about the service technician’s visit adopting a humorous approach). The beneath statement from *informant B* elaborates this perspective:

*“ [After a technician’s visit] I had to call his [the technician’s] boss, since the technician had left a complete mess at my house. Wires were all over the place and they were sticking out of the wall.” “ I have told friends and family about the technician’s visit. To entertain.... I am not especially mad at them [the firm]. I took up a humorous approach.”*

‘Paper 2’ presents findings that illustrate how customers manifest CEB in connection to what they experience in the service relationship, hence will their CEB manifestations differ across types of service relationships.

*Informant A* is an example of a customer, who experiences to be a customer with her financial services provider because of a certain employee and overall is still in the service relationship because of this ‘you and me scenario’. In fact informant A refers to this particular employee by name (‘Lars’) when she tells her touch-point history, and not to the brand-name or the firm-name. A informs, when probed, that she would never ‘trash’ or ‘bash’ the firm, - despite the fact she has a negative experience with the pricing of some of the services offered by ‘Lars’ (leading informant A to place some of her business with a competitor):

*“The fee [the foreign exchange fee] is far too high at my bank. Lars knows this, I guess” ... “No I would never share this information [that the foreign exchange fee is too high] with anybody. Why would I do that? What would be the purpose of doing that? I think that it would be substandard behavior. I only share the ‘good’ experiences.”*

In contrast, *informant A* experiences to be in a constant ‘boxing’ fight with her telecommunication provider. The ‘boxing fight’ is as well related to pricing of the services offered by the firm. This leads *informant A* to adopt a rather aggressive approach to manifesting CEB both targeted the firm, and her private sphere:

*“ It is like we are boxing. You really have to be on your toes. They have robbed me for this amount. [When probed by the researcher about A’s experiences related to be boxing with the firm about pricing] Yes, I have most certainly shared this experience. And unfortunately – I had nothing positive to share.”*

Furthermore, does ‘Paper 2’ illustrate how one and same customer sometimes have several ‘customer experiences’ in one and same service interaction, which potentially are connected with inconsistent and not sequential CEB manifestations.

An example could be a customer who experiences to be an expert customer (experience to be knowledgeable about the products/service and domain, which would incline for instance willingness to give feedback) and at the same time experiences to be unable to master a (technological) touch-point (which would incline ‘no CEB’ or negative valence CEB

manifestation, targeted the customer's private sphere). Such conflicting experiences across touch-points are inherently resulting in inconsistency when it comes to the overall experience of the service interaction – from the perspective of the customer. The conflicting experiences across touch-points potentially disrupt the value-creation process in terms of stimulation for CEB manifestations – from the perspective of the firm.

The above findings and reflections might suggest that the firm's initiatives for CEB and customers' CEB manifestations are indeed not always manifested in a consistent or sequential manner by the customer: A positive valence interaction (or encounter) might be followed by a negative valence interaction (or encounter). The latter could disrupt the potential positive value creation (favorable CEB) and even result in value destruction (unfavorable CEB).

### ***CEB turns the service relationship into a plethora of (service) events***

CEB initiatives and CEB manifestations are crucial in the service relationship today and probably any service-provider should consider its potential.

CEB can definitely be a source of value to the firm. CEB entails however 'a dark side', which literature and service providers should consider; a) unfavorable CEB manifestations (which could lead to value destruction) happen, b) lost resources due to CEB initiatives, which are deemed irrelevant by the customers happen, and c) because customers do not always manifest CEB in a consistent and sequential manner, the value-creation process intended by the firm might be disrupted. These elements (a, b, c) are as well part of the potentially valuable CEB landscape.

CEB is manifested at and across touch-points in and out of control of the firm. The traditional understanding of a service relationship, service interaction and service encounter (Gutek et al. 1999) might be insufficient in this landscape, characterized by more than ever empowered and omni present customers.

Hence, it is suggested that *CEB manifestations turn the service relationship into a plethora of (service) events of sometimes conflicting valence, which might disrupt the value creation process intended by the firm.*



The following section (5.3) discusses ‘The new service relationship – a plethora of (service) events’, and section (5.4) discusses ‘(How) could the firm manage the unmanageable?’.

### **5.3 The new service relationship – a plethora of (service) events**

#### **5.3.1 Customer – Firm relationships. Is ‘customer engagement behavior’ any news?**

Firms’ relationships with their customers have been discussed over the last decades. It can be observed that authors in general tend to emphasize how firms that adopt a long-term customer orientation (i.e. build relationships with their customers) improve the performance of the firm (e.g. Heide and John 1992; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995).

When a firm wants to build a relationship with a customer or a group of customers, it naturally requires the firm to take various initiatives targeted the customer or group of customers in question. The relational oriented initiatives taken by the firm should concern other matters than the transactional exchange, which is considered short-term, tangible and specified (Guo, Grun and Tang 2017; Sheth and Shah 2003). Initiatives of a relational building nature are in contrast transpiring over time, intangible and aiming at linking the customer with the firm at several levels (Kotler 1992).

So, what are these initiatives firms could adopt to build relationships with their customers? Guo, Gruen and Tang (2017, p.365) analyze for instance ‘rewards from the firm’, ‘referral of new customers’ and ‘fill out surveys (feedback)’, and Sheth and Pavartiyar (1995, p.260) consider amongst other ‘The Influence of Reference Groups and Word-of-Mouth communication’.

The initiatives firms could adopt to build relationships with their customers (referred just above) hence seem to be similar to CEB and initiatives firms could implement to stimulate for CEB.

In support, recent CEB research furthermore confirm that CEB indeed is valuable for the firm in terms of it relation building benefits (Beckers, Van Doorn and Verhoef 2017). This should confirm that CEB is integrated – at least partially – in the literature concerning customer-firm relationships, and that a common ground exists between the two. It appears plausible that (relevant) CEB initiatives could be building-bricks in the firm’s efforts to sustain and develop their relationships with customers.

The previous section about CEB from a value-creation perspective (5.2) suggested that CEB manifestations turn the service relationship into a plethora of (service) events of

sometimes conflicting valence, which might disrupt the value creation process intended by the firm. Today's service relationships share common ground with CEB manifestations, so what does 'the new service relationship look like'?

The next sections (5.3.2. and 5.3.3) discuss CEB and the impact of CEB upon the service relationship by re-visiting some of the corner-stones agreed upon to be the pillars in a customer-firm relationship.

### **5.3.2. To whom are customer-firm relationships relevant?**

Firms invest resources into developing relationships with customers since they want to develop and sustain revenues. That 'firms strive to establish and cultivate close relationships with their customers because retained customers drive sustained growth and profitability' (Guo, Gruen and Tang 2017), seems to be a commonly accepted reason for business managers to pursue a strategy to "fence in" customers (in a customer-firm relationship of some sort).

From the perspective of the firm, it is of course appealing to think that customers are (willingly) in a type of relationship with the firm, since this would typically entail reciprocity at some level. Reciprocity is considered to be at the heart of relationship marketing (Bagozzi 1995; Fournier 1998) and universal to the functioning of any relationship. Goulder (1960, pp. 169-170) states that reciprocity concerns the 'pattern of exchange through which the mutual dependence of people, brought about by the division of labor is realized'. It is hence through the creation of interdependence between the customer and the firm, the long-term orientation of the customer-firm exchange is established (McLean Parks and Smith 1998).

Sometimes customer-firm relationships are conceptualized as partnerships of various characteristics and qualities, which could be similar to for instance a marriage or a friendship (Fournier 1998). This is as well an appealing thought (for the firm) that customers would consider the firm as a worthy partner in a type of binding relationship, which should entail for instance strong commitment and loyalty (marriage) and commitment and trust (friendship) and in any case reciprocity. The framework by Fournier (1998) has indeed been scrutinized and critique has been forwarded about for instance the facets underlying the partner-ship types and the robustness of the framework has been questioned. The customer – firm relationship theory framework (Fournier 1998) has however proved itself in terms of conceptual clarity and can be observed to have been implemented for instance in the media agency business (MediaCom) as a model for understanding underlying drivers for why customers would enter into a relationship with the firm (i.e. initiate and sustain exchange).

The customer –firm relationship literature furthermore emphasizes the before-mentioned transactional exchange versus relational exchange. Most often are the two customer orientations considered to be juxtaposed and researchers tend to compare and contrast the two orientations (Guo, Gruen and Tang 2017). Competing views have been presented and Shore and colleagues (2006) forward that customers could tandem approaches and contend that social (similar to relational) and economic (similar to transactional) exchange can operate concurrently. This means that a customer sometimes benefits from a transactional exchange (the customer just wants to purchase a certain product) and at other times he /she benefits from a relational exchange style (same customer gives feedback to the firm).

This latter view is in line with the findings in 'Paper 2' in this thesis, where it amongst others is suggested that customers have one overall reason for still being in the service relationship (relational or transactional based) and at the same time are interacting with the firm in a manner which is at times relational oriented and at other times transactional oriented. The transactional and relational approaches do in other words not necessarily exclude each other from the perspective of the customer.

This author follows the idea forwarded by Shore and colleagues (2006) that customers tandem or can operate transactional (economic) and relational (social) approaches concurrently. It is however still beneficial to understand the differences between them in a customer-firm relationship perspective. Blau (1964) forwards that an economic exchange is characterized by its content being specific and governed by a contract, which stipulates the obligations, which are to be fulfilled for the parties involved. In contrast are the benefits involved in a social exchange not specified or governed by a contract. Obligations between the two parties are left to the discretion of each party. In a landscape with constant and numerous initiatives for CEB, it is difficult for customers to fulfill the intended (by the firm) 'obligations' in terms of for instance 'giving feedback', 'endorsing the firm' or 'helping the firm to improve the experience' simply because the CEB initiatives from the firm often lack relevance and are in stark competition with other 'obligations' and /or tasks in the customers' everyday Life (Grönroos and Voima 2014).

Firms should of course take interest in sustaining and developing relationships with valuable customers. It is however a challenge for the firm that customers not necessarily share this interest to the same extent as the firm. Guo, Gruen and Tang (2017, p.357) state; “.. even in long-term patronage situations customers often do not desire to form close relationships with the commercial provider. Despite the increasing relationship investment from the

supplier, the buyer may internalize different types of reciprocity norms from the supplier and not be motivated to engage in the reciprocal behaviors desired by the supplier”.

Gutek and colleagues did already in 1999 distinguish between different types of events in the service relationship and discussed how it is mainly the firm that discusses to have ‘a service relationship with customers’, whilst customers discuss service relationships only when the service provider is in fact a human being, with whom they (over time) establish some sort of ‘relationship’. Gutek and colleagues (1999) forward that what most firms have with customers are ‘pseudo relationships’ made up of for instance various, anonymous employees, various self-service solutions and today an interactive website and other substitutes for human interaction.

### 5.3.3 Is the ‘new service relationship’ still a ‘relationship’?

Considering some of the elements, which are agreed in literature to be vital for the functioning of a service relationship and to be descriptive of what happens in the service relationship, it is worth considering whether and how CEB as a phenomenon has changed the service relationship as discussed in extant literature (and touched upon above).

One of the cornerstones in a relationship of any sort is in literature emphasized to be the presence of **reciprocity** (Bagozzi 1995), which according to Shalin (1972) could be conceptualized in three dimensions; the immediacy of returns, the equivalence of returns and the nature of the interest of each party in the exchange. The traditional way of discussing reciprocity in the service relationship literature is from the perspective of the firm. One example of a relation building initiative from the firm could be: The firm sends out surveys to collect feedback – and the customers are ‘obliged’ to give feedback - *ideally* immediately, by answering every question in the survey, and with great interest in the matter.

CEB manifestations take multiple dimensions (giving feedback, endorsing the firm, posting at blogs) (Van Doorn et al. 2010) which from the firms perspective indeed are potential elements in developing relational exchange with the customer in question.

The problem related to reciprocity is that customers’ CEB manifestations are governed by mechanisms which are not necessarily rooted in the firm’s initiatives for CEB (as discussed in the three papers and in the previous section 5.2). This makes the traditional way of discussing reciprocity obsolete. The issue of reciprocity still holds, but in the CEB landscape is the perspective customer-centric and the ‘new service relationship’ is influenced by the firm’s capabilities and abilities to fulfill its ‘obligations’ towards the customers. The issue of

reciprocity in the CEB landscape becomes clear for instance when customers manifest CEB online and the firm doesn't respond to for instance valuable feedback or harsh word of mouth in comparison to *when* the firm responds to its customers CEB manifestations. This leads this author to suggest, that 'reciprocity' today is eschewed in favor of the customer, and hence is a question of the firm fulfilling its obligations towards the customer's CEB manifestations - and not the customer fulfilling its 'obligations' towards the firm's relational overtures.

Customers' CEB manifestations are driven by goal-mode integration and rather functional oriented, why metaphors along the lines of the firm as a '**partner**' tends to become obsolete and irrelevant from the perspective of customers. It is suggested to re-consider the appealing (for the firm) idea that customers are driven into the relationship as if it is a 'marriage' or a 'friendship' with their telecommunication firm or financial service provider. The firm should avoid potential intrusive and irrelevant overtures (or at least be careful with the relational overtures to which not all customers respond favorably (Guo, Gruen and Tang 2017) in terms of CEB) by realizing that the firm is simply 'a counter-part' or similar expression emphasizing skills and knowledge (Vargo and Lusch 2004) (only exception is 'you and me' scenario II in 'Paper 2', where customers bond with that particular employee (identified in financial services only)). Furthermore, firms most often don't deliver upon the relational overtures in terms of for instance availability and caring when the reality hits the continuous service relationship (due to sales-focus and bottom-line orientation as debated in 'Paper 3'). The findings across the three papers and in the previous sections of this chapter (5) support Gutek and her colleagues (1999) when they contend, that customers don't enter into partnerships with firms, they enter into an agreement with the firm revolving around the firms products and services offered (at least within the type of firms, central in this thesis cf. the exception mentioned above, when the service provider is in fact a human being).

