Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration Lappeenranta
Degree Program in International Business

Nguyen Hoang Phu

The Significant of Personalization in Customer Experience Design

Thesis report 2017

Abstract

Nguyen Hoang Phu

The Significant of Personalization in Customer Experience Design,44,1

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences

Faculty of Business Administration Lappeenranta

Degree Program in International Business

The objective of this study was to introduce new concept in customer service which is called "Personalization".

The theoretical framework of this concept was built from the foundations of Customer Relationship Management and Customer Experience Management. Data was collected through various sources: academic books, research articles, experts' blogs. The study of empirical includes the analysis of case company Amazon. It was carried out using the qualitative approach comprises of document analysis and semi-structured interview.

The outcomes of the study show that there are potentials and rooms to grow for "Personalization" in the future. Therefore, it encourages enterprises to consider investing in developing proper Customer Relationship Management systems in order not to fall behind in associating services besides actual products. The concept can be implemented to different types of industry and scale of enterprise. Hence, through the analysis and data provided in the study, companies and consumers can identify a new trend as well as acknowledge the great values of customer services as adequately as advanced products.

Keyword: Personalization, Customer Service, Business Model, Customer Satisfaction

Table of Contents

1 Background and introduction

Throughout the studying years at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and after couples of work-placements, customer services aspect has become my great interest. Recently, due to the advance in technology, most companies invest heavily in Research and Development (R&D) department in order to produce the latest, smartest products. However, they are omitting one of the most important factors that critically affect the customer's buying decision as well as customer's loyalty which is: customer services. C. Haroun (2016) says that at least 30 years are needed in order to build a brand; however, just a couple of poor customer experiences can destroy it totally. The customer is always right and those who can value and identify customer's satisfaction as the main asset, the wealth of the business more than money those companies survive. (S. Wudaru 2014.) From my perspective, there are various way how a business can treat their customers. This reflects the company's culture and their visions.

Culture as defined by Oxford Dictionary (2016) is what defines the attitude and distinct characteristics of a particular social group. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016) it is the set of shared values, characteristics and behaviors that characterize the organization. Therefore, studying how businesses design and implement their customer services is helping one to understand the company better. This can be analyzed thoroughly for academic purpose, investment, curiosity, lending, and competitor analysis and so on.

2 Objectives of the study

From the author own's assessments, there is a current trend of "personalization" in customer services. Due to the fact that enterprise's Web interface is modified and tailored to a specifically target individual consumer, people tend to refer personalization as one-to-one marketing. It is designed for the purpose of increasing customer satisfaction and repeated visit by fasten the interactions and make it more efficient, effective and easier to access and meet the need of customers. (M. Rouse 2007)

There has not been many researches covering this topic. However, most companies are implementing it unconsciously. They are just not realizing how importance it is for their company and the scale of it.

According to a survey by Evergage, Inc (2016): 85% of companies are now implementing some forms of personalization. Additionally, when it comes to the importance of the marketing initiatives; 74% respondents agreed that personalization is very or extremely important. 55% of respondents plan to use website or in-app personalization within next year. Regarding companies already using personalization, 89% of them report an improvement, and of those, 53% have seen a lift of 10% or more. On the one hand, 35% said to increase their spending or budget for personalization will go up in the coming year, while 4% said it would go down.

As mentioned above, the definition of personalization by M. Rouse (2007) only states the aspect that web display is tailored to specifically target each individual consumer. The survey also indicates that most companies have been implementing personalization into their marketing efforts the most. Nevertheless, it can be also applied in product's design, interaction between employees and consumers, marketing, delivery and so on. This research defines "Personalization" as a method of delivering unique and personal experiences to customers ranging from the services to the actual products.

The objective of the study is:

The significance of Personalization in Customer Experience Design.

The research question is:

How customer insights are used in personalizing customer experience?

3 Delimitation of the study

This study only covers the relationship between customer experience design and personalization strategy. Thus, it evaluates the benefits and advantages of implementing such model into daily business operations. It does not cover the method to implement personalization into different business sectors, in-depth analysis of specific business departments.

Moreover, the author acknowledges the restrictions and difficulties depending on business's nature, culture, where the business operates and so on but chooses to neglect it. The analysis in the report is only valid for researching purposes and based on the reports of case company Amazon. Furthermore, Amazon's

business is quite complex, it provides both service platform and products for its users. Therefore, this research focuses on covering the services platform of Amazon to its users, to be specific, the experience of the users when using such platform.

In addition, the study consists of different models and illustrations. The scope of this research is only appropriate for those approaches. Other approaches may possess different aspects and are not interchangeable. The author also acknowledges the limitation when choosing interviewees who are all Vietnamese. They can be affected by the same culture and behavioral thinking which will not promise the result is going to be practical and applicable for every case.

4 Basic terms and definitions

Customer relationship management: there are quite many definitions and concepts of customer relationship management (CRM). Customer relationship management (CRM) is designed to improve business relationships with customers, assist in customer retention and increase sale revenues by offering technologies with strategies and practices in managing and analyzing customer interactions and data throughout the customer life cycle (M. Rouse 2014). Or according to Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong (2010), CRM stores and manages all the detailed information about individual customers and its usage in "touch points" to maximize customer loyalty. It is used by all customer facing departments and partners as an alignment of strategy, processes and technology to manage customers (S. Chand 2015).

While CRM has always been a lethal weapon in helping businesses convey important data into resources, not all businesses correctly implement and make use of it.

Customer service: fulfills the needs of customer by assist them with professionals, helpful services throughout the whole customer journey: before, during and after the experience (P. McKinney 2015). The external customer is not customer services' only target but also the internal customer is receiving value added services through commitment to delivering timely, knowledgeable, technically supportive and high quality services. (I. Miler, 2016.)

Customer journey is the whole experience of customers when interacting with a company and its brand. It documents the full journey of being a customer instead of just focusing on a part of a transaction (Sorman M., 2014).

Touchpoints are the components of customer journeys; they are everything interactions point between company and customers (A. Richardson, 2010).

Customer Experience: can be understood differently depending on individual preferences, companies' strategies, personal cultures. J. Baer (2016) says that customer experience is measured by how companies handle every interaction between them and the customer against customer's expectations. K. Bodine states the similar thing about customers often set perceptions about their interactions and businesses are responsible for designing and managing those interactions. M. Wittenstein (2016) and J. Pine (2016) include in their statements regarding customer experience the concept of emotional attachment between customer and company or its brand; everything a brand does for customers, to customers and makes them feel worth spending time by creating memorable and personal interactions.

The key concepts and models used in this study are mostly studied from the book "Customer Experience Management" written by B. Schmitt (2003). Internet sources, lectures at Saimaa UAS from variety of courses such as customer journey, personal selling and marketing, consumer behavior, managing customer relationship and so on are also different data sources in order to acquire up-to-date knowledge regarding technology advancement and changes in megatrends.

5 Research Method

The research was carried out using a qualitative method. The reason why the author chose qualitative research is because it offers in-depth studies of small sample group to guide and support the hypotheses. Moreover, it also allows the author to dig deeper in the target audience's range of behavior and perceptions regarding specific topics or issues. (Qualitative Research Consultants Association 2015) Furthermore, qualitative approach is much more suitable for the aims of the thesis which is acquiring deep understanding of a specific organization or event rather than numerical analysis of a large sample of a population. Specific organization is analyzed under the perspective or a particular

concept; in this case "Personalization" which means that its strategies, operations, results are evaluated and measured distinctly and explicitly. (California State University Long Beach 2016)

Hence, it gives a clearer picture of how companies apply personalization into their strategy especially with different departments. Moreover, by investigating specific cases, it is believed that we can understand the insight, difficulties, benefits and results of business firms that had already applied this kind of strategy. The cases were analyzed using company's annual reports available on their home page, specific marketing campaign, services, products and many more aspects such as: press releases, business articles and so on.

The empirical data shall be acquired and divide into two parts: document analysis and semi-structured interview.

