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A dynamic perspective on customer experiences

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Abstract

This paper aims to conceptualize and empirically highlight customer experience dynamics. So far, much service literature has approached the customer experience as a static and firm-controlled phenomenon, confined to interactions during the service encounter. We take on a more dynamic approach to the construct, arguing that customers experience service over time and beyond the firm's actions. Consequently, the customers' sense-making of the experience is also apt to change due to factors outside the firm's control. The paper presents a study conducted among 18 customers of a mobile sports tracking service, which locates 8 different change-triggering factors in the customer's context. We characterize these factors into three change categories causing experience dynamics: 1) long-term change 2) short-term change and 3) swayers. The findings help service firms understand how customers within their own context may cause and influence change in experiences. The paper ends with suggestions for how managers may manage such change.

Keywords customer experience dynamics, change-triggering factors, long-term change, short-term change, swayers, customer's context

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Introduction

Over the past decades, scholars have extensively addressed the concept of *customer experience* (Gentile et al., 2007). To date, despite the proliferation of studies viewing service exchange and value creation as dynamic in nature (Flint et al., 2002; Edvardsson et al., 2011), research has traditionally approached the experience construct as rather static, essentially designed and controlled by the company through direct and indirect interactions (Berry et al., 2002; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). However, several scholars (e.g. Heinonen et al., 2010; Helkkula et al., 2012; Verhoef et al., 2009), especially within the Nordic School of thought, challenge this view arguing that customer experiences are in fact emergent, dynamic and continuous in nature, orchestrated by customers in their own social lifeworlds.

Some authors (e.g. Verhoef et al., 2009) note the importance of understanding the experience as a holistic phenomenon, formed through a combination of experiences evolving over time. Yet, the service research done on customer experience dynamics remains scarce (Walter and Edvardsson, 2012). As Walter and Edvardsson (pp. 106) note, “little attention has been devoted to the dynamic mechanisms that drive the customer’s service experiences in a particular direction”. In other related fields such as relationship marketing, scholars have acknowledged the dynamics of relationships, discussing factors causing, for example, their initiation, fading and ending (Halinen and Tähtinen, 2002; Heinonen, 2011; Roos, 1999; Keaveney 1995). Some researchers have also focused on different types of change categories. For example, Roos (1999) explored customer switching behavior and suggested three determinants that may cause permanent, temporary or swaying relationship switching and presented a framework capturing the underlying factors leading to such switching decisions. However, within the customer experience literature few studies have examined similar change-triggering factors or change characteristics. In their study of customer experiences, Verhoef et al. (2009) briefly discuss customer and situational moderators, without explicit consideration of how these factors change the customer’s sense-making process of the service. Moreover, research tends to emphasize firm-originated factors (Sloot and Verhoef, 2008; Walter and Edvardsson, 2012) over factors emerging in the customer’s own context. With the customer’s context we refer to the customer’s world, that is, a context which is not under the firm’s control (as opposed to the firm’s world, see Heinonen et al., 2010).

This paper aims to describe customer experience dynamics **1)** by conceptualizing factors in the customers' contexts that trigger changes in customers' service experiences, and **2)** classifying these factors into different change categories. To this end, the study is positioned in the customer dominant logic (CDL, see Heinonen et al., 2010) of viewing experiences as emergent in customers' activities and practices. CDL represents a customer-dominant approach to service, where the customer's logic is set as the foundation for all marketing and business. Similarly, we view service from the customer's perspective and define it as the process and outcome elements related to customers' own activities beyond the customer-provider interactions (Heinonen et al., 2010). Service thus represents more than the outcome of the service provider's activities or the co-creation processes and their outcomes. We utilize exploratory data collected among customers of a sports tracking mobile service to illustrate change-triggering factors. In the following content analysis, we draw from Roos' (1999) framework of change determinants in the context of relationship switching to (systematically) categorize these factors.

The empirical illustration takes an envisioning (MacInnis 2011) and questioning (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) approach to customer experiences and thus, reveals a novel way of exploring the construct. We locate 8 different change-triggering factors in the customer's context and categorize them into long-term, short-term and swaying change. This synthesizing framework contributes with a more in-depth understanding of customer experience dynamics. Since the provider-dominant perspective continues to prevail in marketing research, this study fills a gap in the extant relationship marketing and customer experience literature by acknowledging the sources of dynamics beyond firm actions and interactions. This approach is important because the factors in the customer's context were previously invisible for companies. By acknowledging factors outside the firm's control and changes occurring in the customer's world, both researchers and practitioners will expand their knowledge about what goes on in the customer's everyday life and how the customer integrates different services into a lifetime of accumulated experiences. This will also increase the understanding of how companies can support customers' own processes, practices, experiences and activities.

We have organized the remainder of this paper as follows. First, we provide an overview of the experience construct. Second, we discuss previous service literature on customer experiences and dynamics. We also draw from the relationship literature, elaborating on possible change triggering factors and their characteristics. Thereafter, we offer a conceptualization of customer

experience dynamics. The next section highlights our exploratory study and discussion of the different factors causing change in customers' service experiences. Finally, we present the theoretical and managerial implications of this paper together with limitations and future research directions.