Finally, the findings across the three papers develop the idea forwarded by Shore and colleagues (2006) that more than one **exchange form** is relevant for customers. In fact the findings in this thesis suggest that several exchange forms are relevant for customers over the course of time ('Paper 2') and contingent the customer situation ('Paper 3'). It appears that customers' encounters and interactions at and across touch-points are indeed multiple events, which from a value perspective can be in conflict. This thesis hence suggests an updated perspective on customers' multiple exchanges with the firm, which exceeds the relational versus transactional exchange views since it seems that customers indeed have multiple (simultaneously, in parallel, sequential or not) types of exchanges with the firm over the course of time and contingent the customer situation.

From the perspective of the firm is CEB a challenge. The ‘new service relationship’ which is dominated and influenced by CEB manifestations could be described as a ‘plethora of (service) events’ which is taking place at and across touch-points, in and outside the control of the firm, at technological and/or human touch-points, and last but not least are driven by customers’ motivations.

Still, business managers have to navigate the seemingly unmanageable. The managerial challenges are summarized in the final section (5.4). The objective of the final section is to create an overview over the CEB landscape and to prepare for the concluding chapters (6) and (7).

## **5.4 (How) could the firm manage the un-manageable ?**

### **5.4.1 The ever changing CEB landscape**

This thesis investigates a landscape – CEB – which amongst other is considered dynamic, iterative and decided by the context in which CEB occur.

The reason for investing resources into gaining an improved understanding of CEB is from the perspective of the firm a) to benefit from the indisputable potential value creation via CEB, b) to avoid harmful CEB (which would destroy value) and irrelevant CEB initiatives (which would lead to lost CEB value, and c) to figure out how to navigate in a reality where customers manifest CEB in a manner which is neither always consistent or sequential.

The value creation process as intended by the firm is sometimes found to be disrupted by CEB manifestations and the ‘new service relationship’, which entails (service) events of conflicting valence, probably requires managers to re-think the virtues of the traditional service relationship.

CEB is manifested at and across touch-points both in and outside the control of the firm. Furthermore is CEB manifested at and across touch-points of a human and/or technological nature. CEB is hence facilitated and limited by the evolution (external to the firm) of touch-points, in particular online and technological touch-points.

The pointed out challenges with CEB indicate that it would be difficult for the firm to manage CEB based on a life cycle inspired approach since such an approach is based on pre-figured sequences and compliant adaption (as can be observed for the PLC curve, which is widely implemented by business managers to monitor for instance more traditional marketing initiatives in a sequential manner along the stages in the PLC curve).

This thesis discusses ('Paper 3') the concept of 'customer journey' as a managerial framework for mapping the customers' activities, hence possibilities for value creation at touch-points along the customer journey. The concept of customer journey is as well a sequential model, which is unfolded in pre-figured phases. The customer journey revolves most often around the customer purchase situation, and specifies 'what happens' at touch-points before, during and after the customer purchase situation. It can be observed that the concept of customer journey has been widely adopted in business (McKinsey&Company 2016) and that the academic literature as well has embraced the concept.

As elaborated in 'Paper 3' does the sequential or 'life cycle' approach entail problems for managers, who wish to manage CEB better. CEB is de facto manifested at touch-points of various sorts, in and outside the control of the firm, and of a human and/or technological nature. The problem arises because customers rarely follow the pre-figured sequences sketched by the firm in terms of which touch-points they are active at when manifesting CEB, and because customers' CEB manifestations are indeed related to many other situations than the purchase situation, such as 'I need an overview situation' or 'I need to have the product installed' (cf. 'Paper 3'). Furthermore are customers active not only at singular touch-points, but across touch-points, when they are in a certain 'customer situation'. From the perspective of the customer is the goal to fulfill the issue in the customer situation at and across the touch-points they find best suited to achieve fulfillment. The number of touch-points at and across which the customer is active is found to be relatively low (typically less than five), which should make the managerial task doable. This group of touch-points is in this thesis coined 'customer arenas', which represents the group of touch-points where a customer would be active in a non sequential manner and tied only to a certain customer situation.

By adopting the concept of 'customer arenas' as a managerial tool for managing CEB better, the firm would take up a functional approach. The firm would envision (and investigate) the relevant customer situations and the relevant touch-points, for the customer situations respectively. Furthermore, the firm would envision (and investigate) how to stimulate favorable CEB by understanding what from the customer perspective makes sense at and across the touch-points ( for instance that touch-points are 'co-ordinated' when the customer situation is 'I need installment of a service' and 'connected' when the customer situation is 'I need an overview' cf. Table 3 in 'Paper 3').

From a narrow customer arena perspective – that is 'what happens' inside the customer arena at and across touch-points ? – it would be crucial for the firm to understand the conflicting valences sometimes co-created at various touch-points. (An example of conflict

across touch-points in a customer arena could be the presence of an ‘expert customer’ inclined to give feedback, but same customer is helpless when it comes to self service technology and hence refrains from giving feedback and even flips to the dark side and participate in negatively valenced word of mouth). This pluralistic nature of ‘what happens’ inside the customer arenas respectively should be carefully investigated and understood by the firm. (‘Paper 2’) in order to reduce conflicting events

In a larger perspective is the firm, its customers and the concept of customer arenas under the constant influence of a landscape in flux. The evolution in technology and fast adaption of various technological solutions in general (streaming of movies solutions, surveillance of health related conditions) via online solutions affect the participants and the way they interact today, and how they would be expecting to interact tomorrow (and in the future), also with their financial services provider and telecommunication provider. This entails for the firm who wishes to improve the management of CEB to investigate the behaviors at and across touch-points in the customer arenas and to update the nature of the touch-points in accordance with the technological evolution in general and not only compared with the touch-points offered by the competitors or touch-points where the competitors are active.

Since customers’ CEB manifestations as a phenomenon has entered the scene and could be argued to have turned the service relationship into a ‘plethora of (service) events’ taking place at and across touch-points in an inconsistent and non sequential manner, this thesis suggests business managers to adopt the concept of customer arenas as a possible managerial framework. Customer arenas could create the best possible and relevant point of departure for value creation via CEB.

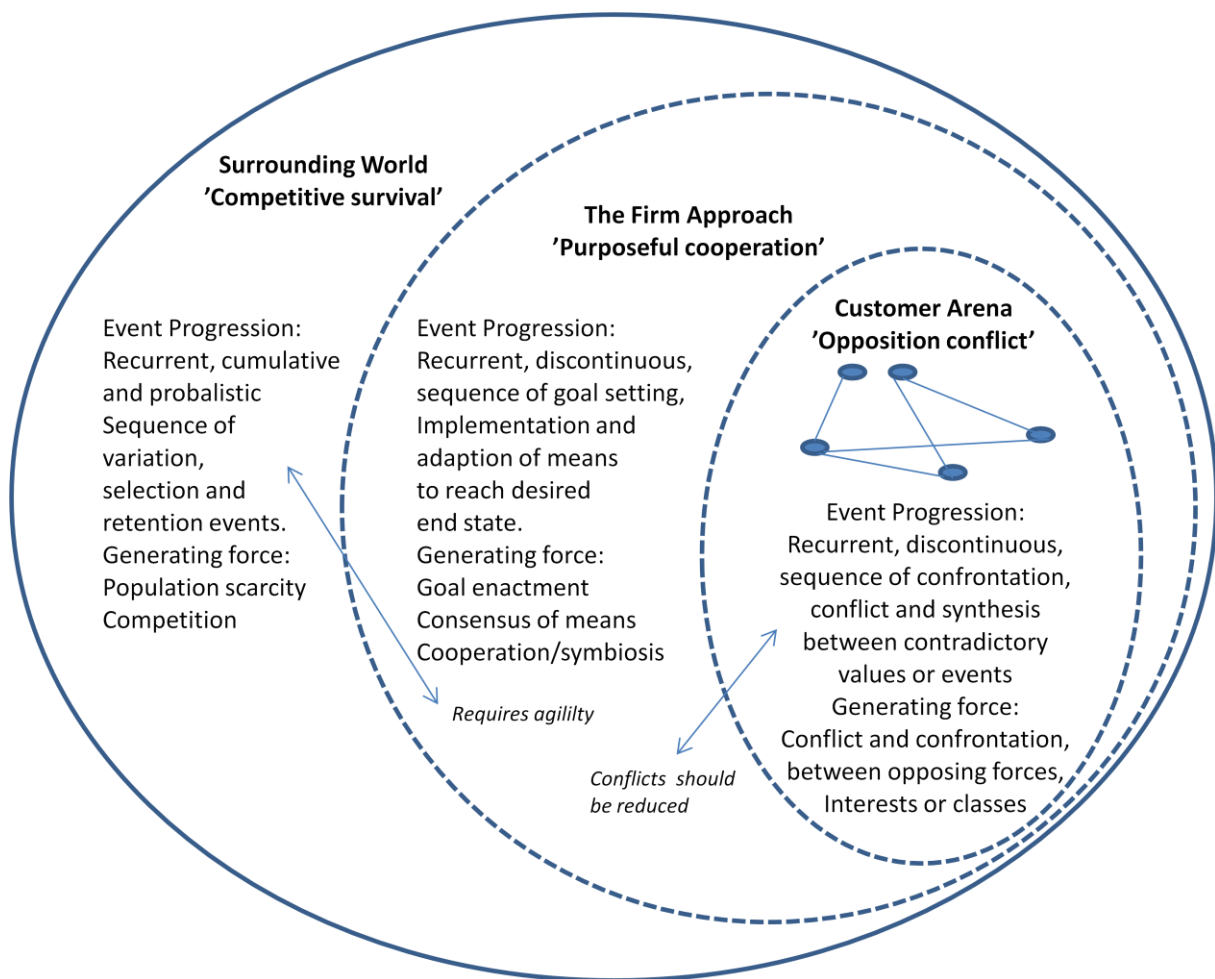
Customer arenas should be implemented with an agile mindset with managers. Business managers should understand customer arenas from both a narrow perspective - which entails conflict and pluralistic customer behaviors across touch-points in the arena - ; and from the larger perspective -which entails that the composition, the nature and ‘what happens’ at and across touch-points in the arena are impacted by evolution in for instance technology and Lifestyle; and customers’ adoption of various new ways of interacting with firms, with other customers and other entities (e.g. governmental bodies or organizations of a non commercial nature).

Business managers would have to manage CEB best possible in this ever changing landscape. The scope of the CEB landscape is illustrated just beneath in Figure 5. ‘The ever-changing CEB landscape’.



**Figure 5. The ever changing CEB landscape.**

Descriptions and key-words are adopted from Van de Veen and Poole (1995)



## CHAPTER 6. CONTRIBUTIONS

### 6.1 Contribution to theory

This thesis contributes mainly to the CEB literature. Contributions for theory are stipulated in each of the three papers (Chapter 4) in detail. Beneath, please find a summary of the contributions made across the three papers, followed by contributions derived from the meta-discussion.

#### *Contribution 1. Paper 1.*

The findings result in an empirically based conceptualization of CEB that expands the hitherto predominantly firm-centric and descriptive CEB literature, especially by illustrating the where, why and how of CEB manifestations. It is suggested that CEB consists of inextricably linked goal-directed behaviors and exhibition of different interaction modes. The findings can be summarized as follows: (I) CEB is motivated by an integration of customers' 'goal-directedness' and their 'interaction mode' when interacting at touch-point(s), (II) customers' goal-directedness determines the touch-points where CEB are manifested, and (III) interaction mode assists goal-achievement and governs why CEB is manifested as it is.

In this regard, the findings reveal that four of the five CEB dimensions (Van Doorn and colleagues 2010) are rather contextual facets and behavioral means to an end, while goal-mode integration explains the motivational forces behind these behaviors.

'Paper 1' contributes to theory with an improved understanding of how dimensions of 'the nature of CEB' are not necessarily side-ordered - meaning that some elements are more pronounced and could be integrated (as was found to be the case in the context of continuous service relationships). Furthermore is a novel dimension suggested, namely customers' interaction-modes. Finally, 'Paper 1' contributes with novel perspectives on customers' inconsistent and not always sequential CEB manifestations as a consequence of the particular goal-mode integration performed by the customer at and across touch-points.

#### *Contribution 2. Paper 2.*

First of all, the findings fill content into the hitherto suggested (but hitherto not elaborated) contextual and shaping elements for CEB. This paper identifies concrete contextual elements and situations in customers' continuous service relationships, which leads to the introduction of eight dominant scenarios.

Second, the findings expand existing knowledge by introducing an empirically underpinned conceptualization of how ‘customer experience’ and CEB are connected in each of the eight scenarios. It is a new approach to investigate CEB in the light of customer experience literature.

‘Paper 2’ expands the finding that CEB is a multifaceted construct, which in a continued service relationship is unfolded by the individual customer, dependent of the situation and co-existing with other customer related constructs such as CEX. ‘Paper 2’ contributes with an improved understanding of how and why CEB is living and breathing in co-existence with customer experience in the continued service relationship as follows: CEB is sometimes manifested by customers to re-experience, reinforce or challenge what the customer is currently / has been experiencing. CEB is as well sometimes embedded in the service relationship to a degree, where customers’ experiences and CEB become deeply intertwined or even become one and same construct. Finally, customers’ experiences are sometimes an antecedent for CEB. ‘Paper 2’ furthermore points out how customers’ behaviors across touch-points are not consistent or sequential but characterized by being events sometimes bearing conflicting valence within one and same service interaction.

### ***Contribution 3. Paper 3.***

‘Paper 3’ suggests to replacing the existing concept of ‘customer journey’ with the novel concept of ‘customer arenas’ to improve the firm’s ability to manage CEB in the context of continuous service relationships.

Customers’ CEB manifestations are often integrated by nature and manifested at and across touch-points (for instance when the customer purchases a service and afterwards gives feedback (knowledge value) or participates in word of mouth (influencer value)) in an inconsistent and non-sequential manner.

