

Managing Sticky Experiences Across the Customer Journey

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Abstract

Customer experience management research is increasingly concerned with the evolution of the customer experience across multiple service cycles of the customer journey. A dominant ‘smooth experience’ model focuses on making customers’ lives easier with predictable experiences. Per this model, firms facilitate a cycle of consistent service experiences conceptualized as a *loyalty loop*. This thesis suggests that customer experience management research is prematurely converging on the smooth experience model without adequately interrogating its underlying assumptions. It proposes that customers sometimes value exciting, unpredictable experiences, which the marketing press refers to as ‘sticky’ to highlight that customers cannot seem to pull away.

Drawing on ethnographic data from three service contexts (CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder), the thesis develops an alternate ‘sticky experience’ model that focuses on making customers’ lives exciting with unpredictable experiences. Here, firms facilitate a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement conceptualized as a *spiralling roller coaster*. The findings of the thesis trace the evolution of sticky experiences across the initial, subsequent, and terminating phases of the customer journey, linking key firm capabilities to customer journey patterns.

The thesis makes three contributions to the field of customer experience management. First, it integrates insights on the smooth experience model. Second, it empirically develops an alternate sticky experience model. Third, it provides practical implications at the intersection of the two models. Concretely, the smooth experience model is ideal for instrumental service categories, wherein customers have jobs to be done. By contrast, the sticky experience model is ideal for recreational service categories, wherein customers seek never-ending adventures. Firms are advised to situate purchase opportunities during the initial service cycle of smooth experience journeys, and during subsequent service cycles of sticky experience journeys. The thesis also suggests new avenues for future research on customer experiences and customer journeys.

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- (1) Tables and figures are listed in the order in which they appear in the text
- (2) Tables and figures in the published article (Siebert et al., *Journal of Marketing*, forthcoming), in Appendix G, are not included in this list of tables and figures.

1 Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This introductory chapter is structured as follows: First, it outlines the research motivation (section 1.2), followed by the research questions (section 1.3). The chapter then briefly introduces the research contexts (section 1.4). After that, it discusses the limitations in previous literature that the current research seeks to address (section 1.5). The following chapter introduces the anticipated theoretical contributions (section 1.6), followed by the practical implications (section 1.7). The final section provides a brief outline of the thesis (section 1.8). Next, this chapter presents the research motivation for the thesis.

1.2 Research motivation

Customer experience – the sensorial, affective, cognitive, social, and behavioural response customers live through as they come in contact with their market-related environment (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) – has become a top priority for both marketing practice and research (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Sorofman, 2014; Janiszewski, 2009; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; MSI, 2016). According to a recent Gartner survey on the role of marketing, the percentage of firms assuming to compete primarily through managing customer experience has soared from 36% in 2010 to 89%, as expected for 2016 (Sorofman, 2014). Academic research, in turn, has demonstrated that (positive) customer experiences can strengthen consumers' ties with a brand community (Schouten *et al.*, 2007), help establish enduring involvement (McGinnis *et al.*, 2008), deliver value (e.g., Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Mathwick and Rigdon, 2004), and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., Brakus *et al.*, 2009). This thesis research introduces the notion of *sticky experience* as a type of customer experience that customers yearn to repeat. The research (1) conceptualizes sticky experiences, (2) develops a model of sticky experience management across the customer journey that is contrasted with the dominant *smooth experience model* of managing the customer experience across the customer journey, and (3) provides recommendations for firms seeking to facilitate sticky experiences.

Recently, firms in several industries including fitness, gaming, and dating are attracting media attention by facilitating unpredictable experiences in which ‘the excitement never seems to wear off’ (Peacock, 2013). Indeed, firms such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder have become known for their customers’ frequently and enthusiastically repeated experiences (e.g., Chamary, 2016; Fry, 2013; Rega, 2015). For these firms, managing the customer experience seems to be a matter of providing an endlessly changing core offering and inviting customers to engage with unfolding opportunities. For example, the group fitness service CrossFit offers customers ‘constantly varied’ workouts (Glassman, 2002, p. 2) and announces the unique workout mixture with short notice, if at all, before workouts sessions. The virtual reality game Pokémon Go, which also offers augmented reality options, encourages players to walk around in real-world locations to catch unpredictably spawning virtual creatures and exploit other game opportunities such as raids (Barrett, 2018). Similarly, the geosocial dating app Tinder invites its users to a dating journey ‘filled with adventure, unknowns, and endless possibilities’ that the brand calls a swipelife (Tinder, 2018, p. 3). The business press and other popular media outlets have begun to refer to such services as ‘sticky’ (Lynley, 2016; Miller, 2011; Reich, 2014) to emphasize that they are not only able to attract customers but also able to keep them excited and coming back for more again and again (Alter, 2017; Eyal, 2014; Lopatto, 2018). This stickiness-focused approach is paying off: It has helped these firms grow rapidly and become leading industry actors. CrossFit has become a multi-billion-dollar brand (Ozanian, 2015), growing from 13 affiliates in 2005 to more than 15,000 affiliates worldwide in 2019 (CrossFit, 2019). Meanwhile, Pokémon Go was the fastest mobile app to reach \$1 billion in revenue (Nelson, 2017) and ‘more cumulative time is spent playing Pokémon Go than any other [mobile] game’ (Barrett, 2018, p. 3). Likewise, Tinder is among the highest grossing non-gaming apps worldwide (Sydow, 2019) and ‘the most-used dating app in the UK and the US’ (Hern, 2019, p. 1).

Despite the pervasiveness of unpredictable experiences that customers enthusiastically or near obsessively repeat (e.g., Alter, 2017; Eyal, 2014; Lopatto, 2018), however, marketing research on customer experience management has thus far failed to recognise the existence of this type of customer experience (see section 1.5 Theoretical contributions). As a consequence, we know very little about how firms can best manage this kind of repeated experience along the customer journey.

In fact, the approach of firms such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder to create sticky experiences across the customer journey differs starkly from the dominant model in marketing research on customer experience management over time, across multiple cycles of re-accessing and/or re-purchasing a service. Much of the literature in this area recommends creating experiences that are ‘consistent and predictable’ (Hyken, 2009, p. 55; Frow and Payne, 2007; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019) along a customer’s journey in order to maintain that customer’s satisfaction and loyalty. The literature advises firms to guide customers with relevant help and support through customers’ deliberate decision-making processes in the initial service cycle in order to make a well-informed purchase decision. To optimize subsequent service cycles, the literature emphasises techniques such simplifying service interactions for the customer and tailoring a service offering to the customer’s unique needs and position along the customer journey, thereby ‘streamlining’ the customer journey (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 90). In the ideal scenario, firms can lead customers into an ‘ongoing cycle’ (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 101) of less deliberate re-purchase and re-consumption experiences in which customers remain loyal to the brand or firm. Accordingly, this ongoing cycle is referred to as a ‘loyalty loop’ (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 65; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2016; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The literature on the loyalty loop-focused model (henceforth, smooth experience model) highlights the importance of consistent, effortless, and predictable experiences for customers across the customer journey. In this model, services that facilitate loyalty loops enable customers to easily resolve their problems and make them feel like they are ‘sliding down a greased chute’ (Fleming, 2016, p. 227). The smooth experience model is commonly grounded in, and applied to predominantly utilitarian service categories, such as insurance services (e.g., Progressive), parcel services (e.g., FedEx), and mobile carriers (e.g., Verizon).

Even though marketing research is increasingly concerned with understanding the customer experience across multiple service cycles (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), much of the extant literature is limited to the smooth experience model (discussed in this chapter in section 1.5 and in Chapter 2 in the sections 2.3 and 2.4). Given its focus on predictable experiences within streamlined loyalty loops and its foundation in high-utilitarian services, this model seems to offer little insight into the management of sticky experiences – unpredictable experiences that customers yearn to repeat and that typically occur in high-hedonic services. Here, customers do not merely want to resolve problems but also, or predominantly, seek ‘fantasies, feelings, and fun’ (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 132).

1.3 Research questions

Building upon these previous points, this thesis aims to build a model of sticky experience management throughout customers' evolving journeys, capturing the customer experience management resources and key experiential patterns for customers along this journey. Two specific questions guide the theoretical parts of this thesis:

First, do sticky experiences exist and if so, how can sticky experiences be conceptualized? Second, how do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey?

1.4 Research contexts

To answer these questions, qualitative research was undertaken in three contexts exhibiting enthusiastically and frequently repeated consumer behaviour: CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. These contexts are ideally suited for the theoretical purposes of this thesis because (a) they are characterized by high variability of their core offerings that render customer experiences relatively unpredictable. For example, Tinder experiences tend to vary each time a user opens the app and swipes through profiles and/or communicates with matches, CrossFit workouts change continuously and are only revealed shortly before the workout, and Pokémon Go's virtual reality offers novelty and uncertain outcomes on an ongoing basis. Further, the three selected contexts (b) represent services that tend to be repeated frequently and enthusiastically over certain periods of time. This contrasts with other market offerings that are repeatedly used primarily as part of routines and habits (e.g., checking email, using navigation services) or regular events and rituals (e.g., grooming, Christmas celebrations). The three selected services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder are briefly introduced next.

CrossFit: a global fitness regimen founded by Greg Glassman in 2000. It offers group workouts and competitions based on a variety of functional movements mainly from gymnastics, Olympic weightlifting, and body weight exercises (CrossFit, 2019; Stoddard, 2011).

Pokémon Go: a global augmented-reality, mobile video game released by Niantic in 2016. It was initially released in July 2016 in the United States and subsequently in other countries such as the United Kingdom, where it was available two weeks after the initial release. It uses Google data and the global positioning system (GPS) to provide players a virtual world mapped onto their physical surroundings. Players can collect virtual creatures named Pokémon and use them for activities such as battles (Niantic, 2019; Chamary, 2016; Dilger, 2016).

Tinder: a global online dating platform launched by Hatch Labs in 2012. It uses the geographical location of its users and data from Facebook to allow users to create profiles, view and select other profiles, and communicate with mutually interested users on a mobile app and desktop version (Tinder, 2019; Bilton, 2014; Lapowsky, 2013).

1.5 Limitations in prior literature

This research contributes to customer experience management by addressing three shortcomings in the literature. First, most research on general firm resources for customer experience management have investigated predominantly high-utilitarian contexts or points of contact between a customer and a firm. For example, Homburg *et al.* (2017) develop a customer experience management framework consisting of multiple firm resources based on managerial input from primarily utilitarian contexts, such as: financial services and insurance, health care, and information and communication. Although the authors (p. 379) claim to derive ‘a generalized [customer experience management] understanding across firm and industry contexts,’ their work largely resides outside of what Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) identified as fruitful areas for an experiential perspective (i.e., entertainment, arts, leisure) and mainly applies to experience management in low-hedonic situations along the customer journey. Similarly, overview work by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) finds customer experience understanding firmly rooted in classic purchase and decision-making processes, and derives a conceptualization of customer experience and the customer journey focused around the customer as an informed decision-maker aiming to ‘get the job done’ (p. 84; Christensen *et al.*, 2005). The authors’ best practice recommendations for customer experience management are much in line with this conceptualization, revealing how

Disney uses its 'Magic Band' technology to encourage preplanning, reduce uncertainty and friction, and make processes for the customer and the firm more effective throughout Disney's parks; in other words, they reveal how to optimize low hedonic aspects of an overall leisure experience.

Because extant work has mainly studied how to enhance customer experiences emerging from primarily utilitarian points of contact or entire market offerings, we have limited understanding of the resources firms require for managing customer experiences occurring in primarily hedonic contexts and characterized by higher degrees of unpredictability and change (Arnould *et al.*, 1998). Neglecting a considerable portion of compelling customer experiences in today's consumer markets also runs counter to advancing a truly generalized or inclusive concept of customer experience management that 'can comprehensively systemize and serve the implementation of an evolving marketing concept' (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 377).

Second, prior work on resources firms use for customer experience management over time have also been limited in scope. Managerial research has taken the lead in this area and extended the standard decision-making journey to account for loyalty-enhancing dynamics and critical points of contact along repeated purchase cycles (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009). This work argues that the classic journey is either streamlined into a 'loyalty loop' leading 'to customer loyalty (through repurchase and further engagement) or begins the process anew, with the customer reentering the prepurchase phase and considering alternatives' (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, 76). In this model, firms employ customer experience management resources such as personalization and automation to guide customers along smooth journeys consisting of relatively predictable repeated experiences around values such as simplicity, seamlessness, and customization (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2015, 2016).

Being steeped within a predominantly utilitarian, information processing view (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), the smooth experience model is largely cognizant of market offerings of leisure, entertainment, or the arts, builds on decision-making processes typically associated with problem-solving customers, and argues that value creation should focus on streamlining the customer journey to make customers' lives easier over time (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015). However, the smooth experience model is limited in its explanatory power regarding experiences

that customers yearn to be more hedonic and unpredictable for ongoing excitement, rather than being practical and predictable for quick results.

Third, we have little understanding of customer experience management goals beyond the current focus on customer loyalty. Most research argues that customer experience management primarily aims to ‘enhance customer loyalty – in other words, the customers’ intentions to live again through a touchpoint journey of a given firm or brand by transitioning from post-purchase to pre-purchase’ for firm success (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 386; e.g., Berry *et al.*, 2002; Frow and Payne, 2007; Grewal *et al.*, 2009; Pullmann and Gross, 2004). For instance, Frow and Payne (2007, 99), also echoing the limited focus on relatively predictable customer experiences discussed above, emphasize how managers should ‘provide a consistent customer experience’ in order to ‘improve customer loyalty and enhance profitability’ (p. 98). Lastly, as the name ‘loyalty loop’ suggests, the focus on loyalty is also true for the smooth experience model (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009).

Narrowing the goals of customer experience management to loyalty is not only theoretically problematic when considering the breadth and diversity of key customer outcomes and drivers of recurring behaviour, such as habits (e.g., Shah *et al.*, 2014), rituals (e.g., Otnes *et al.*, 2012), and addictions (e.g., Cui *et al.*, 2018). It is also problematic for firms because misunderstanding differing customers experiences and journeys can have substantial financial implications. Marketing research on loyalty versus habit, for instance, shows that when repeated experiences are not well understood and a default state of loyalty is assumed for habitual customers, logical marketing efforts can be less effective or even negatively affect the firms’ bottom line (e.g., Liu-Thompkins and Tam, 2013; Shah *et al.*, 2012). In addition, managerial research finds that loyalty is fleeting and shopping around behaviour increasingly common in today’s technology-mediated marketplace (Court *et al.*, 2017).

1.6 Theoretical contributions

To address these research gaps, this doctoral research develops a model for managing unpredictable experiences throughout the customer journey over time, across multiple service cycles. This model reveals critical experiential patterns that customers live through and specific customer experience management capabilities facilitating these desirable experiences, most of

which differ from key experiential patterns and customer experience management resources in extant research, including the smooth experience model and general customer experience management frameworks. The current research refers to this emergent model as the sticky experience model to capture the enthusiastic nature in which customers stick to repeating their experiences with a market offering.

To arrive at this theoretical contribution, the first step was to address the first research question (First, do sticky experiences exist and if so, how can sticky experiences be conceptualized?). To find out if sticky experiences exist, marketplace evidence (e.g., business press articles and social media content) was reviewed. Searching for reports on, for example, ‘addictive’ services that customers are ‘hooked’ on or ‘obsessed’ with, typically in a lay sense of these terms, revealed that sticky experiences were not only confined to a minimal number of services, service categories, and customer experiences. In fact, sticky experiences are common among customers of dating apps (e.g., Bumble), dramatic serials (e.g., HBO), driving clubs (e.g., Jeep Jamboree), content networks (e.g., Instagram), fast fashion (e.g., Zara), gaming (e.g., Fortnite), group fitness (e.g., Orange Theory), lifestyle media (e.g., Thrillist), meal kits (e.g., Foodist), and music discovery (e.g., Spotify). To conceptualize sticky experiences, literatures from across the social sciences were reviewed and relevant insights synthesized to derive the following definition: Sticky experiences are unpredictable, intensely emotional, and increasingly meaningful experiences that customers frequently and enthusiastically seek to repeat over time. This definition suggests that sticky experiences are not merely repetitive, but highly iterative, encouraging customers to learn and become increasingly involved in the complexities of a market-related activity. Chapter 2 also discusses how sticky experiences overlap with and differ from extant concepts in marketing and consumer research.

The second step was to develop a conceptual model that addresses the second research question (How do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey?). This model was developed based on a qualitative investigation of sticky experiences and their evolution in the three research contexts. Throughout this process, the doctoral student went back and forth between emergent findings and prior work on the smooth experience model and related research on customer experience management (Court *et al.*, 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2016; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Hyken, 2018; Leboff, 2014; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). This thesis presents preliminary and revised

findings in contrast to the smooth experience model (see Appendix F and Chapter 4) which is the dominant model of customer experience management across multiple service cycles along the customer journey.