Customer experience as a dynamic construct

What is experience?

The marketing literature entails various definitions of the *experience* construct. One of the reasons for this is that we can interpret the experience both as a noun and a verb. As multiple dictionaries (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003; Webster's Dictionary, 2001) show, the English language views 'experience' either as an outcome or as an affective and process-based phenomenon. Some languages (such as German) have surpassed this problem by introducing distinct words for the two meanings. For example, as Palmer (2010, pp. 197) notes: "Erfahrung/erfahren refer to knowledge and expertise gained after an event, whereas Erlebnis/erleben refer to a process of undergoing and living through an event". For marketers, these different ontological and epistemological views of the construct raise the question whether to approach customer experiences from a perceptive and knowledge accumulating perspective, or a more holistic and phenomenological viewpoint (Helkkula, 2011; Helkkula and Kelleher, 2011; Palmer, 2010). Moreover, depending on the area of foci and theoretical roots, marketing researchers have embraced the experience phenomenon as e.g. consumer experience (Carú and Cova, 2003), consumption experience (Carú and Cova, 2003), product experience (Hoch, 2002), customer experience (Palmer, 2010) and service experience (Helkkula, 2011). Service researchers tend to use the two latter, often interchangeably.

For the sake of clarity, this paper uses the concept of *customer experience* to depict customers' experiences with service. Moreover, this paper differentiates between perception and lived experience and builds on the notion that experience involves an element of sense-making: "Even though both experience and perception refer to a person's subjective understanding of some external object or event, 'experience' contains an element of activity and reflection that is not innate in 'perception'. We can thus view 'perception' as the act of subjectively registering information and forming initial impressions about it, while 'experience' is the process of realizing how these impressions relate to oneself and how one understands and feels about them"

(Heinonen et al., 2010, pp. 542). For that reason we argue, similarly as Schembri (2006) and Helkkula (2011), that the customer's sense-making of the experience becomes inherent in the experience *per se*. In other words, we view the customer experience as a phenomenon containing idiosyncratic sense-making and reflection. Moreover, we theorize that the customer experience is a context-specific phenomenon, which means that the experience is always grounded in a situational and temporal context.

Customer experience dynamics

Traditionally, service scholars (Berry et al., 2002; Mascarenhas et al., 2006; Meyer and Schwager, 2007) have assumed that firms create customers' service experiences through the design and application of tangible and intangible service features. By placing out the right kind of experience cues along consumption, the firm is able to illicit desired cognitive and emotional customer reactions (Berry et al., 2002; Pullman and Gross, 2004). This stimulus-organism-response approach results in a rather static view of the construct: If the company controls experience creation (Berry et al., 2002; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), the experience is confined to pre-defined service encounters and subject to change only due to process inefficiencies or mismanagement (e.g. Fliess and Kleinaltenkamp, 2004). These factors are driven by an orientation on the service blueprint or offering from a provider perspective.

As Heinonen et al. (2010) and Bolton et al. (2014) note; an alternative perspective acknowledges that customers evaluate their experiences based on the evolving relationship with the service provider. Rather than only comprising snapshots of specific points in time (Bolton et al., 2014), customer experiences accumulate over time into a customer journey with the service firm (Payne et al., 2009). Previous experiences thus have the possibility of affecting future experiences with the service, which results in a more dynamic view of the construct. Although much service literature adopts this *relational approach*, some researchers (e.g. Heinonen et al., 2010) argue that these studies continue to emphasize the firm's management capabilities during the various touch points, leaving little room for other factors present in the customer context to trigger changes in customers' service experiences.

Some service researchers (e.g. Heinonen et al., 2010; Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010; Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013) have proposed a customer-dominant approach to experience research. Based on CDL, this view argues that experiences are emergent rather than controlled by the firm.

That is, the firm does not create experiences, but instead, experiences emerge through the customer's own sense-making of the service (Heinonen et al., 2010). For example, a customer buying a cup of coffee from a café will experience the service in some subjective way regardless of how the company acts. Much of the customer's sense-making will also take place outside the actual service encounter in that particular café, perhaps before when planning the visit with some friends, or even years later when reminiscing about the type of coffee served at the café. Hence, customer experiences also comprise of related and even non-related experiences taking place in the customer's own context that together, over time, form the 'total' service experience. Thus far, this customer-dominant perspective entails the most dynamic view of the experience construct in service literature. That is, this perspective sees experiences as continuous phenomena, bound to evolve and change in customers socially constructed lives (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010).

Despite the fact that some scholars acknowledge experience dynamics, research on the topic remains limited (Verhoef et al., 2009). One of the reasons for this is, perhaps, that empirically capturing the dynamics of a multifaceted construct such as the experience is difficult. Where should we start looking for change in a phenomenon, which is constantly on the move and affected by different related and even non-related experiences? Whereas we can, for example, quite easily locate the different stages, such as the initiation or ending phases, in a customer-firm relationship, it is much harder to determine the boundaries of a customer experience, especially since many types of experiences tend to become intertwined in the customer's daily life. Despite these types of challenges, we and other authors (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009) posit that studies on experience dynamics could potentially contribute with a more theoretically in-depth understanding of the experience construct, as well as help managers in understanding how customer's experiences change over time.