The problem with the hitherto dominant concept, customer journey, is the inherent firm-centric approach where customers’ potential behaviors at singular touch-points are mapped in pre-figured sequences and based on the assumption of consistency in behaviors (as is the case in similar approaches such as the touch-point wheel (Davis and Dunn, 2002) or customer activity cycle (Vandermerwe, 1999, 2003)).

The concept of ‘customer arenas’ is integrative and assists the firm in stimulating and managing CEB at and across touch-points by taking point of departure in the customer’s various situations (reasons to be active towards the firm), the affiliated touch-points and how to stimulate favorable CEB in that particular customer situation.

### **Further contributions for theory:**

Furthermore, this thesis contributes with insights regarding the ‘dark side of CEB’, as follows: I) CEB manifestations are in some situations destroying value, and sometimes are the firm’s investments in CEB initiatives not returned (lost CEB value); and II) the thesis explains how and why customers behaviors are not always consistent or sequential and hence how and why the absence of sequential customer behavior might lead to disrupted value creation process (as intended by the firm).

Finally, this thesis contributes with an updated view on the service relationship. The existence of CEB is found to have changed the traditional service relationship into a plethora of (service) events of sometimes conflicting valence, which is labeled ‘the new service relationship’. Some of the often referred to virtues and characteristics of a service relationship is as a consequence being challenged.

This leads the author to suggest that ‘reciprocity’ today is eschewed in favor of the customer, and hence is a question of the firm fulfilling its obligations towards the customer’s CEB manifestations - and not the customer fulfilling its ‘obligations’ towards the firm’s relational overtures. Furthermore are customers’ CEB manifestations driven by goal-mode integration and rather functional oriented, why metaphors along the lines of the firm as a ‘partner’ tends to become obsolete and irrelevant from the perspective of customers. It is suggested to re-consider the appealing (for the firm) idea that customers are driven into the relationship as if it is a ‘marriage’ or a ‘friendship’ with their telecommunication firm or financial service provider. The firm would avoid potential intrusive and irrelevant overtures by realizing that the firm is simply ‘a counter-part’ or similar expression emphasizing skills and knowledge (only exception is ‘you and me’ scenario II (‘Paper 2’) with that particular employee). Finally, this thesis contributes with an updated perspective on customers’ multiple exchanges with the firm, which exceeds the relational versus transactional exchange views by highlighting how customers indeed have multiple (simultaneously, in parallel, sequential or not) types of exchanges with the firm over the course of time and in various customer situations.

### **6.2 Contribution to business**

This thesis contributes mainly to service providers of continuously delivered services. Contributions for business managers are carefully and with great detail and examples described in paper 2 and 3, while paper 1 takes a more theoretical perspective.

This section hence aims at pinpointing, which issues business managers should foremost consider and be aware of in relation to the daunting task of managing CEB.

***a. Understand what customers are experiencing at different levels in the new service relationship***

Customers manifest CEB because they have a goal of some sort with investing resources into the act of manifesting CEB. Customers manifest CEB in connection to what they experience overall, as an aggregated sum of all experiences with the firm; what they experience across touch-points in a service interaction (which from the customer perspective could span several touch-points and endure for a while); and what they experience at singular touch-points. It is beneficial for the firm to understand which different types of customer experiences are dominant at these three levels, since CEB is found to be connected with customer-experiences. The point is to sustain and develop favorable customer experience - CEB scenarios and reduce unfavorable scenarios.

***b. Customers manifest CEB as an integrated part of their everyday Life***

Customers typically don't spend many resources reflecting over their service relationship with their telecommunication or financial services provider. CEB are manifested at touch-points, which makes sense to the customer, and could be manifested at touch-points in – or out of control of the firm and at human and/or technological touch-points.

Business managers should consider why customers are active towards the firm (and its services) and understand which touch-points are relevant for the customer, also those out of control of the firm contingent the customer situation. More important should the firm investigate and understand which features in particular stimulate favorable CEB manifestations, for instance by connecting touch-points (also those outside the firm e.g. expert forum with their website), or ensure collaboration (for instance when the customer is relying on successful communication between call centre and technicians) between touch-points in the customer arena.

***c. CEB is an ever-changing landscape. Is the firm a point of interest in this landscape?***

The firm is an island in the CEB landscape. Inwards the firm should implement a type of CEB management system, which in this thesis is suggested to be the concept of customer arenas. However, the firm will only develop and sustain value via CEB if the firm at all levels

are oriented outwards and develops absorptive capabilities to constantly update the organization and design of the touch-points relevant (in the customer arenas in question).

This entails that business managers investigate customer arenas from a narrow perspective to understand the potential conflicting valences created via CEB at and across touch-points in the customer arena (with the aim to reduce conflict/ to reduce negative value creation); and that business managers investigate customer arenas from a larger perspective to understand how evolution in technology and lifestyle, and the adoption of same, affect their customers' behaviors at and across touch-points (to for instance be up to speed with current market-standards and consumer trends).

***d. Get in tune with 'the new service relationship'***

Business managers might benefit from realizing that the traditional way of thinking about 'service relationships' has been changed due to CEB. The reality of today's service relationship is that customers are agenda setting when it comes to value creation or destruction of value via CEB (or lost CEB value). The new service relationship is eschewed in the sense, that it is up to business managers to for instance reply to posts at portals online (think expert fora or social fora online) and to appreciate unsolicited feedback from customers to nurture the service relationship. Furthermore it might be advisable for business managers to take a good look in the mirror, to question whether the firm is in fact delivering upon facets mirroring a partnership between human beings (for instance, when the firm deflects customers in acute need to self service solutions or hide contact information at the very bottom of their website). Customers don't fancy to be patronized why it might be better to present the firm as a counterpart, emphasizing for instance skills and knowledge to stimulate favorable CEB. Finally, are viable new service relationships characterized by many types of exchanges between customers and firms, which happen in parallel, simultaneously, sequentially or not sequentially.

## **CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS**

### **7.1 In conclusion**

This thesis discusses CEB in the context of continuous service relationships. CEB manifestations are definitely potential sources for value-creation for the firm. CEB can however at times destroy value or cause lost CEB value (when CEB initiatives are not returned).

From the perspective of customers are CEB manifestations part of their everyday Life. Customers manifest CEB to obtain a certain goal, sometimes targeted the firm, and sometimes targeted a group external to the firm. Customers manifest CEB by adopting a certain interaction style to facilitate goal achievement, and the way customers manifest CEB are sometimes inconsistent and follows not necessarily pre-figured sequences.

Customers' CEB manifestations co-exist with the experiences customers have in their service relationships. CEB is sometimes manifested by customers to re-experience, reinforce or challenge what the customer is currently / has been experiencing. CEB is as well sometimes embedded in the service relationship to a degree, where customers' experiences and CEB become deeply intertwined or even become one and same construct, and sometimes is a CEB manifestation a consequence of a certain customer experience.

CEB has changed the service relationship, and some of the recognized cornerstones in what constitutes a service relationship are challenged.

This thesis suggests that CEB manifestations turn the service relationship into a plethora of (service) events of sometimes conflicting valence, which might disrupt the value creation process intended by the firm. This might be the reality of 'the new service relationship'.

These obvious managerial challenges are best solved by the firm, when the firm adopts a customer-centric approach and understands which situation(s) their customers are most frequently in (revolving around the firm). The firm should investigate which touch-points are relevant contingent the customer situation and finally how the touch-points could be best possible organized to stimulate for favorable CEB. This novel managerial concept is labeled 'customer arenas'.

## **7.2 Further avenues for research**

Further avenues for research are mentioned in each ‘Paper 1, 2 and 3’ and additional avenues for research have been suggested in section (4.1), where reflections over the work done with the three papers are presented.

Additional avenues for research:

It would be relevant to investigate CEB also in the context of other types of industries (for instance hospitality, fashion or fast moving consumer goods) as well as other types of markets (for instance business to business or business to government). This study has been conducted at Danish ground, and all participants are embedded in the Danish culture (with the exemption of one of the members of the research team). It might be fruitful to expand the investigations to other parts of the World, both from a cultural perspective, and since Denmark has a high penetration of digital solutions, which is not the case in every other country.

Finally, it would be relevant to expand the research into how CEB changes service relationships (and other types of customer-firm relationships) in greater detail, for instance to which degree, why and how human interaction might safe-guard against unfavorable CEB? Or, whether, how and why some types of customer – service relationships might stimulate particular types of CEB?

The CEB landscape offers several scenic routes and academics and business managers alike will most probably prosper from exploring this novel territory further.



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# APPENDIXES

## Appendix A: Conference proceedings

### I: EMAC 2014

#### **True or False Customer Engagement Behaviour: What can we learn from Customers' Touch point Histories?**

##### **Abstract**

Customers' engagement behaviours are considered an important source of value to the company. So far, the discussion has mainly been conceptual and focused on the company's perspective. By adopting the customer's perspective we investigated how customers perceive their service relationship encounters with a company, using in-depth interviews. We found the following key factors driving and explaining customers' engagement behaviours: (1) transactions matter and inconsistent engagement behaviours are a reality, (2) mundane products and services are still highly relevant for customers, and (3) different degrees of customer experience alignment with services and products exist. Moreover, the distinction between true and false engagement behaviours we suggest indeed is relevant and we could establish their mediating capabilities.

**Key Words:** *Customer engagement behaviours, customer dominant logic, loyalty discrepancy*

**Track:** *Relationship Marketing*

## 1. Customer Engagement Behaviours

Customer Engagement Behaviours (CEB) has recently been introduced as an important perspective for managing customer value (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013), focusing on non-transactional customer behaviour (Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010). CEB is conceptualized “*as a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders*” (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253). CEB are driven by different motivations and are performed through, for instance, a post in a community on the Internet, a suggestion for new product development or word-of-mouth activities online or offline or simply telling others about one’s experiences (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013). The construct CEB consists of customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, behaviours manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and “other” consequences (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Kumar et al. (2010) suggested an additional concept, namely Customer Engagement Value (CEV), which consists of four core dimensions as metrics for the company’s measurement of engagement behaviours. The metrics are an expression of the value (consequence to the company) of customers’ (observable) behavioural manifestations (including transactions). Customer value management (CVM) is to a large extent driven by IT rather than taking a customer centric approach (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013). Yet, the focus on IT rather than on customers might lead to CVM that only measures but not maximizes customer equity (Rust et al., 2004). Hence, there is a need to understand how to motivate, engage and manage customer engagement (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013) and to relate these insights to relationship marketing (Ashley, Noble, Donthy and Lemon, 2011) in a customer centric manner. It is difficult though to empirically assess how these many elements interplay both concurrently and over time and with which consequences (Bijmolt et al., 2010).

Particularly for firms that offer mundane products and services such as energy supply or telecommunication it is challenging to encourage engagement behaviour, since their offerings are commonly regarded as basic necessities that only receive attention in case of malfunctioning. Such firms often use various initiatives to add content and value to their relationships - ranging from customer service closely related to the service offered to company-hosted events such as invitations for concerts or soccer-games, which often have little to do with the firm’s core offerings.

The main challenge for a firm is that customer engagement behaviours are eclectic and consist of many different elements that most often lie outside the customer-company sphere and are embedded in customers’ everyday life (Heionen, Strandvik and Voima, 2013).

While extant research on CEB as a core construct in customer value management mainly takes the firm perspective, our research is concerned with identifying patterns at the individual customer level that are a reflection of patterns at the company level. We investigate, from a customer’s perspective, which factors drive and explain CEB, how various elements lead to either true or false CEB, and which consequences they may have for the customer-company relationship.

## 2. True or False Customer Engagement Behaviours

Based on our findings from 12 interviews with senior executives and managers in a major Danish telecommunication company, we suggest distinguishing between ‘true’ and ‘false’ engagement behaviours. The executives and managers found it challenging to comprehend, and thus manage, CEB due to customers’ inconsistent and divergent behaviours. The executives and managers explained for instance how customers who express their



satisfaction with a certain service encounter or the overall service relationship directly towards the company for instance by calling the callcenter, would not express the same satisfaction with the company in other contexts such as social media or other private spheres. Sometimes customers even expressed dissatisfaction with the company in these other contexts.

Hence, the starting point for our research is the proposition that ‘true’ and ‘false’ engagement behaviours are an important distinction to understand “*how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm*” (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253). We also propose that taking the customers’ perspective instead of the firm’s perspective is adding valuable insights to customer engagement management.

‘True engagement behaviour’ consists of either positive or negative activities but *without conflicting elements*, i.e. consequential behaviours that are *consistent* with the experiences during a given encounter. An example would be the customer who benefits from superb service for instance in the physical shop and endorses the company in a relevant context, or when the customer experiences bad service in a certain touch-point and expresses it directly to the company.

‘False engagement behaviour’ occurs when either positive or negative experiences lead to *conflicting elements* because the consequential behaviours are *inconsistent* with the experience during a given encounter. This is the case when a customer enjoys a company-hosted event such as a concert but does not change his or her attitude towards the company or satisfaction with it. Another example would be the customer who benefits from superb service of the company’s callcenter and expresses his or her satisfaction directly to the company in the subsequent feedback session, but refrains from telling other customers about his or her good experiences, or even engages in negative word-of-mouth activities about the company.

Our research model therefore introduces the concept of ‘true and false engagement behaviours’ as crucial for a better understanding of which factors drive and explain CEB. We also suggest that these behaviours can empirically be captured through customers’ touch point history (cf. Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Research Model**



The concept of *customers’ touch point history* describes the aggregate sum of customers’ encounters with a company over time. Such a record of ‘touches’ is important for services that are provided continuously (for instance energy or telecommunication) and is seen as an important ‘tactic’ to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al., 2004). Touch point stories then are narratives about customers’ various experiences with goods and services (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011), in this case with a telecommunication

company. Customers' touch point (hi)stories therefore contain both antecedents for customer engagement behaviours and the actual behaviours from the customer perspective (C1). Customers' touch point (hi)stories also include transactions (typically purchases) with the company. Transactions with a company are a natural part of a customers' touch point history and therefore considered part of the engagement behaviours (Kumar et al., 2010). The second construct (C2) is following the terminology of the CEB conceptualization by Van Doorn et al. (2010) and is referred to as 'Consequences of customer engagement behaviours.'