The contrast between the two models can be summarized as follows: In the initial service cycle, the smooth experience model proposes the key firm capability of *providing customers with informational support* to guide customers' key experiential pattern of a *deliberate decision-making process*. By contrast, the current research reveals the key firm capability of *providing customers with rapid entry* to enable customers' key experiential pattern of a *quick spin*, a spontaneous and quick process in which customers move from sparks of curiosity to trying a service first-hand. In subsequent service cycles, the smooth experience model proposes the key firm capability of *streamlining the customer journey* to lock customers within an ongoing experiential pattern of a *loyalty loop*, an increasingly seamless cycle of consistent service experiences. In contrast, this research reveals the key firm capability of *endless variation along the customer journey* to enable customers' ongoing experiential pattern of a *spiralling roller coaster*, a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement. Finally, the loyalty loop literature suggests the termination trajectory of *brand switching triggered by loyalty-weakening incidents*. By contrast, this research finds that, besides brand-specific reasons, the main termination trajectory is *service usage fluctuations fuelled by wellness concerns*, as sticky experiences can and often become overly consuming for customers.

By developing the sticky experience model and contrasting it with the dominant smooth experience model, this thesis begins to address calls for more research on how firms can manage customer experiences across the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; MSI, 2014, 2016). As Homburg *et al.* (2017, p. 377) observe, while customer experience management research is overall in a nascent state, 'practitioners have taken the lead, appraising customer experience management...as one of the most promising marketing approaches in consumer industries.' This thesis recognizes that the smooth experience model is a visionary and useful model of customer experience management spanning multiple service cycles. However, the thesis also questions the smooth experience model's assumption of experience predictability and its application as a generalized model. This thesis can be understood as an attempt to redress the emerging, yet arguably premature, consensus around the smooth experience model as a generalized model for customer experience management across services categories. The presented insights into the

nature and management of sticky experiences across multiple service cycles may serve to begin to remedy these unfortunate tendencies toward overgeneralization.

Beyond this core contribution, the emergent model for sticky experience management advances understanding of customer experience management in three ways. First, it advances understanding of customer experience management by proposing that the sticky experience and the smooth experience models include two types of ‘touchpoint journey orientations’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017) guiding a firm’s market-facing decision making in specific directions and requiring different firm resources to facilitate desirable customer experiences. Second, this research contributes to our understanding of customer experience management by extending the contingency factors shaping different customer experience management patterns identified in Homburg *et al.* (2017) by revealing the importance of the customer experience-based factor of predictability, emphasising certain firm resources for customer experience management over others. Third, this thesis research contributes to knowledge in customer experience management by developing the customer experience management goals by introducing the concept of stickiness as a relevant outcome and driver for repeated customer experiences beyond loyalty.

1.7 Practical implications

The conventional customer experience management wisdom, including the smooth experience model, recommends that firms create relatively predictable experiences along increasingly streamlined journeys. This thesis emphasizes that the conventional approach is largely limited to high-utilitarian market offerings – it is derived largely from such offerings (e.g., insurance, banking, mobile carriers) and applied largely to such offerings. Developing a model of sticky experience management from qualitative research in three high-hedonic market offerings, this research recommends that firms seeking to facilitate experiences that customers yearn to repeat instead focus on creating unpredictable experiences along increasingly involving journeys. The current research also suggests that managers use the metaphor of spiral, rather than a loop, to communicate this new mindset across the firm.

Building on the empirically developed sticky experience model and prior literature on the smooth experience model, this thesis addresses three practical customer experience management concerns at the intersection of the two models: First, when should customer experience

management practitioners choose a sticky experience approach (over a loyalty loop approach)? Second, when are purchase opportunities most appropriate in the sticky experience approach (versus a loyalty loop approach)? Third, how can loyalty loops and sticky experiences be combined to sustain or enhance customer journeys? These questions will be answered in detail in the Discussion Chapter. Here, the key practical takeaways from this chapter are briefly summarized.

First, to make a strategic choice between the two models, this thesis suggests that customer experience management practitioners consider two factors: service category, and target market. If the service category in which a firm competes is primarily utilitarian and customers as *jobbers* seek to primarily get a ‘job’ done (Christensen *et al.*, 2005), the smooth experience model is the better choice. However, if the service category in which a firm competes is primarily hedonic and customers as *adventurers* seek a never-ending ‘adventure’ (Scott *et al.*, 2017), the sticky experience model might be more beneficial to adopt.

Second, while there are multiple purchase options (e.g., one-off purchases, limited time access, tiered membership plans), the overall recommendation derived from reviewing the loyalty loop literature and conducting the current research regarding when to highlight purchase opportunities along the customer journey is as follows: Firms adopting a smooth experience model should fit purchase opportunities in the initial service cycle, when customers are already engaged in a deliberate decision-making process, but avoid doing so in subsequent service cycles when customers seek to enjoy the much less deliberate ease of loyalty loops. Firms adopting a sticky experience model should fit purchase opportunities in subsequent service cycles, when customers have become more involved in the experiential journey and are willing to further invest in it but avoid doing so in the initial service cycle when customers mainly seek to spontaneously experience fun.

Third, this thesis makes suggestions about sustaining customer journeys by combining elements of the two models. More concretely, it suggests six ways in which loyalty loops and spiralling roller coaster can be interlinked in multi-service systems, which are systems that entail both high-utilitarian and high-hedonic services. In brief, multi-service firms that have customers in a loyalty loop could expand upon this loop by triggering an adjacent loyalty loop, sparking a spiralling roller coaster, or escalating the loop with spiralling logic for a short period of time. Multi-service

firms that have customers in a spiralling roller coaster could extend that roller coaster by sparking a new spiralling roller coaster, triggering an adjacent loyalty loop, or easing the spiralling roller coaster into a loyalty loop, especially when the current roller coaster is losing momentum.

1.8 Thesis outline

Chapter 2 present the literature review. This chapter reviews key literature on customer experience and customer experience management to develop a basic understanding of what has been done before in this space and how the current thesis seeks to move beyond the current state of theory in this space. The chapter's purpose is not only to review relevant literature and familiarize the reader with foundational work and the key concepts that are used in this thesis (section 2.2). Importantly, this chapter introduces the model of customer experiences across the customer journey against which the emergent findings of this thesis are positioned against (i.e., the smooth experience model; section 2.3). Based on the detailed review of the loyalty loop mode, as well as the review of foundational research and key concepts, the following section (2.4) develops a customer experience management matrix that succinctly situates the current research in the area of customer experience management research. Section 2.5 conceptualizes sticky experiences and provides a definition of sticky experiences. Section 2.6 contrasts this newly generated understanding of sticky experiences from other related concepts in marketing and consumer research.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology deployed in this thesis. The first half of this chapter deals with the 'philosophical' background and the key methodological choices. This section broadly follows Belk *et al.*'s (2013) suggestions for beginning a research project. Concretely, the authors (p. 17) argue that researchers generally make choices around three key issues: 'what research questions to answer drawing on what empirical phenomena; what [...] research traditions will underpin the work; and what kinds of data to be certain to collect.' Section 3.2 explains that the research questions chosen in this study are aimed at theory building and reminds the reader that no readily applicable concept exists of the phenomenon of 'sticky' experiences. Section 3.3 provides a definition of qualitative research and notes how the tenets of qualitative research inform, and will be reflected throughout, the method section. Section 3.4 takes a broad perspective and introduces positivism and interpretivism as two central research paradigms, situating the current study in the paradigm of interpretivism. Section 3.5 briefly outlines popular research

methodologies in interpretive marketing research and explains why market-oriented, multi-sited ethnography was chosen in this study. Subsection 3.6 provides a brief overview of interpretive research traditions and explains the main reasons hermeneutics was chosen in this study. The combination of ethnography and hermeneutics is well established in interpretive marketing research for its ability to produce mid-range theory, which the fields of marketing and consumer research primarily seek to achieve (Janiszewski *et al.*, 2016).

The second half of Chapter 3 deals with the ‘procedural’ aspects of the methods and details the research journey. Section 3.7 presents the criteria for context selection and introduces the three selected contexts. Section 3.8 outlines the sampling strategy and offers a table with information on the interviewed informants. Section 3.9 presents the three sources of data collection, namely observations, interviews, and archival material. The data collection section will also encompass reflections on ethical considerations. The following section (3.10) outlines the data interpretation procedures. Section 3.11 discusses evaluation criteria and demonstrates that the current thesis meets criteria for research steeped within an interpretivist research paradigm.

Chapter 4 present the findings of the thesis, thereby developing a sticky experience model. The chapter outline is as follows. At the core of the chapter are the research’s findings on the beginning of sticky experiences (section 4.2), the continuation of sticky experiences (section 4.3), and the termination of sticky experiences across the customer journey (section 4.4). The first section (4.1) provides an overview of the key empirical outcome of this research, which is an emergent model of sticky experiences across the customer journey, or the sticky experience model in brief. This model spans the initial service cycle, subsequent service cycles, and termination trajectories of the customer journey. All four sections in this chapter compare the proposed model with the extant smooth experience model (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019), which is the dominant model on ongoing customer experiences across the customer journey in marketing. As will be shown, the sticky experience model and the smooth experience model are remarkably different in each of the three phases. It is hoped that revealing the similarities and differences between the two models might help to redress marketing’s strong reliance on the smooth experience model and its focus on consistency and predictability at the expense of other customer experience management ideas, such as the emergent sticky experience model (see the Discussion Chapter).

Chapter 5 presents the discussion. The main purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of how the thesis answers its research questions posed in Chapter 1 (Introduction). The chapter also presents additional theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations and opportunities for future research. Concretely, section 5.2 summarizes how sticky experiences can be conceptualized and provides a succinct summary of the sticky experience model. Section 5.3 presents additional theoretical contributions that this thesis hopes to make to marketing research on customer experience management and marketing research more broadly. Section 5.4 makes suggestions to customer experience management practitioners on how to manage sticky customer experiences across the customer journey, and how to deal with managerial concerns at the intersection of the two models, with an emphasis on the sticky experience model. Before concluding the chapter, section 5.5 discusses limitations of this thesis and provides questions for future research on customer experiences and customer journeys in different areas of marketing research, such as Consumer Culture Theory and Transformative Consumer Research.

The appendix provides two noteworthy sections. **Appendix F** presents preliminary findings based on an initial round of data interpretation that provided the basis for developing the more refined conceptualization of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey that is presented in the Findings Chapter. Sections of this thesis were adapted toward a publication in the *Journal of Marketing*. **Appendix G** provides the accepted version of this article (Siebert *et al.*, forthcoming). This manuscript was authored by Anton Siebert with the second, third, and fourth authors (current and former supervisors) suggesting edits throughout the review process. The next chapter presents the literature review.

2 Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews key literature on customer experience and customer experience management to develop a basic understanding of what has been done before in this space and how the current thesis seeks to move beyond the current state of theory in this space. The chapter's purpose is not only to review relevant literature and familiarize the reader with foundational work and the key concepts that are used in this thesis (section 2.2). Importantly, this chapter introduces the model of customer experiences across the customer journey against which the emergent findings of this thesis are positioned against (i.e., the smooth experience model; section 2.3). Based on the detailed review of the loyalty loop model, as well as the review of foundational research and key concepts, the following section (2.4) develops a customer experience management matrix that succinctly situates the current research in the area of customer experience management research. Section 2.5 conceptualizes sticky experiences and provides a definition of sticky experiences. Section 2.6 contrasts this newly generated understanding of sticky experiences from other related concepts in marketing and consumer research. An introduction to each of the sections referencing all subsections is provided at the beginning of each section.

2.2 Customer Experience

This section lays the theoretical groundwork for this chapter and the overall thesis. The purpose of this section is to familiarize the reader with the basic theoretical vocabulary used in this thesis, which has its roots in marketing, consumer research, and practitioner writings on customer experiences and customer experience management. The first subsection (2.2.1) briefly introduces three foundational articles on this topic and mentions their relevance for this thesis. Subsection 2.2.2 gives an overview of selected, frequently used definitions of customer experience. Subsection 2.2.3 builds on this overview and provides definitions of customer experience, service cycles, and customer journey as they are used in this thesis. Subsection 2.2.4 introduces key extant research and insights on customer experience management, which captures the firm-side of how to facilitate and manage customer experiences across the customer journey.

2.2.1 Foundational research on customer experience

This subsection covers three critical articles that highlighted the importance of experiences for marketing and consumer research and laid the foundation for much of the subsequent research in this area. The relevance of these articles for the current thesis will briefly be mentioned after the introduction of each article.

Historically, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) provide a foundational account of an experiential view in marketing and consumer research. This approach is positioned against the prevailing information processing view at the time, a view that assumes that consumers are primarily problem-solvers who seek and process information about market offerings to make appropriate decisions about how to solve their problems through these market offerings. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 132) propose a contrasting experiential view experiential view ‘that focuses on the symbolic, hedonic, and esthetic nature of consumption. This view regards the consumption experience as a phenomenon directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun.’ In addition, the authors (1982, p. 132) argue that the ‘experiential perspective is phenomenological in spirit and regards consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness.’ The experiential view will be referenced frequently in the following sections of the literature review to uncover the underlying assumption of some of the customer experience management literature, especially the literature of and related to the smooth experience model. As will be argued throughout this chapter, the current thesis broadly falls into the realm of the experiential view, instead of the information-processing view.

Thompson *et al.*’s (1989, p. 133) foundational article introduced a philosophy and method focused on understanding consumers’ ‘lived’ (i.e., contextualized) experience that they call existential-phenomenology: ‘Existential-phenomenology is a paradigm that blends the philosophy of existentialism with the methods of phenomenology (Valle and King, 1978). The result is a contextually based, holistic psychology that views human beings in non-dualistic terms and seeks to attain a first-person description of experience (Giorgi, 1983).’ Some of the tenets of this philosophy are that experiences can only be fully understood in the context in which they appear as well as in the person’s life-context (e.g., his or her personal history and life projects), that experience is dynamic and organized in line with these changing contexts, and that the

research goal is to develop a thematic description of experience. As method, existential-phenomenology highlights the importance of the ‘interview [as] perhaps the most powerful means for attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences’ (Thompson *et al.*, 1989, p. 138). The current thesis builds on many of the foundational arguments made in Thompson *et al.*'s (1989) article, as it builds on many tenets of Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) foundational work on the experiential view. For example, it uses in-depth interviews as the primary means to understand sticky experiences of consumers. Likewise, it attempts to understand sticky experiences as a dynamic and contextualized phenomenon, that is, a phenomenon that evolves over time and that is more likely to occur in high-hedonic, recreational consumer activities (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) rather than in high-utilitarian, problem-solving focused contexts. Wherever relevant, Thompson *et al.*'s (1989) work will be cited in this thesis, for example in Chapter 3 on the methodology.

In customer experience management, Schmitt (1999) provides one of the earliest accounts on what customer experience is and how it can be managed. Similar to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Thompson *et al.* (1989), Schmitt (1999, p. 53) positions his approach of experiential marketing against dominant thinking and practice in marketing at the time: ‘Traditional marketing views consumers as rational decision-makers who care about functional features and benefits. In contrast, experiential marketers view consumers as rational and emotional human beings who are concerned with achieving pleasurable experiences.’ Moreover, Schmitt (1999, p. 53) argues that marketers need to start thinking about experiences holistically and address five dimensions of experience through strategic marketing action: ‘Five different types of experiences, or strategic experiential modules (SEMs), that marketers can create for customers are distinguished: sensory experiences (SENSE); affective experiences (FEEL); creative cognitive experiences (THINK); physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyles (ACT); and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE).’

Experiential marketing, according to Schmitt (1999), is more appropriate than traditional marketing in an emerging experience economy in which the ‘next competitive battleground lies in staging experiences’ (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, p. 98). In fact, Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that the progression of economic value has moved from commodities to goods to services and finally to experiences, which have become the focus of attention of leading-edge companies. This early observation, while critiqued by some scholars (see Schmitt, 2011), is echoed in practitioner

statements (e.g., Tierney, 2014) and survey reports from consulting firms (e.g., Sorofman, 2014), and increasingly adopted across industries (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017). The current thesis is written in the spirit of standing on the shoulders of the three foundational articles introduced here. These article’s critique of dominant, traditional thinking in marketing has also inspired this thesis’s critique of the smooth experience model and related literature in customer experience management that seem to converge on recommending experience predictability for customers’ problem-solving pursuits (i.e., ‘thoughtful, reasoned action undertaken to bring about need satisfaction;’ Schmitt, 1999, p. 56) across industries, while neglecting other possible pathways such as providing experience unpredictability for more hedonic customer pursuits.