Change-triggering factors and categories of change

The Oxford dictionary explains the word 'dynamic' as "(Of a process or system) characterized by constant change, activity, or progress" and 'dynamics' is viewed as "The branch of mechanics concerned with the motion of bodies under the action of forces". Taking a dynamic view of the experience thus makes forces or *factors* causing *change* inherent in the experience. To date, however, customer experience studies (e.g. Baker et al., 2002; Sousa and Voss, 2006; Walter et al., 2010) mainly describe factors or drivers as "mechanisms that evoke

customer experiences” *per se* (Walter et al., 2010, pp. 238), rather than as factors actually *causing change* in how the customer experiences the service over time. Only few studies look into factors triggering change, and nearly all authors emphasize factors under the firm’s control. For example, Walter and Edvardsson (2012) argue that the physical environment, the servicescape where the customer experiences the service, may act as a dynamic driver causing change in the customer’s service experience. Even so, since the experience evolves over time in the customer’s context, the customer will also experience the service beyond customer-firm interactions (Verhoef et al., 2009; Heinonen et al., 2010). We should therefore also acknowledge that multiple factors outside the firm’s control may cause changes in customers’ service experiences. Except for Verhoef et al. (2009), who shortly review situational and moderating factors causing changes in the drivers of the customer experience, very little research aims to explore such factors in the customer’s context. Although service researchers make few attempts to systematically review change-triggering factors and categories of change, the related relationship marketing literature has acknowledged the dynamic nature of relationships. This literature stream could also potentially extend the extant perspective on change in customer experiences.

Dwyer et al. noted, already in 1987, the importance of approaching relationships as dynamic constructs. The authors argued that relationships are ever-changing phenomena, demanding “*continuous adjustments to the service offering in order to meet the changing need of customers*” (Bell et al., 2005). To date, researchers have looked into relationship dynamics, mainly in a B2B context, by examining the forces causing their initiation, fading, ending, switching as well as other changes during the various stages of the relationship lifecycle (e.g. Halinen and Tähtinen, 2002; Edvardsson et al., 2008; Roos, 1999).

For example, Edvardsson, Holmlund and Strandvik (2008) examined relationship initiation and located and characterized change-initiating factors as converters and inhibitors of the business relationship. Here, possible converters, which give direction to the initiation process, were *time, trust* and *service offerings*. On the other hand, there could also be inhibitors, such as *bonds, risk* and *image*, which prevented development in the relationship process. Similarly, Heinonen (2011) explored the forces of dynamics in the process development of consumer’s relationships in an online community context. Heinonen (2011) identified maintainer-, service- and interpersonal factors, such as *physical magazine, usability* and *word-of-mouth*, which she

then categorized into forces that strengthen, weaken or inhibit relationship development. Moreover, Åkerlund (2005) emphasized the dynamic aspects of relationship fading by locating drivers, such as *quality perceptions, expectations, commitment and involvement, relationship value* and *critical incidents*, initiating such fading processes. Åkerlund (2005) characterized four types of fading processes based on these drivers. In terms of critical incidents, authors such as Edwardson (1998) and Edvardsson and Strandvik (2009) have also studied their impact on the customer-firm relationship. As Edvardsson and Strandvik (2009, pp. 332) note, such incidents may include “quality problems in the services delivered, reorganization or strategic changes (including either buyer or the seller or both), a new supplier offering a new and “better” service and ownership change but also factors that gradually develop over time such as lack of interest on the behalf of the service provider, communication problems and stress due to expectations not being fulfilled.” All such factors operate through the flow of critical time, which the authors characterize as a time with heightened stress and sensitivity that changes the business relationship. Edvardsson et al. (2014) spin further on this critical time concept, arguing that the magnitude and amplitude of change also need to be accounted for. They conceptualize critical negative waves of relationship turbulence, which categorize the change into both “long and wind-blown or short and sudden but all deviating far from stability and equilibrium – travelling through space and time” (Edvardsson et al., 2014, pp. 285).

Roos (1999) identified three types of determinants causing switching behavior among supermarket customers: ‘pushing determinants’, ‘pulling determinants’ and ‘swayers’. Examples of pushing determinants were *the range of goods, price, variation* and *location*. These determinants stand for the customer’s reason for switching to another supermarket. In that sense, factors under this category caused permanent or long-term change to the customer’s relationship with the supermarket. The pulling determinant, on the other hand, caused temporary (short-term) change. Also here, *the location, range of goods* and *variation* were the most frequently expressed reasons for customers to switch back to their original supermarket. Roos (1999) also identified swayers, such as the *personnel, atmosphere, location* and *range of goods*, which do not cause change independently, but may prolong or reinforce the customer’s switching decision. As Roos (1999) notes, swayers need a context so that they can be distinguished from the other determinants. For example, personnel may not be the actual reason for the customer to switch to

another supermarket, but they can prolong or mitigate that decision through their customer service.