Document analysis: the process of interpreting the documents by the researcher in order to analyze a specific meaning or aspect to end up with a conclusion over that study (G. A. Bowen 2009). Data shall be collected and interpret by the author's perspective targeting "Personalization" as defined in this research. A business timeline of Amazon is going to be established in order to identify specific milestones that are considered to be important, explain the reasons in implementation and results.

Semi-structured interview: this form of interview allows the interviewers to freely guide the interviewee towards the topic while letting the interviewee to express their opinion without any strict formalized questionnaires. Because the author believes that most of interviewees may not realize or recognize the concept of "personalization", therefore, this method allows the authors to explain clearly the expectations and guides them to discuss their experience more effectively. (A. Doyle 2015)

The results are going to be compared between the company's perspective and the user's experience. It is interesting whether the result is a correlation or not, if the result display a correlation between the implementation of the company and the customers, personalization would have proved itself to be a wise choice. Otherwise, it should be interesting for the author as well as the company to recognize and reevaluate this concept.

6 Customer service of a company

6.1 How has business changed?

Thanks to the advance in technology, in the past few years, we have seen dramatic changes in products, especially, technology-based products such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, drones and so on. However, from the author's perspective, as the products continuously being innovated, services witness little or no changes at all. R. Lucas (2012) states that businesses in the past knew their customers personally: their families, religions and what was happening in their lives. Is it true that we are falling behind in providing customer services to our customers?

Whether businesses are providing tangible or intangible products-which means that the services are the products such as: hotels, restaurants and so on; they are still associating customer services to some degree. This is an undeniable fact; however, the majority of companies focuses only on innovating product portfolios in order to meet the demands and needs of market. Consequently, "Today's products often lack functional differentiation" (B. Schmitt 2003).

For example: even though through marketing, businesses emphasize how their products are different from others' such as: Samsung, Apple, Sony and so on have been doing with their flagships; they are actually providing the same functionalities: making phone calls, messages, notifications and assist daily tasks. What truly differentiate themselves among others is the experience they deliver. This includes customer services, branding, pricing strategies, marketing efforts.

What exactly is customer service? It is the ability to use the knowledge, database, skills to deliver products and services in order to satisfy identified as well as unidentified needs of internal and external customers. It is assisted by technology and is responsible 24/7. Hence, ultimately results in positive word-of-mouth publicity and return businesses. (R. Lucas 2012)

Big corporations realized these signals. They acknowledged that factors such as increased technology, globalization, and governmental programs are encouraging an economic shift from manufacturing to service. Businesses operate internationally, providing global experience services. In order to do this,

they must become customer-centric organization. Organizations are adding CCOs (Chief Customer Officer) to their executive level. This person is responsible for all operations that involve and influence customer relations. By looking after how they are treating their customers, they aim to increase satisfaction and loyalty of customers. (R. Lucas 2012)

With the help of technology, companies are associating "personal emotion" services to their customers which is regard as "personalization" in this research. According to Intrends magazine (2006), personalization within globalization is going to be the next global megatrend.

6.2   The importance of customer-centric thinking

According to B. Schmitt (2003), companies of all kinds acknowledge that their customers are the company's most valuable asset. A company survives only when it has customers and grows only when the existing condition is retained and new customers are acquired; and that the company, therefore, should be structured and managed around the customer. In one of his survey conducted in 2002 at Columbia Business School, customer focus was the most important differentiator between the best and worst companies. This was identified by more than a hundred U.S. managers. As mentioned above, while firms being internal focus and devote enormous resources to developing new products and technologies. They lack customer inputs. To be more accurate, they are developing without taking into account the needs and demands of their customers. Therefore, being customer-oriented is so important, organizations with customer-centric thinking determine and meet the needs of their customers both internal and external. They provide powerful and compelling customer experiences to set themselves apart from competitors. In addition, customer's problem is being solved or even denied to be developed in the first place. (R. Lucas 2012.)

R. Lucas (2012) also points out a couple of common characteristics for leading edge customer-focused organizations. Companies' policies are in place to allow employees to make decisions in order to better serve customers. To be more accurate, it gives the employees the autonomy and the power of decision-making; which encourages them to take a step further for their customer's requirements.

The management and systems of the companies should support the same purpose and reward employee efforts adequately to boost their morale and performance. Leading companies build relationship through Customer Relationship Management programs for both internal and external customers. Last but not least, customer-centric thinking is an ongoing, long-term achievements; re-evaluation and quantitative measurement are necessary to modify and upgrade the quality services to the customer; continuously benchmarking or comparing with competitors and related organization helps maintain an acute awareness and implementation of best service practices. Latest technology plays a critical role in connecting with and providing services to customers, vendors or suppliers and supporting business operation.

6.3   Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management: there are quite many definitions and concepts of customer relationship management (CRM). Customer relationship management (CRM) is designed to improve business relationships with customers, assist in customer retention and increase sale revenues by offering technologies with strategies and practices in managing and analyzing customer interactions and data throughout the customer life cycle. (M. Rouse 2014). Or according to Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong (2010), CRM stores and manages all the detailed information about individual customers and its usage in "touch points" to maximize customer loyalty. It is used by all customer-facing departments and partners as an alignment of strategy, processes and technology to manage customers. (S. Chand 2015). R. Lucas (2012) adds that CRM also identifies customer needs and based on that provides understandings and influences to customer behavior through ongoing communication strategies to acquire, satisfy and retain the customer. Needless to say that the ultimate goal is acquisition of customer loyalty the tendency of customers to return to a product or organization regularly because of the service and satisfaction they receive. CRM process's components includes different levels and channels of interactions between brand representatives and a customer. Operational-level processes involving sales and services representatives are usually physical interaction at stores. Collaborative processes are virtual interactions such as: e-mail, web-page assist and automated voice response. Through CRM, organizations acquire valuable customer data which is the input of analytical processes for marketing,

financial forecasting and so on. Then the outputs are used to satisfy customer's demand by providing appropriate products and services. (R. Lucas 2012)

Even though CRM is a lethal weapon in business, not all companies make the most use of it. B. Schmitt (2003) evens claims that CRM is one of the three misguides for businesses since CRM records customer data (mostly transactions) that is easy to measure, then helps to shape customer behavior through what is called operant conditioning - the consequences of customers spending pattern. It lacks information over the big picture, the data should record information that the customer cares about as well as information that can be used by employees to better serve and build relationship with customers. To be put in another way, databases instead of being a record-keeping device; must be experience-focused to provide relevant differentiation for the company. (B. Schmitt 2003).

Therefore, he encourages businesses to shift towards a more innovative concept of CRM which is called Customer Experience Management (CEM). This is basically the same as CRM, but is more focused on the process of strategically managing a customer's entire experience instead of an outcome-oriented. CEM aims to establish long-term relationship also known as customer retention by providing compelling experiences through delivering services and interactions before and even after the sale. Long-term relationship is believed to be the one that sustain the organization. (B. Schmitt 2003) This is also being mentioned by R. Lucas (2012), companies should enhance customer loyalty by making them feel comfortable through establishing and retaining ongoing friendships with customer.

Both of these visions conclude to one common result, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty which also generates customer insights. In both Business-to-Business or Business-to-Consumer markets, senior managers do not have much contact with customers (G. van Wulfen 2011) customer insights enables a company to become more responsive to customers by incorporate it into their strategies and implementation. This results in offering products with the right features, appeal, communications and all other factors that was retrieved from the customers themselves. (B. Schmitt 2003)

Customer insights are also a priceless asset of a company that contributes in designing customer journeys and experience which will be mentioned later in this research.

CRM or CEM as Bernd takes it up a notch, also offers other benefits such as: acquire customer loyalty, repeat and referral business, less need to obtain new customers through marketing, reduce marketing costs, increase return on investment (ROI), enhance existing customer loyalty, elevate profitability and identify marketing target based on statistics. (R. Lucas 2012)

It is essential to correctly understand how CRM can help you to control and develop your business. These statistics can be shocking. According to the Technical Assistant Research Program (TARP) Worldwide: it will cost an organization at least five times more to acquire a new customer than it will to keep an existing one. At least 50 percent of your customers who experience problems will not complain or contact your organization for help; they will simply go elsewhere. Customers who are dissatisfied will tell as many as 16 friends about a negative experience with your organization. An average business loses 10 to 15 percent of its customers per year because of bad service. Additionally, according to Harris Interactive (2010): bad customer experience causes a company to lose 86% of its consumers.