### **3. The Study**

The research was conducted applying a qualitative research design with customers of a major Danish telecommunication company. We used semi-structured in-depth interviews for exploring customers' touch point histories and the consequences of their engagement behaviours (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2009). The in-depth interviews were revolving around the customers' histories with the company over time and aided by customers' visual mapping of their encounters and activities (Langley, 1999). These techniques aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements of the interplay between antecedents for customer engagement behaviours and the actual behaviours as well as their various consequences. The informants were selected based on demographic and lifestyle variables in order to provide for greatest possible diversity. They had to be customers for a minimum of two years to ensure that touch point histories were accessible. Saturation was achieved with 13 informants.

The informants were primarily interviewed in their homes. The interviews were conducted in October and November 2013 and lasted on average one hour (the interview guide and additional material are available in Danish upon request). The informants did not receive any information before the interviews, but were simply invited to a 'conversation about service'.

The research was retrospective since the pool of knowledge that we tapped into was in the touch point histories the informants had had with the company over at least two years. The interviews were conducted using various techniques to facilitate memory retrieval (Hansen, 2000). The research was conducted using the interview guide's themes as primary analytic units, yet incorporating new themes if they emerged. In the following, we will present the essence of the interviews concerning the key factors driving and explaining CEB. For reasons of space limitations we have refrained from including interview citations.

### **4. Key Factors driving and explaining CEB from a customer perspective**

#### *4.1 Factor 1: Transactions matter and inconsistent engagement behaviours are a reality*

In general, informants expressed overall satisfaction with and trust in the company. Most of them gave as main reason the company's long history and presence in the Danish telecommunication market.

Informants explained that they saw the company as the 'expert company' and a source of valid information and reliable products and services of all kinds such as information about country codes, arrangements for conference calls or legal information. Many informants pointed out how they engaged with the company by spending time searching the company's website for this type of information and emphasized their intention of concluding a transaction, however often with little luck. The subsequent frustration was typically *excused*

by informants with either internal reflection about lack of own ability to search the website ‘correctly’, or the company’s history of being a monopolistic company as an *ironic* leeway for not attending properly to customers’ needs. This frustration certainly did not encourage customers to improve their current low levels of commitment. Yet, it had no consequences in terms of terminating the relationship nor did it affect the perceived quality of it.

Hence, engagement behaviours in this case are driven by satisfaction and trust, which is in alignment with current causal explanations for CEB (Van Doorn et al., 2010), however, these drivers are rather unrelated to commitment. Another important finding is that informants reported that their actual engagement behaviours were closely tied to a transaction, such as (intention of) a purchase. This finding supports Kumar et al.’s (2010) viewpoint that purchases are also a type of engagement behaviour, thus advocating for a broadening of the CEB conceptualization by Van Doorn et al. (2010).

We also found that the consequences at the customer level of CEB cannot be directly decoded because of a conflict between the actual behavior (for instance customers searching the website without concluding an intended purchase) and the consequence at the individual level (for instance that trust and satisfaction remains unchanged due to customers *excuse* of the company). This inconsistency of customers’ engagement supports our proposal of incorporating the dimension of ‘true and false engagement behaviours’ in CEB.

Furthermore, our results indicate that the consequences for the customer-company relationship cannot be satisfactorily explained (or understood) by simply measuring customers’ behaviours with standard metrics from the company perspective (Kumar et al., 2010). Customers’ own experiences – their touch point stories – are an important and valuable input to understand how and why these inconsistent behaviours occur and develop.

#### 4.2 Factor 2: Mundane services of high relevance in customers’ everyday life

Informants repeatedly pointed out how they considered telecommunication products and services to really matter in their everyday life, thus contradicting the common view of these services to be low-involvement. The main reasons were: (1) Young family members’ dependency on these products and infrastructure for entertainment, (2) work-related dependency on high-performing technological products and infrastructure (think home-office), and (3) the general social focus on keeping up with fast-paced innovations, making it a recurring conversational topic both with colleagues and in private settings.

The combination of principally mundane products and services that just ‘should work’ becoming highly relevant if they don’t proved to be a cocktail that infused and fuelled the interplay between antecedents for engagement behaviours and the actual behaviours, and hence shaped the consequences of engagement behaviours.

Informants for instance reported how they enjoyed *entertaining* their friends and family with stories about how unsuccessful basic service deliveries from the company had cut them off from internet access. They felt confirmed in their despair and frustration by their friends and families’ similar stories (often about other telecommunication companies), thus making the informant feel better about the unfair yet sometimes also comical situation. Yet, none of the informants had left the company based on such bad experiences, since talking to others about it seemed enough as “compensation”. This mediating ability of – in this case false - engagement behaviours was also evident with informants who took on the role of *warning* friends and family against the company, yet they still stayed loyal customers themselves.

Hence, informants predominantly turned to CEB oriented towards their immediate private sphere and, surprisingly, no informants reported about online engagement behaviours.

Since all informants remained loyal customers of the company, it seems that the “private sphere” CEB does not have important consequences for the customer - company

service relationship, mainly due to the mediating ability of engagement behaviours at the customer level. This finding contributes to explaining inconsistent customer behaviours, in this case the discrepancy between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

#### *4.3 Factor 3: Degree of alignment of customer experience and the service or product*

Informants pointed out how they had recommended certain specific products to family and friends based on specific features such as timeliness and stability in the related service delivery and quality of the actual product. It is of course no surprise that such positive experiences lead customers to recommend products to others, but it is relevant to mention that this was reported to happen almost exclusively when the total experience was closely related to the actual product such as a purchase of a streaming service and its technical installation.

Such ‘close to product’ experiences led more often to true engagement behaviours since there were no reports about conflicts between the behaviours and the consequences at the individual level. The true engagement behaviours were pointed out by informants to be driven by motives related to *‘fairness for the company’*. The informants explained how they wished to contribute with for instance positive WOM as a counterweight to common negative WOM, or how they wished to help the company with direct positive or negative feedback. These true behaviours tended to reinforce or improve the quality of the service customer-company relationship.

Overall, informants expressed low levels of commitment towards the company. They highlighted how company-initiated experiences ‘distant from product’ (such as invitations to attend ‘social’ gatherings with for instance a free meal) would not increase their commitment towards the company, but would at a maximum stabilize or neutralize the current level of commitment. The informants explained how they would actually deserve that meal (or similar extra treatment) as a fair compensation for their loyalty. Such ‘distant from product’ experiences led more often to false engagement behaviours since informants reported how their participation, which would be positive per se, would not improve for instance their level of commitment. The false engagement behaviours were pointed out by informants to be driven by motives related to *‘justification of previous service failures or a reward for their loyalty’* in a manner that would at a maximum reinforce existing quality of customer-company relationship.

For companies that offer mundane products and services with high relevance in customers’ everyday life it is relevant to know how to stimulate CEB that adds value to the customer-company service relationship. Our findings indicate that customers’ inconsistent behaviours and their consequences are affected by mechanisms of how customers perceive and align company-initiated experiences with their personal experience of the service or product.

## **5. Discussion and conclusions**

This study investigated, from the customer perspective, which factors drive and explain CEB, how various elements lead to either true or false CEB, and which consequences they may have for the customer-company relationship. The research was conducted by interviewing informants about their touch point (hi)stories with a company that provides mundane products and services. It is likely that had the company been providing another type of products and/or services we might have identified other key factors.

The findings show that the current elements in the conceptualization of customer engagement behaviours from a company’s perspective (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef & Lemon, 2013) is a rather comprehensive mapping of elements that match our informants’

perspective to a large degree. Yet, we could also empirically establish that the distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ engagement behaviours is a relevant addition to CEB that deserves further research into its relationship with, for instance, satisfaction, loyalty and trust. We also showed how transactions are embedded in CEB, and we illustrated that taking the customers’ perspective provides valuable insights about CEB drivers, which in turn inform the management of customer-company service relationships.

The main insights from this study can be summarized as follows: (1) the distinction between true and false engagement behaviours is relevant, (2) engagement behaviours can mediate the discrepancy between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, (3) mediation may lead to passive loyalty and hence not lead to disruption of the relationship, and (4) the three following factors that drive and explain CEB are important: ‘Transactions matter and inconsistent engagement behaviours are the reality’, ‘Mundane services and products with high relevance in customers’ everyday life’ and, ‘Degree of alignment between customer experience and product or service’. This is a step towards a conceptualization of CEB from the customers’ perspective, and therefore also a suggestion for more research into the co-creation features of CEB in a service relationship context.

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**Goal-Role Integration as Driver for  
Customer Engagement Behaviours across Touch-points**

**Abstract**

Customers and firms interact at many different touch-points that enable customer engagement behaviour. By adopting a customer-centric approach we investigated through 20 in-depth interviews what drives service customers' CEB manifestations in touch-points, which the firm either manages, monitors, or manoeuvres between. The key findings are that (a) CEBs are driven by different forms of goal-role integration across touch-points, (b) customers' goal-directedness determines the touch-points where CEBs are manifested, (c) customers' role-playing behaviours determine the nature of CEBs, and (d) customers' role-playing behaviours can change across touch-points, contingent upon goal-directedness. Hence, this study provides rich insights into customer-firm encounters at touch-points, which subsequently define and shape the relation over time.

**Key Words:** *Customer engagement behaviours, touch-points, goal-role integration*

**Track:** *Relationship Marketing*

## **1. Customer Engagement Behaviours (CEB)**

CEB has recently been introduced as an important perspective for managing customer value (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013), focusing on non-transactional customer behaviour (Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft, 2010). CEB is “a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders” (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253). CEB are driven by different motivations and are performed through, for instance, a post in a community on the Internet, a suggestion for new product development, or word-of-mouth activities online or offline (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013; Verhoef et al., 2010). The CEB model consists of customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, actual behaviours, and customer, firm and “other” consequences (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Van Doorn and colleagues (2010) suggest five dimensions of CEB manifestations: Valence, form/modality, scope, nature of impact and customer goals. Kumar and colleagues (2010) emphasize that also financial transactions are customers’ behavioural manifestations revolving around a focal firm.

While these contributions give a conceptual overview over relevant constructs covering possible antecedents, manifestations and outcomes for CEBs from a firm perspective, both empirical data concerning specific drivers and manifestations of CEB as well as an understanding of the customers’ perspective of touch-point encounters is absent. The study presented in the following provides insights into both issues.

## **2. Engagement**

‘Engagement’ is a rather new concept in the context of marketing. Hollebeek (2011) suggests that “engagement represents an individual-specific, motivational and context-dependent variable emerging from two-way interactions between relevant subject(s) and object(s)” (p. 787) and that “... the meaning of engagement is however context specific, giving rise to potential variations in the interpretation of the concept” (p. 786). Hence, the engagement concept is open for flexibility to investigate its facets in different research contexts, and has been adopted by both marketing scholars and practitioners as Customer Engagement (Bowden, 2009), Customer Brand Engagement (Hollebeek, 2011) and Customer Engagement Behaviour (van Doorn et al., 2010).

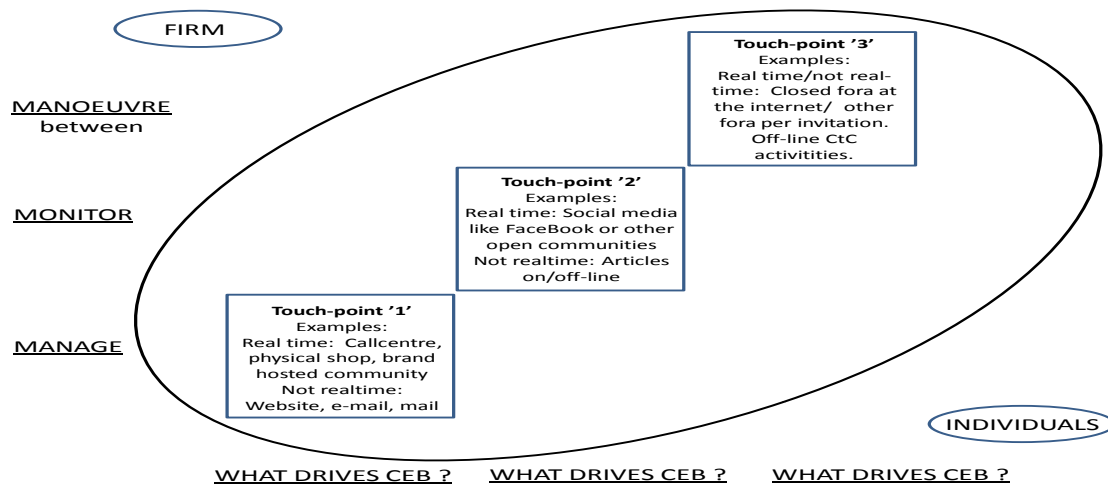
In a recent nomological network analysis, Fehrer, Woratschek, and Germelmann (2014) identified 12 relational concepts (such as satisfaction, trust, and involvement) that can act as both antecedents and outcomes of engagement. This analysis emphasizes the dynamic and iterative nature of engagement. By investigating customers’ engagement at and across touch-points our study adds empirical findings to the conceptualization of engagement as not only being motivational and individual-specific, but also dynamic and iterative.