What combines all these studies is their emphasis on firm-originated factors. As Edvardsson et al. (2014, pp. 286) note: “The effects of relationship dynamics beyond the customer-provider relationship have rarely been empirically studied”. Thus, we still know little about the sources of dynamics originated in the customer’s domain. This knowledge gap persists since the provider-dominant logic is prevailing in marketing research and practice. This study takes a step toward addressing this gap in the literature by exploring the sources of dynamics beyond the line of visibility of service encounters. A customer dominant logic as basis of experience dynamics provides a more holistic understanding of what changes customers’ sense-making in relation to a service.

Next, based on the above literature review, we present our characterization of customer experience dynamics, including change-triggering factors and different categories of change.

Characterizing customer experience dynamics, change-triggering factors and categories of change

Customer experience dynamics denote to the ever-changing mechanisms in the customer’s experience with service in and over time, and the different factors and forces causing such change. As table 1 shows changes in the experience may take place due to firm-originated factors as well as factors emerging in the customer’s own context (Verhoef et al., 2009). Firm-originated factors denote to those that the firm more or less controls. Such factors comprise, for example, the core service offering or the physical location, such as the servicescape. The customer-originated factors comprise of factors within the customer’s context, and can be both personal and social. For example, a personal factor may be how often the customer decides to use the service, whereas a social factor comprises of co-customers. We want to note that all of these factors may be either tangible or intangible in nature. For example, whereas the service employees are tangible elements, the atmosphere represents an intangible factor. Finally, we argue that these change-triggering factors are always contextually embedded, which means that the factors can change due to their temporal, spatial and social surroundings.

TABLE1. Change-triggering factor types

Change-triggering factors	Examples
Firm-originated	Core service, service offering Location, servicescape, atmosphere Employees Critical incidents
Customer-originated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal • Social 	Frequency of service use Co-customers
Tangible Intangible	Service employees Atmosphere
Contextual and event-specific boundaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporal • Spatial • Social 	Specific point in time, e.g. morning Physical location, e.g. golf court Social connections, e.g. fellow golfers

Similarly as in the relationship literature (e.g. Roos, 1999), we also posit that different types of factors have the possibility of affecting customers' sense-making of their experiences with the service in different ways. Although Roos (1999) discussed firm-originated factors, we argue that she presents her framework on a very high abstraction level. The framework may thus also be applicable to the customer's context. However, on a more detailed level of analysis, this framework needs to be applied to a specific context. Based on the literature analysis, and inspired by Roos' framework for relationship dynamics, we conceptualize three potential categories of change-triggering factors: 1) factors causing long-term change, 2) factors causing short-term change and 3) swayers enabling other factors to trigger change (See table 2). The first types of factors affect the customer's sense making of the experience by clearly initiating *long-term change* into some specific direction, for example positive or negative. In other words, due to such factors, the customer's service experience changes rather permanently. The second factor category causes *short-term changes* in a circular manner. This type of change is thus more temporary in nature, where the experience tends to 'resume' to its 'equilibrium' after a short while. Last, we argue that there are factors acting as swayers, further enabling other factors to cause either long-term or short-term change. These factors strengthen, mitigate or prolong the change caused by other factors.

TABLE 2. Factor categories of change

Factor	Characterization
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Factors causing long-term change	Initiate long-term change in the customer experience into a specific direction
Factors causing short-term change	Initiate short-term change in the customer experience in a circular manner
Swayers	Enable, strengthen or mitigate other factors to trigger changes in the customer experience

Methodology

We conducted an explorative, qualitative study in a mobile service context to explore experience dynamics in the customer's context.

The chosen context for the study is a sports tracking mobile service. This service, either as a mobile application or a sports watch, helps consumers in tracking their exercises over time. There are several reasons why this particular context suits the aim of our study. First, the sports tracker enables customers to use the service in their own setting and on their own terms, thus making it easier to locate change-triggering factors in the customer context. Second, the device enables a longitudinal approach to the experience, since the sports tracker saves each run and thus supports the customer's understanding and sense-making of how the experience evolves over time. Third, the sports tracker can be used in a variety of customer activities such as running or walking, and therefore involves many types of experiences. Nonetheless, this integration of different experiences also represents a challenge for the researcher, as both the consumption of 'running' and 'sports tracking' become intertwined. Since our chosen context is indeed the sports tracker, it would be impossible to separate the two. Running in itself will thus also play an important role in customers' narratives of their experiences with the sports tracking service. Finally, to the authors' knowledge, there are no previous empirical studies within this particular mobile sports tracking context. Typically, the research in the mobile service context has focused on e.g. communication services (Chen and Chang, 2013) banking and financial services (Kleijnen et al., 2004; Laukkanen 2006), location-based services (Pura, 2005), entertainment services (Pihlström and Brush, 2008) and shopping services (Yang, 2010). The context of a mobile sports tracking service is thus novel, and answers the call made by e.g. Ngai and Gunasekaran (2007) to expand the mobile service research into new service categories.