7 Consumer Behavior

To sum up, understanding customer behavior definitely helps businesses define their target customer, how to approach and influence them on their buying decision, what can be done in order for the companies to acquire them as loyal customers, earned marketing channels and so on. It is then important to shift our focus on what factors and how to influence customer behavior before and after their buying decision.

For the past recent years, businesses have witnessed a consumer behavior shift. Consumers have developed a totally different mindset: they are now more conscientious about their spending because there are so many options to choose. These options, alternatives and competitors' information are within reach, thanks to the Internet. Consequently, due to the various choices, consumers' expectations of quality service are more demanding than before. According to consumers, customer service agents failed to answer their questions half of the time (Harris Interactive). Customer services professionals

are expected not only to have up-to-date product information but also knowledge regarding companies' policies, procedures, competitors' offers, latest news and techniques. While 80% of companies believe that they are delivering superior customer service, only 8% of people think the same companies actually deliver such service (Lee Resources). Consumers are now being more enhanced with their preparation. With the ease of accessing information from the Internet, customer is more aware of what they are searching for: specification, promotions, campaigns and so on. Statistic says that approximately 58% of Americans perform online research about the products and services that they are considering purchasing (J. Jansen 2010)

This is why it is so important to identify what influence customer behavior has on their decision-making process. To obtain customer loyalty, companies need to not only satisfy their needs but also theirs wants - things that they typically desire but do not necessarily need. These wants are personal recognition and empathy. They want to be understood and appreciated. Personalization is said by 38% of consumer as a factor determine happy customer service (Genesys Global Survey 2009). Offering personal recognition can be as simple as treating them as an individual: focus on them personally and show them that we appreciate their time, effort, patience and trust or as complicated as showing empathy by listening actively and sharing emotional feelings with their problems. Just be cautious that it is not bothering or offending them as invading privacy. (R. Lucas 2012.)

This research only takes into account two factors, which from the author's perspective hold the most influential power over customer-decision making or customer buying behavior. These factors are brand experience and customer satisfaction.

7.1 Brand experience

Branding has become more and more important for companies as well as customers. The brand itself helps customers set the image differentiating one company's products over others. In his book of customer experience management, B. Schmitt (2003) states that brand experience includes the product itself, logos and signage, advertising, packaging and brochures. In short, it is all the static elements that the customer encounter.

Brand experience has three key aspects: the product experiences, brand identity and the experiential communications. The products are the utmost important factor to the experience. It is what the customers were there for in the first place. However, not only the features of the product are important, how the product works and the intellectual as well as emotional experience it delivers are focal. Brand identity comprises of all the environment and surrounding elements associate with the product such as: stores design, packages, the user interface of an application and so on. The experiential communications is a rather complicated concept where there are four layers of the experiential world how brand communicates with the customers: sociocultural/business context, usage and consumption situation, product category experiences and experience of the product or brand.

Firstly, the brand experience is developed out of an understanding of the broadest layer of sociocultural trends which means that it is created in order to re-solve a demanding problem. Then, the brand fits perfectly into the usage situation where it becomes iconic and unique. Moreover, the brand offers a differentiated experience within the product category, this is what we so-called "competitive advantages". Thus, the brand is considered to be meaningful and relevant to customers by helping them solving their problems. (B Schmitt 2003)

Since branding is a broad and very complex factors of customer experience, this research is not going to cover the aspect of it. This chapter shows that how branding can influence and contribute to the personalization concept.

Example of slogans that focused on delivering personal emotional towards custtomers:

"It's your store" - Albertsons Grocery Stores

"We'll leave the light on for you" - Motel 6

7.2 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the index that companies use to measure their customer feelings and satisfaction toward products or services they provide with. It can be measured by evaluating customer expectations: if the expectations are met, the customer is satisfied; otherwise, the customer is not satisfied. Customer expectations is set from the customers' perspective after considering the product features, influenced by advertisements, word-of-mouth publicity, testimonials. It can be different with two people even for the same product of the same brand. Another factor that needs to be taken into account is the charting rate of usage. It is very different for the end-users to experience the product the first time compared with the experience of using the product the thirtieth time. What impress customers in the first time may no longer be relevant after using such a long time, they look for more characteristics in the product which sometimes can be demanding and challenging. (R. Lucas 2012.)

However, customers are usually not expecting specialized services or products if they are not tailor-made. Since their expectations have been set so that whether they get the product and whether the product works flawlessly. Personalization facilitates the ideas of taking another step for the customer by associating extra freebies along with the actual products/services.

For example, a couple who just got married and were on the way to enjoy their honeymoon. They booked a 5-stars hotel superior room in advance as well as a table for two at the hotel's restaurant with a cake to celebrate their wedding that has "Jake and Mary" written on it. As they arrived, the receptionist greeted them by their first names, congratulated on their wedding and cheerfully announced that their room had been upgraded to Honeymoon Suite free of charge. The couple was delighted; they came into the room to find a bottle of wine and a handwritten letter by the manager thoughtfully placed on the table. No need to say that they were shockingly impressed, they enjoyed their honeymoon, willingly spent more on the services such as: spas, local tours, bars and restaurants at the hotel; registered themselves as membership, shared their photos via social medias, rated and left comments on Tripadvisor.com. It was a win-win situation, the hotel took a wise step for the customer and they receive much more

afterward: more sales revenues, earned marketing channels, brand image, consumer-generated contents and so on.

According to B. Schmitt (2003), the misconception of customer satisfaction is that the majority of companies is building its strategy and business revolving around the concept of customer satisfaction paradigm which for the matter of fact is an outcome-oriented approach. It is totally irrelevant what has been believed to be "satisfaction = loyalty". Thus, most satisfaction measures have been bad predictors of customer loyalty. Is customer experience very much differentiating itself to customer satisfaction? By asking the question regarding the same topic differently, the results can be quite stunning. For examples: "Are you satisfied with the deal?" and "Are you satisfied with the experience?" generate different answers. The concept of satisfaction is outcome-oriented while experience, in contrast, is process-oriented. The experience does not simply take into account only customers' feelings whether getting or not getting what they want at the end of the transactions. It also manages, measures and controls the whole experiences, touchpoints and interactions between customers and the employees.

When we take into account the ongoing process of handling customer problems, we can define the service breakdown at specific moments, control and modify it way better. Customers often take their businesses elsewhere without informing the company what is wrong during their experience, or take legal actions over the company. On the other hand, some customers generously give the company a second chance by complaints and feedback. For every customer who complains, there are 26 other customers who choose to remain silent (White House Office of Consumer Affairs). Every company must respect and appreciate customers who are willing to give feedback and complaint about receiving such poor treatment. They may not lose a customer but also recruit another negative word-of-mouth marketing channels. Consequently, damaging their brand and image badly. Retaining existing customers is cheaper and smarter than trying to attract new customers, especially when dealing with a huge rate of churn in competitive business. (R. Lucas 2012.)

This can be done in displaying right attitude and courtesy when dealing with customers. Personalization, from the author's perspective, this takes up a notch. Customers are likely to appreciate what employees and companies can offer them if they are feeling emotional attached as a result of what they received or heard. Personalization is an approach helping companies doing just that crucial part: "feeling emotional attached". The benefits it shall bring consists of: enhancing company and employee image when your customers feel comfortable about you and the image projected, a higher level of trust and willingness are developed to be more tolerant when things do go wrong occasionally. It means that your mistakes are much more forgiving. It also increases customer loyalty. People often return to organizations where they feel welcome, serviced properly, and respected. Moreover, companies can gain a positive Word-of-Mouth marketing channel. This is a powerful and compelling earned marketing channel that has a very high credibility to customers as well as helping decreasing the traditional marketing methods. Complaints are reduced since they are satisfied with their needs and wants. Additionally, employee morale and esteem increase since they feel that they are doing a good job and get positive customer and management feedback, they will probably feel better about them-selves. Hence, employee-customer communication is improved which encourage customer to freely approach and talk to you. Needs, expectations, and satisfaction levels can then be more easily determined. Last but not least, financial losses decrease: companies are less likely to desert to competitors, file law-suits, steal and be abusive toward employees, spread negative stories. (R. Lucas 2012.)