## **3. Touch-points**

Touch-points constitute encounters between customers and a given firm that facilitate interaction and provide the opportunity for value-(co)creation (Munoz & Kumar, 2004; Prahalad & Venkatesan, 2004; Rust et al., 2004; Vandermerwe, 2003), and hence trigger CEB. Touch-points can be initiated and managed directly by the firm (for instance acquisition and service channels). Additionally, touch-points can lead to customer activities that are outside the firm’s control, but can nonetheless be monitored (for instance open communities on the internet or social media). Finally, there are customer-driven touch-points that are invisible for the firm (for instance word-of-mouth both online and offline). For understanding CEB drivers across touch-points we suggest the following taxonomy (see Figure 1):

- **Touch-point '1'**: A customer can access and have real-time/no real-time interaction directly with the firm (via call-centre, a chat, website, physical shop, firm's e-mail, firm-hosted forum/community) and hence can manifest CEB directly to the firm. The firm can here initiate CEB and manage activities.
- **Touch-point '2'**: A customer can access and have real-time/no real-time interaction with other individuals (via social media, open communities at the internet, articles/responses to articles in media) and hence can manifest CEB in a manner, which is observable for the firm. The firm does not initiate these touch-points and can solely monitor (launch initiatives, intervene, participate in) but not control activities.
- **Touch-point '3'**: A customer has real-time/no real-time interaction with other customers (like closed online / offline fora and inter-personal communication in the private sphere, i.e. all forms of word-of-mouth) and thus displays CEB in a manner that is not observable for the firm. The firm does not initiate these touch-points and can solely try to manoeuvre between them as an indirect reaction to observable consequences.

**Figure 1:** Taxonomy of touch-points and customer-firm interaction options



#### 4. The Study

To investigate CEB drivers from a customer perspective, a qualitative research design was chosen to provide rich insights in a hitherto empirically uncharted territory. 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted for exploring individuals' touch-point histories with their telecommunication and bank provider. Touch-point histories are a narrative approach to collecting data considered appropriate when events are tied to a timeline (Langley, 1999), since they cover the total sum of a customer's interactions with a firm over time. This approach provides the opportunity to explore different CEB drivers in both singular and aggregated interactions. Such a record of 'touches' is especially relevant for services that are provided continuously (such as telecommunication, banking or energy) and is seen as an important 'tactic' to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al., 2004).

Respondents were between 30-55 years old and of both genders to reflect the majority of customers in the large-scale databases of both companies. Customers in this age group have typically experienced different needs in both telecommunication and banking services over time. The in-depth interviews were revolving around the customers' touch-point histories with the firm over time and aided by customers' visual mapping of their various interactions (Langley, 1999). The visual mapping was executed by the informants' use of inspirational images and the informants could choose to either apply images provided by the researchers or



make own drawings on a timeline displayed on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. These techniques helped informants to remember episodes of interactions with the firm and their responses, and thus aimed at covering spatial, temporal, and descriptive elements of CEB drivers as an outcome of subject-object interaction. The 20 informants were primarily interviewed in their homes and interviews lasted on average 70 minutes. All interviews followed the same guidelines, yet were adapted to industry differences where necessary. Informants were invited to a ‘conversation about service’ and did not receive any further information beforehand.

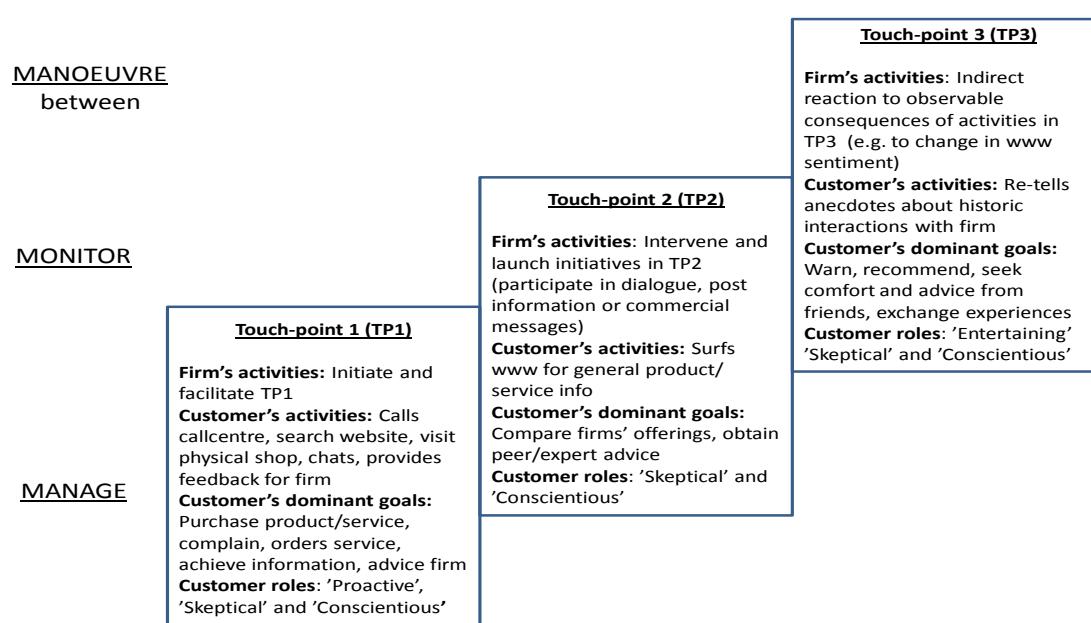
The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed. The text analysis took its starting point in the conceptual CEB model (van Doorn et al., 2010), while at the same time carefully noting all other relevant information from the customer’s perspective.

In the following, we present the essence of the interviews concerning the key drivers for CEB as outcome of customer-firm interactions in various touch-points. For reasons of space limitations we have refrained from including interview citations and detailed industry specific differences. As regards the latter, both industries have in common that they provide services only.

## 5. Key Drivers for CEB across Touch-points

The core contribution of our study with its customer-centric perspective consists of filling the motivation component of the conceptual model by van Doorn and colleagues (2010) and the engagement construct described by Hollebeek (2011). In a nutshell, the interview analysis clearly pointed at two central constructs to understand CEB drivers, namely goal-directed behaviours (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Osselaer & Janiszewski, 2012) and role-playing behaviours (for a similar yet different conceptualization see Bolton & Saxena-Iyer, 2009). Moreover, these two constructs proved to be linked and together to determine which touch-points were used for CEB manifestations, both at a singular touch-point and at various touch-points over time (see Figure 2 for an overview). While goals define the touch-point(s) chosen, roles govern the nature of interaction at different touch-points.

Figure 2: Goal-role integration across touch-points



### 5.1 Goal-directed behaviours in touch-points

Informants repeatedly reported how they only interact with their telecommunication firm and bank because they have a specific goal for the contact, which usually is grounded in a problem-solving need and rarely in a purely informational need. Customers do not interact with these firms unless they are driven by specific goals such as ‘purchasing a product’ or ‘obtaining information’. Informants reported also that they would manifest CEB across different touch-points with the goal of ‘advising the firm’, ‘obtaining peer advice’ or ‘exchanging experiences with friends’. Extant literature describes CEB driven by motivations (van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef & Lemon, 2013) and having a behavioural focus revolving around a focal firm (Hollebeek, 2011). Our findings reveal that motivations and behaviours are inextricably linked through goal-directedness.

Goals play an essential role in purposive behaviour associated with striving, achieving, evaluating or choosing something (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Osselaer & Janizewski, 2012). Our findings show that customers’ goals decide which touch-point is best suited for goal achievement. Customers who manifest CEB subsequent to an encounter (such as giving feedback for the firm, rating a service interaction, seeking peer advice, or recommending the firm to others) also select the appropriate touch-points aligned with their goals.

A given service interaction not only constitutes a touch-point encounter, but is often the trigger for further CEB manifestations. Our findings clearly indicate that CEB in the two service sectors investigated is almost exclusively tied to a financial transaction or existing subscription and/or service contract between customer and firm. While van Doorn et al. (2010) see CEB as behaviours displayed beyond transactions our results are in line with Kumar et al. (2010) who posited that financial transactions are both a starting-point and a catalyst for subsequent CEBs. In other words, financial transactions are often at the centre of goal-directed behaviour that is initiated for solving a given problem (e.g. broadband connection, TV channel subscription, account, loan, investment).

### 5.2 Role-playing in touch-point encounters

As mentioned above, another important result of the interview analysis concerns the way CEB are manifested across touch-points and over time. These CEB manifestations can best be described as role-playing behaviours.

The analysis revealed that many informants used word clusters that defined and aggregated descriptive and explanatory adjectives of the roles they play during a given touch-point-encounter. These four roles are: the ‘*proactive customer*’, the ‘*conscientious customer*’, the ‘*sceptical customer*’ and the ‘*entertaining customer*’.

A ‘*proactive customer*’ focuses on what can be improved with regard to the firm’s product or service and will not hesitate to provide own ‘wisdom’ to enlighten the firm via feedback on the encounter (TP 1) and either recommending or warning a peer (TP 2 and TP 3). The ‘*conscientious customer*’ reflects over his/her contribution during the interaction and negotiation with the firm. The ‘*sceptical customer*’ is resistant to most firm initiatives for subsequent CEB (such as suggesting new product development or rating a service interaction) and her/his CEB-related goals are typically limited to purchasing a product or service (TP 1). Additionally, the ‘*sceptical customer*’ may manifest subsequent CEB that most often will be of a self-promoting character (such as framing him or herself as the expert and goal-achiever in TP 2 and TP 3). Finally, the ‘*entertaining customer*’ most often plays his/her role in TP3 by putting him or herself in the centre of an anecdote typically spinning around previous touch-point encounters managed by the firm.

Moreover, the analysis indicates that customers may change their role-playing across touch-point encounters. ‘*Conscientious customers*’ tend to remain in the same role across touch-points (TP 1 to TP 3), while the ‘*proactive customer*’ tends to change role and

becomes, for instance, an *'entertaining customer'* or *'sceptical customer'* when moving from touch-point 1 to 3. The *'sceptical customer'* takes a rather stable role across touch-points and will only occasionally become the *'entertaining customer'* in a private sphere setting. This finding underlines the importance of considering the timeline in a given customer-firm relationship as opposed to assessing the outcome of single encounters (as is commonly done via satisfaction surveys after an interaction).

Conclusively, we suggest that goal-directed behaviours and role-playing behaviours in touch-point encounters are not only intertwined, but also determine subsequent CEBs. This integration and its outcomes (such as (dis)satisfaction, (dis)trust and ultimately (un)loyalty) is therefore the driving force for further CEB and thus customer-firm relationships, manifested in either one of three touch-points over time.

### *5.3 Touch-point histories: The importance of timeline*

Touch-point histories are narratives about customer-firm interactions tied to a timeline. The timeline approach assesses the chronology of encounters related to specific touch-points and identifies antecedents, correlates and consequences of these encounters. It therefore also facilitates an understanding of the dynamic and iterative nature of CEBs (cf. Fehrer et al., 2014) as well as the identification of specific CEB drivers, both at singular touch-points and across touch-points over time.

Not least this approach contributed significantly to our core finding about the crucial link between goal-directed and role-playing behaviours that drive the initialization and manifestation of CEBs at specific touch-points as well as govern CEBs subsequent to previous touch-point encounters.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study took a customer-centric perspective to understand the drivers of CEB as an outcome of customer-firm interactions across touch-points. In-depth interviews with customers about their activities related to their telecommunication provider and bank revealed that CEB consists of inextricably linked goal-directed and role-playing behaviours at and across touch-points. The findings can be summarized as follows: (a) CEBs are driven by different forms of goal-role integration across touch-points, (b) customers' goal-directedness determines the touch-points where CEBs are manifested, (c) customers' role-playing behaviours determine the nature of CEBs and (d) customers' role-playing behaviours can change across touch-points, contingent upon goal-directedness.

From a conceptual perspective, this study fills the motivation component in Van Doorn et al.'s (2010) CEB model with content, thus expanding our knowledge about CEB drivers. Moreover, the timeline approach enabled empirical findings supporting the notion that CEBs are of a dynamic and iterative nature.

From a methodological perspective, the combination of a narrative technique and visual mapping contributed significantly to a better understanding of what happens at and across touch-points.

From a managerial perspective, the result of the link between goal-directedness and role-playing should inform the design of touch-points and the support and negotiation behaviour of employees active at touch-points.

As regards further research perspectives, it is conceivable that the results might have looked differently in another industry context – not necessarily concerning goal-role integration and goal-directedness but probably revealing different roles. Additionally, the findings of a very detailed interview analysis (that could not be presented here for space limitations) are expected to provide input not only for a better understanding of relational

concepts within the nomological network of engagement (Fehrer et al., 2014), but also for further quantitative analyses.

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**Customer touch point histories:  
A tool to assess customer engagement behaviours in service relationships**

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**Abstract**

Customers' engagement behaviours are considered an important source of value to the firm. So far, the discussion has mainly been conceptual and focused on the company's perspective. By adopting the customer's perspective we investigated what drive and explain customers' engagement behaviours as reactions to their service encounters over time with a firm, using in-depth interviews. We found the following key factors driving and explaining customers' engagement behaviours: (1) mundane product and service environment indeed drives customers' engagement behaviours and mediating capabilities are identified, (2) customers produce (positive) value for the firm through engagement behaviours when perceived alignment between firm-initiated experience and product/service is present, and (3) transactions matter and drive (other) engagement behaviours.

**Introduction**

The concept of customers' engagement behaviours (CEB) has recently been introduced in the service marketing literature as an important source of value to the company (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013). So far, the discussion has mainly focused on conceptualizing relevant constructs, i.e., customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, behaviours manifested in various ways, and customer, firm and "other" consequences (Van Doorn et al., 2010). The concept has been treated predominantly from the company's perspective. Additionally, the emphasis has been on non-transactional customer behaviour (Verhoef, Reinartz & Krafft, 2010).

Kumar et al. (2010) suggested an additional concept, Customer Engagement Value (CEV), consisting of core metrics for the company's measurement of engagement behaviours, namely an expression of the value (consequence to the company) of customers' (observable) behavioural manifestations (including transactions). Customer value management (CVM) is to a large extent driven by company IT (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013), yet the focus on IT rather than on customers might lead to CVM that only measures but not maximizes customer equity (Rust et al., 2004). Hence, there is a need to understand how to motivate, engage and manage customer engagement (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013) in a customer centric manner. It is difficult though to empirically assess how these many elements interplay both concurrently and over time and with which consequences (Bijmolt et al., 2010).