Data consists of altogether 18 interviews conducted among customers using a sports tracking service regularly during their runs. By utilizing a personal interview approach we were able to gain rich and in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon (Deshpande, 1983; Grace et al.,

2010; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). We selected the participants based on the following criteria. The participants had to have used their choice of sports tracker service for a minimum period of one month. This way, we ensured that the customers were familiar with the service and would be able to express in what ways they had experienced the tracker. The type of sports tracking service could either be a mobile application (e.g. Sports Tracker, Nike+ or Run Keeper) or a sports watch (e.g. Polar, Suunto or Garmin). Seven females and 11 males participated in the study, with the ages ranging between 20 and 38. The interview guide consisted of a set of semi-structured questions, covering the themes of running, sports tracker usage and positive and negative memories of such a service (For examples see table 3). We transcribed all interviews verbatim and saved them to separate Word documents.

TABLE 3. Summary of the data collection and analysis procedure

Data Source	18 customer interviews
Type of service	Sports Tracker (e.g. Sports Tracker, Nike+ , Run Keeper or Polar and Garmin Watch)
Study conducted in	2013 (September, October, November and December)
Participant selection criteria	The participant had used the device for a minimum of 1 month prior to the interview The participant exercised on a regular basis
Data collection	Sample Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe a normal run 2. Describe the perfect run 3. Describe the worst possible run <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe your sports tracker 2. How, when, where and why do you use it? 3. Describe a positive memory of the Sports Tracker 4. Describe a negative memory of the sports tracker
Interview length	30 – 50 minutes/each
Data analysis	The authors transcribed all interviews verbatim and saved them to separate Word documents. The interviews were first categorized and coded according to Spiggle’s (1994) and Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) guidelines for qualitative data analysis. The emerging themes were then grouped under the change-triggering factors (permanent, temporary and swaying change)

In the coding and analysis of the gathered data, we followed the guidelines provided by Spiggle (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). We began the analysis procedure with a categorization of the data by reading through the separate word documents twice. This way, we gained a more rounded and in-depth understanding of the informants and their narratives (Hirschman, 1992). During the second reading we concurrently looked for and noted emerging themes in each transcription. This thematic analysis is consistent with the thematic-variable approach to qualitative data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006). We divided

the transcribed interviews into data units and coded each unit according to the emerging themes. The emerging themes were then assembled under our predetermined change-triggering factors of long-term, short-term and swaying change. Finally, we compared these different factors in terms of similarities and differences. Such iteration between theoretical and qualitative data with the goal to establish refined codes is grounded in the abductive logic (Patton, 2002).

Findings

Factors initiating *long-term change* within the context of a sports tracking mobile service include *frequency of use*, *co-runners and friends* and *physical progress*. For example, when customers started to use the sports tracker, many viewed the service as quite extraordinary in nature, but rather meaningless in their everyday lives. However, after *frequent use*, customers' sense-making of the experience was 'permanently' transformed into the opposite; the tracker was now quite ordinary in nature, but played a much more important role in their daily lives. Likewise, *co-runners and friends* could also cause this type of long-term change. For example, some customers quit using the service after realizing that many of their friends were not using the same sports tracker. On the other hand, some customers also quit using the service because they did not want to associate themselves with some particular group of people, such as athletes. In both cases, the customers made sense of the experience with the sports tracker as less important on a long-term perspective. Finally, the *physical progress* of the customer could also initiate long-term changes in the experience. For example, one informant reported that seeing his progress over a period of 6 weeks through the sport tracking device's running log, the experience around the service now became much more positive for him as compared to what it had been when he started using the service. See Table 4 for sample quotes further demonstrating factors initiating such long-term change.

Overall, the long-term change seemed to be quite **stable** in nature. Moreover, the change could also be categorized into **radical** or **incremental**. The radical change comprised of factors that clearly initiated change into some specific direction, as when friends did not use the same sports tracking service and the customer therefore quit using it altogether. On the other hand, the long-term change also place through a continuous process, e.g. through frequent usage (over time), which made the change more incremental in nature.

TABLE 4. Long-term change factors

Factor initiating long-term change	Description	Illustrative Quotes
Frequency of use	The amount of service usage over time, e.g. once a week/month/year	<p><i>“In the beginning I went out for a run just because it was so extraordinary, now it has become more like a well-known friend.” (male 27 yrs)</i></p> <p><i>“Over time, it has become more like an ordinary tool, like your jogging shoes, it is now part of the whole running experience”. (male 26 yrs)</i></p>
Co-runners and friends	The customer’s social connections	<p><i>“The reason that I stopped carrying it so much is because; well none of my friends really use it, if there were lots of people using it we could all compare times.” (male, 25 yrs)</i></p> <p><i>“I used to associate the sports tracker with being an athlete (competing together with others), and with really investing in one’s training and getting better. And when I chose not to care about those things any more, I felt that it was very deliberating to run (without the Sports Tracker) and feel that I could just run in order to see how long I would manage. (male, 26 yrs)</i></p>
Physical progress	The customer’s accumulated physical progress over time	<p><i>“We actually ran the same route ten to fifteen times under a time period of six weeks...the first time ran with the sports tracker it showed 6 minutes and 15 seconds per kilometer. And the last time we ran the route, or the fastest lap, I think it was between 5 and 18 or so. That is over one minute of progress per kilometer, and that is very good, and it feels like, well I was super happy when I had progressed that much, and felt that I could have potential to become a really good runner. And there the Sports tracker also plays an important role, because it measured all this to me, and I can, well it also saves all my runs, so I can easily scroll back and check and compare my times. (male, 27 yrs)</i></p>

