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Embedding Memorable Experience to Customer Journey

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Abstract. Customer journey mapping (CJM) is a well-known customer-oriented technique used to document and understand a customer’s emotional responses (dissatisfaction-satisfaction) to a product or service on an individual journey for improving the overall experience. Despite the widespread use of CJM, the intention has been centered on providing a good and failure-free customer journey but may not guarantee success in today’s competitive market wherein the aim is towards creating customer loyalty. Type and characteristic of experiences that create memorable experience have not yet been intentionally considered in this technique. Meanwhile, the 4Es model describing four distinct types of experience has been pervasively used, especially in the tourism industry, for providing the richest customer experience. Researchers found that the 4Es model has a positive effect on customer memories and loyalty. Therefore, presented in this paper is an approach to embedding memorable experience to customer journey by incorporating the 4Es model in CJM. A kick-off meeting program of a curriculum development project was used to illustrate the implementation of the proposed approach. The results show that the approach can be practically applied and appropriate for continuous improvement.

Keywords: Memorable Experience, Customer Journey, Experience Design.

1 Introduction

Customer journey mapping (CJM) is a well-known customer-oriented technique originated in the 1960s. CJM assists in documenting and understanding a customer’s emotional responses, whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied, to products and services in a journey that a person may undertake for a company to improve the overall customer experience [1]. Customer pain points are subject to improvement.

The concept of the CJM, “walk in the customer’s shoes” [2], and its applications have been seen in various fields of research [3]. For example, in the UK’s National Health Service, CJM aided healthcare providers to visualize patients’ journey map and to understand what to do and where their focus should be paid to improve the patients’ experience [1]. At Birmingham City University Library and Learning Resources, CJM was used to improve students’ experience and satisfaction [4]. CJM was also incorporated with service assembly concept to redesign a service in exhibition and tourism industries for dynamic improvement of the customer experience [5]. In this research, the emotional range [6] was applied to evaluate the experience of a group of customers.

With CJM, companies normally focus on a good and failure-free customer journey to satisfy their customers. However, the interesting question is, will it guarantee success in today's competitive market where many have been intending to create customer loyalty? Pine and Gilmore [7] stated that customers obtain the richest experience when they experience the four different types of experiences (4Es: entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapism). The 4Es model has been pervasively applied in tourism industry [8], especially in wine tourist industry. A study shows that wine tourist activities, which collected from 30 publications, have already covered the 4Es [9]. Additionally, the 4Es has been reported to have a positive effect on customer memories and loyalty [10].

Therefore, this paper proposes an approach to embedding memorable experience to a customer journey by incorporating the 4Es model in CJM. The next section presents the definitions of the 4Es and examples. Sections 3 and 4 present a proposed approach and its illustration on a real case study followed by the conclusions and future research in the last section.

2 The 4Es Model

As aforementioned, the 4Es model composes of entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapism. The four types of experience are according to two dimensions: 1.) how a customer participates in the experience (passive-active), and 2.) how a customer connects to the experience (absorb-immense). The entertainment (passive absorption) is to sense, such as watching shows and attending concerts where customers do not affect the outcomes of the events. The educational (active absorption) is to learn. Customers gain this experience by taking, for instance, a cooking class where they do affect the outcomes of the event. The esthetic (passive immersion) is to be in the environment. The customers put themselves in a surrounding for pleasure such as sightseeing trips. The escapism (active immersion) is to do something new. The customers experienced something they do not do or have on a daily basis such as performing on a stage. When customers gain all the four types of experience, the richest experience (sweet spot) is stimulated [7], [11].

3 Embedding Memorable Experience to Customer Journey

Presented in this section is a proposed approach for embedding memorable experience to a customer journey. It composes of six steps. The first two steps are similar to the conventional CJM where a company prepares a good and failure-free customer journey. The remaining four steps are for embedding experience to make the journey memorable.

1. Create a customer journey. This step begins with acquiring the inventory of activities that the customers will go through. According to the obtained list of the activities, a customer journey is then created from the beginning to the end. It can be the journey

that the customers have undertaken or that the company would like the customers to take.