8 Customer Experience Design

8.1 Customer Journey

Customer journey is the whole experience of customers when interacting with a company and its brand. It documents the full journey of being a customer instead of just focusing on a part of a transaction. (Sorman 2014). During the customer journey, the customer receives services from the brand representatives which may or may not by physical and human. For examples: services can be delivered at physical stores or via telephone, emails; the information given to the customer may come from the employee or may be generated by the automated

response system. However, delivering services do not only exist during the purchasing process but also follow-up after the sale concludes. There are vast of opportunities to enhance the overall experience and attain customer satisfaction. Providing track and trace code for customers, neat packaging, correct invoices and fast payment procedures are just a few examples of after-sales services. (R. Lucas 2012.) Many companies have recognized this and have been continuously improving their customer experience by incorporating all the customer service environment. The experience competition is getting tough. However, they are not well though-out for their journey design, the service blueprint itself may not be customer-focused or interrupted. The purpose should be only including what is beneficial to the customer by helping employees to identify customer's request and respond to it as quickly, efficiently and cheerful as possible. Complicated procedures and too many unnecessary steps often cause criticism, dissatisfaction, potential customer loss and employee frustration. (R. Lucas 2012.)

The way to do this is to create a seamless integrated customer journey. Not only it has these benefits:

1. Integration provides differentiation: this is especially important for small companies because they lack budgeting and innovations. "80% of Americans agree that smaller companies place a greater emphasis on customer service than large business" (2011 Global Customer Service Parameter Survey 2011)
2. Integration provides deep connection with customers: approach customers intellectually and emotionally. Thus, it provides a memorable experience that is worth sharing.
3. Integration saves costs.

It is only proved to be effective and successful provided the experience the customer perceived is an unified whole instead of a scattered delivery of random impressions (B. Schmitt 2003).

8.2 Touchpoints

Touchpoints are the components of customer journeys; they are everything interactions point between company and customers (A. Richardson 2010). Any

procedures that involve a contact between service providers or an organization via any forms (virtual, physical, verbal or non-verbal) with a customer is considered to be an opportunity to attain customer loyalty and strengthen the relationship (R. Lucas 2012).

In order to create a seamless customer journey, every touchpoint have to be connected and smoothly take the customer throughout the processes. One failure of delivering service can ruin the whole process, it is not responsible by one aspect of customer service; business must see the broader view of it as a whole. (B. Schmitt 2003)

For example, a customer wanted to buy a TV for their new house. After hearing a lot of testimonials about a specific model, he decided on the retailers. He chose retailer A because the user-interface on the website was friendly, information was easy to read, and every comment received decent answer from the customer service department. As he visited the store to experience the product, he was not fully satisfied with the TV he was recommended, the staff was helpful, provided consulting, recommended another product that met his demand, and offered discount. Everything was perfect and he was happy. However, the deal did not end at that moment, the TV was promised to be delivered to his house within 2-3 working days. Yet it never came. There were issues and the delivery was delayed. He got frustrated, called the service line several times, the agent apologized for the inconvenience and politely asked him to wait but it took forever to get back into conversation. Consequently, the company lost its positive impression, he is not likely going to make any purchase from retailer A anymore.

Example: Avis car-rental services: the company identified and strategically implement customer-focused thinking in every touchpoint. It paid off by streamlining processes, improving efficiency and ruled out any obstacles between services and customers. In 2002, Avis was ranked number one in its category by the Brand Keys customer loyalty index, an annual survey of brand loyalty for 158 companies in almost 30 different industries. (Mucha 2002 pp 84-86).

As part of managing touchpoints and experiences, things can be a bit over-the-top. For example: the company name Jamba Juice pays attention to the little details such as "suckability factor" of the straw as part of its quality control. The

key objective of tracking the experience at individual touchpoints is to develop profound understandings of how an experience can be enriched for the customer throughout what marketers call the "customer decision-making process". Each stage of the decision process provides a touchpoint that is worthwhile finding out not only what information needs customers have (as most traditional marketing has done) but also what experiences they desire. (B. Schmitt 2003)

"Customer loyalty is an emotional rather than a rational thing and every touch point with a customer is an opportunity for you and your organization to influence customer loyalty." (R. Lucas 2012)

From the author's assessments, personalization does the best job of arousing emotional attached between customers and brand's representative. At different touchpoints, personalization can be applied in various ways. At the early stage of the process, such as approaching customers whether physical or virtual marketing contents (see Amazon case study) or even after the deal has been closed and the customers are using the actual products.

8.3 Customer Interface

"Customer interface refers to the dynamic exchange of information and service that occurs between the customer and a company- in person, over the phone, online or in any other way" (B. Schmitt 2003.)

It is believed that even small companies can differentiate and win over customers from big corporations by putting efforts in designing customer interface with correct customer insights. The customer interface can indeed enhance or degrade depending on how you design it. It must incorporate all the tangible (product display, store environment...) as well as intangible (voice, attitude, music, and attitude of employees) elements. Moreover, it is not an occasionally job but company needs to monitor and control it over and over until it reaches a certain degree of consistency and efficiency. We are talking about a whole journey that contains various touchpoints, not only at specific touchpoint. (B. Schmitt 2003.)

For most companies, according to B. Schmitt (2003), the customer inter-face includes three types of exchanges and interactions:

1. Face-to-face: communication in physical stores and service counter.

This aspect is where employees are involved and the most critical. Because they are the front-line representatives who are directly communicating and delivering services to the customers. Their ability to handle customers may reflect heavily on how customers perceived the brand and their experience. Some important approaches to remember is always treat customers with respect and as an individual. Make them feel special by listening and being attentive to their problem. Look for opportunities to communicate on a personal level if possible, compliment them to brighten up the mood. Always ensure a two-way communication. It basically explains itself, there must be a sender and a receiver, who each contribute to the communication process. During the delivering, used customer-focused language and make customers feel welcomed. For example, using first name is the top tricks used by hotels; instead of "You'll need to fill out this form before I can process with your request", try "Mr. Renaldi, can you please provide some information on this form while I start processing the document on my computer? That way, the procedures will be much faster and you can catch up on your day." The latter approach recognizes and puts the customer on top priority or at least, it sounds like that. Hence, the result is stunning and customers are more likely to forgive or even impressed by how his or her situation are dealt with. (R. Lucas 2012.)

2. Personal-but-distant: communication via phone, fax or in writing. This is where most companies go wrong. Even though they acknowledge that phone services is one of the most basic and efficient form of customer services. It is easy to access by every customer, easy to manage and operate. However, the statistic shows otherwise

"75% of customers believe it takes too long to reach a live agent" (Harris Interactive)

"67% of customers have hung up the phone out of frustration they could not talk to a real person" (2011 Global Customer Service Parameter Survey, 2011)

Make sure the right measurements are applied for such kind of services: the amount of calls, numbers of replies, average waiting times, resolved calls, and so on.

3. Electronic: interact via websites, emails, SMS often is the product of mass-produced communications. This is a modern approach recently since the amount of phone subscribers has been skyrocketed in the past few years. Almost every one owns a phone today so mass-produced SMS for surveys, marketing are adopted and developed. However, not so much positive results have been yielded from this method. In fact, it may prove to be negative as it leaves not good impression to the customers that your company is trying to spamming them.

8.4   The experiential platform

The experiential platform from the book of B. Schmitt (2003) consists of:

1. Experiential positioning: is an image-driven depiction of the experience that the brand stands for. It can be viewed as the brand experience associating within the experience of the customers.