Factors initiating *short-term change* include *personal performance*, *location* and *unexpected events*. Many customers reported negative experiences with the sports tracker when having performed a less satisfactory run. However, this change in the lived experience was only temporary and often quite quick to change, as many subsequent successful runs resulted in new positive experiences with the service. Moreover, the *location* could also temporarily enhance the customer experience. Many customers described their sport tracking experience as momentarily more pleasant when running in scenic environments, such as the mountains or along a beach. Finally, *unexpected events*, such as losing the sports tracker or simply forgetting to push the start button seemed to cause short-term change in the experience; mainly, irritation and a feeling that

this affected that one particular running experience in a negative manner. Table 5 showcases the factors initiating short-term change with quotes from the customers.

Overall, these factors seemed to initiate change in a **circular manner**, that is, one day the experience was positive, the next negative and this cycle could then repeat itself depending on e.g. the personal performance or location. In other words, this type of change is quite **elastic**, meaning that although these factors initiate change in the customer's service experience, this change will quickly bounce back to the 'original' state of the experience. The **intensity** of such change can thus be quite prompt and high, as it was a question of factors appearing suddenly and then disappearing in the same way.

TABLE 5. Short-term change-factors

Factor initiating short-term change	Description	Illustrative Quotes
Personal performance	The customer's own physical level of performance during one particular run.	<i>"...understanding how hard you have run affects it. So when I was really running, when I was in the 6-7 mile range, just looking down at the app and seeing 6-7 miles is motivation, and for an actually perfect run it makes you want to run more."</i> (male, 38 yrs)
Location	The physical space in which the customer uses the sports tracking mobile service.	<i>"I have to run in the Alps or some similar place for it (the sports tracker) to feel extraordinary...because then I will connect the sports tracker to my computer so that I can see where I have been running."</i> (male, 27 yrs)
Unexpected events	Unexpected events that have an impact on the experience	<i>"Well, sometimes I have forgotten to push the start button, I have had everything else, but forgotten to push on start. So then it has been a bit sad, since I have run in the belief that I will see all the statistics in the end of the run"</i> (female 24 yrs)

Finally, we also located **swayers**: *feelings, routinized use and frequency of use*, which enabled other factors to cause changes in customers' service experience in specific contexts. One of these swayers (*frequency of use*) was earlier categorized as a factor initiating long-term changes. However, frequency of use could also enable other factors to cause change. For example, frequency of use empowered the customer to follow up his or her *physical progress*, which eventually led to more meaningful experiences with the service. Here, the frequency of use was not in itself the change initiator, rather, this factor made it possible to follow up on the physical progress, which eventually spur changes in the service experience. Likewise, *routinized use* of the sports tracker also enabled the customers to see their physical progress over time. Moreover, in terms of short-term changes, feelings allow customers to interpret their physical performance,

and subsequently the sports tracker, as negative, whereas they experience the next run as positive. We can therefore also characterize feelings as a swayer. See table 6 for quotes exemplifying swayers.

The swayers either **strengthened** or **mitigated** the change caused by other factors. For example, the customer's negative experience with the sports tracking service due to a bad run was strengthened through negative feelings. Overall, swayers thus seemed to facilitate both short-term and long-term changes through a continuous process.

TABLE 6. Swayers

Swayers	Description	Quotes
Feelings	The customer's personal and internal feelings.	<i>"A more negative experience with the Sports tracker would occur during a day that I've felt a bit down and without any energy. Then it would have felt really hard and I would not have had this super happy feeling after coming home from the run." (female, 26 yrs)</i>
Routinized use	The customer's usage of the service in the same repeated way over time, e.g. always running the same route	<i>"We actually ran the same route ten to fifteen times under a time period of six weeks...the first time ran with the sports tracker it showed 6 minutes and 15 seconds per kilometer. And the last time we ran the route, or the fastest lap, I think it was between 5 and 18 or so. That is over one minute of progress per kilometer, and that is very good, and it feels like, well I was super happy when I had progressed that much, and felt that I could have potential to become a really good runner. (male, 27 yrs)</i>
Frequency of use	The amount of service usage over time, e.g. once a week/month/year	<i>The best thing would be if you could wear the watch on you 24/7...then you can see your training, your effective training and also compare your progress. (male 27 yrs)</i>

Discussion

This paper described the dynamic nature of customer experiences by locating factor's present in the customer's context that trigger changes in how customer's experience a service and further classifying these factors into different change categories. This paper thus goes beyond the extant service research (e.g. Berry et al., 2002; Mascarenhas et al., 2006; Meyer and Schwager, 2007), which has put little effort into exploring experience dynamics, let alone factors in the customer's context explicitly initiating change.