2.2.2 *Definitions of customer experience*

This subsection references selected definitions of customer experience and discusses their relevance for this research. Discussing, however briefly, extant definitions of customer experience is common practice in research on customer experience management and customer experience. It enables the reader to get a fuller picture of the ‘giants’ upon which any new research stands on, and how that research uses what has come before it. In addition, not knowing how a piece of research understands its key concepts, including those that it builds on from prior research, makes it difficult to understand that research’s findings and appreciate its contribution (Belk *et al.*, 2013). First, however, to anchor this discussion further, this subsection provides a definition of experience in general (Gove, 1976, p. 800; see also Schmitt, 2011, p. 59-60), before it moves on to talking about *customer* experience.

ex.pe.ri.ence

L experientia, fr. *experient-*, *experiens* (pres. part. of *experiri* to try)

1. *obs a*: a trial or test **b**: **a** tentative trial **c**: **a** conclusive proof;
2. : direct observation of or participation in events: an encountering, undergoing, or living through things in general as they take place in the course of time;
3. **a**: the state, extent, duration, or result of being engaged in a particular activity (as a profession) or in affairs, **b obs**: something approved by or made on the basis of such experience;
4. : knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events: practical wisdom resulting from what one has encountered, undergone, or lived;
5. **a**: the sum total of the conscious events that make up an individual life, **b**: the sum total of events that make up the past of a community or nation or that have occurred within the knowledge of mankind generally;

6. : something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through, as **a**: an event observed or participated in, **b(1)**: a state of mind that forms a significant and often crucial part of one's inner religious life and that is sometimes accompanied by intense emotion, **(2)**: an account of such an experience, **c**: illicit sexual relations;
7. : something by which one is stimulated or moved;
8. *philos* **a**: the act or process of perceiving or apprehending, **b**: the content or the particular result of such experience, **c**: the discriminative reaction or the nonconscious response of an organism to events or happenings within its environment

This definition of experience is useful to understand what experience generally is. While the term may refer to any of the above descriptions and has been used in various ways in the social sciences (see Schmitt, 2011), it is helpful to generally appreciate the term experience as 'an encountering, undergoing, or living through things in general as they take place in the course of time;' experience is 'something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through;' experiencing occurs through 'direct observation of or participation in events' (Gove, 1976, p. 800). This understanding of experience as an individual's 'living through things' in time and context is echoed most vividly in Thompson *et al.*'s (1989) work on consumer experience, as described in the previous subsection (2.2.1). When the current thesis refers to experience or experiences, it refers to this core part (i.e., 'living through things' in time and context) of the overall description of, or the possible ways of understanding the term experience. For example, the thesis does not assess experience as the extent of 'practical wisdom' an individual has gained through his or her experience (Gove, 1976, p. 800).

The fields of marketing and consumer research are interested in the experience not of human beings per se, but of those human beings when they are customers or consumers (Thompson *et al.*, 1989; Janiszewski, 2009; Schmitt, 1999). In their role of customers, human beings have experiences along a journey with a firm's products, services, and brands; and in their role of consumers, human beings have experiences along their personal journeys that may implicate one or multiple firms (Hamilton and Price, 2019). This thesis adopts the notion of the *customer* because it seeks to study sticky experiences of people in their role of customers, not merely potential consumers of a market offering. It seeks to find out what it is that customers find so appealing that they yearn to continue their journey with a certain firm over time, rather than switch to another firm on their more personal journeys as humans who use the marketplace to achieve their goals and projects (Hamilton and Price, 2019).

Definitions of the customer experience tend to be in line with this core understanding of human experience. Customer experience scholars provide definitions of the customer experience that are tailored to the focal actor having an experience, namely the customer, and the focal events a customer lives through, namely market-related events. For example, Meyer and Schwager (2007, p. 118) offer the following definition: ‘Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs during purchase, use, and service and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact most often involves unplanned encounters with representations of a company’s products, services, or brands and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews, and so forth.’ This definition, while not attending to the multi-dimensional nature of experience mentioned above, is useful because it clarifies that both ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ contact with a firm and its offerings contribute to the customer experience.

Furthermore, Meyer and Schwager (2007, p. 119) argued that experience marketers should look for opportunities to optimize the customer experience at these points of contact, called ‘touch points,’ rather than at the level of the product or service and its attributes. This thesis uses the concept of touchpoints to capture the points of interaction or contact between a customer and a firm, as Meyer and Schwager (2007) and others (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) suggest. However, as will be explained in Chapter 3 on the methods, this thesis will focus more on higher-order concepts on both the customer (e.g., journey patterns) and the firm side (e.g., firm capabilities), given the long-term evolution of the customer journey that the thesis seeks to examine and that contains innumerable such points of contact.

Other descriptions of customer experience highlight the different dimensions. There is broad agreement in the customer experience literature that the customer experience is a multidimensional concept encompassing a customer’s evolving cognitive, affective, sensorial, behavioural, and social responses to a firm’s offerings (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Schmitt, 1999; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). Definitions of the customer experience tend not to vary in major ways. Developing the foundation for the creation of a brand experience scale, Brakus *et al.* (2009) reviewed the five senses commonly proposed in prior research (e.g., Schmitt, 1999) as follows: ‘The sense experience includes aesthetics and sensory qualities. Consistent with recent research in consumer behaviour [...], the feel experience includes moods and emotions. The

think experience includes convergent/analytical and divergent/imaginative thinking. The act experience refers to motor actions and behavioural experiences. Finally, the relate experience refers to social experiences, such as relating to a reference group.’

This thesis acknowledges and builds on the different dimensions of customer experience as crucial to understand the experience concept as a holistic ‘living through things’ (Gove, 1976, p. 800), as a ‘total’ customer experience (Berry *et al.*, 2002), rather than a mere slice of the experiential spectrum. For example, as mere cognition or mere behaviour. However, this thesis does not dive deeply into the dimensions of customer experience for several reasons. First, in contrast to the work of Brakus *et al.*, (2009) and others, this research does not seek to develop a scale to measure experience, a process for which experience dimensions are crucial. Second, this research does not seek to examine the influence of certain experiential marketing strategies or tactics (e.g., background music in a store) on isolated dimensions of the customer experience (e.g., the sensorial dimension). Third, and more broadly, the aims of this research are to understand the evolvement of the customer experience holistically across multiple service cycles; its analytical focus is on holistic experiential patterns over time, rather than certain dimensions of experience.

The evolvement of the customer experience over time – its dynamic and iterative quality (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009) – is gaining increasing attention in recent customer experience management research and practice (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Rawson *et al.*, 2013). There is also growing recognition among practitioners and academics of the importance of considering the customers’ journey through which experiences emerge and evolve (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Rawson *et al.*, 2013). Recent definitions of the customer experience reflect this nascent focus. For example, Homburg *et al.* (2017, p. 384) define customer experience as follows: ‘[Customer Experience] is the evolvement of a person’s sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioural responses to a firm or brand by living through a journey of touchpoints along prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase situations and continually judging this journey against response thresholds of co-occurring experiences in a person’s related environment. In this regard, a touchpoint represents any verbal (e.g., advertising) or nonverbal (e.g., product usage) incident a person perceives and consciously relates to a given firm or brand.’

Homburg *et al.*'s (2017) definition incorporates the multiple dimensions of experience and highlights the concept's dynamic nature, describing it as an 'evolution' of a customer's experiential responses evoked by 'living through a journey' with a firm (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 384). In a similar vein, Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 71) 'conclude that customer experience is a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey.' Understanding the customer experience as a multidimensional and iterative entity that takes place along a customer's journey with a firm is central to this thesis. The next subsection provides a definition of customer experience for this thesis and introduces the idea of service cycles along the customer journey.

2.2.3 Customer experience, service cycles, and the customer journey

This subsection begins by providing a definition of customer experience based upon the discussion of existing customer experience definitions in the foregoing subsection (2.2.2), including only what is fundamentally required to understand the concept. After providing this basic definition, this subsection outlines two other key elements of the theoretical vocabulary used in this research, namely service cycles and the customer journey. These three elements of the theoretical vocabulary used in this thesis are critical to fully apprehend the findings and the contributions of this thesis, which centre on a new understanding of sticky *customer experiences* across multiple *service cycles* along the overall *customer journey*. First, this thesis defines customer experience as follows:

Customer experience is a customer's multidimensional cognitive, emotional, sensory, behavioural, and relational responses to a firm's offerings.

Customers have experiences due to direct or indirect (Meyer and Schwager, 2007), verbal and non-verbal (Homburg *et al.*, 2017) points of contact with a firm's offerings. Customers live through these contacts and think, feel, and sense certain things, behave in certain ways, and relate to certain people or things in certain ways. For example, doing a group fitness class may evoke thoughts about the right technique for an exercise, feelings of pride about doing an exercise properly for the first time, sensations of sweat on one's heated skin, moving one's arms over head with a bar in both hands, and relating to fellow class participants and trainers as supporters of

one's intense effort. A customer may summarize this kind of experience by calling it an 'awesome, intense experience', emphasizing that he or she finally got an exercise right after a long while of trying. A researcher might call this customer's experience an extraordinary experience (i.e., positive, out of the ordinary, infrequent) characterized by increased mastery.

For the purpose of the current research – to advance marketing thought on the evolution of sticky experiences across multiple service cycles along the customer journey – the concept of the customer experience needs to be understood in its dynamic, iterative nature. Therefore, this thesis builds on prior research, suggesting the ideas of customer journey and service cycles to help achieve this objective. Bringing these ideas together, this thesis defines the customer journey as:

Customer journey is a customer's experiences within and across service cycles, from the initial cycle to subsequent cycles to the terminating service cycle.

Prior research has often defined the customer journey as a customer's experiences, or ongoing experience, across the phases of a service cycle. A service cycle in prior literature is demarcated differently, for example as 'pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase situations' (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 384), 'pre-core, core, and post-core service encounters' (Voorhees *et al.*, 2017, p. 270), or 'search, purchase, experience, and reflect' (Dellaert, 2019, p. 243). However, this focus on a single service cycle is problematic if customer experience management practitioners wish to have customers returning for several cycles over time, achieving the ultimate goal of long-term loyalty according to general customer experience management (Homburg *et al.*, 2017).

Understanding the customer journey as merely spanning a single cycle, or a phase within a service cycle such as the prepurchase phase (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005), or a particular end-to-end journey (Rawson *et al.*, 2013) beyond which no contact with a customer is perceived valuable to a firm, is too myopic for the purpose of understanding and managing customer experiences across the customer journey over time (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Zomerdijsk and Voss, 2010).

Therefore, recent customer experience management literature is calling for research that captures the full picture, rather than just a fraction, of the entire possible journey a customer has with a firm (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; De Keyser *et al.*, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Some research addresses this nascent concern, broadening the scope of customer experience research from the

customer experience within phases of a single service cycle to the broader experiential patterns across multiple service cycles (Court *et al.*, 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015). This nascent research emphasizes that an initial service cycle tends to be distinct from subsequent service cycles, both in terms of customer experiences and in terms of their management (Court *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, recent work highlights that these subsequent service cycles are not repetitive but iterative such that the customer experience in each successive service cycle builds on experiences during previous service cycles (Bolton *et al.*, 2014). Some literature also examines the inevitable termination trajectories that lead customers away from the incumbent firm or brand toward a competitor firm or brand (Court *et al.*, 2017).

Accordingly, to answer this thesis' second research question (How do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey?), all three brackets of service cycles need to be addressed: the initial service cycle, subsequent service cycles, and termination trajectories that finally end the customer journey. Picking up the example of group fitness from above, a study of the customer experience could focus on the one prototypical experience that customer have in this setting, or dissect the customer experience and study the influence of other customers on the social dimension of the overall experience, or focus on a slice of the overall journey such as the customer's evaluation stage of different group fitness offerings during the prepurchase phase. By contrast, examining a group fitness consumer's experiential journey across the three stages of, simply put, getting into a group fitness service, staying with the service, until leaving the service after months or years, helps to achieve this thesis research aims, and nicely aligns with calls in recent customer experience management literature to look beyond the customer experience of a single service cycle or phase within it (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The next subsection deals with the management of customer experiences. The main purpose of this subsection is to briefly discuss extant frameworks and to introduce the suggestion in prior research to focus on firm resources, particularly firm capabilities, for managing customer experiences and journeys (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

2.2.4 Customer experience management

This thesis focuses not only on the customer side of sticky experiences but also seeks to develop insights into how firms can facilitate such experiences. Therefore, the thesis must also review prior work on managing customer experiences, which has been referred to as experiential

marketing (Schmitt, 2011) and more recently by many researchers and practitioners as Customer Experience Management (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Customer experience is the action object of customer experience management, which aims to facilitate desirable customer experiences by optimizing the contacts with a customer and the customer's entire journey. In business practice, customer experience management is 'a set of frameworks, tools, and methodologies to manage customer experiences' (Schmitt, 2011, p. 85) and has been applied across industries. Early managerially-oriented books and journals around the millennium report on various customer experience management practices and suggest frameworks for optimizing such management (Carbone, 2004; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 2003). More recent publications stress the value of creating experiences of convenience, ease and satisfaction by developing and properly executing firm resources often including the use of technology (Court *et al.*, 2009; Fleming, 2015; Hyken, 2018). Recent marketing research, in turn, also emphasizes the importance of firm resources for customer experience management, especially firm capabilities and mindsets pertaining to the organizational culture (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The current thesis follows these recommendations and focuses on firm resources, especially firm capabilities, to develop insights into the firm-side facilitation of sticky experiences over time. Consequently, this subsection briefly discusses early work on customer experience management, as well as a recent framework of customer experience management as a firm resource (Homburg *et al.*, 2017). The next section (2.3) on managing customer experience via the smooth experience model unpacks in great detail the approach to creating experiences of ease and convenience (e.g., Hyken, 2018), against which the creation of sticky experience is positioned.

Among the early managerial customer experience management works, Pine and Gilmore (1999) understood experience management primarily as event management, and compelling experiences as events that are memorable and engage customers in a personal way. The authors argue that managers should think of themselves as theatre producers who stage events for customers, which may range from stable to dynamic depending on the kind of performance and audience. Understanding experience management in this way is certainly helpful in some contexts (e.g., themed restaurants), but may not be applicable to other contexts in which customers seek to simply get something done rather than experience a theatre-like event, or seek to experience multiple quick 'doses' of excitement at their hand's reach, such as through technology-based

services via apps on smartphones. Schmitt (2003) presents a project-based framework for managing experiences that encompasses five steps: an analysis step, a strategy step, and three implementation steps. The first step is to analyse the experiential world of the customer to create brand applicable customer insight. The next step is to build the experience platform, which should be aligned with the brand and ‘includes a dynamic, multi-sensory, multi-dimensional depiction of the desired experience (referred to as ‘experiential positioning’) and a specification of the experiential value that the customer can expect from the product (the ‘experiential value promise’) (Schmitt, 2011, p. 89). The final bundle of steps is about implementing the experience platform in a brand experience and across interactions with customers. The newly developed experience philosophy needs to be incorporated consistently across the organization, and continuous innovations is required to keep the experience desirable.

This thesis builds on Schmitt’s (2003) view of customer experience management as an approach to managing a customers’ entire experience with a firm or market offering, rather than to more narrowly focus on managing experiences as events (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). However, while Schmitt’s (2003) framework seems useful for general real-world projects around (brand) experience creation, it provides little insight on how sticky experiences emerge and evolve over time and what resources firms require to facilitate such desirable experiences across the customer journey. Carbone (2004, p. 97) argues that, ‘experience management is a completely integrated set of disciplines that seeks to identify the clues — rational and emotional, humanistic and mechanic — that customers consciously and unconsciously wish to find in their encounters.’ When customers are ‘clued in’ by receiving the experiential value they seek, for example through appropriate environmental design (mechanic clues), they are more likely to remain as customers according to Carbone (2004). Carbone (2004) also discusses useful methods for identifying what customers value in their experiences and what they wish to encounter. For example, he suggests observational methods and in-depth interviews, the latter of which are particularly suited to investigate what customers perceive as desirable in their experiences. The current thesis, while not adopting a ‘clue management’ perspective per se, also seeks to identify what customers value most while living through encounters with a firm’s offerings and also focuses on the total experience rather than certain dimensions (see also Berry *et al.*, 2002).