2. Experiential value promise (EVP): specifies precisely what the experiential positioning will do for the customer: it states what the customer will "get" as an experience; the company must fulfill this promise, or the customer will be disappointed. For example: NIKE's EVP has been to provide functionally superior shoes and sportswear that will allow customers to engage in superior performance. That is what Nike promises and guarantees to its customers. In implementing the brand experience, Nike's emphasis is on product functionality (the shoe must fit, perform, and protect). The company's Web site provides detailed information about the technology related to the performance characteristics of the shoe. (B. Schmitt 2003)

3. Overall implementation theme: is a concrete manifestation of the platform- a value-adding concept that can be implemented in the style and content of the brand, interface, and innovation elements.

Experiential platform allows firms to identify and implement key customer insights into designing phase. Involving customers' ideas and needs is the most effective and straight-forward method to improve the quality of the experience. It incorporates relevant knowledge and insight based on qualitative and quantitative research of the experiential word of the customer while providing coordination by connecting key internal personnel with external firms involved in the implementation. (B. Schmitt 2003); (G. Van Wulfen 2011.)

Last but not least, always remember to go the extra mile by giving your customers exemplary service. This is a critical point where company exceeds its promise and customers' satisfaction in order to leave impression for loyalty

Examples:

Auto repair technician: "After I rotated and balanced your tires, I checked and filled all your fluids, and also inspected all your hoses free of charge."

Hotel operator: "Along with your wake-up call, I'll have some complimentary coffee or tea brought up. Which would you prefer?"

Clothing salesperson: "While you try on that outfit, I'll go pick out a couple of other blouses that would suit you perfectly."

(R. Lucas 2012.)

8.5 Innovations

As the market has become more and more competitive, plus the customer has become more demanding than before. It is a must for organizations, who want to grow, have to adapt quickly to the changes, incorporate and make use of the advancement in technology to innovate existing products/services or invent new ones. (G. Van Wulfen 2011.)

Therefore, innovation is an undeniable factor to keep the business running and retain customer's satisfaction and loyalty. However, it is not necessary for firms to literally invent something new and genius. Because from the customer's perspective, even small improvements can be considered to be a huge innovation if they simplify the barriers or speed up the processes of doing businesses with them. For example: the 1-Click button provided by Amazon in 1997, Amazon recognized the troublesome for customers to repeatedly typing their address and credit card information repeatedly which restrict the ability to do shopping online. The company announced 1-Click button for customer to have their information saved to its database and can be retrieved immediately with just a press of a button. It was brilliant and a huge leap for their business as well as e-commerce. The important aspect that we must look up to that is because they stepped in the shoes of their customers, knowing what they were looking for and hoping to get.

The ultimate goal is to create a memorable and compelling customer experience; therefore, companies have to incorporate customer insights gain from qualitative and quantitative data: innovate new product/service, reflect the experiential platform which improves customer's personal and business lives. (B. Schmitt 2003.)

An example of a marketing innovation:

NikePark: 2002 Fifa World Cup in Korea and Japan. Nike staged its own amateur, walk-in World Cup for fans all over the world. People could walk in, sign up and join teams to compete in a series. NikeParks were set up in cities around the world- Tokyo, Seoul, Mexico, London, Beijing just to name a few. NikeParks did not focus on commercialism, it was built to celebrate soccer playing and in the process created a unique customer interface. The Website experience was carefully customized for local markets. For example: London received message "NikePark SKO has now finished. But you don't have to. Play on."; while Mexico received "El torneo ha finalizado. Gracias a todas las personas que hicieron suyo el NikePark". To complete the interface experience, visitors can buy Nike products on the site. Buyers can customize their shoes, selecting the style, the kind of tread they want, and their preferred color combinations. They can even request a monogram of their name and jersey number if they like. (B. Schmitt 2003.)

To sum up, continuously innovate can contribute to customer experiences in several ways:

1. Increase the value of doing business with the company. (This is for both B2B and B2C)
2. New solutions improve personal and business lives of customers thus enhance the whole experience.
3. Keep up with competitors and be relevant in the market. (In order not to fall behind to the advancement of technology)

(B. Schmitt, 2003.)

9 Empirical Data

9.1 Amazon

Amazon is primarily an e-commerce business even though it manufactures and sell electronic devices such as Kindle, or Fire (phones, tablet). E-commerce is where companies market their products and services on the Internet with the help of technology. These products and services are accessible for Internet users to choose and evaluate (R. Lucas 2012.). Over the past few years, Amazon has been one of the pioneers that focused on mining and using customer data to create a more curated e-commerce experience both front-end and back-end by extending its personalization features for its sellers on marketplace. (L. Rao 2013.)

Based on the comments above and personal assessments, the author believes that Amazon is one of the leaders in implementing personalization into their business operations. By analyzing how such a big corporation is implementing personalization approach can help clarifying the idea and the importance of personalization strategy. The analysis consists of two parts: the business timeline and the users' experiences. The business timeline consists of the milestones indicating Amazon's announcements or introduction of events which, according to the author, are relevant to enhance the customer service in a personalization approach. However, this is totally based on the author's point of view, which may not be as valid for Amazon Incorporation. For latter, the users' experiences: the author is going to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews to rationalize the correlations between the business's intentions and users' experiences. The author anticipates that there would be a correlation to some extend between the company's intentions and users' experiences. Therefore, he proposes that the personalization concept and strategy is relevant and worth investing. However, if it is proved otherwise which means no correlation is found, it is critical to identify the deficits of Amazon's operations in order to raise awareness of such concept or whether this concept is valid for businesses to invest and implement.

9.1.1 Business timelines

In this section, the author create a table that illustrates the key events from the author's perspective; these events are developed by Amazon by mining and analyzing customer database, opinions, feedback or to response to special occasions and objectives. The information was collected from Amazon websites and press release articles between the year of 1997 and 2015. Amazon has been continuously improving and adding more products as well as services into its portfolios and operations. The author classifies these innovations into five different categories: User interface and business operation, Personalized customer content (including customer-generated reviews), Add-on services (most of them are free of charge), Portfolio expansion and Multiple platform experience, and personalized products/services for developers, sellers and partners. The table below shows the event occurs (introduction or announcement of new products/services by Amazon), year of event and in which categories the event has most influence (some event may have multiple influences). More information regarding the products/services can be found on Amazon websites, press releases

	User Interface and business operations	Personalized customer content	Add-on services	Portfolio expansion and multiple platform experience	Personalized for developers, sellers and partners
1997		1-Click Shopping			
2000	Amazon Marketplace				
2001			-In-store pick up -Look inside the book feature		
2002					Amazon Web Services
2003			Search inside the book feature		
2005		-Amazon Prime -Gift Central	Amazon Wedding		Alexa Web Information Services
2006	-Emergency Preparedness Store -Grocery Store -Interest-free financing	-Customer Vote	-Click-to-call -Premium Delivery		-Amazon Connect -Amazon S3 -Webstore and Fulfillment for SMEs

Year					
2007		Customer video review	-European Storage for S3 -Bill-me-later service	Amazon Kindle	
2008	Frustration-free packaging	-Amazon Giver -Amazon Grapevine -Daily deal text alerts	-Amazon TextBuyIt -		-Elastic IP -Elastic Block Store -Amazon CloudFont
2009	-Xbox live store -AmazonBasics -Bestsellers Archive	-Amazon Encore	-Local express delivery -AWS to Asia -Textbook Trade-in program	-Kindle 2 -Kindle app for Iphone and Ipod -Kindle DX -Shopping application for Android -Kindle for PC	-Amazon Encore
2010		-"Your Kindle Commercial Contest"	-Amazon Webstore -Mom program -Price check by Amazon	-Kindle for Blackberry, Mac, Web -Kindle App for Ipad, Android -Shopping App for Ipad	-Amazon Studios
2011	-Amazon Local		-Prime instant videos -Cloud Drive -Cloud Player -Kindle Cloud Reader -Kindle owners' lending library	-Amazon Appstore -Amazon Silk -New Kindles -	-AWS Cloud Formation -Amazon VPC -KDP Select
2012	-Amazon Supply -Textbook Rental	-Friends and families gifting	-Dynamic Content Support -Game Circle -Game Connect -X-Ray for Movies -Kindle Serials -Whispercasst for Kindle -Video Gift catd -Kindle Freetime Unlimited	-Kindle Paperwhite -AWS Marketplace on Microsoft Windows.	-Amazon Dynamo DB -AWS Marketplace -Amazon Glacier -Reserved Instance Marketplace -Amazon RedShift - Amazon EC2
2013		-AmazonSmile -Personalized Kindle Accessories	-Amazon AutoRip -Kindle Matchbook	-Log in and pay with Amazon	-Amazon OpsWorks -Log in with Amazon' -Mobile Association API -Appstore Developer Select -Amazon EC2 GPU Instance Type