Based on the collected empirical data among mobile sport tracking users, we located eight different change-triggering factors within the customer's context. These include *frequency of*

use, co-runners and friends, physical progress, personal performance, location, unexpected events, routinized use and feelings. As posited in our earlier theoretical framework, the characteristics of these factors varied causing long-term, short-term or swaying change.

TABLE 7. Summary of change-triggering factors

Type of change category	Long-term change	Short-term change	Swaying change
Type of factors	Factors that clearly initiate change into some specific direction.	Factors that initiate temporary change in a circular manner.	Factors that enable other factors to cause either long-term or short-term change.
Nature of change	Both radical and incremental in nature, stable	Elastic and circular in nature, unstable	Strengthens or mitigates the change caused by other factors.
Occurrence	If radical change – seldom If incremental change – Continuous	Frequent	Continuous
Intensity	High or low depending on context	High, prompt and often unexpected	Mixed
Scope	Tangible and intangible factors	Tangible and intangible factors	Tangible and intangible factors
Illustrative factor examples	Frequency of use Co-runners and friends Physical progress	Personal performance Location Unexpected events	Feelings Routinized use Frequency of use

In Table 7, we have categorized the located change-initiating factors into the three different change categories. In terms of similarities (See table 7), all change types included factors that are either tangible or intangible. In this particular data set, the tangible factors included, for example, the physical location and co-runners and friends. Intangible factors were such as feelings and frequency of use. We argue that the firm needs to acknowledge both types of factors to develop a more broadened understanding of change-triggers in the customer's context.

Moreover, as the table shows, the *long-term* and *short-term* change categories mainly differ in terms of nature and occurrence. Long-term change tended to be quite stable in nature, taking place through a continuous process (e.g. frequency of use) or due to critical incidents in the customer's context (e.g. friend's opinions). The short-term change represents a more elastic adjustment in the experience, which tended to arise and resume quite often (e.g. change of location or physical performance). Finally, the *Swayers* enabled, strengthened or mitigated the two above presented types of changes in particular contexts.

All change categories are also very much grounded in a temporal perspective, where time enables all of these factors to emerge in the customer's context. This is in line with Verhoef et al.

(2009), who discuss time as the main cause for experience dynamics. On a more aggregated level, one could posit that time, as well as space (both physical and social) act as ‘swayers’, making all these changes possible. Nonetheless, in this particular study we did not include these more ‘abstract’ entities as specific change-initiating factors. Rather, as we already proposed earlier in this paper that the change-triggering factors are always context- and event specific, we view them as the playground where other, more concrete factors, have the possibility of initiating and enabling change.

We want to stress that all of these types of changes are equally important to understand. Similarly as Roos (1999, pp. 79) notes: “these determinants should be considered only in their context, as elements in a switching path and not in a particular order of priority”, we argue that all of the located change-initiating factors also are idiosyncratic and relative. In other words, a long-term change-factor for one customer may very well form a short-term change-factor for another customer. Additionally, a long-term factor may also become short-term over time. Hence, ‘long-term’ does not refer to something permanent or infinite (since nothing is really permanent in the world we live in), but rather indicates that a more important change has taken place in the customer’s sense-making of the service experience.

Theoretical implications

This paper makes several theoretical contributions to the extant service, customer experience and relationship marketing literature. First, we contribute with a novel and systematic framework for studying and understanding experience dynamics, including change-triggering factors and different categories of change. We consider this conceptual framework a first step towards demonstrating that experiences are dynamic and can change either on a long-term or short-term basis. Moreover, this framework illustrates that, in addition to understanding the nature of customer experiences (e.g. Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010; Palmer, 2010), it is essential to increase our knowledge of how experiences change and evolve in context over time, and identify what factors cause such changes.

The findings illustrate how it is not only the firm’s activities that cause change in customer experiences. Change-triggering factors are also formed in customers’ contexts through their own sense-making of the service. The firms can thus only to a certain extent influence how customers experience their service. Because researchers have traditionally directed their focus on

interactions and firm processes, thereby emphasizing changes in the firm or customer-firm interactions, factors in the customer's context have previously been invisible for companies. By understanding such factors, we argue that it also becomes easier for companies to actually implement service as intended to (Grönroos and Gummars, 2014), that is, to support customers' own processes, activities, practices and experiences. This is an implication that customer experience and relationship marketing literature will benefit from, since virtually no previous studies have examined change-triggering factors present in the customer's context.

This paper also contributes to CDL (Heinonen et al., 2010) and our understanding of the customer's logic grounded in the customer's context. As the study shows, customers make sense of the service experience idiosyncratically, based on their previous experiences with the service and much grounded in their own life worlds. This study provides insight into the customer's own logic, and shows in what ways the customer makes sense of a service in a mobile sports tracking context.