The most recent and prominent academic study on customer experience management was conducted by Homburg *et al.* (2017). Homburg and colleagues (2017, p. 377) define customer

experience management as a ‘higher-order resource of cultural mindsets toward [customer experiences], strategic directions for designing [customer experiences], and firm capabilities for continually renewing [customer experiences], with the goals of achieving and sustaining long-term customer loyalty.’ The authors find several mindsets, directions, and capabilities in their grounded-theory based, generalized framework of customer experience management. Cultural mindsets are mental portrayals used by managers to describe the competitive advantage and reflect that customer experience management is also an issue at the level of corporate culture. For example, the cultural mindset of the touchpoint journey orientation is that ‘touchpoint journeys across prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase situations should be the main object of market-facing decision making across the firm’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 388). Strategic directions are a set of organization-wide guidelines targeted at market-facing choices, which shape the realization of customer-firm exchanges. For instance, the thematic cohesion of touchpoints is the ‘direction to extend core touchpoints along a brand theme that promises customers to realize a certain lifestyle or activity with the help of multiple touchpoints’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 388). Another critical component of the authors’ framework are firm capabilities, which are organizationally embedded patterns of processes and routines. For example, the capability of touchpoint journey design is the ‘capability of planning potential touchpoint journeys as a means for business planning and modelling and disseminating requirements across functionally oriented capabilities such as product development, sales, and communications (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 388).

Cultural mindsets, strategic directions, and capabilities of customer experience management are all viewed as intangible resources that together shape and can increase the sustainability of a firm’s competitive advantage. Importantly, Homburg *et al.* (2017, p. 386) find that the ‘identified [customer experience management] capabilities [...] contribute to the continual design and redesign of [customer experiences] to achieve and sustain customer loyalty in dynamic market environments. In other words, firm capabilities are critical for the successful management of customer experiences across the customer journey over time, which the current thesis seeks to investigate in the context of sticky experiences. The critical role of capabilities is echoed in Lemon and Verhoef’s (2016) review of the customer experience management literature and the authors’ best practice example of Disney’s Magic Band, as elaborated on in the next section. Specifically, Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 84) note that, ‘research on these capabilities is very scarce, and further development is definitely required.’ This research builds on Homburg *et al.*’s

(2017) framework throughout the thesis, discussing different parts of the authors' study in different parts of the manuscript. This thesis also critiques Homburg and colleagues' work as being less generalizable as the authors claim, given that their grounded-theory framework was developed based on a selection of largely high-utilitarian and low-hedonic contexts. More generally, both Homburg *et al.*'s (2017) focus, and Lemon and Verhoef's (2016, p. 87) call for more research, on 'specific capabilities and mindsets' was critical to the decision to examine sticky experience management with an eye toward firm capabilities and, to a lesser extent, mindsets, in this thesis.

This section has reviewed foundational literature on customer experience and customer experience management. It has provided the theoretical vocabulary necessary to fully apprehend this thesis. The next section provides a detailed account of the smooth experience model. This model is the dominant model in the customer experience (management) literature on how customers experience, and firms facilitate, ongoing customer experiences across the customer journey.

2.3 Managing Customer Experience via the Smooth experience model

This section offers a detailed account of the smooth experience model, including the firm capabilities recommended for efficient customer experience management and customers' desirable experiential responses to the execution of these firm capabilities. This thesis seeks to critique its underlying dimensions and develop an alternate model that can account for exciting 'sticky' experiences that customers have in high-hedonic service categories, as opposed to the efficient, practical, and smooth experiences that customers have in the smooth experience model. In this sense, the study's main contribution of the sticky experience model was developed in direct comparison with the smooth experience model, and the study's practical implications are developed at the nexus of these two models. Therefore, this section introduces the smooth experience model in detail.

The first subsection (2.3.1) provides a brief overview of the smooth experience model. Subsections 2.3.2-2.3.4 outline the initial, subsequent, and terminating service cycles in the smooth experience model, considering both the firm side and the customer side across these three phases of the customer journey. Subsection 2.3.5 offers a succinct account of the smooth

experience model across the customer journey, summarizing the key points of the foregoing subsections.

2.3.1 Introduction to the smooth experience model

This thesis positions sticky experiences against the smooth experience model, which is the dominant model capturing the management of repeated customer experiences over time (Court *et al.*, 2009; Hamilton *et al.*, 2020; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Based on the loyalty loop literature (Court *et al.*, 2009, Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2015, 2016) and related customer experience management research, the smooth experience model can be summarized as follows. The smooth experience model is describing the management of repeated customer experiences along customers journeys that (a) contain relatively predictable customer experiences, that (b) attract customers through relevant information and support in the initial service cycle, and that (c) keep customers through ongoing exposure to brand news and ‘streamlining’ (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 90) techniques such as personalization, contextualization, and simplification in subsequent service cycles. Loyalty loops (d) create value for customers by guiding customers through their deliberate decision-making process to arrive at the right purchase decision in the initial service cycle, and by enabling the positive experiential pattern of the loyalty loop in subsequent service cycles, which includes consistent, seamless, and customized experiences, helps customers achieve desired results quickly, and leads to a loyalty build-up. Loyalty loops streamline the customer journey to make customers’ problem-solving or job-completing processes easier over time. Consequently, (e) the metaphor best capturing the essence of the smooth experience model is a *loop* that customers quickly and easily go around and round.

2.3.2 The initial service cycle

This subsection covers the initial service cycle in the smooth experience model, which in this model spans the consumer journey from the prepurchase to the purchase to the initial postpurchase phase. In the **prepurchase** phase, firms enable consumers to move from initial consideration to active evaluation and finally to a ‘right’ (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 11) purchase-decision by providing them with relevant information and support along the initial service cycle.

When consumers consider satisfying their needs or goals through the marketplace, they search for information and evaluate the options they have in their consideration set, before making an informed purchase decision (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Pucinelli *et al.*, 2009; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). Previous marketing and consumer research have commonly framed these processes as attempts to solve problems (see Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Recent research in management has developed the ‘jobs to be done’ approach (Christensen *et al.*, 2005) to better capture processes conducted by consumers in order to achieve something in their lives, rather than merely solve problems that arise. Overview work on customer experience management argues that consumers who aim to solve a problem and/or accomplish something typically go through what is being called the ‘customer decision journey’ or ‘customer purchase journey’ (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 71) described gradually in this section. The loyalty loop literature similarly builds on this journey consisting of a prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase phase.

The loyalty loop literature suggests that firms attempt to optimize this **deliberate consumer decision-making process** as early as possible. Most notably, firms enhance consumers’ decision journeys by ‘giving them the information and support they need to make the right decisions’ (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 11). As firms refine the initial touchpoints, they can help consumers avoid the paralyzing, overwhelming effects of information or choice overload (e.g., Markus and Schwartz, 2010; Sela and Berger, 2012) and instead make it easier for consumers to move toward getting the job done (Christensen *et al.*, 2005). Managerial research shows that what consumers value most during the prepurchase phase is ‘‘decision simplicity’’—the ease with which consumers can gather trustworthy information about a product and confidently and efficiently weigh their purchase options.’ (Spenner and Freeman, 2012, p. 110) Accordingly, the smooth experience model holds that the intended and desired outcome for consumers in this phase is a guided deliberate buying-decision emerging from an experience of efficient and reliable consideration and evaluation of options. The concrete information and support that firms offer to consumers during introductory touchpoints can take many forms in the marketplace. The following paragraphs provide marketplace examples of this key finding of the loyalty loop literature.

To illustrate best practice for current customer experience management, for example, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) unpack Disney’s Magic Band technology and the accompanying online tool MyMagic+. While the Magic Band is used during the actual visit to the Disney World park,

MyMagic+ is a tool to redesign the prepurchase phase of the experience. It enables consumers ‘to preplan their experience and to identify specific times to experience various rides and events in the park’ (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 89). Through MyMagic+, Disney encourages consumers to develop a more accurate idea of what to expect and how to optimize their time at the park; and getting the preplanning job done in this way also builds a foundation for ‘reducing uncertainty and frustration during the purchase stage – the customer’s visit to the park’ (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 90), for instance by reducing waiting times for rides and pre-ordered meals.

Companies often strive to make the purchase path more satisfactory for consumers by providing rich applications that help consumers decide which products make the most sense for them. For instance, credit card finders and car configurators are dynamic tools that provide ample information opportunity and have become widespread in their respective industries (Court *et al.*, 2009). Some companies create value for themselves and for consumers by, somewhat counterintuitively, also providing consumers with access to competitor price information on their websites (Trifts and Haeubl, 2003). For example, Eyal (2014) points out that online retailer Amazon and car insurance company Progressive used this tactic to increase trustworthiness and overall perceived utility. Against the backdrop of widespread comparison shopping online (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2017), interacting with consumers through a more inclusive space for consideration and evaluation has proven to be a viable customer experience management tactic for these and other companies (e.g., Trifts and Haeubl, 2003).

Other companies literally make the information they provide clearer and more relevant to customers. Consider, for instance, how adding front-of-package nutrition labels to products with back-of-package nutrition information helps consumers reduce the number of calories in their purchases and results in a long-term decrease in price sensitivity for these products (Elshiewy and Boztug, 2018). Finally, some companies use data and estimates to tailor the journey early in the purchase process, aiming to reduce consumers’ consideration of competitors. For instance, solar panel provider Sungevity uses data from Google Earth and the real estate service Trulia to provide homes and businesses with customized information on their solar potential (Edelman and Singer, 2015). Throughout the initial service cycle, Sungevity aligns online and offline sources to provide consumers with relevant, trustworthy, and readily available information to make a decision, whether via one-click access to unique Google Earth images and energy savings calculations, explanatory videos, names of referees nearby, or sales representatives informed

about where the consumers is on his or her path to signing up with the firm (Edelman and Singer, 2015). According to Edelman and Singer (2015), this firm capability (of providing relevant informational support to enable better decision-making) has helped Sungevity become the fastest-growing company in the residential solar business.

The moment of **purchase** is another key aspect or ‘battleground’ (Court *et al.*, 2009) in the initial service cycle in the smooth experience model. In the general conceptualization of the consumer purchase journey, the purchase phase consists of choice, ordering, and payment behaviours (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). According to the loyalty loop literature, consumers make a choice based on the guided decision-making process outlined above. Firms can enhance the chances that their brands are chosen by customers at the moment of purchase if firms, for instance, win the ‘in-store battle’ (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 105). Marketing techniques such as appropriate placement of products and service offerings, in-store advertisements, and sales promotions may all help firms win this battle.

The behaviours of ordering and payment are hardly theorized but present in the examples used to illustrate the model. Key to the differentiation between the extant smooth experience model and the emergent sticky experience model developed in this thesis is the observation that firms in the former model typically require consumers to go through all three behaviours at the point of purchase. That is, after consumers have chosen and ordered a service, they are typically required to make a payment to initiate ownership transfer or access to a service. This purchase process can be in the form of full payments (e.g., groceries, Elshiewy and Boztug, 2018), discounted rates for regularly shipped products (e.g., Amazon), or leasing contracts (e.g., Sungevity, Edelman and Singer, 2015), among other options. The continuous introduction of new payment methods such as the mobile systems by Apple, Google, Samsung, Garmin, or Fitbit indicate a general tendency of technology companies to invest in, and benefit from, the actual payment process of consumers. This leaves firms with ever-increasing payment options to offer to consumers as they conclude their path to purchase.

Finally, the smooth experience model seeks to optimize the **postpurchase** phase to facilitate a loyalty build-up. The loyalty loop literature suggests that firms attempt to optimize the postpurchase process by exposing customers to points of contact on an ongoing basis. This ‘ongoing exposure’ typically relates to variously owned touchpoints including the service itself,

advertisements, news reports, and customers' conversations with family and friends (Court *et al.*, 2009). It can also include more personally tailored recommendations for customers that are created by firms (Edelman and Singer, 2015). Specifically, managerial research advises firms to '[b]uild a pipeline of innovative product, service, and brand news' (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 9). When companies successfully expose customers to innovative and relevant news, loyalty loop scholars argue that they can help customers create a more enjoyable experience and nurture customer loyalty in the form of advocacy and bonding (Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015).

As firms refine touchpoints after purchase, they can help customers reduce the uncertainty or anxiety about whether they made the right purchase (e.g., Markus and Schwartz, 2010; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). Managerial research shows that customers often express negative feelings over their decisions and take further action to alleviate them. For example, in Spenner and Freeman's (2012) survey of over 7,000 consumers, 41% of consumers express anxiety about their purchases and 20% of consumers said they conducted research postpurchase. Similarly, Court and colleagues (2009) report that more than 60% of those who bought facial skin care products conduct further research online. What customers seem to seek, and value is to 'validate their decisions' (Spenner and Freeman, 2012, p. 112) as part of achieving a satisfactory decision-making experience in the initial service cycle. Accordingly, the smooth experience model holds that desirable and loyalty-inspiring touchpoints can be facilitated in the postpurchase phase when customers have affirmative experiences not only with the service itself, including informative packaging, but through ongoing exposure to innovative brand news (Court *et al.*, 2009; Spenner and Freeman, 2012).

In the marketplace, innovative news can range from announcements about new services or features to messages about new positionings (Court *et al.*, 2017), among other news shared by firms. For example, to lend support to the usefulness of this customer experience management capability, Court and colleagues (2017) emphasize that it is successfully employed by companies that achieve above-average growth despite an 'elusiveness of loyalty' in their category. Among the leaders in their study, the authors point to Apple, which has a tradition of using news on innovations to not only trigger new consumers to consider their brand but also to help validate current customer's decisions and foster their loyalty (Court *et al.*, 2017). For example, the long

waiting lines in front of local Apple Stores at the time of new product releases can serve as a source of validation when reports and pictures of them are circulated in the media.

Other companies use marketing campaigns in line with the smooth experience model's recommendation to literally alleviate customers' anxiety about their decisions and potential events in the postpurchase phase. For example, the South Korean car manufacturer Hyundai adopted a campaign to ease customers' concerns about the considerable investment of buying a car by allowing them to return their cars in the event that customers lose their jobs (Court *et al.*, 2009). A customer may become exposed to the news about this new service in any stage of the purchase journey; however, it is during the initial service cycle that it most unfolds its effect of reducing financial worrying and encouraging potential customers to purchase a Hyundai car. Affirmed about having made a financially safer decision compared to buying a competitor's car without this advertised guarantee, customers are able to enjoy their overall Hyundai consumption experience more. According to Court and colleagues (2009), this innovative message was a major facilitator for the company's growing market share in the automotive industry in the United States.

2.3.3 Subsequent service cycles

This subsection covers subsequent service cycles in the smooth experience model, which in this model spans the customer's journey with a service or brand onwards from the initial postpurchase phase. Subsequent service cycles include repeated access and/or repurchase of a service and ensuing consumption of the service. In the classic customer purchase journey, the postpurchase phase covers direct and indirect interactions between a customer and the firm, brand, product, or service after purchase. On the customer side, it includes behaviours such as consumption, usage, service requests, and engagement (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Referring to the smooth experience model, Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 76) point out that recent 'managerial research has extended this process to include the 'loyalty loop' as part of the overall customer decision journey (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009).' Accordingly, this subsection reviews the loyalty loop as an extension of the classic customer journey process that incorporates subsequent service cycles in which customers remain loyal to a brand or service.

In the smooth experience model, firms lead customers into a loyalty loop and lock them within if they develop and utilize the overall firm capability of streamlining the customer journey (Edelman and Singer, 2015). To achieve this desired long-term result, the literature highlights customer experience management techniques such as personalization, contextualization, and simplification. This subsection introduces these techniques and provides illustrative examples.

Personalizing and **contextualizing** touchpoints along customers' continuing journey helps create seamless, customized experiences for those customers. The loyalty loop literature suggests that firms place great emphasis on tailoring the customer experience to groups of customers (e.g., households) or individual customers as they move from one step to the next along their ongoing customer journeys. This finding is not limited to the loyalty loop literature. In their generalized customer experience management framework, Homburg *et al.* (2017, p. 388) include 'context sensitivity of touchpoints' as a strategic customer experience management resource defined as the 'direction to establish touchpoints that address and optimize the customers' situational contexts and their touchpoints' specific features for value-adding perceptions along customers' touchpoint journeys.' Managerial research by Edelman and Singer (2015, p. 92) argues that the technique of 'proactive personalization' and 'contextual interaction,' among others, are key to deliver value in today's market. By proactive personalization, the authors refer to the capability to use information received from past interactions or external sources in order to instantaneously customize experiences. By contextual interaction, Edelman and Singer (2015) describe the capability to employ knowledge about where a customer is in a journey, either physically or virtually, in order to draw him or her toward the next set of desirable interactions. When companies successfully personalize and contextualize touchpoints, loyalty loop scholars argue that they can lead customers more seamlessly into the loyalty loop and further along the 'ongoing cycle' (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 6) of their journey with a firm.