2. Make a pain point-free customer journey. This step requires the company to identify potential pain points for each activity along the journey and to try to find solutions to alleviate or remove them. The possible solutions are generated and selected.
3. Establish experience theme(s). The focus of this step is on establishing theme(s) to make the journey memorable. The theme(s) provides a specific context that assists in designing format of the activities to deliver particular types of 4Es.
4. Match the settings of the activities with the theme(s). With their typical settings, each activity is checked for their feasibility and compatibility with the theme(s). Adjustment of the settings may be required for the activity to support the themes(s).
5. Assess the 4Es of the current customer journey under the theme(s). The type of 4Es (E1: Entertainment, E2: Educational, E3: Esthetic, E4: Escapist) is identified for each activity. How each activity is set for the customers to connect with and how actively the customers will participate are two criteria for assessing the type of 4Es. The overall experience is assessed next from the presence of each of the 4Es in the journey. The ideal case (the richest MCJ) is when the customers experience all the 4Es through a set of activities in a designed MCJ.
6. Enhance the experience in the customer journey. Additional activities, if necessary, may be introduced to enhance the experience in the customer journey. In case that the current set of activities offers limited experience, the company should consider introducing additional activities to increase experience as much as possible but should also manage potential pain points that may arise from the additional activities.

4 Customer Journey Implementation and Evaluation

A well-designed journey may not create a memorable experience for customers if activities are executed poorly. Therefore, the company must also pay attention to both preparation and execution during the implementation. It is important that a right set of physical settings and actions to execute each activity along the MCJ is predefined to avoid problems, issues, difficulties or inconveniences leading to customer dissatisfaction during participation in the MCJ. The plan assures that the customers will gain the designed types of 4Es.

Evaluation is also needed to improve the next offer. It intends to cross-check with customer feedbacks made on the designed MCJ in the following aspects: 1) whether unexpected pain points exist, and 2) how satisfied customers are with the activities. Accordingly, a query contains two sections. The first section focuses on identifying remaining pain points during participation in the journey caused by impromptu preparation. The second section focuses on customer satisfaction after completing the journey. The customers rate their satisfaction for each activity based on the experiential value [12] as (-3) intolerable, (-2) unacceptable, (-1) acceptable, (0) neutral, (+1) ordinary, (+2) extraordinary, (+3) priceless. The average values obtained from the survey results are illustrated and analyzed through a proposed memorable customer journey map. It is reasonable to conclude that the activity receiving either extraordinary or

priceless rating and the majority agree on priceless is their memorable experience. Suggestions for further improvement are made when:

- Unexpected pain points are reported by the customers. The 2nd step must be revisited to obtain appropriate solutions.
- Some activities cannot satisfy a significant number of the customers. The activities are not well designed, and embedded type of experience might not be appropriate. Therefore, these activities should be redesigned in the 4th step.
- Some activities can satisfy the majority; nonetheless, someone still dissatisfies. The activities are not well implemented. The preparation plan and execution have to be investigated for improvement.

5 Designing Memorable Customer Experience Journey for MSIE4.0 Kick-off Meeting Program

This section illustrates the implementation of the proposed approach through an MSIE4.0 Kick-off Meeting. Since many participants travel a long distance, an organizing team, therefore, would like to create a memorable experience for them.

MSIE4.0 is a Curriculum Development of Master's Degree Program in Industrial Engineering for Thailand Sustainable Smart Industry project, which is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union (EU). The project has nine partners: six Thai universities and three European universities. The project kick-off meeting was held on February 12-16, 2018, in Thailand. The meeting aimed to provide a unique understanding of the objectives, rules, regulations, requirements, achievement, and space to exchange ideas to develop the project work plans. Besides, it was also intended to nurture partnership among all the partners. The meeting program was mainly organized by Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), the host, in collaboration with Prince of Songkla University (PSU) and Thammasat University (TU). Thirty-five representatives from all nine universities, including ten from the three European partners, and a few representatives from industry partners participated in the meeting. The main activities on the first two days at AIT were for all participants, and the rest of the program at PSU and TU was for the participants from EU to learn more about Thai education, industry and culture.

The meeting was for the first time that the representative of all partners met. The organizing team did not have much information about the participants and organized this type of a meeting for the first time. Therefore, they used their previous experiences in attending several meetings and international conferences to create a customer journey map containing ten key activities: 1. Project Executive Committee (PEC) meeting, 2. Work Package meetings, 3. General meeting, 4. Public seminars, 5. Group photo sessions, 6. Program registrations, 7. Coffee breaks and meals, 8. Local transportation, 9. Hotel reservations, and 10. Domestic flight booking.

Each activity was studied. The team did brainstorming to identify possible pain points as well as to find possible effective solutions. The possible pain points identified

for meeting activities, for example, were improper room layouts, non-functional facilities and equipment, and participants getting thirsty and sleepy. As such, the given solutions were to re-arrange the rooms' layout, to prepare and check facilities and equipment, and to provide water as well as candies.