Year					
					-Amazon Kinesis -Amazon Appstream -Amazon Workspaces -Amazon StoryBuilder
2014	-Prime Music -#AmazonWishList -Amazon Elements	-Make an Offer	-Amazon Zocalo -Amazon Student Scholarship -PrimePhotos -PrimeNow -Kindle Textbook Creator -Amazon WorkMail	-Amazon Fire TV -Amazon Fire -All-new Fire HDX -All-new Fire HD	-Dynamic SDK, Firefly SDK -AWS for Mobile Developers -Amazon new EC2 -Amazon Lambda -EC2 Container serviced -Lifecycle Management servces -Amazon Aurora -Amazon Elements
2015	-Amazon Home Services -Amazon Business		-Amazon Cloud Drive -Unlimited Cloud Storage -Amazon Workspaces application manager -Alexa Skill Kits -Instance Preview for Kindle Books -StoryWriter	-AWS for Desktop -Shopping App for Apple Watch -Amazon Echo	-Amazon Machine Learning -M4 instances -Amazon API Gateway -AWS Device Farm -AWS Database Migration Services -Amazon RDS -AWS IoT -Amazon QuickSight -Streaming Partner program

Table 1: Amazon's Business Timeline

(Amazon Press Archives)

Those mentioned above are the highlights form 1997-2015 of Amazon's business. Even though, the author has not experienced all the services himself, still acknowledges that the firm has been continuously innovating itself and its services/ products to meet the needs and demands from customers. We can clearly see that there are hundreds of innovations- small or big ones for all the aspects: the marketplace ("Bill me later", "1-Click", "Dash-button") to developers (Amazon Web Services, Amazon Cloud, Amazon S3), or even customers who

are the sellers (Amazon fulfillment program). By adding additional innovative features as technology has moved forwards (the amount of innovations increase enormously in recent years compare to before 2005), it enriches the online customer experience. (B. Schmitt 2003). This can be easily seen by how Amazon takes care of its customers. For example: as they developed, they also introduce shopping application across platforms: IOS, Android, Tablets and Kindle; this is also applicable for Kindle app and Kindle devices. Amazon wanted to eliminate any obstacles or difficulties in users' experience, people can seamlessly continue their shopping processes on their phone after they leave their workstation without bothering searching and filling out products and information over and over again. Moreover, it also connects others and responses to special occasions. Amazon Wish List allows you to add items into your wish lists for future reminders and alerts; Amazon Giver and Amazon Grapevine then use this Wish List in order to connect with your friends on social media: make them aware that you would like to have these items in the upcoming future. Special occasions whether personal or not are also noticed and respected by the firm: Amazon Wedding for a couple making lists of presents and gifts; Amazon Emergency preparedness store actively response to the forecast of a disastrous hurrican in 2006. Those are few examples how Amazon values such small details and provide solutions with proper delivery approach to its customers. The question is: **How did Amazon develop those innovations mentioned above?**

From the author's perspective, there are two main sources: the internal customer proposal and the customers' insights gathered from customers' behaviors and activities.

The internal customer proposal is the efforts and contributions of Amazon's employees, especially the R&D department. They are responsible for innovating new projects and services to enhance the customers' lives and experiences. Some of the ideas may originally come from the employee himself/ herself. That is remarkably important due to the fact that not every customer knows what they actually need and how they can enrich the experience. Originals are breakthroughs and often be highly appreciated by the customers.

Secondly, this is where the customer database comes into the strategy. B. Schmitt (2003) states that Amazon was one of the first Websites to use cookies to customize the online experience. All the associated features include, for example: greeting by

name, personalized recommendations based on buying and browsing behaviors on previous visits, information and product specifications online (availability, delivery dates, customer-generated contents, and so on), up-sell and cross-sell by deliver "Customers who bought this book also bought". This enhance the users' experience, make they feel special about their interest and behaviors, hence, remind and encourage them to buy or spend more, write reviews, and recommend for friends and families. Not only tracking and fostering customer relationships help increase effectiveness in e-marketing, raise sales revenues and average spending; but it also gathers helpful data from customers. What kind of obstacles, or difficulties they encounter during the whole experience? From accessing the websites (putting more servers to optimize the loading time), searching for products (introduces specific categories, Search in text, First Look…), evaluating alternatives (product specifications, customer generated reviews...), payment (" Bill me later", 1-Click payment), Delivery (One-day delivery, Prime, Drone) or even from third-party platforms: mobile, watch, tablets or website (Log in with Amazon, Kindle, Amazon Shopping app, and so on). There are experts at Amazon who specialize only in examining and interpreting the re-views, comments and feedback that customers give them and then assess them for the R&D team to develop resolutions. It can be easier said than done, that is why Amazon has been ranked as top companies and e-commerce platforms for so many years despite large number of new competitors such as Alibaba, EBay, Lazada, Zalora, and so on.

9.2 Interview Analysis

The interviews were conducted in form of semi-structure interviews either face-to-face or via Skype due to the difference in locations.

A total of five interviews were conducted, the interviewees were gathered sampled amongst friends of the author who has had experiences using Amazon (preferably more than two times). Most of the interviewees are studying or interesting in business-related industry. Therefore, the concepts and case shall be reviewed under a business's perspective. Moreover, open-minded 22-28 years old candidates were selected due to the nature of Amazon; an E-Commerce retailing platform- which prefer people who access Internet frequently. There are basic back-ground information of the interviewees. Interviews were recorded and availability of sharing information has been granted and approved by the interviewees themselves.

No	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Vu Kieu Phong Vu	Male	27	Student
2	Danny Dung Vu	Male	23	Lotte Cinema Marketing Specialist
3	Tin Trung Tran	Male	23	Project Manager at Fundstart
4	Khue Duong Pham	Female	24	Outsourcing officer cum Headhunter at Hyundai Consulting and Services
5	Hien Duc Nguyen	Male	25	Student

Table 2: Interviewee's background information

All those above-mentioned interviewees have had more than two experiences with Amazon. Moreover, all the experiences were as a normal user, not Prime member of Amazon. The collected data are going to be analyzed into seven aspects: reason for choosing Amazon, user's interface, personalized marketing, personalized services, potential for investment, future of E-commerce and Amazon's future position.

9.2.1 Reason for choosing Amazon

While being asked about the reason behind choosing Amazon as the e-retailer for the purchase, all 5 participants agreed that Amazon has a good reputation. It is one the first e-commerce website and has been consistently growing its business until now. In addition, 4 out of 5 participants said that the wide range of product categories that Amazon offers is a remarkable competitive advantage. Others factors such as: cheap and affordable prices, seasonal promotion, dis-counts, testimonials were also taken into account while participants were doing the research. Another important point is that, except for participant No.4, other participants are either studying and working in European countries, they say that using Amazon in Europe gives them the advantages of convenience and tax-free

(sometimes even free shipping). This may not be relevant in the future when the location of participant is changed.