As firms refine touchpoints in this way, they can help customers reduce the frustration over mass-targeted, poorly tailored and timed, or related 'friction or pain points' (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 84). Research by Homburg *et al.* (2017) shows that optimizing context sensitivity of touchpoints can contribute to value creation by making touchpoints more informative, convenient, (self-)customized, or flexible. The loyalty loop literature echoes these findings and emphasizes that value is created dynamically via this customer experience management technique, given that it can improve subsequent steps in a customer's journey and how smooth a

customer flows from one journey step to another (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2015). Accordingly, and in line with findings by Homburg *et al.* (2017) on the value of context sensitivity and by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) on the importance of seamlessness, the smooth experience model holds that a desirable outcome for customers lies in having seamless, customized experiences with a firm or service. Likewise, such techniques also cultivate customer perceptions of consistency and build customer trust that a service predictably and repeatedly helps them solve a problem or get a task done (Hyken, 2018). These loyalty-enhancing experience likely deepen as the degree of personalization and contextualization increase over time (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015).

Consider Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) best practice example of Disney's Magic Band wearable computer bracelet as an illustration of these customer experience management techniques and ensuing customer experiences. With the ultimate goal of improving the Disney experience and increasing revenues, Disney invested more than \$1 billion to remove friction, free up customers to take advantage of more offerings, and be able to better reach and service customers (e.g., Kuang, 2015). Together with the preplanning tool MyMagic+, the Magic Band enables customers to personalize and optimize their stays in the Disney World park. Customers can use the Magic Band wristband conveniently throughout the park, for instance, to make food and merchandise purchases, enter theme and water parks, and open their hotel room doors. Guests also benefit from Disney's ability to know where they are physically in the park and in their preplanned schedule. This enables Disney to efficiently carry out pre-ordered services such as a meet-and-greet with a Disney character and make better use of opportunities such as taking a family photo on a popular ride. While visits to Disney's theme parks commonly provide enjoyable experiences customized to different consumer segments (e.g., Epp and Price, 2011; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), the techniques described here helped the company further improve the total experience of each individual guest by removing critical pain points. As Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 90) summarize, 'The Magic Band technology and its surrounding and supporting information systems enable Disney to deliver a seamless, customized, and surprisingly frictionless experience to its guests. It almost enables Disney to anticipate its customers' needs.' Park attendance, resort hotel occupancy, and income from Disney's parks and resorts rose considerably after the introduction of this customer experience management initiative (Martin, 2015).

The **simplification** of journey processes is another key customer experience management technique in the smooth experience model. According to the loyalty loop literature, this technique is particularly suited to facilitate experiences of quick, easy results (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Hyken, 2018; Court *et al.*, 2009). The literature suggests that firms attempt to build competencies expressly focused on optimizing how customers can execute journey processes in their pursuits to move toward desirable outcomes. Concretely, managerial research finds that one way to achieve simplification is to use ‘automation’ to streamline journey steps: ‘Automation involves the digitization and streamlining of steps in the journey that were formerly done manually’ (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 6). When companies successfully automate and hence simplify journey processes, loyalty loop scholars argue that they can reduce the number and complexity of steps required for customers to achieve results (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015; Eyal, 2014). In this way, automation contributes to producing a ‘greased chute’ (Fleming, 2015, p. 229), sending customers onto smoother rides, and also benefits firms internally by helping them increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

As firms refine touchpoints through simplification, they can help customers reduce the frustration over lengthy, complicated, or related pain points in the customer journey. Practitioners in the loyalty loop space (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Eyal, 2014; Fleming, 2015, 2016) argue that customers receive high value from being able to follow an easy and fast track through the ‘myriad possibilities and paths a customer may take to complete his or her ‘job’’ (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 79). In fact, Eyal (2014, p. 52) argues that simplifying the digital user experience by taking out steps in the customer journey ‘spurs each successive phase of the web,’ helping to turn prior niche behaviour such as blogging and posting into frequently conducted, mainstream consumer behaviours. Accordingly, the loyalty loop rationale holds that a desirable experiential outcome for customers that facilitates lasting customer loyalty are quick and easy results enabled by the simplification of journey processes.

Simplification is often a highly technical firm technique for customer experience management, being typically grounded in automation processes. Simplification can work alone or in tandem with other capabilities such as personalization and contextualization to improve the customer experience. For example, in the case of the guest experience at Disney World parks, simplification helps to create value for customers and firms through its interconnection with

individual and context sensitive data collected in real-time through the Magic Band wristband (Kuang, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Simply put, the technology allows customers to get more done more easily and be less concerned about navigating formerly painful and lengthy journey steps such as queuing for top attractions or ordering meals during busy hours. In addition, if customers happen to face obstacles in the form of long waiting lines, for instance, Disney can respond in real-time by automatically e-mailing a coupon to them in order to mitigate the ‘pain.’ The combination of customer experience management techniques allows Disney to optimize its operation, including more appropriate logistics and a more efficient service delivery (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Other companies have gained loyal customers by literally removing steps from the customer journey. As a case in point, take Amazon’s simplification initiatives to reduce the distance and effort between the moment a customer needs something and the moment he or she can consume it. This has led Amazon to create the ‘iconic benefit’ based on what Yu (in Joel, 2018) calls the ‘idea of no patience required.’ A key manifestation of this idea is the 1-Click option on its website and the physical and virtual 1-Click dash buttons that the company offers to repeat customers. Similarly, Scholarly search engine Web of Science’s latest addition of a one-click tool ‘simplifies’ finding and legally downloading journal articles for researchers ‘frustrated by complicated login processes’ (Else, 2018, p. 2).

In a different industry, consider how TSA PreCheck enables travellers to reduce the amount of time it takes to go through security at airports by offering a special line with fewer people and without the hassle to take off shoes or separate liquids and laptops. Similarly, service CLEAR shortens wait times at airports and sport stadiums in the US when IDs and tickets are checked (Forbes, 2018). As a final example, compare the multi-step analog process of depositing a check at a physical bank or ATM with the streamlined digital process of taking a photograph of the check and depositing it via an app on a smartphone (Edelman and Singer, 2015). By helping customers achieve desired outcomes quicker and easier, these and other companies using simplification techniques aim to produce loyalty-enhancing responses along customers streamlined journeys.

2.3.4 Termination trajectories

This subsection of the review of the loyalty loop literature covers markedly reduced usage or termination of a service. This phase of the customer journey is called termination trajectories in this thesis. The loyalty loop literature does not conceptualize service termination in the same depth and detail as the initial and subsequent service cycles. This may be due to a general tendency in managerial and academic research to focus on what works well to create superior customer experiences and to develop managerial recommendations based on positive cases. Nevertheless, the loyalty loop literature mentions two scenarios in which customers discontinue the loop track of active loyalty. These termination trajectories are generally linked to loyalty-weakening incidents that prompt customers to question their current choice (Court *et al.*, 2009). First, customers can become ‘**vulnerable repurchasers**’ who consider alternatives but who end up staying passively loyal to the incumbent brand (Court *et al.*, 2009, 2017, p. 66). In other words, customers may temporarily stay with a brand but become ‘passive loyalists [who] are open to messages from competitors that give them a reason to switch’ (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 6). Passive loyalists’ bond with and recommend brands to a much lesser degree, if at all, than active loyalists (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009). Second, customers can become ‘**switchers**’ who re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and choose an alternative brand (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 66). In other words, customers may terminate the service relationship and switch deliberately to an alternative market option.

Recent work by Court and colleagues (2017) finds that what separates active loyalists from other customers is that the latter shop around, at least briefly, before making repurchase decisions. Among the 30 categories included in Court and colleagues’ (2017) data set, only three categories were predominantly driven by loyal customers who made the same repeat choice without considering alternatives. In the remaining 27 categories, 87 percent of customers shopped around and considered alternatives, with 29 percent of customers eventually staying with the previously chosen brand (‘vulnerable repurchasers’) and 58 percent buying another brand (‘switchers’). While the phenomenon of ‘research shopping’ across channels has been recognized and studied in marketing (e.g., Verhoef *et al.*, 2007), Court *et al.*’s (2017) study highlights how ephemeral and elusive loyalty overall is in the market.

How do firms contribute to passive loyalty and switching behaviour? Loyalty loop scholars remain relatively mute on how and why specific firm resources, actions or other factors related to customer experience management (e.g., macro factors such as changes in the state of the

economy), lead to (near) service termination (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015). What the loyalty loop literature suggests is that loyalty-weakening incidents such as poor service experiences with a brand or comparatively better service offerings from competing brands prompt customers to reconsider their choice (Court *et al.*, 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017). Loyalty-weakening incidents can make customers more vulnerable to being steered away. For example, Court and colleagues (2009, p. 7) note that insurance companies GEICO and Progressive can ‘interrupt the loyalty loop’ by providing relevant information and support that make comparing and switching easy. Court and colleagues (2017) also provide anecdotal and survey evidence that traditional marketing initiatives, such as loyalty programs are becoming less effective in engaging customers and preventing them from considering alternatives.

Loyalty loop scholars also point to the importance of meeting customers’ expectations along the customer journey. In line with the dynamic understanding of customer experience (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), the loyalty loop literature conceptualizes the customer journey as an ongoing cycle in which the customer builds expectations based on his or her experience that inform subsequent steps (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009). ‘Expectation gaps’ (e.g., Fleming, 2015) may occur at any stage when the actual experience does not meet a customer’s expectations. This phenomenon is well known in the marketing literature, which has shown that a negative (positive) disconfirmation between a delivered performance and customer expectations reduces (increases) customer satisfaction and affects key outcomes such as firm performance (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2004; Gupta and Zeithaml, 2006). Applied to the smooth experience model, these findings suggest that expectation gaps, or negative disconfirmations, contribute to interruptions in the loyalty loop by lowering customers’ satisfaction with a firm or brand.

Beyond these dynamic effects, loyalty loop scholars argue that it is the ‘sheer weight’ of new technologies and greater choice that encourages consumers to shop around (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 3). For example, Court and colleagues (2017) mention the exponential growth of online tools to easily compare and purchase products, of mobile shopping apps that further simplify processes and provide peer reviews, and of social media that continuously inform consumers about their friends’ purchases and evaluations. The potential impact of these factors is clearer when we consider that the customer experience evolves not in isolation but by way of living through a journey with a firm and ‘continually judging this journey against response thresholds of co-occurring experiences in a person’s related environment’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 384).

Accordingly, what the loyalty loop literature seems to suggest is that today's marketplace and personal environment of many customers makes shopping behaviour and switching brands a simple, effortless undertaking – a rational detour from the ongoing loyalty cycle done in anticipation of a more desirable experience. Given that customers tend to use only one solution to resolve a problem or get things done in high-utilitarian service categories (e.g., one automotive insurance, one household utilities provider, one phone carrier), such customer behaviour is a lingering threat to the continuity of loyalty loops.

2.3.5 *Summary of the smooth experience model*

The previous subsections have described the smooth experience model in detail throughout the initial service cycle, subsequent service cycles, and termination trajectories along the customer journey. The current subsection summarizes this detailed description, synthesizing the loyalty loop literature with a focus on key recommended firm capabilities and customer experience patterns.

In the **initial service cycle**, customers move through four phases or 'battlegrounds' (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 98) of a *deliberate decision-making process*, including (1) the initial consideration of multiple brands, (2) the active evaluation of those brands, (3) the moment of purchase; and (4) the postpurchase consumption experience (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 98). Firms are advised to provide *relevant informational support* to enhance customer experiences along this process – 'giving [customers] the information and support they need to make the right decisions' (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 107). This support can be thought of as phase specific. Concretely, firms can provide customers with trustworthy and efficient decision-guidance, such as (1) advertising during the initial consideration phase, (2) dynamic tools on websites for the active evaluation phase, (3) in-store deals at the moment of purchase, and (4) informative packaging and brand news to enhance the consumption experience (Court *et al.*, 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). In this model, customers are typically required to make a payment at the moment of purchase to initiate ownership transfer or access (Court *et al.*, 2009). Firms facilitate an enhanced postpurchase experience and loyalty build-up not only by using informative packaging, but also by exposing customers to ongoing brand news. Such techniques help validate customers' decisions (Spenner and Freeman, 2012) and encourage customers to 'enjoy' their experience, become an 'advocate,' and 'bond' with the brand (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 90).

To optimize **subsequent service cycles**, firms are advised to *streamline the customer journey* (Edelman and Singer, 2015). Streamlining techniques can be used by firms for ‘locking’ (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 90) customers within *loyalty loops*, understood as increasingly seamless cycle of consistent service experiences. The techniques of tailoring touchpoints to customers’ unique histories and expected future behaviour (personalization) and providing customers with relevant and timely information at service touchpoints (contextualization) can help firms create seamless and customized experiences (Edelman and Singer, 2015). This accords with the general customer experience management resource of ‘context sensitivity of touchpoints’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 388) and the role of seamlessness to remove ‘friction or pain points’ (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 84; Fleming, 2016). Such customer experience management techniques create a smooth flow from one touchpoint to another (Edelman and Singer, 2015). The simplification of journey processes is another critical technique that helps customers repeatedly achieve results ‘quickly and easily’ (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 92). Simplification refers to making interactions with a service as uncomplicated as possible. This technique typically involves (digital) automation to reduce the number and complexity of steps required for customers to accomplish a task (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Eyal, 2014). Together, these streamlining techniques ensure high experience predictability and facilitate positive and useful experiences such as convenience, ease, and satisfaction (Fleming, 2016; Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). With his or her expectations consistently met, the customer stays within the loyalty loop and lives through lowly deliberate, largely automatic cycles of re-consumption. In the best-case scenario, the brand becomes the unquestioned solution to the customer’s problem or job to be done, and the customer becomes an active loyalist who advocates for the brand (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015).

Customer journeys in the smooth experience model can come to an end due to *loyalty-weakening incidents* (Court *et al.*, 2009; Fleming, 2016; Hyken, 2018). These incidents may be related to the focal brand (e.g., poor service delivery) or competing brands (e.g., competitors creating superior services). Recent loyalty loop research also finds that loyalty has generally become elusive in today’s marketplace, and many customers shop around before making repurchase decisions (Court *et al.*, 2017). The literature notes two **termination trajectories**, one toward near termination that leaves customers in vulnerable state to be steered away, and a full termination trajectory of *brand switching*. ‘Vulnerable repurchasers’ (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 66) stay with a

brand after briefly shopping around, remaining as ‘passive consumers [who] are open to messages from competitors that give them a reason to switch’ (Court *et al.*, 2009, p. 101). Such passive loyalists bond with and recommend brands to a much lesser degree than active loyalists (Court *et al.*, 2009). ‘Switchers,’ in turn, re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and choose an alternative (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 66), thus terminating the relationship.

This section has provided a detailed account of the smooth experience model. The current thesis is positioned against the smooth experience model, which is the dominant model of the long-term evolution of customer experiences across the customer journey. The next section develops a customer experience management matrix, revealing underlying dimensions of previous customer experience management research. Importantly, it reveals a critical underlying dimension of the smooth experience model (i.e., experience predictability), which limits the applicability of this model and opens up space for the development of an alternate model.

2.4 Developing a Customer Experience Management Matrix

This section develops a customer experience management matrix that situates the smooth experience model and the notion of sticky experience within the customer experience and customer experience management research area. The matrix reveals a critical underlying assumption of the smooth experience model and other customer experience research addressing customer problems or tasks to be done, i.e. customers typically value *experience predictability* along their customer journeys. By revealing this underlying assumption, the matrix makes an important first step toward redressing the unfortunate tendency of overgeneralization in the customer experience management literature; namely, to rely on the smooth experience model as a general model of managing customer experiences across multiple service cycles in both highly utilitarian and highly hedonic industry settings, irrespective of what customers are actually seeking as they interact with a brand or service.

The review of the literature highlights two dimensions that serve to effectively situate the current study in relation to prior work and reveal a previously overlooked assumption underlying approaches to customer experience management. The first dimension is the scope of the customer experience (subsection 2.4.1) and the second dimension is the predictability of the customer experience (subsection 2.4.2). These dimensions also help reveal what ‘has yet to be apprehended

or given serious study' (MacInnis, 2011, p. 143). This is intended to enable this thesis to carve out space for the conceptual contribution of sticky experience management within the customer experience management literature through 'identifying' (MacInnis, 2011) an under-explored area of managing repeated customer experiences in comparison to the extant model of the loyalty loop. Subsection 2.4.3 presents a customer experience management matrix based on the two identified dimensions.

2.4.1 The scope of the customer experience

The first dimension is the scope of the customer experience addressed, that is, whether a singular experience or multiple, iterative, evolving experiences are examined. Typically, empirical and overview studies in customer experience management conceptualize the customer experience in its singularity as a particular, overall, or 'current' customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 77; e.g., Berry *et al.*, 2002; Otnes *et al.*, 2012). For instance, Berry *et al.* (2002) examine the experience that customers have in a hospital setting, advising practitioners to optimize the experience as a singular 'total' customer experience, comprising multiple dimensions such as thought and emotion, while not discussing the evolving nature of the customer experience, nor addressing how to manage it accordingly, for instance across multiple hospital visits.