Particularly for firms that offer mundane products and services such as energy supply or telecommunication it is challenging to encourage engagement behaviour, since their offerings are commonly regarded as basic necessities that only receive attention in case of malfunctioning. Moreover, CEB often are eclectic and consist of many different elements that most often lie outside the customer-company sphere and are embedded in customers' everyday life (Heionen, Strandvik & Voima, 2013).

While extant research on CEB as a core construct in customer value management mainly takes the firm perspective, our research is concerned with identifying patterns at the individual customer level that are a reflection of patterns at the company level. We investigate, from a customer's perspective, which factors drive and explain CEB, how various elements in the customer-firm interaction lead to CEB, how various touch-points serve as scenes for initiating versus manifesting CEB, and which consequences CEB may have for the customer-company relationship.

## Background study

Based on findings from 12 interviews with senior executives and managers in a major Danish telecommunication company, we identified challenges related to managing CEB. Overall, all informants found it difficult to comprehend, and thus manage, CEB due to customers' inconsistent and divergent behaviours. They for instance described how customers who express their satisfaction with a certain service encounter or the overall service relationship directly towards the company (e.g., callcenter contact), would not express the same satisfaction with the company in other contexts such as social media or other private spheres. Sometimes customers even expressed dissatisfaction with the company in these other fora.

Hence, the starting point for our research is that it does not seem possible to take an outside-in or firm centric approach when trying to understand what drives and explain CEB. Standard 'cause and effect' such as for instance 'good service leads to positive WOM' is not rich (or always correct) enough to embrace "*how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm*" (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253) and hence to understand and explain which (and how and why) concrete elements in the customer-firm interaction lead to CEB.

The executives and managers reported how CEB sometimes consists of either positive or negative activities *without conflicting responses*, i.e. consequential behaviours that are *consistent* with the experiences during a given encounter. An example would be the customer who benefits from superb service for instance in the physical shop and endorses the company in a relevant context, or when the customer experiences bad service in a certain touch-point and expresses it directly to the company.

The more problematic CEB, however, occurs when either positive or negative experiences lead to *conflicting responses* because the consequential behaviours are *inconsistent* with the experience during a given encounter. This is the case when a customer enjoys a company-hosted event such as a concert but does not change his or her attitude towards the company or satisfaction with it. Another example would be the customer who benefits from superb service of the company's callcenter and expresses his or her satisfaction directly to the company in the subsequent feedback session, but refrains from telling other customers about his or her good experiences, or even engages in negative word-of-mouth activities about the company.

Hence, we propose that taking the customers' perspective instead of the firm's perspective is adding valuable insights to customer engagement management and has great potential to improve the understanding and explanation of both consistent and inconsistent CEB. Customer-firm relationships are built over time and a customer's perception of a firm is an aggregate sum of (past) experiences (Hogan, Almquist & Glynn, 2005; Vandermerwe, 2004). The scene for both initiating and manifesting CEB is constituted by touch-points (any place a firm touches/interacts with customers). Therefore our research takes its point of departure in studying what (and how and why) elements in the firm-customer interaction in various touch-points affect CEB. We suggest that these elements leading to various CEB can empirically be captured through customers' touch point histories.

## Customers' touch point histories

The concept of *customers' touch point history* describes the aggregate sum of customers' encounters with a firm over time. Such a record of 'touches' is important for services that are provided continuously (for instance energy, banking or telecommunication) and is seen as an important 'tactic' to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al., 2004). Touch point stories then are narratives about customers' various experiences with goods and services (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011). Customers' touch point (hi)stories therefore contain both antecedents for customer engagement behaviours and the actual behaviours from the customer perspective. Customers' touch point (hi)stories also include transactions (typically purchases) with the firm. Transactions with a firm are a natural part of a customers' touch point history and might therefore be considered part of the engagement behaviours (Kumar et al., 2010).

## The study

The research was conducted applying a qualitative research design with 20 individuals. We used semi-structured in-depth interviews for exploring customers' touch point histories to capture which, how and why elements in the customer-firm interaction led to engagement behaviours (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2009).

The informants were selected based on demographic and lifestyle variables in order to provide for greatest possible diversity. They had to be customers for a minimum of two years to ensure that touch point histories were accessible. Saturation was achieved with 20 informants. The informants were primarily interviewed in their homes. The interviews lasted on average one hour (the interview guide and additional material are available in Danish upon request). The informants did not receive any information before the interviews, but were simply invited to a 'conversation about service'.

The in-depth interviews were revolving around the customers' histories with (a) their telecommunication provider and (b) their bank over time and were aided by customers' visual mapping of their encounters and activities (Langley, 1999). This technique aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements of the interplay between antecedents for CEB and the actual behaviours as well as their various consequences.

The research was retrospective since the pool of knowledge that we tapped into was in the touch point histories the informants had had with the firm over at least two years. The research was conducted using the interview guide's themes as primary analytic units, yet incorporating new themes if they emerged. In the following, we will present the essence of the interviews concerning the key factors driving and explaining CEB. For reasons of space limitations we have refrained from including interview citations.

## Key Factors driving and explaining CEB from a customer perspective

*Factor 1: Mundane product and service environment indeed drives CEB and mediating capabilities are identified*

Informants repeatedly pointed out how they considered telecommunication and banking products and services to really matter in their everyday life, thus contradicting the common view of these services to be low-involvement. The main reasons were: (1) Young family members' dependency on telecommunication products and infrastructure for entertainment, (2) work-related dependency on high-performing technological products and infrastructure (think home-office and home-banking), and (3) the general social focus on keeping up with fast-paced

innovations and societal economic development, making both types of firms and products/services recurring conversational topics both with colleagues and in private settings.

The combination of principally mundane products and services that just 'should work' becoming highly relevant if they don't proved to be a cocktail that infused and fuelled the interplay between antecedents for engagement behaviours and the actual behaviours, and hence shaped the consequences of engagement behaviours.

Informants for instance reported how they enjoyed *entertaining* their friends and family with stories about how unsuccessful basic service deliveries from the telecommunication firm had cut them off from internet access or how they had been waiting for the bank's callcenter for ages. They felt confirmed in their despair and frustration by their friends and families' similar stories, thus making the informant feel better about the unfair yet sometimes also comical situation. Yet, none of the informants had left the company based on such bad experiences, since talking to others about it seemed enough as "compensation". This mediating ability of engagement behaviours was also evident with informants who took on the role of *warning* friends and family against the firm, yet they still stayed loyal customers themselves.

Hence, informants predominantly turned to CEB oriented towards their immediate private sphere and, surprisingly, only very few informants reported about online engagement behaviours.

Since all informants remained loyal customers of the company, it seems that the "private sphere" CEB does not have important consequences for the customer – firm service relationship, mainly due to the mediating ability of engagement behaviours at the customer level. This finding contributes to explaining inconsistent customer behaviours, in this case the discrepancy between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

*Factor 2: Customers produce (positive) value for the firm through CEB mainly when perceived alignment between firm-initiated customer experience and product/service is present*

Informants pointed out how they had recommended certain specific products/services to family and friends based on specific features such as timeliness and stability in the related service delivery and quality of the actual product. It is of course no surprise that such positive experiences lead customers to recommend products to others, but it is relevant to mention that this was reported to happen almost exclusively when the total experience was closely (in terms of timeline) related to the actual product such as a purchase of a streaming service and its technical installation, or informational events about societal financial development at the bank's premises.

Such 'close to product' experiences led more often to valuable engagement behaviours since there were no reports about conflicts between the behaviours and the consequences at the individual level. The engagement behaviours were pointed out by informants to be driven by motives related to for instance '*fairness for the company*'. The informants explained how they wished to contribute with for instance positive WOM as a counterweight to common negative WOM, or how they wished to help the company with direct positive or negative feedback. These behaviours tended to reinforce or improve the quality of the service customer-company relationship.

Overall, informants expressed low levels of commitment towards both telecommunication and banking provider. They highlighted how firm-initiated experiences 'distant from product' (such as invitations to attend 'social' gatherings with for instance a free meal) would not increase their commitment towards the firm, but would at a maximum stabilize or neutralize the



current level of commitment. The informants explained how they would actually deserve that meal (or similar extra treatment) as a fair compensation for their loyalty. Such 'distant from product' experiences led more often to not necessarily valuable engagement behaviours since informants reported how their participation, which would be positive per se, would not improve for instance their level of commitment. This type of engagement behaviours were pointed out by informants to be driven by motives related to *justification of previous service failures or a reward for their loyalty* in a manner that would at a maximum reinforce existing quality of customer-company relationship.

For firms that offer mundane products and services with high relevance in customers' everyday life it is relevant to know how to stimulate CEB that adds value to the customer-company service relationship. Our findings indicate that customers' inconsistent behaviours and their consequences are affected by mechanisms of how customers perceive and align firm-initiated experiences with their personal experience of the service or product.

### *Factor 3: Transactions matter and drive (other) CEB*

In general, informants expressed expectations towards their telecommunication and banking provider to be 'the expert' and a recognized institution in society.

Informants explained that they saw (ideally) the firm as the 'expert firm' and a source of valid information and reliable products and services of all kinds such as information about country codes, arrangements for conference calls or legal information (telecommunication) and trustworthy advice, knowledge about financial development and specific terms and conditions for private economy (bank). Many informants pointed out how they engaged with the firm by spending time searching the firm's website for this type of information and emphasized their intention of concluding a transaction, however often with little luck. The subsequent frustration was sometimes *excused* by informants with either internal reflection about lack of own ability to search the website 'correctly', or the company's history of being a monopolistic or 'old-school' firm as an *ironic* leeway for not attending properly to customers' needs. This frustration certainly did not encourage customers to improve their current low levels of commitment. Yet, it had no consequences in terms of terminating the relationship nor did it affect the perceived quality of it.

An important finding is that informants reported that their actual engagement behaviours were strongly tied to a transaction, such as (intention of) a purchase. This finding supports Kumar et al.'s (2010) viewpoint that purchases are also a type of engagement behaviour, thus advocating for a broadening of the CEB conceptualization by Van Doorn et al. (2010). Transactions and CEBs are deeply intertwined and thus it makes no sense to separate transactions from CEB for reasons related to how to define a construct (CEB).

We also found that the consequences at the customer level of CEB cannot be directly decoded by the firm because of a conflict between the actual behavior (for instance customers searching the website without concluding an intended purchase) and the consequence at the individual level (for instance that trust and satisfaction remains unchanged due to customers *excuse* of the firm).

Our results therefore indicate that the consequences for the customer-firm relationship cannot be satisfactorily explained (or understood) by simply measuring customers' behaviours with standard metrics from the company perspective (as suggested by Kumar et al., 2010). Customers' own experiences – their touch point stories – are an important and valuable input to understand how and why these inconsistent behaviours occur and develop over time.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated, from the customer perspective, which factors drive and explain CEB, how various elements interplay and lead to CEB, and which consequences they may have for the customer-firm relationship. The research was conducted by interviewing informants about their touch point (hi)stories with firms that provide mundane products and services. It is likely that had the firms been providing another type of products and/or services we might have identified other key factors.

The findings show that the current elements in the conceptualization of customer engagement behaviours from a company's perspective (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef & Lemon, 2013) is a rather comprehensive mapping of elements that match our informants' perspective to a large degree. Yet, we could also empirically establish that CEBs are eclectic, and we found patterns of how specific elements in the customer-firm interaction interplay and lead to CEB. Hence, the topic deserves further research into its relationship with, for instance, satisfaction, loyalty and trust. We also showed that transactions are embedded in CEB, and we illustrated that taking the customers' perspective provides valuable insights about CEB drivers, which in turn informs the management of customer-firm service relationships.

The main insights from this study can be summarized as follows: (1) engagement behaviours can mediate the discrepancy between attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, (2) mediation may lead to passive loyalty and hence not lead to disruption of the relationship, and (3) the three following factors that drive and explain CEB are important: 'Mundane product and service environment indeed drives CEB', Customers produce (positive) value for the firm through CEB when perceived alignment between firm-initiated customer-experience and product/service is present', and 'Transactions matter and drive other CEB'. This is a step towards a conceptualization of CEB from the customers' perspective by focusing on themes for which, how and why elements in the customer-firm interaction in various touch-points lead to CEB.

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**IV: French – Austrian – German Conference 2015**

French-Austrian-German Workshop on Consumer Behaviour

Extended abstract

**Touch-points and customer engagement behaviours  
in the context of continuously delivered products and services**

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**Abstract**

Touch-points are loci for customer and firm interaction where customer engagement behaviours (CEB) are manifested. Contrary to the extant literature on CEB that is mainly conceptual and taking a firm-centric perspective, this study adopts a customer-centric perspective and empirically investigates the connection between different touch-points and CEB. Within the context of telecommunication and banking services, the findings of our qualitative study illustrate that goal-directedness influences CEB at various touch-points, and reveals how customers respond to three different types of touch-point structure (one-stop, connected, and related) that are needed to achieve their goals.

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## Introduction

Firms spend considerable time and effort to design and organize touch-points that engage customers. These efforts become more challenging in a world that is interconnected both off- and online, providing customers with access to numerous touch-points they can choose between. These touch-points range from touch-points in control of the firm (such as the firm's website or call-centre) to touch-points the firm can influence but not control (such as open communities on the internet) and touch-points the firm can neither control nor influence (such as closed communities on the internet or customers' private sphere). Particularly firms that offer mundane products and services such as telecommunication and banking products and services find it challenging to organize touch-points in a way that engages customers, since their offerings are commonly regarded as basic necessities that often only receive attention in case of malfunctioning.