9.2.2 User's interface

Participants (No).2 and (No).5 state that they have been using various platforms from different retailers: E-Bay, Alibaba.com. Both of them agreed that Amazon's user's interface is simple, user friendly and straight-forward compared to others. Either of them has had no obstacles in searching the products and comparing alter-natives. Product specifications, seller's information, customer-generated contents such as customer reviews, customer video review, seller's review are all available and noticeable. After the author introduced the concept of personalization, how it is applied in the Amazon's web interface, all the participant acknowledged that they had encounter such experience. They showed no surprises since they said that most of the Internet websites, such as Youtube, Google, Instagram, booking.com, momondo.com and so on are doing the exact same things: recommendations, preferences, "you may also be interested in" sections. However, four of them said that it was nice to have such features since it reminds them of what they looked at previously, also recommends things that they might had been looking for or might had not realized the need of it. Participant No. 3 had another opinion, he said that it was not a big plus to apply such method since the sites neglect opportunities to promote other products beside what he has looked for. Moreover, since lots of sites have also implemented such concept, it is no longer a unique competitive advantage for businesses. All the participants experienced the Amazon shopping experience on multiple devices: phones, personal computers and tablet. They agreed that Amazon has done a great job in creating a seamless experience in online-shopping.

9.2.3 Personalized Marketing

Four out of five participants said that they noticed the personalized advertisement on third-party websites after visiting Amazon. Participant No.2 and No.4 were surprised and wondered "How do they know about my browsing history?". Beside the shocking feeling, they also raised questions regarding their privacy on browsing the Internet. Participant No.5 made a note about this matter, he said that it was already a risk of privacy invasion when you decided to browse the

Internet. He also noted that he rarely encountered such personalized banner or advertisement since he used a third-party software called AdBlock which prohibit any advertisement from appearing on the web. They agreed that this method has effective effect on reminding users about their interested products, offer discount and promotion available.

9.2.4 Personalized Services

Beside the personalized marketing, the interviewer introduced to interviewees that there were other personalized services that Amazon offered for their customers. Being a buyer on Amazon, the most familiar and directive services for them is the 1-Click button- which can save all the information regarding: credit card, shipping addresses in order to rule out excessive procedures to fasten the shopping experience. All of the participants have never had experience in using the 1-Click button. When being asked about the reason why they have not been using this button, they answered that they realize the benefits it brings. However, participant (No).5 often makes purchases over 100$ which requires him to pay attention and carefully fill out the information in order not to make mistakes. Participant (No).2, (No).4 and No.3 said that they rarely buy things from Amazon so this button is not necessary but it may be useful and time-consuming for regular or Prime member. Participant (No).1 had a great experience with Amazon. Once time, he bought an item on Amazon, but the order was incorrect which cause him to received incorrect items. He contacted the seller, asked for reverse logistics and re-order. He received the reply with courtesy, all the reverse shipping fee was covered, he got his wanted product few days later and was satisfied with the experience.

9.2.5 Potential for investment

Regarding the potential of personalization strategy, only participant (No).3 said that it might not be a wise choice for business to implement this concept. He believed that it is not a new trend, the advantages it brings may not outnumber the disadvantages as well as the number of resources spent. Participants (No).1, (No).2 and (No).4, on the other hand, think that this is an effective strategy and worth-investing. It designs the overall experience of customers, take care of those touchpoints, increase satisfaction, strengthen relationship with customer, encourage positive Word-of-Mouth. Hence, it helps generates more sales, attract

new customers, retain and enrich relationships with existing customers, and gain competitive advantage for business. However, they also stated that they have not acknowledged or witnessed any other personalized experiences with Amazon besides marketing advertisement and interface appearance. Participant (No).5, while being supportive of this concept, raises questions regarding the possibilities of implementing it for every departments in the company. The possibility of one-to-one approach is nearly impossible for large and multinational organizations where customers are massive and different in nationalities, languages, cultures and so on.

9.2.6 Future of E-commerce

When confronting the global trend of E-Commerce, which is believed to be able to replace or outperform traditional business, interviewees agree on to some extend such as high-tech products, e-services and e-products (eBooks). However, they also believed that E-Commerce can never be able to replace the traditional business market. On the other hand, companies shall try to combine and integrate these two in order to create a seamless and convenient journey for the customers. Participant (No).1 also gives specific example that the clothing industry shall never be replaced by E-commerce since consumers would like to try on the outfits, being able to touch and feel the products: materials, quality, size.

9.2.7 Amazon's future position

The participants' opinion toward Amazon's positioning in the upcoming future are promising since Amazon has a good reputation, history and are on the right way of using customer database: feedback, opinions and so on to continuously research and develop new services and products. They believe that the most important for E-commerce is credibility. Amazon is one of the biggest corporations in the world and It is going to strive for its motto: being the most customer-centric company in the world. Hopefully, by continuing expanding its product categories, benefits for both internal and external customers and effective strategy, Amazon can achieve great results.

10 Limitation

The study does not cover in-depth analysis of different business department and aspect such as: branding, finance, supply chain management, type of business (B2B, B2C, services industry) and so on. Due to the limited resources and the scope of a Bachelor's thesis, the author chose to only analyze Amazon as case company, Vietnamese interviewees and only five interviews. The author acknowledged that choosing all Vietnamese as interviewees may narrow the opinion and vision of the study. However, despite alike nationality, they have been living and experiencing, in this case, Amazon from different region of the world such as: Finland, Germany, Netherland and Vietnam. It is suggested that this study may not have the same result and be applicable for other users; such as non-Vietnamese, prime users, middle-aged users or seniors. The timelines of Amazon and analysis are mostly based on the knowledge of the author with references from academic books and business articles. Those assumptions may not be true and valid from Amazon's perspective.

Moreover, both the author and the participants have never experienced other services besides its e-retailer website. Therefore, the user experiences with Amazon Web Services as sellers, corporations, and developers may encounter differences and possesses unsimilar perspective.

11 Conclusion

In summary, customer experience plays an utmost important role in influencing decision making process and customer loyalty. With the help of advance technology and customer-focused thinking, businesses are now developing customer relationship database, research and develop innovative products and associated services according to the needs and demands of customers. This can be retrieved and yielded from customer insights acquired from various sources such as: surveys, interactions with employees, customer reviews, complaints and so on. Customer relationship management needs to play a more effective role than just being a record-keeping devices in the company. It should be a lethal weapon available even for low-level operational employees to use the relevant information to assist and provide professional, high quality, timely services. This is a win-win situation for both parties: employees feel respected and competent

in his job, customers receive top-notch services, and enriched experience. Customer relationship database is also needed to be used in analyzing process in order to obtain customer insights, sales and marketing effectiveness, product research and development and so on. Based on customer insights, companies allocate its resources better, reduce overhead costs, improve operation, continuously measure and control every touchpoints and aspects of its business.

With the study of Amazon, it can be seen that how little and simple details can heavily affect and influence the buying-decision of customers. Being an e-retailers, it is undeniable that users' interface is one of its most important and influential factors in customer experiences. The interface of Amazon has been using personalization concept to modify a unique display and appearance for individual customer. There are no two-alike interface exist. Other details, such as recommended for you, bestsellers category, "you may be interested in" section encourage up-sell and cross-sell across departments, generate sales revenues and to some extend fulfill the overall customer experience. This is correlated to the data collected in the interviews. The concept is slightly recognized but not yet proved to be effective besides marketing and interface. While Amazon is continuously mining, and analyzing customer-generated contents in order to re-search and develop additional services, it needs to pay attention to raise the awareness of what they are aiming and doing to enrich the experience for its user. They need to measure the recognition level from its users: how many of them realize the concept and make use of it, churn rate and cost per customers when implementing this strategy. From the author is perspective, Amazon is on the right way toward its objectives and target and they should keep sticking with the personalization mindset.

Last but not least, the applicability of personalization strategy is not restricted to marketing aspect only but also has plenty room-to-grow in other departments across organizations. Moreover, the concept values both internal and external customers. Despite being a risky and resource-consuming approach, it still proves to be a big leap in improving service quality of firms – both tangible/in-tangible products. Further research may be needed to study more profoundly into different aspects of business such as marketing, or human resources and see how personalization can help achieve overall business performance. It would be suggested that further studies focus more on the internal aspect of

personalization, how suppliers and partners as well as employees can receive better benefits, compensations and values by treating them with respected and emotional attachments.

List of references

Amazon Inc. Annual reports 1997-2015. http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=97664&p=irol-reportsannual. Accessed on 22 February 2017

Amazon Inc. Press Release Archives. http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-news&nyo=17. Accessed on 22 February 2017

Baer, J. 2016. Customer experience definition. https://www.usertesting.com/blog/2016/03/09/what-is-cx/. Accessed on 19 February 2017.