Similarly, research on the influence of the customer experience on marketing outcomes in prolonged or sequential service encounters has focused on the influence of a singular experience, rather than cumulative or evolving customer experiences, on such outcomes (e.g., McGinnis *et al.*, 2008; Schouten *et al.*, 2007; Verhoef *et al.*, 2004). For instance, Verhoef *et al.* (2004) highlight the importance of peak experiences, besides the average performance of a service, for the formation of customer satisfaction in service encounters defined as sequences of events. McGinnis *et al.* (2008) examine the influence of the individual experience of flow and the social experience of *communitas* on establishing enduring involvement in extended service encounters.

In these studies, the scope of the customer experience is limited to a singular experience. Berry *et al.* (2002) address the management of the customer experience as a singular, comprehensive customer response, and both Verhoef *et al.* (2004) and McGinnis *et al.* (2008) draw on extant concepts of particular experiences, such as peak experience and flow. These and other studies do not address the dynamic or iterative aspects of customer experience, including issues such as how

experiences change over time, how future experiences are shaped by earlier experiences, and how customer experiences should be managed in order to bring people back again and again. In other words, questions that arise when the customer experience is viewed as evolving across the customer journey over time are largely omitted from such work.

However, some early work has touched on these questions. Most notably, Celsi *et al.* (1993) examine customer experiences in high-risk leisure consumption over time. The authors describe how customers become increasingly familiar with the practices and processes involved in such consumption, and how their motives for beginning and continuing to participate in this form of consumption, their risk perceptions, and benefit/cost outcomes change over time. For example, Celsi *et al.* (1993, p. 14) find that the ‘evolution of hedonic motives follows a trajectory from thrill seeking through pleasure and fun to experiences of flow.’ More broadly, Celsi *et al.* (1993, p. 21) find that ‘the individual experiences a highly interrelated pattern of motive evolution and risk normalization,’ which creates a high-risk customer identity among seasoned, acculturated customers, and provides customers with ‘a sense of maximized potential and a life more richly experienced.’

Recently, research on the smooth experience model has also extended the limited focus on a singular experience to include ongoing, cumulative experiences across multiple service cycles along the customer journey (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015). The smooth experience model has been introduced previously and will be discussed in contrast to emergent findings regarding the sticky experience model in the Findings and Discussion chapters. Following from this discussion, this thesis argues that the scope of the customer experience is a useful and appropriate dimension to differentiate prior research on customer experience management.

2.4.2 The predictability of the customer experience

The second and more latent dimension that surfaced from the review of customer experience management and related literatures is the predictability of the customer experience. The following paragraphs discuss customer experience management research on predictable experiences, customer experience management research on unpredictable experiences, sources of

such experience unpredictability, and the dimension of predictability on comparison with the dimensions of ordinariness/extraordinariness and utilitarianism/hedonism.

Customer experience management research on predictable experiences. For an individual, some customer experiences are rather predictable or foreseeable, while others are more unpredictable or surprising. One part of the academic and managerial literature examines relatively predictable customer experiences and journeys and how they can be improved through customer experience management (e.g., Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Otnes *et al.*, 2012; Rawson *et al.*, 2013). For example, Edvardsson *et al.* (2005, 151) examine prepurchase experiences engineered ‘by placing and staging customers, in accordance with a ‘realistic script,’ in experience rooms using hyperreality to simulate the service and create the desired customer experiences.’ Edvardsson *et al.* (2005, p. 151) theorize that such experiences can be ‘more distinct and more unambiguous than the reality we know,’ and illustrate their framework using IKEA experience rooms designed to copy real rooms and offer solutions to everyday problems. In such contexts, experience predictability is desirable for both the service and the customer. After all, a hyperreal prepurchase experience is meant to enhance customer problem-solving and guide customers toward making better choices typically from a limited set of options (e.g., the colour of a toaster) in accordance with typically clear preferences (e.g., preference for dark colours in the kitchen). Unpredictability, in such settings, would unnecessarily complicate the customers’ decision-making process and delay, if not prevent, purchase decisions.

Similarly, a foundational assumption underlying the smooth experience model is that firms should create high touchpoint predictability within and across service cycles to make customers’ lives easier along the customer journey (Court *et al.*, 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2016; Hyken, 2018). This assumption can be traced back to earlier marketing thought on service management. For example, research has long argued that maintaining predictability within and across service encounters ‘increases cognitive control, minimizes risk, and reduces cognitive effort,’ and is thus ‘integral to consumer satisfaction’ (Surprenant and Solomon, 1987, p. 88-89). This approach toward ensuring predictability in service encounters should be, unsurprisingly, ‘with no surprises’ (Solomon *et al.*, 1985, p. 108). More recent marketing research on customer experience and customer journey management echoes this assumption. Concretely, Kuehnl *et al.*’s (2019) research on effective customer journey design builds on the same authors’ earlier work on general customer experience

management (Homburg *et al.*, 2017) to argue that touchpoint consistency facilitates ‘learning through easy recognition, evaluation, and retrieval of information,’ and touchpoint contextualization creates ‘perceptions of convenience, control, and risk reduction along the customer journey’ (Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019, p. 555).

Customer experience management research on unpredictable experiences. Another part of customer experience management work examines relatively unpredictable customer experiences and journeys and their management (e.g., Arnould *et al.*, 1998; Carù and Cova, 2006; Schouten *et al.*, 2007). For example, Arnould *et al.* (1998) show that the inherent dynamism, variety, and the non-rigid scripting of roles prevalent in the context of the ‘wilderness servicescapes’ (among other factors such as the elicitation of cultural narratives) contribute to a quality service experience that sometimes is transcendental and lets customers live through varied and often surprising moments such as compatibility, soft fascinations, flow, adrenaline rushes, and a sense of freedom and possibility.

Carù and Cova’s (2006) research on immersion shows that unfamiliar and sophisticated consumption activities such as visiting a classical music concert are an unforeseen and often surprising process of experiencing proximity with and distance from the consumption activity. Carù and Cova (2006) find that immersion – understood as becoming one with a consumption experience – is more like a process consisting of intense and less intense moments of submerging that a consumer lives through. In addition, this is a process that includes, and requires, continuous customer effort. The authors argue that immersion occurs through combinations of (a) enabling service elements (e.g., service personnel in the role of guides that accentuate a proximity effect), and (b) brief sequences of three ‘operations of appropriation’ exerted by consumers to reduce the distance between them and the experiential context. Specifically, in operations of ‘nesting,’ consumers try to (positively) perceive their environment and establish familiarity and comfort in an experience. This is accompanied by a controlled isolation of parts of an experience, service, or activity to better create a foothold in it. In operations of ‘investigating,’ consumers attempt to explore and identify new aspects in order to enhance anchorage and control, extending their known territory. Lastly, operations of ‘stamping’ refer to consumers’ creative meaning making. In this operation, individuals develop impressions and ascribe personalized meanings to (parts of) experiences, service elements, and other aspects. Carù and Cova (2006, p. 10) find in an empirical study of the customer experience in classical music concerts that sequences of these

appropriations contribute to ‘mini-immersion episodes’ in which consumers conjure up (and acquire) knowledge and competencies, embark on magical voyages of discovery, and have ‘a feeling of well-being, growth, and gratification, which some described as ‘small victories’.’

Sources of experience unpredictability. The predictability of customer experience can be shaped by many factors, including the nature and design of a market offering (e.g., Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), the influence of different types of touchpoints (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), and the involvement of actors and their influence to co-create experiences (e.g., Chandler and Lusch, 2015). For example, a highly unpredictable customer experience may occur through interactions with an offering that is inherently dynamic (e.g., white water river rafting servicescapes, Arnould *et al.*, 1998) or materially elusive (e.g., online stock market investing, Zwick and Dholakia 2006). A customer experience can also be rendered less predictable when it is substantially influenced by social, external, and independent touchpoints outside of market actors’ control. Examples of such touchpoints include the natural environment (Arnould *et al.*, Tierney 1998), and the influence of other market actors equipped with sufficient levels of power to shape touchpoints, as is the case in lateral exchange markets that connect actors and leave exchange processes largely to those actors (Perren and Kozinets, 2018).

In contrast to the smooth experience model and other customer experience management research on experience predictability, considerable thought in the social sciences emphasizes the allure of experience unpredictability and examines its sources (Alter, 2017; Eyal, 2014; Lopatto, 2018). The remainder of this section briefly introduces key ideas from the social sciences explaining what keeps people ‘sticking’ to an activity and coming back for more. Relevant work includes research on entertainment (Mittell, 2006), gambling (Schüll, 2004), game studies (Calleja, 2011), as well as consumer desire (Belk *et al.*, 2003) and extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993). These various areas of research suggest that unpredictability creates a sense of adventure that keeps customers excited.

For instance, research on entertainment, such as television shows, demonstrates that a critical source of welcome experience unpredictability lies in unpredictable and complex plotlines (Mittell, 2006). Dramatic serials with such plotlines (e.g., *Breaking Bad*) keep audiences bingeing through multiple episodes and seasons, while dramatic procedurals with more predictable plotlines and a less complex structure (e.g., *Law and Order*) keep audiences involved during an

episode but do not prompt customers to watch the next episode immediately afterwards (Alter, 2017). Gambling research highlights a key insight for the mechanism of keeping customers ‘hooked.’ The gambling literature has repeatedly shown that a variable-ratio reward schedule is much more exciting than a fixed-ratio reward schedule (Schüll, 2004). In a variable-reward schedule, customers win in an unpredictable way – they do not know when and what they are going to win. In a fixed-ratio reward schedule, customers win in a more predictable way – for example, they know they will win a glass of orange juice on approximately every fifth play. Building variable-ratio reward schedules that enable intermittent wins into the design of gambling offerings, such as slot machines, the gambling industry creates an environment of potentially highly rewarding, adventurous, unpredictable experiences that can make gambling a compelling recreational activity for many customers (Lindridge *et al.*, 2018), and a pathological addiction for some customers (Schüll, 2004).

Likewise, gaming research demonstrates that, if gaming outcomes are perceived by users as fair and within the overall game logic, the ‘unpredictability of outcomes leads to meaningful and compelling experiences’ (Iacovides *et al.*, 2015, p. 224). The overall unpredictability of gameplay contributes to long-term or ‘macro involvement’ that ‘keeps players returning to the game’ (Calleja, 2011, p. 40). More recent developments in digital technology and high-speed internet have enabled additional sources of unpredictability in fast-paced and immersive online games. For example, sources of unpredictability such as evolving objectives and multi-player actions in ‘ever-enfolding and expanding’ games (Lunenfeld, 2011, p. 76) seem to make such games (e.g., World of Warcraft) stickier than prior generations of games, which tended to be more predictable (Alter, 2017). Similarly, consumer research on consumer desire (Belk *et al.*, 2003) and extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993) – the latter of which often focuses on adventurous consumer activities such as white water river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), guided mountain climbing (Tumbat and Belk, 2011), or participation in obstacle races, such as Tough Mudder (Scott *et al.*, 2017) – both reinforce that consumers are much more likely to stay involved in a customer journey when they are not entirely sure what comes next; the suspense is thrilling (Eyal, 2014). To conclude, prior research suggests many sources of experience unpredictability, emphasizing that the variability of a market offering and consumers’ rewarding activities can create an appealing sense of adventure, which renders customers eager to continue their journey within a service cycle and across multiple service cycles.

Predictability versus ordinariness and hedonism. The dimension of predictability is reminiscent of the dimension of ordinariness used to differentiate experiences in the consumer behaviour literature. For instance, Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014, 2) argue that extraordinary experiences are ‘uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond the realm of everyday life’ while ordinary experiences are common, occur more frequently, and take place in the realm of everyday life. However, this thesis questions the use of this dimension for the thesis’s research purposes, because it does not clearly accommodate the phenomenon under investigation in relation to prior work in customer experience management. When viewed through this differentiation, the kinds of repeated experiences this research examines seem to be a hybrid form, being frequently yet enthusiastically repeated and allowing customers to simultaneously incorporate them into their daily life and to experience, at least at times, the deep involvement, meaningfulness, and even transformative potential typically reserved for extraordinary experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017; Tumbat and Belk, 2011).

The dimension of customer experience predictability is also reminiscent of the differentiation between utilitarian and hedonic offerings and customer processes (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). For instance, marketing scholars argue that consumers seek high-hedonic products because they are ‘fun, exciting, delightful, thrilling, and enjoyable’ and high-utilitarian products because they are ‘effective, helpful, functional, necessary, and practical’ (Schulze *et al.*, 2014, p. 4). In theory, both high and low predictable customer experiences may emerge from either utilitarian or hedonic offerings and may be processed by customers using either of these approaches. In practice, utilitarianism and hedonism function as tacit (pre)selection and evaluation frameworks that guide customers toward different kinds of offerings that provide different values (e.g., Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Low-predictable customer experiences typically emerge from high-hedonic touchpoints along the customer journey, while high-predictable customer experiences tend to occur from low-hedonic or high-utilitarian touchpoints. Customer value tends to be similarly distributed with unpredictable customer experiences typically enabling customers hedonic value and more predictable customer experiences typically enabling more utilitarian value. Substituting this dimension for customer experience predictability would cause a less clear accommodation of the phenomenon under investigation in relation to prior research on customer experience management and understate the importance of (un)predictability.

In brief, and in line with prior work (Schulze *et al.*, 2014), this thesis treats the categories of hedonism and utilitarianism primarily as dimensions of market offerings that are useful to delineate the boundary conditions within which different approaches to customer experience management are applicable and useful. Given the primacy of customer experience in this thesis, and for customer experience management as the primary action object (Homburg *et al.*, 2017), experience predictability more aptly represents an underlying dimension for a customer experience management matrix. The next subsection develops a customer experience management matrix based on the two dimensions of the scope of the customer experience and the predictability of the customer experience.

2.4.3 *Customer experience management matrix*

Crossing the scope of the customer experience (singular vs. repeated) with the predictability of the customer experience (low vs. high), the current study offers a customer experience management matrix that entails four distinct areas of customer experience management research and practice (see table 1): job-oriented experience (singular, high predictability), adventure-oriented experience (singular, low predictability), loyalty loops (repeated, high predictability), and sticky experiences (repeated, low predictability).

Table 1: Customer Experience Management Matrix

	Singular customer experience	Repeated customer experiences over time
High predictability of the customer experience	Job-oriented customer experience	Loyalty loops
Low predictability of the customer experience	Adventure-oriented customer experience	Sticky experiences

Source: Author.

The following paragraphs introduce each of the four quadrants, beginning with the singular customer experiences of job-oriented customer experience and adventure-oriented customer experience. After the paragraphs on loyalty loops as one possible kind of repeated customer experience over time, the research aims regarding sticky experiences will briefly be presented and the following subsection introduced.

Job-oriented customer experience. The job-oriented customer experience takes a ‘jobs to be done’ perspective (Christensen *et al.*, 2016, p. 56; see De Keyser *et al.*, 2015; Epp and Price, 2011; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) with customer experience management research that focuses on a singular customer experience characterized by high predictability (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005; Frow and Payne, 2007; Rawson *et al.*, 2013). The managerial focus of work in this area is predominantly on enhancing a particular or overall customer experience by way of optimizing a touchpoint journey through which a customer achieves something, for example moving to a new house (Rawson *et al.*, 2013) or finding solutions to everyday life situations such as sleeping and cooking (e.g., Edvardsson *et al.*, 2005). Extant research on job-oriented customer experiences shows that firms contribute to value creation in this area by directing customer experience management toward supporting the customer’s attempts to get something done or resolve a problem that has arisen in the customer’s life (Christensen *et al.*, 2005).

Adventure-oriented customer experience. By contrast, the area of adventure-oriented customer experience captures customer experience management research on a singular customer experience with a low level of predictability (Carù and Cova, 2006; McGinnis *et al.*, 2008; Schouten *et al.*, 2007). Here, the managerial focus of work in this area lies primarily on enhancing a particular or overall customer experience by way of optimizing a touchpoint journey through which a customer explores, discovers, and enjoys something, for example an appreciation of a classical music concert (Carù and Cova, 2006) or a marketer-facilitated automotive leisure event (Schouten *et al.*, 2007). The current research calls this the research area of the ‘adventure-oriented customer experience’ in reference to the adventurous nature commonly described in research on customer experiences with a low level of predictability, particularly research on extraordinary experience (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017; Tumbat and Belk, 2011). Extant research on adventure-oriented customer experiences shows that firms contribute to value creation in this area by directing customer experience

management toward ‘presenting customers with desirable challenges while also providing the support customers need to manage related risks and achieve success’ (Schouten *et al.*, 2007).