Touch-points are the loci of 'customer engagement behaviours' (CEB) that are considered an important source of value to the firm (Verhoef and Lemon, 2013). CEB is "a construct with the objective to capture how and why customers behave in numerous ways that are relevant to the firm and its multiple stakeholders" (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253). CEB are driven by different motivations and are performed through, for instance, a post in a community on the Internet, a suggestion for new product development, or word-of-mouth activities online or offline (Verhoef and Lemon, 2013; Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010). The CEB model consists of customer-, firm- and context-based antecedents, actual behaviours, and customer, firm and "other" consequences (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Kumar and colleagues (2010) emphasize that also financial transactions are customers' behavioural manifestations revolving around a focal firm. Finally, Hollebeek (2011) suggests that 'engagement' is tied to the individual as an outcome of a subject-object interaction and is therefore determined by the context in which it occurs.

Extant literature on CEB is mainly conceptual and adopts a firm-centric perspective. Moreover, an understanding of touch-points as loci for CEB manifestations is basically absent. Since touch-points constitute the opportunity for customers to connect with the firm, it seems highly relevant to investigate this topic from a customer-centric perspective.

## Touch-points and CEB

CEB can be manifested at numerous and different touch-points. Touch-points are referred to as places, moments, situations, or instances for possible value-(co-)creation (Munoz and Kumar, 2004; Prahalad and Venkatesan, 2004; Rust et al., 2004; Vandermerwe, 1993, 2003). Extant literature focuses mainly on functional and descriptive aspects such as whether the touch-point is human or technological or on-line or off-line (Hogan, Almquist and Glynn, 2005). Other authors suggest mapping the customers' activities before, under and after a purchase of a certain product or service with the purpose for the firm to identify value-gaps (Customer Activity Cycle (CAC): Vandermerwe, 1999, 2003) and thereby identifying those touch-points to that harvest value, though addressing only touch-points the firm manages and controls.

Building on the assumption that "communication planning tools should correspond reasonably with how human minds actually work" Jenkinson (2007, p.166) focuses on developing an integrative model for touch-point planning by integrating the 'behavioural school' with the 'attitudinal school' in and across touch-points. The resulting CODAR planning tool exemplifies the value of a customer-centric approach to touch-points. Other authors such as Chattopadhyay and Laborie (2005) also take a customer-centric approach to contact points (i.e., touch-points) when developing and conducting 'The Market Contact

Audit' (MCA) in the context of managing brand experience. The MCA does, however, not take into consideration how customers interact with brands (firms) driven by different motivations and goals (for instance, to buy a product, to complain or to endorse the brand or firm in the private sphere) - which is highly relevant in the case of CEBs.

Based on the above, our study contributes to and extends extant literature by taking a customer-centric perspective on touch-points as loci for CEB manifestations with the purpose of understanding how customers behave in and across the three types of touch-points described above. Moreover, we are not only focusing on singular touch-points in relation to a purchase (like the CAC) but investigate how customers manifest CEB across touch-points in the context of mundane products and services delivered in a continuous service relationship.

## **Methodology**

Since the focus of this study is on individuals' behaviours revolving around their telecommunication and banking service providers, data were collected through 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with customers from various firms. We applied a narrative approach, since narratives are a rich source in terms of nuance and elaborated explanations (Langley, 1999). We have labelled these narratives 'customers touch-point histories', defined as 'a customer's own account of experiences with specific goods, services or companies' (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011). The narrative approach provides access to histories that are "freely told by customers, not just recounted in response to the company's requests for explanations of actions, thoughts, and outcomes" (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011, p. 576). Hence, a customer's touch-point history describes the aggregate sum of the customer's interactions (touches) with a firm over time. Such a record of 'touches' is important for services that are provided continuously (such as energy, banking or telecommunication) and is seen as an important 'tactic' to understand the effectiveness of various touch-points (Rust et al., 2004).

Visual mapping assisted informants in remembering and retelling their touch-point histories. Visual mapping was executed by the informants' use of inspirational images (printed and physically present). Informants could choose to apply images to or make own drawings on a timeline that had been prepared on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. These techniques helped informants to remember episodes of touches with the firm and their own behaviours and thus aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements. The informants were primarily interviewed at their homes and interviews lasted on average 60 minutes. The informants did not receive any information before the interviews, but were simply invited to a 'conversation about service'. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis was undertaken in two stages. First, all transcripts were analysed using an open coding approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), which allowed some initial themes to emerge. Themes were then subjected to selective coding in the second stage to explore commonalities between data sources. In the second stage we analyzed informants' touch-point histories using an inductive categorization process (Spiggle, 1994). Due to page limitation we have refrained from including verbatim citations in the following findings section.

## **Findings**

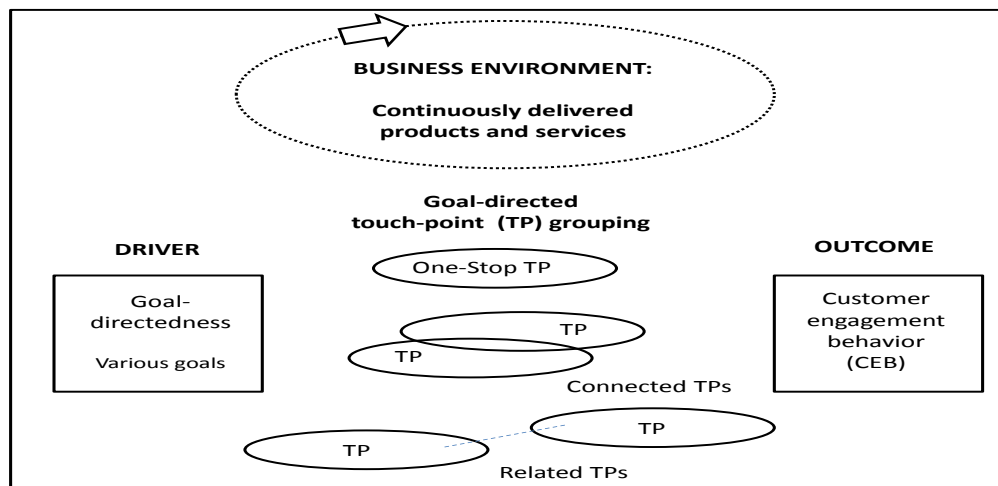
One important finding of the analysis was that customers are driven by specific goals when engaging in touch-points of any kind. This goal-directedness (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999; van Osselaer and Janiszewski, 2012) determines not only CEB manifestations but also how customers actually respond to touch-points when interacting with the focal firm.

Our analysis identified three types of touch-point structure:

- (1) The '*One stop*' touch-point where the customer achieves his or her goal at one single touch-point, such as 'service request via call centre' or 'endorse firm via social media'.
- (2) The *connected touch-points*, i.e. touch-points that are connected by the firm where the customer achieves his or her goal via more than one touch-point, such as 'service-request deflected by firm from firm's call-centre to website', or 'purchase of product deflected by firm from firm's physical shop to online-shop'.
- (3) The *related touch-points*, i.e. touch-points that are related by the customer where the customer achieves his or her goal via more than one touch-point such as the customer's need to look up a phone number at the 'firm's website' before calling 'firm's call centre' or the customer's search for information about a certain product in an 'expert forum on the internet' related to same search on the 'firm's website'.

The difference between '*connected touch-points*' and '*related touch-points*' is that connected touch-points are provided by the firm and need to be activated for goal achievement (hence experienced as 'connected' by the customer), while related touch-points are activated on the initiative of the customer. In all three cases though, touch-points are chosen contingent upon goal-directedness.

**Figure 1:** Customer-centric conceptualization of touch-points as loci for goal-directedness as CEB driver



Customers who achieved their goal via a 'one-stop' touch-point were more likely to manifest CEB, both during the actual service-interaction (such as giving feedback when requested at the end of the service-interaction) and after the actual service-interaction, i.e. subsequent CEBs (such as endorsing the firm in social media). These customers were furthermore also more likely to manifest favourable (for the firm) CEB, such as endorsing the firm vis-à-vis friends and family or giving constructive input to the firm regarding products or service.

Customers who achieved their goal via 'connected' touch-points showed less favourable CEB both with regards to the actual service-interaction and sub-sequent CEB. These consisted, for instance, of customers' non participation in feedback requests from the firm. 'Time spent' seems to be one crucial factor here, with customers not wishing to spend additional time on manifesting CEB after time-consuming deflection manoeuvres from the firm (for instance, from web-site to call centre or vice versa).



A similar result was found with customers having to use related touch-points in order to obtain goal achievement. For instance, time-consuming search at the firm's website for a telephone number for the firm's call centre. Table 1 summarizes the findings concerning the relationships between touch-point groups, dominant touch-points in each group and informants' input of which elements and actions - beyond customers' goal achievement - would stimulate their favourable CEB manifestations.

**Table 1:** Touch-point types and customer-firm interaction

	<b><u>Dominant Touch-points (TPs)</u></b>	<b><u>Elements &amp; Actions</u> <u>which stimulate favourable CEB</u> <u>(beyond goal achievement)</u></b>
<b><u>One Stop</u> <u>Touch-points (TPs)</u></b>	<p><b>A: TPs the firm can control:</b> Call Centre Firm's website Physical shop</p> <p><b>B: TPs the firm can influence but not control:</b> Open web communities e.g. Facebook</p> <p><b>C: TPs the firm can't influence nor control:</b> Friends/Family</p>	<p><b>A:</b> TPs ability to remember customer's recent interaction(s) (TP history) - Shortest possible 'time spent' in TP - Knowledge is provided on demand - Direct activation of customer's TP history in real time segmentation e.g. In call centre or web-site</p> <p><b>B:</b> Relevant knowledge is provided by firm proactively</p> <p><b>C:</b> Firm's understanding and emphasizing use of relevant talking-points</p> <p><b>COMMENT:</b> It is customers' preferred scenario to achieve goal in 'one stop' TP</p>
<b><u>Connected</u> <u>Touch-points (TPs)</u> <i>by the firm</i></b>	<p><b>A+A: TPs the firm can control:</b> Call Centre -&gt; Web Site Physical Shop -&gt; Web Site Web Site -&gt; Call Centre Web Site -&gt; Physical shop</p> <p><b>A+B: TPs the firm can influence but not control:</b> Web Site -&gt; Open communities Open Communities -&gt; Web Site</p>	<p><b>In general:</b> Simulate 'one stop' scenario</p> <p><b>A+A:</b> - Ability to recognize customer across touch-points - Shortest possible 'time spent' in total in TP's - Relevant knowledge is provided proactively in receiving touch-point - Reference to customer's current goal with interacting across TPs</p> <p><b>A+B:</b> - Relevant knowledge is provided by firm proactively across touch-points</p>
<b><u>Related</u> <u>Touch-points (TPs)</u> <i>by the customer</i></b>	<p><b>A+A: TPs the firm can control:</b> Web Site -&gt; Call Centre Physical Shop -&gt; Web Site</p> <p><b>A+B: TPs the firm can influence but not control:</b> Call Centre -&gt; Social Media</p> <p><b>A+C: TPs the firm can't influence nor control:</b> Call Centre -&gt; Friends and family</p>	<p><b>In general:</b> Make it easy for customers to get as close as possible to 'one-stop' scenario</p> <p><b>A+A:</b> - When possible: relate TP's upfront - Relevant knowledge is consistent across touch-points</p> <p><b>A+B:</b> - Firm's understanding and emphasizing use of relevant talking-points</p> <p><b>A+C:</b> - Firm's understanding and emphasizing use of relevant talking-points</p>

## Discussion and conclusion

Extant literature treats touch-points mainly from a firm-centric perspective (Hogan, Almquist and Glynn, 2005; Vandermerwe, 1999, 2003) and unrelated to CEB. Taking a customer-centric perspective, our study illustrates that goal-directedness drives CEB at touch-points and how customers then respond to three different touch-point interactions, one-stop, connected and related touch-points. The findings reveal that customers often find themselves involved in various touch-points either because the touch-points are connected by the firm, or because customers have to relate touch-points to one another in order to obtain goal achievement and hence be able to manifest CEB. When customers find themselves deflected from one touch-point to another on the firm's initiative or when customers must relate touch-points on their own initiative, there seems to be a significantly greater risk of decreasing engagement or even stimulating un-favourable CEB.

Our findings also demonstrate that indeed "context matters". First of all, the context of this study consists of services perceived as mundane, namely telecommunication and banking. Engagement in such services predominantly occurs in connection with financial transaction when purchasing a product and service, and in case of malfunctioning. It is highly likely that the connectivity between CEB and touch-points is displayed differently in other industries, for instance fashion, automobiles or travel. Secondly, goal-directedness as driver for touch-point choice and CEB is in itself a "context". Thirdly, the firm's organization and structure of touch-points provides the context within which a customer is able to manoeuvre and achieve her/his goals. As our findings reveal, this room for manoeuvring plays an important role for the ensuing valence of CEB.

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## Appendix B:

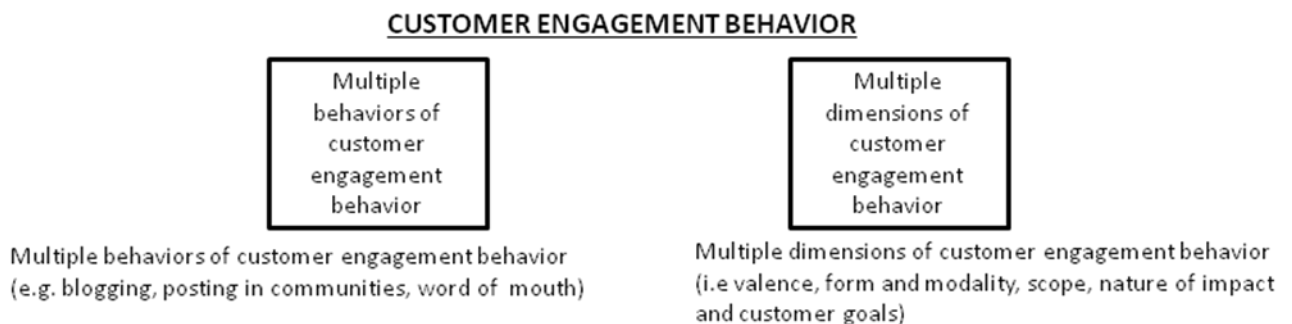
### Questionnaires and composition of groups of informants

#### Appendix B I: Interviews with individuals

##### **The questionnaire**

The questionnaire prepared for the interviews with individuals is developed according to guidelines presented by Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2008, p.405-6) in order to secure an optimal flow and wording of the questions. The completion of the interviews follows guidelines suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 177) for instance how to ‘stage the interview’, pay attention to themes and dynamics in the interview situation and to probe for deeper insights.