Finally, this study answers Ngai and Gunasekaran's (2007) call to expand the mobile service research into new service categories by revealing new insights about customers' use of various kinds of mobile sports tracking services. The results from this particular empirical context show how the core service (mobile sports tracker) becomes intertwined with another activity (running), and thus, how different types of experiences together form the total customer experience with the service. In that sense, the study also builds on Heinonen et al. (2010), who argue that many different types of experiences, also related and even non-related, form the customer's total service experience.

Managerial implications

The study emphasizes the need for firms to recognize that it is not only a matter of understanding how customers experience their offerings at a specific point in time. Rather, by using methods that capture a more aggregated, long-term perspective to experiences, firms may gain further insights about how customers' experience change. Likewise, Palmer (2010) has argued that managers, in order to attain a competitive advantage on the market, should think of experiences as a stream, developing over time. Second, this study shows that firms need to acknowledge that even though no visible changes have occurred, for example in their own or their competitors' activities and offerings, customers' experiences may change. Third, this study

revealed that experience dynamics is a multifaceted and challenging construct. Based on the conceptual framework and empirical illustration we can, however, draw some implications about the characteristics of experience dynamics:

- **Visibility:** Companies cannot see all changes that occur in customers' experiences because some changes take place in the customers' context. Companies need to maintain a relationship with their customers, even though no visible changes have occurred and develop systems for maintaining contact with and getting feedback from customers.
- **Control:** Change may also occur without the influence or involvement of the firm, thus firms are not able to control change. Aligning communication according to customer logics is one strategy for managing change.
- **Longitudinal:** Experiences may change over a longer period of time, and this change is not necessarily dramatic or critical in nature. Firms need to develop customer insight practices, which showcase this temporal aspect of change and its impact on company revenues.
- **Different categories of change:** Many factors cause different change. Moreover, some customers may be inclined to experience change more often than others. Managers could develop customer profiles based on how change-resistant they are.
- **Positive/negative experiences:** Experiences may change in a positive or negative direction, and this direction is idiosyncratic. That is, positive change for some customers may be negative for others. Managers need to be aware of possible factors causing change, and locate which factors are the most important ones. In doing so, managers may more easily succeed in preventing negative change.
- **Extraordinary/ordinary:** Extraordinary experiences may become ordinary and ordinary experiences may become extraordinary in a circular manner. Consequently, an extraordinary service context, such as a theme park or ultra-fine dining, does not guarantee extraordinary customer experiences with the service. Firms need to be aware of this when evaluating their service outcomes.

The findings also enable us to draw some initial conclusions about possible strategies for managing experience dynamics. Change is inevitable and not necessarily controllable by the

company. However, companies may try to influence the direction and effect of the change in a favorable manner. Managers can aim to both trigger long-term positive change and prevent long-term negative change. In terms of temporary change, the firm can support, i.e. push into the right direction, positive change and reduce negative change. Regarding swayers managers must either balance or slow down change. Finally, we want to note that through the understanding of how customer's experiences with the service change in and over time, the service firm may also find new ways of delivering and managing their services. By truly understanding the customer's context and the factors present there, the firm may thus ultimately gain a competitive advantage on today's dynamic markets.

Limitations and future research

In terms of limitations, this paper presents only one exploratory study in order to highlight experience dynamics within customers' own life contexts. We located the change-triggering factors in one particular context, that is, customers using a sports tracking service. We encourage future research to systematically identify change factors in different empirical contexts and evaluate the transferability of the findings to a broader context. Nevertheless, we argue that since our presented conceptual framework for experience dynamics is on a high abstraction level, it should, in broader terms, be transferable to other empirical contexts.

Moreover, we located the short-term and long-term factors based on customers' recollections of their experiences with the sports tracker. It could very well be that over time, the located short-term factors would have turned into long-term factors or vice versa. Therefore, we encourage researchers to conduct longitudinal studies that span over a greater time period to truly grasp the dynamic nature of the customer experience. For example, consumer diaries could provide interesting insights into changes that take place in the customer experience over time.

Based on the findings we can draw a number of topics for further research (table 8). We especially encourage researchers to advance the field regarding the conceptual nature of dynamics and to conduct empirical studies that succeed in capturing various types of changes, and their underlying factors, in the customer's sense-making of the service experience.

TABLE 8. Future research directions

Topic	Future research questions
Experience dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do the factors present in the firm's context differ from factors present in the customer's context?

Change-triggering factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do changes in firm activities influence customer experiences? • How do customer experiences of one particular offering or company change as a result of competing offerings or companies? • How do customer experiences change depending on the interaction with employees and other key stakeholders? • Is there some specific point in time when customer experiences are inclined to change more than usual? • Are the factors which play a more important role than others in specific contexts/for specific customers? • What types of factors remain as change-triggers in the customer's context over time? • In which other possible ways can we categorize change-triggering factors?
Long-term change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there factors causing long-term change, which are transferable across different contexts and services? • What are the characteristics of radical and incremental long-term change? • In what ways can long-term change turn into short-term change?
Short-term change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there factors causing short-term change, which are transferable across different contexts and services? • What makes short-term changes more elastic in nature? • In what ways can short-term change turn into long-term change?
Swayers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the characteristics of swayers? • Are there factors which are more inclined to act as swayers than others?

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