Loyalty loop experience. Moving beyond singular customer experiences, the matrix also captures the relatively scant customer experience management research that emphasizes the iterative or repeating aspect of customer experiences (De Keyser *et al.*, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Despite calls for more research on these dynamic aspects of customer experience over time (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), much less research goes beyond the singular scope of the customer experience. One existing concept of repeated customer experiences over time is loyalty loops. Loyalty loops are streamlined purchase cycles consisting of predictably repeating customer experiences (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015). Building on, and extending, the classic customer decision making process, the smooth experience model is in line with research on job-oriented journeys in which firms aim to enable customers to live through rather predictable touchpoints and engage in desirable problem-solving activities. The smooth experience model expands this understanding to include the management of ongoing, cumulative, repeated customer experiences occurring after the initial purchase is made. According to this model, managers should initially focus on optimizing the customer’s first purchase cycle (Court *et al.*, 2009, 2017) and thereafter, on proactively leading the customer through future repurchase cycles (or loyalty loops) with ‘simple and useful’ touchpoints along a streamlined customer journey (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 92). While research on loyalty loops provides useful recommendations for managers seeking to enhance customer loyalty by facilitating simple and practical experiences, this model does not address how to manage customers’ yearning for more exciting experiences characterized by low predictability.

Sticky experience. Sticky experiences are low predictable experiences that repeat and accumulate over time. In brief, their two dimensions according to the customer experience management matrix are repeated (rather than a singular) experiences, and low (rather than high) experience predictability. According to reports in the business press, customers seek to repeat their experiences with a firm without knowing exactly what will come next, which adds to the thrill and pleasure (Chamary, 2016; Fry, 2013; Lynley, 2016; Miller, 2011; Rega, 2015; Reich, 2014). The current study explores this under-researched customer experience management area and creates a model of sticky experience management. It is hoped that this model can serve as an alternative to the prevailing smooth experience model and be generative in this neglected

research space of customer experience management. To conceptualize sticky experiences, in the next section, this thesis reviews the limited extant marketing research that mentions sticky experiences and draws insights from research on sticky experiences and stickiness across the social sciences.

This section has reviewed customer experience management research and, based on the two dimensions of the scope of the customer experience (subsection 2.4.1) and the predictability of the customer experience (subsection 2.4.2), developed a customer experience management matrix (subsection 2.4.3). An underlying assumption in the smooth experience model is that customers value experience predictability across the customer journey. In contrast, it is proposed that customers seeking sticky experiences value experience unpredictability over time. The next section conceptualizes sticky experience by reviewing relevant literature in marketing and other social sciences on stickiness, sticky experiences, and related phenomena and concepts.

2.5 Conceptualizing Sticky Experience

To conceptualize sticky experience, the first two subsections review research across disciplines that has touched on the notion of sticky experience or related uses of the two terms sticky and stickiness. The first subsection (2.5.1) reviews marketing research and applied business writings, while the second subsection (2.5.2) reviews social science research and other writings more broadly. Overall, prior work provides interesting insights into sticky (experiences). However, the literature search has neither yielded an existing elaborate concept of sticky experience in marketing nor a readily applicable concept outside of marketing. Note that application of concepts has been the case for customer experiences and marketing constructs. For example, Schouten *et al.* (2007, p. 358) draw on social science work on peak and flow experiences (e.g., Privette, 1983) to develop their key concept of transcendent customer experience, using it unequivocally ‘to refer to flow and/or peak experiences in a consumption context.’

Other constructs in marketing and consumer behaviour have been defined based on a single theory from an adjacent field. For instance, brand attachment with its components of affection, connection, and passion (Thomson *et al.*, 2005) draws on the equivalent concept in psychology. In contrast, due to a lack of an elaborate, established concept of sticky experience, this thesis research can neither build an understanding of sticky experiences upon a theory, nor clearly

associate it with a particular basic discipline. This makes it necessary to carefully review literature across disciplines for clues about what sticky experiences are, which the following subsections address.

Prior research that mentions sticky (experience) in marketing and other social sciences has largely linked stickiness to memory, which is in line with an information-processing view rather than a broadened experiential view (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Yet this work also provides useful insight into repetition and the accumulation of meaning, which may be two building blocks of sticky experiences. A brief closing paragraph after each subsection summarizes each main insight.

Before reviewing the literatures, a quick note on how this thesis uses the term meaningful might be required. Like Lunenfeld's (2011), this research's use of the term meaning is a hierarchical one. The current research argues that individual consumers have experiences, or responses evoked by market-related stimuli (Brakus *et al.*, 2009), that consumers perceive and express to be more meaningful or less meaningful, or even meaningless. On an aggregate level, it is proposed that sticky experience as a social phenomenon belongs into the category of responses that are held to be meaningful, and hence important in some way, to consumers. At the same time, this thesis recognizes that 'humans are constructed so as not to be able not to interpret' (Errington 1990, p. 33). Using the word meaningful as this thesis suggests, therefore, is not meant to imply that there are cultural things or experiences that ontologically have no meaning for people. Rather, the current research builds on the basic assumption of humans as constant meaning-makers to argue that statements about the hierarchy of meaning are possible as we interpret consumers' interpretations of their experiences (Geertz, 1973).

The third subsection (2.5.3) reviews additional relevant research on consumer experience to further develop the conceptualization of sticky experience. To achieve this, the current research discusses three concepts that seem relevant in the context of sticky experiences: consumer immersion (e.g., Carù and Cova, 2006), consumer involvement (e.g., Zaichkowsky, 1985), and desire (e.g., Belk *et al.*, 2003). The final subsection (2.5.4) brings these insights together and derives, in a succinct manner, a conceptualization of sticky experience. This conceptualization serves as a basis for the empirical analysis of how frequently and enthusiastically repeated, 'sticky' experiences manifest across the customer journey in hedonic service contexts.

2.5.1 Sticky experience in marketing research and business writings

This subsection reviews how the term sticky (experience) has been used in marketing and business writings in order to start building an understanding of the nature of sticky experiences. In brief, extant marketing research and applied business writings on sticky experience predominantly uses the notion of sticky (experience) in the context of memorability and to describe a desirable type of marketing and customer. This subsection discusses these two categories.

Memorability. The first category of research understands stickiness as memorability – defined herein as the quality of something to be worth remembering or easily remembered, especially because of being special or unusual. The very few studies in marketing and consumer research mentioning sticky experience use the word sticky interchangeable with the word ‘memorable.’ For example, Aaker *et al.* (2011, p. 127) referring to an overview study on happiness by Dunn *et al.* (2011), link the ‘power of memory’ to the ‘degree to which the current experience will remain sticky over the long run.’ Aaker *et al.* (2011, p. 127) infer that due to their memorable nature, ‘sticky experiences are more valuable because they temporally extend the pleasure of a single moment.’ Sticky experiences certainly encompass memorable moments in which customers respond to direct and indirect market contact such as a successful CrossFit workout, a funny Tinder advertisement, or a conversation with a stranger about Pokémon Go. Confining the term sticky to denote memorable has two main disadvantages, however. It bestows the complex and multi-dimensional nature of human experience, whether sticky, extraordinary, or ordinary, with a narrow focus on neurological processes of information storage and retrieval. Note in this regard that experiences include multiple internal responses (sensations, cognitions, feelings) and typically behavioural and social responses. At the same time, using sticky in the sense of memorable would be too broad and ambiguous, as the idea of memorable experiences easily applies to a broad range of customer experiences, from rare peak experiences (Celsi *et al.*, 1993) to interesting brand experiences (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

These disadvantages are also discernible in applied writings that tend to make similar reference to memorability. For instance, in Miller’s (2014) work, a sticky experience denotes a memorable experience that bears the potential to increase the retaining of information and knowledge for the

purpose of future learning. A sticky or memorable experience can thus have a strong impact on people and translate into knowledge resources, according to the author. Going full circle, Miller (2014, 4) argues that in this type of ‘Memorable Experience Design,’ sticky experiences are also created through knowledge creation and use. Miller’s (2014) work may be valuable in the area of knowledge and learning. However, it seems less valuable for the purposes of this thesis, given that the author’s use of the term experience appears to be rather generic and steeped into a perspective narrowly focused on cognitive processes, as argued above.

In Heath and Heath’s (2007) popular business book on the success of ideas or information, the authors define sticky ideas as ideas that are understood, remembered, and have a lasting impact by changing the audience’s behaviour or opinions. For a piece of information to make a difference in a person’s life and hence qualify as sticky, it needs to persist over time, that is, stick with the person, until the critical customer moment in which a decision about something is made. While Heath and Heath’s (2007) work provides useful ad-hoc insights into consumers’ pre-decision and pre-purchase journey from paying attention to finally acting on an idea, it has little to say about consumers’ actual experiences during that journey and beyond, during repeated consumption. As Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 137) state, ‘one’s purchase decision is obviously only a small component in the constellation of events involved in the overall consumption experience.’ Heath and Heath’s (2007) work fundamentally relies on a ‘spectrum of memorability’ (p. 5) to assess the success of ideas or information. Nevertheless, it usefully points to the importance of creating interest through ‘knowledge gaps’ (Loewenstein, 1994), of evoking surprise through unexpectedness, and of eliciting emotion in order to make people pay attention and care about something. These aspects are used in a subsequent subsection in this chapter to conceptualize sticky experiences as a cumulative and evolving customer experience.

A closer look at the use of the terms sticky experiences, ideas, or information in the research described above reveals that this work is largely based on information processing assumptions that differ from those underlying the experiential view of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), a view that has largely been followed by customer experience researchers (Schmitt, 2011). In their foundational article, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) positioned the experiential view against the prevailing information processing view at the time, which held that consumers were logical thinkers who made purchasing decisions by solving problems. Instead, the ‘experiential perspective is phenomenological in spirit and regards consumption as a

primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria.’ (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 132) In marketing management, Schmitt (1999) makes a similar argument by positioning his approach of ‘Experiential Marketing’ against the prevailing traditional marketing of the late 20th century, which equally considered customers as rational decision makers weighing functional features to bring about satisfaction. These authors urged researchers to recognize important but neglected aspects of consumption, such as emotions, pleasures, multiple senses, play, variety, creativity, and fantasies. Following from that, a sticky moment in the experiential view could generally be related to any of these and other experiential aspects of consumption.

A primary reliance on memory, in contrast, implicitly refers to information processing assumptions in at least two areas of the ‘intervening response system’ (cognition-affect-behaviour), as outlined in Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) framework of consumer behaviour. In the area of cognition, the information-processing view traditionally focuses on memory and related phenomena as part of consumers’ knowledge structures. Much in line with this, the studies cited above revolve around harnessing the power of memory to extend pleasure (Aaker *et al.*, 2011), improve learning (Miller, 2014), and facilitate decision-making (Heath and Heath, 2007). This work first and foremost deals with largely conscious thought processes such as paying attention, understanding, remembering, agreeing, and making deliberate decisions. A proponent of the experiential model would instead also pay attention to subconscious or latent content and processes (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). These may include socially sensitive ideas, exciting daydreams, and fantasies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) as well as social roles, recreational pursuits, conflicting ideals, or culturally shaped lifestyles (e.g., Thompson, 1997; Schmitt, 1999).

In the area of behaviour, research in the information-processing view traditionally focuses on the (choice) process that leads to purchase decisions and finally to actual buying behaviour. This view is most vivid in Heath and Heath’s (2007) key ‘SUCCES’ model (simple-unexpected-concrete-credible-emotional-stories), which conceptualizes this process in five stages: paying conscious attention, understanding and remembering, believing and agreeing, caring, and acting by changing one’s opinion or behaviour. Consistent with the conventional view, the model culminates in, and ends with, desired cognitive or behavioural outcomes. Their work stops short of addressing activities beyond this point, for instance in consumption resulting from these

outcomes, and hence tends to reinforce the distinction between buying and consuming (see Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). When the customer experience is instead put at the centre of interest, as is increasingly being done in theory and practice (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Sorofman, 2014), a broadened view is needed. Specifically, increased attention must be devoted to phenomenological data capturing moments around the entire act of consumption, as well as bigger, multimodal fractions of that data (e.g., Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Thompson *et al.*, 1989). In so doing, researchers are able make statements about the overall experience as well as the customer journey, in other words, the whole journey entailing key situations and experiential patterns a consumer goes through in relating to a firm or market offering (e.g., Richardson, 2010).

Sticky customers. The second category is sticky customers, defined here as customers who are ‘likely to follow through on an intended purchase, buy the product repeatedly, and recommend it to others’ (Spenner and Freeman, 2012, p. 110). This part begins with a brief discussion of the use of the term sticky to describe effective marketing in today’s marketplace (Leboff, 2011, 2014), before discussing in more detail the idea of sticky consumers. The former use of the term sticky is worth mentioning at this point, though it does not provide useful insight into the conceptualization of sticky experiences. Leboff (2011, 2014) uses two terms – sticky and stickier marketing – to refer to marketing approaches aimed at attracting and engaging customers in the ‘experience economy’ and digital era. The author argues that by attending to principles, such as conversation, community, reputation, and sharing, firms become sticky, or attractive. However, Leboff’s (2011, 2014) applied writing does not offer an elaborate concept of sticky experience or customer experience in general. Rather, his work mainly synthesizes extant marketing research combined with practical experience and implications for effective marketing in the contemporary marketplace. Leboff (2011, 2014) simply names this overall endeavour sticky and stickier marketing, respectively.

Spenner and Freeman’s (2012, p. 110) trade writing examines ‘what makes [online] consumers ‘sticky’—that is, likely to follow through on an intended purchase, buy the product repeatedly, and recommend it to others.’ Here, the closest metaphor is not that an experience sticks with a customer, but that a customer sticks by marketers and their actions. The study’s overall focus is, as in Heath and Heath (2007), on the (purchase-) decision process, arguing for decision simplicity as the single biggest driver of stickiness. Concretely, decision simplicity in online environments

includes processes of aiding navigation, building trust, and making it easier for customers to weigh their options. These processes are intended to shift consumer-engagement efforts from overwhelming consumers to helping them become confident, trusting, and efficient completers of the online purchase journey (Spenner and Freeman, 2012).

Decision simplicity seems like an intuitive strategy for companies, considered against the backdrop of research finding that too much choice or information can lead to indecision and negative emotional effects (e.g., Markus and Schwartz, 2010; Sela and Berger, 2012). However, the notion seems less illuminating when viewed regarding the passionate vocabulary that customers use to describe their experiences with services they repeatedly and enthusiastically consume (e.g., Eadicicco, 2016; Fry, 2013; Rega, 2015). For instance, being ‘obsessed’ about the next CrossFit workout (e.g., Pietrzak, 2016) and enthusiastically catching Pokémon for days and weeks (e.g., Eadicicco, 2016) point to qualitatively different factors and processes than the idea of decision simplicity entails. In other words, simplification may not be at the core of the experiential phenomenon this thesis research aims to capture through the concept of sticky experiences.

Again, these differences echo contrasting assumptions inherent in the information processing and the experiential model (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) work most clearly evokes assumptions of the former model in the areas of task definition and search activity. With regard to task definition, the ‘information processing view conjures up an image of the consumer as a problem solver engaged in the goal-directed activities of searching for information, retrieving memory cues, weighing evidence, and arriving at carefully considered judgmental evaluation’ (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 135). Aiding consumers to confidently complete this thinking process is a key concern in this view and precisely what Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) decision simplicity strategy aims at. As the authors’ claim, the path to online purchase is paved with good intentions in the form of marketers’ efforts to interact with and generously inform consumers. Yet these efforts are ill conceived and overwhelm consumers, which is why marketers need to shift toward simplification and a more careful, selective guidance of customers along the purchase journey (Spenner and Freeman, 2012).

The experiential perspective, in contrast, accentuates a task definition that is primarily oriented toward hedonic response (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). In this view, pleasure, gratification,

stimulation, and arousal are pursued, often in an immediate manner, leaving processes of ‘carefully considered judgmental evaluation’ in the background. Accordingly, search activity turns from a results-oriented acquisition of information in the information processing view, as is evident in Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) study, into an activity that is more exploratory and playful (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The consequences of consumption are therefore also evaluated using different criteria, which traditionally focus on functional/utilitarian benefits in the information processing view and traditional marketing approach, and hedonic and symbolic benefits in the experiential view (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and experiential marketing approach (Schmitt, 1999), respectively. Clearly, an experiential perspective may not be the most fruitful approach to explain all kinds of buyer or consumer behaviour. However, as Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) contend, it may be particularly useful in areas such as leisure and entertainment, which tend to be rich in symbolic meaning, focus on experiential aspects of consumption, and spur high levels of involvement among their customers. The current study falls into this substantive area of consumer and marketing research.