Bowen, G. 2009. "Document Analysis as a Qualtiative Research Method", Qualtitative Research Journal, Vol. 9. Issue 2, pp. 27-40. Accessed on 19 February 2017.

California State University Long Beach, 2016. PPA 696 RESEARCH METHODS DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES II: QUALTITATIVE RESEARCH. https://web.csulb.edu/~msaintg/ppa696/696quali.html. Accessed on 19 February 2017.

Chand, S. 2015. CRM : Customer Relationship Management: Meaning, Need and Techniques of Building CRM. http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/marketing/consumer-behavior/crm-customerrelationship-management-meaning-need-and-techniques-of-buildingcrm/32292/. Accessed on 30 March 2016.

Doyle, A. What is a semi-structured interview? https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-a-semi-structured-interview-2061632. Accessed on 15 February 2017.

Echo, 2011. 2011 Global Customer Service Barometer: Market Comparison of Findings. http://about.americanexpress.com/news.docs/2011x/axp_2011_csbar_market.pdf. Accessed on 15 February 2017

Edwards, S. 2016. Why Business Personalization is the key to long-term success. https://www.inc.com/samuel-edwards/why-business-personalization-is-the-key-to-long-term-success.html. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Evergage, Inc. 2016. 2016 Trends in Personalization. http://www.evergage.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-Trends-in-Personalization-Survey-Report-Evergage-final.pdf. Accessed on 19 January 2017

Genesis Global Survey, 2009. Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. Qualitative Research Journal, Vol. 9 Iss:2, pp 27-40.

Gino, F 2015. How to Make Employees Feel Like They Own Their Work. https://hbr.org/2015/12/how-to-make-employees-feel-like-they-own-their-work. Accessed on 16 February 2017.

Haroun, C. 2016. Why the best companies always have the best customer service. https://www.inc.com/chris-haroun/why-companies-like-apple-and-amazon-always-have-the-best-customer-service.html. Accessed on 23 February 2017.

Harris Interactive/Right Now, 2010. Customer Experience Impact Report. http://www.oracle.com/us/products/applications/cust-exp-impact-report-epss-1560493.pdf. Accessed on 16 February 2017.

HelpScout, 2017. 75 Customer Service Facts, Quotes & Statistics How your Business Can Deliver With the Best of the Best. https://www.helpscout.net/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/. Accessed on 23 February 2017.

Jansen, J. 2010. Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project. https://www.helpscout.net/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/. Accessed on 23 February 2017

Kotler, P. ; Armstrong, G. 2010. Principles of Marketing Thirteenth Edition. Prentice Hall.

Lacy, L. 2015. Personalized Customer Experiences: 10 Expert Tips to Maximize Results.https://www.linkdex.com/en-us/inked/personalized-customer-experience/. Accessed on 19 January 2017

Lanoue, S. 2016. What is customer experience? 19 industry experts weigh in. https://www.usertesting.com/blog/2016/03/09/what-is-cx/. Accessed on 19 February 2017.

Lee Resources. https://www.helpscout.net/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/. Accessed on 23 February 2017

Lucas, R. 2012. Customer Service Skills for Success the Fifth Edition. Mc Graw Hill India.

McKinney, P. 2015. What is Customer Service? -Definition, Types and Role in Marketing.http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-customer-service-definition-types-role-in-marketing.html. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Merriam-Webster, 2016. Definition of Culture. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture . Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Miller, I. 2016. . Definition of Customer Service. CSM: the magazine for Customer Service Managers and Professionals. http://www.customerservicemanager.com/definition-of-customer-service/. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Mucha, T. 2002. "The Payoff for Trying Harder", Business 2.0 (July 2002), pp. 84-86.

Neely, P. 2016. Why (and How) Your Team Should Personalize the Customer in Marketing.http://www.business2community.com/brandviews/act-on/team-personalize-customer-experience-01682151. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Nguyen, H. 2017. Student. HAMK. Finland. Interviewed on 27 February 2017.

Oracle Corporation, 2012. Customer Experience Impact Report. http://www.oracle.com/us/products/applications/cust-exp-impact-report-epss-1560493.pdf. Accessed on 15 February 2017.

Oxford Dictionary 2016. Definition of Culture. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture. Accessed on 19 Janurary 2017.

Pham, D. 2017. Outsourcing Officer cum Headhunter. Hyundai Consulting and Services. Vietnam. Interviewed on 25 February 2017.

Pine, J. 2016. Customer Experience definition. https://www.usertesting.com/blog/2016/03/09/what-is-cx/. Accessed on 19 February 2017.

Qualitative Research Consultants Association 2015. What is qualitative research? http://www.qrca.org/?page=whatisqualresearch. Accessed on 30 March 2016.

Rao, L. 2013. How Amazon is tackling personalization and curation for sellers on its marketplace. https://techcrunch.com/2013/08/31/how-amazon-is-tackling-personalization-and-curation-for-sellers-on-its-marketplace/. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Richardson, A. 2010. Touchpoints bring the Customer Experience to Life. https://hbr.org/2010/12/touchpoints-bring-the-customer. Accessed on 19 January 2017

Rouse, M. 2007. Personalization. http://searchsalesforce.techtarget.com/definition/personalization. Accessed on 30 March 2016.

Rouse, M. 2014. Customer Relationship Management (CRM). http://searchcrm.techtarget.com/definition/CRM. Accessed on 30 March 2016.

Schmitt, B. 2003. Customer Experience Management: A Revolutionary Approach to Connecting with your Customer. Wiley.

Sigler, L. Personalization, relevance, and the customer experience. http://www.clarabridge.com/blog/personalization-relevance-customer-experience/. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Sorman, A. 2014. The Best Way to Map the Customer Journey: Take a Walk in Their Shoes. https://www.surveymonkey.com/blog/2014/03/21/map-customer-journey-keep-customers-happy/. Accessed on 19 January 2017

Tran, T. 2017. Project Manager. Fundstart. Vietnam. Interviewed on 23 February 2017.

Vu, D. 2017. Marketing Specialist. Lotte Cinema. Vietnam. Interviewed on 27 February 2017

Vu. V. 2017. Student. Saimaa UAS. Finland. Interviewed on 27 February 2017.

Waddell, T. 2013. Move from Mass Marketing to "Me" Marketing with Data Management. https://blogs.adobe.com/digitalmarketing/web-experience/move-from-mass-marketing-to-me-marketing-with-data-management/. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

White House Office of Consumer Affairs. https://www.helpscout.net/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/. Accessed on 23 February 2017

Wittenstein, M. 2016. Customer experience definition. https://www.usertesting.com/blog/2016/03/09/what-is-cx/. Accessed on 19 February 2017.

Wudary, S. 2014. Why do companies neeed to incorporate customer service in their culture. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140625144507-71421872-why-do-companies-need-to-incorporate-customer-service-in-their-culture. Accessed on 19 January 2017.

Wulfen Van, G. 2011. Creating Innovative Products and Services: The Forth Innovation Method. Taylor & Francis Ltd.

12 List of Tables

13 Appendix 1: The structure of the interviews

- How many times have you had experience with Amazon, either as a seller or a buyer?
- Please describe the experience as detail as possible?
- Why did you choose Amazon amongst others E-retailers such as EBay, Lazada, Alibaba, and so on?

The author shall then introduce personalization concept to interviewees; give example how personalization works by describing personalized advertising of Amazon on their interface and third-party websites. Afterward, ask for the opinion and perspective of the interviewee?

Unstructured questions depending on interviewee's personal interests and experiences such as:

- How do you find the benefits of Prime member?
- Have you ever written a review on Amazon?
- What do you know about the benefits and services that Amazon offers for its sellers, partners?
- Will you consider to be an Amazon's partner?
- Is this personalization concept enhance overall business operations?
- Is it wise for Amazon to invest in this concept?
- Opinion toward E-commerce global trends and Amazon's future positioning?