After preparing for pain points removal, the team designed the memorable customer journey. They decided to use two themes. One was "Industrial Engineering for Thailand 4.0", an academic theme for providing a knowledge base of the project and insights of current needs and viewpoints of the industry towards Thailand 4.0. Another one was "Authentic Thai Experiences", a cultural theme for creating personal ties and nurturing partnership through social activities.

For the academic theme, the meeting activities typically bring participants into ambiances where the knowledge is brought to them. Their roles during the meeting will shape their individual experiences. If they are active, discussing and/or presenting, they gain the educational experience (E2). If they are passive like being audiences, they gain the entertainment experience (E1). Since the current academic activities would offer only entertainment and educational experiences, the organizing team decided to add lab visits at AIT and TU, as well as plant visits, for the participants to immerse into the theme. These additional activities would stimulate esthetic experience (E3) to them.

The main channel to embed Thai experience to the current customer journey was the coffee breaks and meals. The team decided to serve Thai sweet snacks during the coffee breaks and to arrange Thai foods for some meals for the participant to absorb the theme. By having and tasting Thai cuisines and Thai sweet snacks in a cozy/romantic/beautiful place would stimulate the entertainment experience (E1). For a gala dinner, the team decided to provide the esthetic experience (E3) with Thai cuisines served in Thai Benjarong ceramic sets in Thai house to immerse the participants into the theme. Additional activities were brought into the journey to provide the participants more experience on this theme. The organizing team decided to arrange trips to visit attractive places and to arrange a time for the participants to experience a festival celebrated during the week. Visiting the historic city of Ayutthaya composed of several sub-activities. The participants would gain the esthetic experience during an elephant riding in the old city as well as during a visit to historic temples, and gain the entertainment experience during visiting and cruising in the Ayutthaya floating market (an imitative place according to the theme) and watching fencing show.

The designed MCJ for the five-day kick-off meeting program had nineteen key activities offering three types of experience. Only the escapism experience (E4) was omitted in this journey.

The set of embedded experience activities were the focus in the implementation stage. Each activity was prepared for proper execution. For example, the team to deliver the key activity no.5 (Dinner @Ayutthaya Retreat) surveyed the place; tasted foods; reserved dining room; designed the room layout; selected menus; set dining time and duration; set serving time and order; arranged the transportation. The identified potential pain point for this activity was a dietary restriction. Therefore, the team checked with the participants for their dietary preferences before the menu selection and arranged the meal accordingly.

Most of the activities were successfully executed and illustrated in Fig 1 is the ambiances of the key activities captured during the five-day program. Please be noted that the key activity no.2 (ISE Lab Tour) was designed aside from the main journey for a group of participants who are not PEC members.

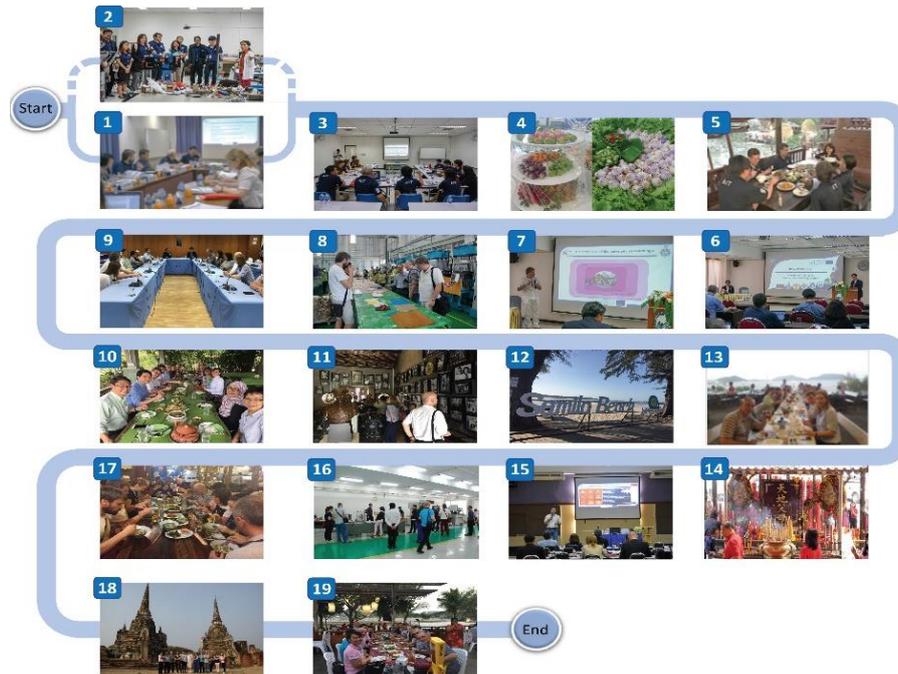


Fig. 1. Key activities in memorable customer journey for MSIE4.0 kick-off meeting program

After the meeting, the ten EU participants, one of them did not partake the program on the 3rd and 4th days, were asked to evaluate their experiences gained from the program via online survey because they were the group that participated in the entire program. Photos taken during the program were also provided on the running questions to remind them about the activities.