The content (the theme) of the interviews with individuals is structured around what is found in extant literature to be the dominant conceptualization of CEB (Van Doorn et al. 2010).



The questions are however relaxed and formulated in a manner, which is in accordance with the philosophical, ontological and epistemological assumptions in this research (cf. chapter 3), hence in accordance with the nature of a qualitative research methodology. The questions are formulated in an open and inviting manner and makes use of lay-persons terminology to stimulate for insights into informants’ various subjective meanings. The interview is framed by the researcher to be a history about what happens in the informant’s (customer’s) service relationship with his/her telecommunication firm and financial service provider respectively.

The objective is hence to stimulate informants to tell their touch-point histories as a free account of what happened over time in the service relationship and to probe informants to elaborate on their explanations. The overall structure and themes to be covered via the

interviews are: What happened (CEB)? Where did it (CEB) happen? (touch-point) Why did it happen? What was the consequence(s)?

Visual mapping (Langley 1999) assisted informants in remembering and retelling their touch-point histories. The visual mapping was executed by the informants' use of inspirational images (each image was printed and available to informants during the interview). The informants could choose to apply the images or make own drawings on a prefabricated timeline on an otherwise blank sheet of paper. This technique helped informants to remember episodes of encounters with the firm and their own behaviors, and thus aimed at embracing spatial, temporal, eclectic and descriptive elements of events in the service relationship.

### **The questionnaire and waiver in Danish**

Uformel samtale – etablering af comfort-zone.

Hvilket teleselskab er du kunde i? / Hvilken bank er du kunde i?

#### **INSTRUKTION:**

Der ligger et stykke A4 papir og en kuglepen foran dig. Der er tegnet en tidslinje på, der går fra venstre til højre. Jeg vil gerne bede dig om at skrive eller tegne på tidslinjen når du synes det er relevant, i forhold til det du fortæller mig.

Det kan fx. være, når du synes det er særlig vigtigt, det du fortæller – eller noget, der har gjort særlig indtryk på dig.

Der ligger også nogle billeder, du kan lade dig inspirere af undervejs i samtalen. Du må gerne lægge billederne på tidslinjen også.

A. Fortæl, hvordan din historie med XX begyndte?

B. Fortæl, hvordan du har været i kontakt med XX igennem tiderne?

Probing B, fx: Hvad skete der? Hvorfor skete det? Og hvad skete så?

C. Er det sket, at du har fortalt om XX til andre?

Probing C, fx: Hvad handlede dine historier om? Hvordan lød de? Hvor skete det? Hvorfor gjorde de det? Hvad fik dig til fortælle disse historier? Og hvad skete der så?

D. Er det sket, at du har været i kontakt med XX, hvor det ikke handlede om at købe et produkt?

Probing D, fx: Hvad fik dig til at kontakte XX, når det ikke handlede om at købe et produkt? Hvad handlede kontakten med XX om? Hvor skete det? Hvordan lød det? Hvad foregik der? Hvorfor lød det sådan? Og hvad skete der så?

E. Er det sket, at du har deltaget i socialt betonet arrangement, hvor XX var repræsenteret?

Probing E, fx: Hvad skete der ved arrangementet? Hvor skete det? Hvordan lød det? Hvordan deltog du? Hvorfor deltog du? Hvordan foregik det? Hvordan var stemningen? Og hvad skete der så?

Jeg vil gerne bede dig om at tænke videre over det vi har talt om i dag. Hvis du kommer i tanke om flere historier med xx, må du endelig kontakte mig.

Afrunding. TAK!

### **Tilkendegivelse om deltagelse som 'informant' i interview**

Jeg er indforstået med at være informant i forbindelse med Helle Haurum's Phd projekt på CBS.

Navn på informant/ sted/ dato: \_\_\_\_\_

- Informanten sikres anonymitet
- Informanten kan til hver en tid afbryde interviewet
- Informanten kan afvise at svare på spørgsmål
- Informanten deltager frivilligt

Læst og forstået:

.....

### **The composition of the group of informants (individuals / customers)**

The composition of the group of informants is based on the following rationale:

- Since females and males are both users of the products and services offered by telecommunication and banking firms a 50/50 representation is considered relevant.
- The overall age span for the informants is 30 – 55 years. This age group is expected to have had several interactions with both telecommunication firms and financial services provider. There is however intra-group differences (native/ not native internet-users and life-cycle related needs in terms of for instance financing of household goods) why it is relevant to ensure some degree of diversity across the overall age span.
- The products and services in focus in the research are characterized by some complexity (for instance mortgage-loans or infra-structure for internet) why it is relevant to ensure best possible diversity with regards to informants' intellectual capabilities. Education and employment is not necessarily perfect proxies, but is a possible indicator hereof and diversity is strived for.
- Since the products and services in focus of the research are common necessities for all kinds of households irrespective of geographic location, it is considered relevant to ensure some degree of diversity across geographic location of the informants' residence, i.e. urban, sub-urban or country-side.
- Civil status is included as the final criteria since it is expected that singles - within the overall age span - might at least to some degree lead a different life-style that for instance married couples.

(Hair, Bush & Ortinau 2008)

Informants were selected to represent customers with at least two years of service relationship with the same telecommunication and financial services provider. This criterion

was necessary to ensure that indeed histories could be retrieved and not only single encounters (as in previous research, see Ojiako, Chipulu, and Graesser 2012).

22 individuals were interviewed. 2 of the interviews were subsequently discharged due to job-related bias (x is employed with a financial institution) and bias due to the nature of the two industries focal for the research (v refused to answer the questions).

<b>ID</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>EDUCATION YRS + FIELD</b>	<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>RESIDENCE</b>	<b>CIVIL STATUS</b>
<b>A</b>	Female	46-50	1-2 Administration	Secretary/ Ministry	Urban	Single
<b>B</b>	Male	46-50	5+ Engineer	Sales Manager/ Hydraulic Pumps	Sub Urban	Married
<b>C</b>	Male	46-50	1-2 Pedagogue	Support Worker	Sub Urban	Married
<b>D</b>	Female	51-55	3-4 Management	Teacher	Sub urban	In a relationship
<b>E</b>	Male	36 - 40	None	Lean Manager/ Industry	Sub urban	Married
<b>F</b>	Female	46-50	5+ Law	Partner/Insurance Company	Sub urban	Married
<b>G</b>	Male	46-50	3-4 Marketing	Sales Manager/ Entertainment	Sub urban	Married
<b>H</b>	Male	46-50	3-4 Management	Sales Director / Office supply	Country-side	Married
<b>I</b>	Female	30-35	3-4 Pedagogue	Kindergarten	Urban	Single
<b>J</b>	Female	30-35	5+ Law	Internal legal Counselor / firm	Sub urban	Married
<b>K</b>	Female	41-45	1-2 Economy IT	Self employed / IT-systems	Sub urban	Married
<b>L</b>	Male	41-45	5+ Communication	Sales director / Pharma	Country side	In a relationship
<b>M</b>	Female	41-45	3-4 Teacher	Self employed / Coaching	Sub urban	Married
<b>N</b>	Female	36 – 40	5+ Marketing	Analytics / Energy	Urban	In a relationship
<b>O</b>	Male	41-45	5+	Currently un-	Urban	In a



			Finance	employed		relationship
<b>P</b>	Female	46-50	5+ Marketing	Secretary / Ministry	Suburban	Married
<b>Q</b>	Male	30-35	5+ Marketing	Teacher	Countryside	Single
<b>R</b>	Male	46-50	5+ Economy	Administrator / Engineering Firm	Sub urban	Married
<b>S</b>	Female	41-45	1-2 Administration	Secretary / Personal Care	Sub urban	Married
<b>T</b>	Female	46-50	3-4 Pedagogue	Associate Professor	Sub urban	Married
<b>U</b>	Male	41-45	5+ ?	?	Sub urban	Married
<b>V</b>	Female	51-55	None	Self employed / Dietist	Urban	Single
<b>X</b>	Male	51-55	3-4 Economy	Advisor / Bank	Country side	Married

## **Appendix B II. Interviews with employees in the telecommunication firm:**

### **The questionnaire**

The questionnaire prepared for the interviews with employees in the telecommunication firm is as well (follows same procedure as interviews with individuals) developed according to guidelines presented by Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2008, p.405-6) in order to secure an optimal flow and wording of the questions. The completion of the interviews follows guidelines suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 177) for instance how to ‘stage the interview’, pay attention to themes and dynamics in the interview situation and to probe for deeper insights.

The content (the theme) of the interviews with the employees is structured around literature discussing touch-points (Hogan, Glynn and Almquist 2005; Prahalad and Venkatesan 2004) as the scene for subject-object interaction (Hollebeek 2011) and the place where CEB is initiated by the firm (Bijmolt et al. 2010).

The questions are however relaxed and formulated in a manner, which is in accordance with the philosophical, ontological and epistemological assumptions in this research (cf. chapter 3) hence in accordance with the nature of a qualitative research methodology. The questions are formulated in an open and inviting manner and makes use of a terminology suitable to the employee in question, to stimulate for insights into informants’ various subjective meanings. The interview is framed by the researcher to be a conversation about the firm’s ‘service’.

The overall structure and themes to be covered via the interviews are: What happens (CEB)? Where is CEB initiated? (touch-point) Why is CEB initiated as it is? What is the consequence(s) of CEB initiatives? Which organizational reflections are relevant to consider? The topics are approached indirectly to avoid employees’ expressing the firm’s values and beliefs on the cost of their own values and beliefs.

### **The questionnaire in Danish:**

Uformel samtale med henblik på at etablere comfort-zone.

Hvor gammel er du i 10 års interval?

Hvilken uddannelse har du?

Antal år i firm?

Jeg ved, at the firm har et strategipunkt, der handler om at tage ansvar for kunden (TAK).  
Hvad betyder TAK i dagligdagstale?

KUNDE OPLEVELSER i touch-points. Hvor ? Hvorfor ? Hvordan ?

INTERACTIONS i touch-points. Hvor ? Hvorfor ? Hvordan ?

HELIKOPTER PERSPEKTIV – Hvilke touch-points er afgørende for the firm – customer ?  
Hvor ? Hvorfor ? Hvordan ?

TOUCH-POINTS – Hvilke skaber værdi ? Hvilke gør ikke ? Hvor ? Hvorfor ? Hvordan ?

### **The composition of the group of employees (the informants)**

12 semi-structured interviews with employees of a telecommunication firm were conducted, focusing on the firm's initiatives at and across touch-points. The informants are selected by the firm to represent the greatest possible diversity in terms of experience, work domain, gender and age. Both managers and executives who themselves serve as 'a touch-point' (such as the manager for technicians and the manager for online solutions) and managers and executives in more administrative functions (such as the executive for human resources and an employee in the legal department) were included in the group.

ID	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION	POSITION in the FIRM	YRS in FIRM
1	Male	29	Diploma / Bachelor's degree	Mid-level manager CX Website	6
2	Male	39	Technician	Mid-level manager Customer contact	15
3	Male	40-50	?	Director Online Sales	0-1
4	Female	45	Master's degree (Cand.Oceon)	Senior Vice President Business to Business	17
5	Male	32	Master's degree (Cand.Mag)	Mid-level manager Functionality Website	0-1
6	Male	42	Master's degree (Cand.Jur)	Employee, Lawyer Legal department	2
7	Male	28	None	Mid-level manager Call centre Copenhagen	2
8	Male	33	Business College	Mid-level manager Hotline	13
9	Female	35	Diploma's degree (Teacher)	Mid-level manager Hotline + FaceBook + SoMe	4
10	Female	40-50	Master's degree (Cand. Psych) + MBA	Senior Vice President HR	5
11	Female	35	Master's degree (Cand.Merc. IMM)	Senior Vice President CMO	2
12	Male	55	Diploma's degree + MBA	Senior Vice President Physical stores	13

**Appendix B III: A summary of the research-log.**

OBSERVATIONS at TOUCHPOINTS	
<b>CALL CENTRE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primarily very young employees (25 yrs +/-)</li> <li>- Mainly male employees</li> <li>- Messy</li> <li>- Loud</li> <li>- Lots of energy</li> <li>- Lots of conversation across desks</li> <li>- Welcoming atmosphere</li> <li>- Low-key adress</li> <li>- No frills</li> <li>- Wall is decorated with sales charts</li> <li>- Posters at the wall shows individual employees' performance</li> <li>- A screen displays number of customers waiting in line</li> </ul>
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dominated by commercial messages</li> <li>- Closed world – no links</li> <li>- Focus is at attracting new customers via ‘good deals’</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
<b>ONLINE SHOP</b>	Do
<b>PHYSICAL SHOP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take a number.. wait in line</li> <li>- Employees wear uniforms</li> <li>- Looks cheap ( the uniforms ) synthetic</li> <li>- Mainly male employees</li> <li>- Masculine colors</li> <li>- Orderly</li> <li>- ‘Supermarket’ layout – you enter through a gate</li> <li>- Employees are very helpful and correct</li> <li>- Boring design – no pleasant surprises</li> <li>- Good deals every-where</li> <li>- Yellow signs scream cheap, cheap</li> <li>- Could be any store with tech stuff</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
<b>FACEBOOK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dominated by competitions</li> <li>- Relevant replies from employees to technical issues raised by</li> </ul>

	<p>participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employees work during the night?</li> <li>- No employees react to participant criticism ?</li> </ul>



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