Fig. 2 presents the memorable customer experience journey map for MSIE4.0 kick-off meeting program, obtained from the survey. The participants agreed that ‘ISE Lab Tour’ and ‘Visiting Historic City of Ayutthaya’ were their memorable experiences. Majority of the participants rated priceless for these two activities, and the rest rated them extraordinary. The main suggestions are for a group of activities that obtained the neutral and negative ratings, specifically, activity numbers 8, 9, 12, 14. There is a need to investigate and improve the preparation plan and execution of these activities, especially activity no.8 because one participant rated his satisfaction at the intolerable level.

Additionally, the survey asked the participants to provide comments for the overall program. The majority expressed that the program was well-organized. However, some comments for improvement were stated, such as “it was great but maybe with too many activities”, “far too many attractions and resulting overload of the program”, and “too

many parallel sessions for the Work Package Meetings”. The team discussed the issues and found that the activities were rearranged to accommodate the schedule of the EU participants and to avoid the conflict with the activity for the festival on that week.

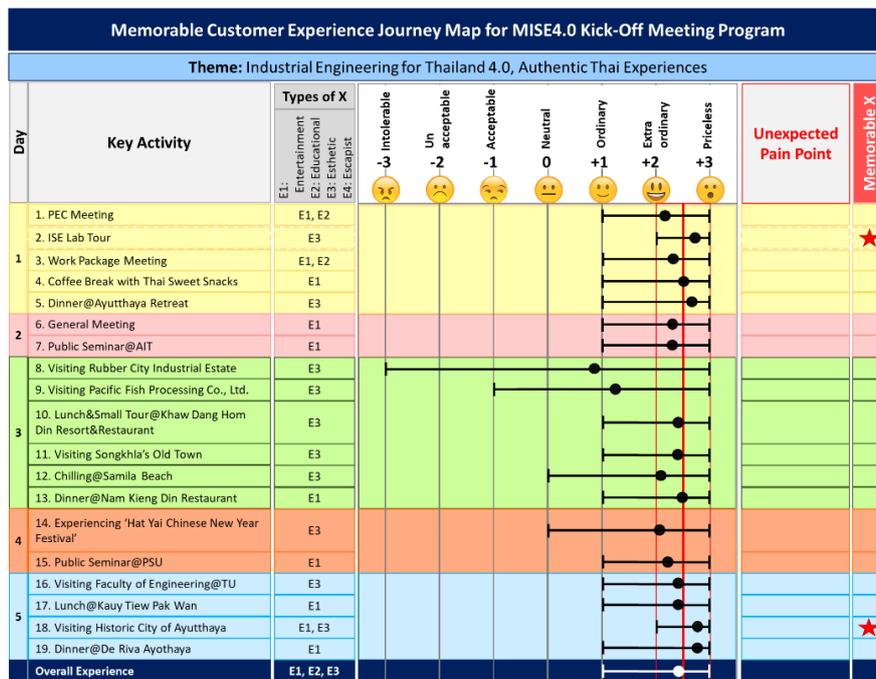


Fig. 2. Memorable customer experience journey map for MSIE4.0 kick-off meeting program

6 Conclusions and Future Research

The 4Es model has been introduced to embed memorable experience to a customer journey. The proposed approach can not only help a company remove pain points but also help embed memorable experience to the customer journey. The approach is practical also for an on-going case and continuous improvement. As illustrated in the case study, the identified activities are ordinary activities being offered in a typical meeting program. The pain points would be removed if the typical CJM was applied, but the activities would remain ordinary ones. The proposed approach transformed most of these ordinary activities to be extraordinary and left the participants with a memorable experience. However, it is still important that the delivery must be well executed to avoid dissatisfaction occurred to a couple activities. Besides, there are still opportunities for enhancement. It is found from the results that one participant rated his satisfaction at the ordinary level to all dining activities while the others scored them as extraordinary or priceless activities. That may be because he concentrated on main activities

(e.g., meetings and industry visits). Therefore, investigating customer preferences and interests would be beneficial in designing a proper MCJ for all customers.

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