By contrast, as a reading of the loyalty loop literature reveals, Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) idea of decision simplicity seems more aligned with, and practically useful in the context of the smooth experience model. Accordingly, despite using the term sticky, Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) work is situated in this thesis as supportive of the smooth experience model and its goals to simplify customers’ lives by providing customers with relevant information support and subsequently streamlining the customer journey to guide customers through their deliberate decision-making processes in the initial service cycle and to keep them within the loyalty loop across subsequent service cycles that ensure, and ideally further increase, ease and simplicity for the customer.

To sum up, marketing research and applied business writings on sticky experience provide little insight for conceptualizing experiences that customers enthusiastically want to repeat. Memorability, as discussed, rather is a desirable quality and/or outcome of customer experiences in general but cannot be particular to sticky experiences. Likewise, sticky experiences should not be reduced to memorable experiences. Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) idea of sticky customers accords more with the smooth experience model than with a conceptualization or model of sticky experiences, as argued above. However, Spenner and Freeman’s (2012) work is interesting for this thesis research in so far as it is geared towards behaviour and repetition, emphasizing the

likelihood of repurchase. When repeated purchase is at the core of what constitutes sticky customers, as Spenner and Freeman (2012) argue, repeated experience might likewise be at the centre of sticky experiences. This also provides the current research with an impetus to think about what the opposite of a sticky experience might be. It can be inferred from Spenner and Freeman (2012) that being a non-sticky consumer entails a lack of involvement in the form of a low likelihood of following through a purchase, repeating it, and suggesting others to do the same. A non-sticky experience, then, may be characterized by a similar lack of involvement and repetition intention. Consumers may not have an appealing experience at all, and may not want to repeat the experience, in such cases.

2.5.2 Sticky experience in other social science research and applied writings

Previous social science research outside of marketing and in applied writings mainly employs the notion of sticky (experience) in the contexts of memorability, sustainable attraction, and meaning accumulation. This subsection discusses each of these categories.

Memorability. The first category of work touching on the term sticky experience also links stickiness to memorability (e.g., Pincus and Sheikh, 2010; Wilkening and Chung, 2009), as discussed above and understood as the quality of something to be worth remembering or easily remembered, especially because of being special or unusual. For example, in their survey-based writing on museum visitors, Wilkening and Chung (2009) speak of sticky experiences as seminal museum experiences that occur during childhood. The authors argue that these experiences are evocative, having a lasting impact on visitors that allows their imagination to soar. Wilkening and Chung (2009) find that highly engaged adult museum visitors, whom they name ‘Museum Advocates,’ frequently recall such a seminal childhood experience. These visitors ‘are significantly more likely to enjoy visiting museums in their leisure time, are significantly more likely to define themselves as curious and appear to be significantly more engaged with the museum than regular ‘Core Visitors’ [members of the general public who visit museums on a regular basis]’ (Wilkening and Chung, 2009, p. 2).

Singular, seminal, early childhood experiences may be associated with a consumer’s tendency toward seeking and enjoying particular experiences. As such, they belong to the realm of personal history and resources – or personality constructs in Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982)

model – that a consumer extends in each market-related situation. Whilst empirical investigations will provide more clarity on the role of childhood experiences in co-creating sticky experiences from the customer side, there are few reasons at this point to suggest that they form an indispensable factor in sticky experiences themselves. Besides, some of the popular services that urge consumers for repeated experiences are too recent or not commonly used in childhood (e.g., Tinder) to allow for early childhood experiences among their core customers.

Moreover, Wilkening and Chung's (2009) idea of Museum Advocates refers to the common observation that some customers derive more enjoyment out of certain market-based experiences and are more involved with the product or service than others. Recent articles in the media about people's experience with services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder show that many customers of these service report relatively high degrees of enjoyment, excitement, and involvement regarding these services (Barrett, 2018; Fry, 2013; Hern, 2019). In general, high degrees of enjoyment and involvement may have many sources. For instance, high degrees of enjoyment may be part of experiencing sticky experiences but also of experiencing other desirable customer experiences such as transcendent customer experiences (Schouten *et al.*, 2007). High degrees of customer involvement can be the outcome of, and a driver for, customer experience in general, without being necessarily linked to early childhood experiences with a service (e.g., a particular museum) or a category (e.g., museums).

Sustainable attraction. The second category of sticky experience usages revolves around the theme of sustainable attraction – the 'ability to attract as well as to keep' (Markusen, 1996, p. 294). Specific manifestations in this category of sticky experience usages include being sucked into and unable to let go off something (Waters, 2013), enjoyable engagement through gamification (Crowley *et al.*, 2012), strong emotional attachments formed to organizations that are able to evoke sticky experience (Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant, 2012), the ability to attract and to keep capital and people (Markusen, 1996), and human relationships characterized by feelings of being nurtured and stuck simultaneously (Werner *et al.*, 2001; in McClendon and Kadis, 2012, p. 76) and by more constraints on exit than in non-sticky, or non-thick relationships (Adams *et al.*, 2004). For example, in their research on creating high-impact non-profits, Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant (2012, p. 39) examine the practice of 'inspiring evangelists' and conclude 'that in order to inspire evangelists, high-impact non-profits needed to create meaningful experiences and foster strong emotional attachments for volunteers and supporters.

Many of the local non-profits we studied are particularly adept at creating this ‘sticky’ experience.’ In the field of economic geography, Markusen (1996, p. 294) likens stickiness to fly tape: ‘Stickiness connotes both ability to attract as well as to keep, like fly tape, and thus it applies to both new and established regions.’ For example, sticky industrial places can sustain their attractiveness for labour and capital despite increasing mobility, thereby anchoring and developing productive activities over time (Markusen, 1996). Although the research on sticky human relationships focuses on a different unit of analysis (i.e., relationships among people; Adams *et al.*, 2004), this thesis takes from it the ideas that sticky experiences may be accompanied by ambivalent feelings and subjectively experienced hardship of removing or mitigating the desire for re-experience, at least occasionally.

The theme of constraining people’s exit in a relationship are echoed in the use of the terms sticky and stickiness by practitioners in the web site and hosting spheres. For example, stickiness came into fashion in the 1990s to describe Web sites with the ability to make users stick around for a long time and return regularly (e.g., Copilevitz, 1999; Mulcahy, 2001). While this use of the term and practice has lost its former status (Lunenfeld, 2011), practitioners in the hosting business continue to refer to services that make it more difficult for an end user to switch to another cloud provider as ‘sticky services’ (Rong *et al.*, 2013). Overall, the research listed here moves beyond a narrow usage of the terms sticky and stickiness to refer to memorability. Instead, this work evokes an image of sticky phenomena as those phenomena that can attract people in a sustainable way so as to create forms of ongoing attachment, or engagement, with them.

Accumulation of meaning. The third category of existing work covering the term sticky experience employs it in association with the idea of accumulation of meaning and adherence of meaning to sticky phenomena (Lunenfeld, 2011; Pincus and Sheikh, 2010; Schwartz and Arena, 2013). Peter Lunenfeld’s (2011, p. 28) work on human behaviour around the computer as culture machine succinctly expresses this idea:

Stickiness refers to surfaces, assemblages, and experiences to which other things adhere. A truly sticky experience should offer the possibility of accumulation. [...] A sticky object or system has affordances that allow other meaningful objects or systems to latch on to it, expand it, or burrow deep within it. Sacred texts like the Bible and Koran, classics like the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Sanskrit epics Mahabharata and Ramayana, and the plays of William Shakespeare have a vast

amount of stickiness due to their long duration along with the vast body of textual analysis that each has generated.

Stickiness, in Lunenfeld's (2011) understanding, is a quality that can build up and arise from almost any human activity. While classics such as the *Odyssey* readily provide a vast amount of stickiness, even trivial pursuits such as train spotting can become sticky experiences through active, 'wonderfully compulsive' (Lunenfeld, 2011, p. 28) and enduring effort. This supports the presumption in this thesis research that the *Odyssey* or any other sticky thing of the world does not automatically produce an experience that consumers yearn to repeat. The current research assumes that it is the interplay between that which adheres to a market offering (e.g., meaning adhering to a service) and the offering itself on the one hand, and that which consumers extend (e.g., resources of time and effort) as they respond to market-related stimuli on the other hand, that creates sticky experiences over time.

Lunenfeld (2011) also provides useful insight into what might not be a sticky experience by invoking the term *Teflon* to characterize the opposite of sticky. In the computer and media context, the author (2011, p. 29) argues, 'the issue is to produce sticky rather than Teflon media, uploading work that accretes into meaning as opposed to bouncing around, atomized and distracting at best.' In contrast to sticky objects, therefore, Teflon objects fail to connect to other elements and do not 'add to larger questions of meaning' (Lunenfeld, 2011, p. 29). This does not imply that something characterized as a Teflon stimulus does not provoke any kind of response in people nor bring about any kind of investment of resources or participation, according to the author. It can be extrapolated from this account that a key factor differentiating a sticky experience from a non-sticky experience may be that of accumulated (personal) meaning. In this sense, non-sticky or Teflon experiences may simply not become a valued, relevant part of the personalized 'web of significance' (Geertz, 1973) within which consumers live their lives.

In addition, Pincus and Sheikh (2010) and Schwartz and Arena (2013) discuss some of the antecedents and consequences, or elements of an experiential cycle, of what they refer to as sticky experiences. Pincus and Sheikh (2010) posit in their scientifically grounded work that painful experiences are very sticky because they easily link themselves to a variety of triggers. For many (former) smokers, for example, the 'experience of nicotine craving is particularly sticky, as cravings for a cigarette become paired to the most benign array of day-to-day

experiences such as drinking coffee, riding in a car, listening to music, having 10 free minutes of time, or, cruelest association of all, thoughts about cutting down' (Pincus and Sheikh, 2010, p. 21). These 'mind-body experience associations' may become stronger or weaker over time, depending on the frequency and specificity of the pairing and the intensity of the experience, according to the principle of 'contiguity' (Pincus and Sheikh, 2010).

Note that Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 138) applied this original principle to the experiential view on consumer behaviour to argue, 'this contiguity principle suggests that sensations, imagery, feelings, pleasures, and other symbolic or hedonic components which are frequently paired together in experience tend to become mutually evocative.' The stream of associations that occurs during consumption or in market-related situations over time forms into patterns of associations, which can be important aspects of consumers' experiences in the authors' perspective. Similarly, in the branding context, Schmitt (1999, p. 57) understands 'the very essence of a brand as a rich source of sensory, affective, and cognitive associations that result in memorable and rewarding brand experiences.' Regarding the overall issue of learning and repeated consumption, such emerging patterns of association represent a form of 'respondent conditioning' (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p. 138).

For Schwartz and Arena (2013, p. 78), sticky experiences are those that are able to create an interest around something – the 'amazing' content of a museum exhibit, for instance – that 'helps further related information stick to that interest.' In this sense, sticky experiences attune people to further responding and engaging with stimuli, such as a newspaper article about an object encountered in the museum exhibit. Both works suggested assuming a broader application of the idea of accumulation beyond the experience itself. Accumulation and adherence of meaning, then, may also apply to the range and depth of associated 'triggers' (market-related incidents evoking a response in a consumer) and potential outcomes (e.g., an increase of meaning or curiosity associated with a particular service offering and experience over time) that may occur for a certain period of interacting with a market offering. Their works also encouraged considering the overall sticky experiential journey.

To sum up, social science research and other writings do not provide an elaborate, readily applicable concept of sticky experience. However, the literature does provide several useful ideas, as outlined above. The two most promising ideas are the notion that stickiness refers to an

entity's ability to attract and to keep (e.g., Markusen, 1996), as well as the notion of accumulation of meaning (e.g., Lunenfeld, 2011), which refers to the possibility of accumulation and attachment of meaning (and meaningful things) in experiences that are sticky. This latter idea may also extend to the before and after of sticky experiences. Research suggests that sticky experiences (a) may become attached to any number of internal or external cues that help trigger subsequent sticky experiences (Pincus and Sheikh, 2010), and (b) may attune consumers to pick up related information and other material in the aftermath of a sticky experience (Schwartz and Arena, 2013). These studies support the assumption that sticky experiences may be fruitfully understood as phenomena that evolve over time and that can be sustained through well-designed interactions with consumers that keep these consumers interested and involved in a market offering. The next subsection further develops the concept of sticky experiences by reviewing selected research that does not mention the term sticky experience but that is related to the phenomenon and helpful for its conceptualization.

2.5.3 Further development of sticky experience

This subsection discusses selected research that is related and relevant to sticky experiences in consumption contexts in order to advance the conceptualization of sticky experiences. The foregoing review of the sticky experience notion across academic disciplines has yielded three key insights for developing the concept of sticky experience: *repetition, the ability to attract and to keep*, and *accumulated meaning*. At this point, therefore, it can be proposed that sticky experiences are more likely to encourage customers to repeat the experience than less or non-sticky customer experiences; that sticky experiences attract customers and keep them participating in a consumption activity, often eliciting emotions or emotional attachments to the activity; and that sticky experiences are meaningful to customers and that meaning likely accumulates over time as customers continue to be involved with a firm's offerings.

To further elucidate sticky experiences, this subsection first presents insight from research on the concept of consumer immersion (Carù and Cova, 2006). The subsection then moves on to review the concept of consumer involvement (e.g., Zaichkowsky, 1985). Finally, the subsection reviews the concepts of need, want, and desire (Belk *et al.*, 2003), as well as habit (see Russell and Levy, 2012) to shed light on the motivational state underlying the likelihood of re-experience. These discussions are intended to help to more fully grasp the kinds of enthusiastic responses to market

offerings that customers and media articles often describe as addictive or obsessive – and that this thesis research seeks to clarify by developing the concept of sticky experiences, before presenting the empirical examination of the management of sticky experiences across the customer journey over time.

Consumer immersion. Consumer immersion has been defined as ‘becoming one with the [consumption] experience and therefore conveys the idea of a total elimination of the distance between consumers and the situation’ (Carù and Cova, 2006, p. 5). For a long time during this research, the concept of consumer immersion appeared to be relevant for an understanding of sticky experiences and is therefore reviewed here. More specifically, the concept of consumer immersion was used in the initial round of data analysis, during the tacking back and forth between emerging findings and prior literature on other experiences and consumer behaviour concepts. The findings of this initial round of data analysis are presented in Appendix F. These findings are meant to be understood as preliminary, because subsequent rounds of data analysis substantially altered the findings and lead to a more convincing and more broadly applicable model of sticky experience management. Nevertheless, given the prominent place that consumer immersion held during the initial round of data analysis, as evidenced in the preliminary findings presented in Appendix F, it is worthwhile reviewing the concept here to enhance the readers understanding of the concept and its potential usefulness to understand sticky experiences.

There are two main ways to understand consumer immersion in an experience. The first, earlier perspective is commonly related to contexts that have a near theatrical or event character such as spectacular themed stores (e.g., Sherry, 1998). In this view, immersion is an immediate, all-encompassing or total, deep plunge into a consumption experience (e.g., Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999b). The second, refined perspective argues that immersion is a more progressive process consisting of intense and less intense moments of submerging that a consumer lives through (e.g., Carù and Cova, 2006). In this view, the key dynamic of the immersion process is held to take place along the dichotomy of proximity and distance – with a decrease (increase) of distance or separation facilitating an increased (decreased) immersion. Carù and Cova’s (2006) research emphasizes co-creation over a postmodern ease of access to experience. Their work show’s that immersion as a process takes places through combinations of (a) enabling service elements (e.g., service personnel), and (b) brief sequences of ‘operations of appropriation’ executed by consumers to achieve immersion: nesting, investigating, and stamping.

This processual view on immersion may be helpful in this thesis research to illuminate important aspects of the nature of and processes around sticky experiences. It is speculated that the dynamic between proximity and distance is prominent and informative in cases when consumers' responses pertain to contact with services inherently marked by constant variability and accompanying unpredictable customer experiences – which are often cases to which popular imagery attends notions of addiction and obsession (e.g., Fry, 2013; Rega, 2015; Stoddard, 2011). This may be most obvious in games such as Pokémon Go, for example, but it might also hold true for the ever-changing workouts offered by the fitness company CrossFit and the flux of available dates in one's surrounding shown by the mobile dating service Tinder. Creating points of anchorage that allow consumers to feel 'at home' in these kinds of experiential settings may be a continuous, challenging undertaking – rather than an immediate, all-encompassing plunge as the earlier view on immersion suggests. It may require considerable investment from consumers and offer substantial rewards in return (Eyal, 2014).

A yearning for repetition of sticky experiences may then be associated with both intense and less intense moments of immersion. For example, feelings of becoming one with an experience during a successful and meaningful CrossFit workout or a Tinder date may spur enthusiasm for further participation. Similarly, a lack or infrequency of intense plunges into an experience may motivate consumers to invest and expand their discovered and mastered territory for future immersions. Consider this scenario, for instance, during new CrossFit instructions that one does not understand, a failed Tinder date, or the inexplicable escape of a rare Pokémon attributed to a lack of skill or understanding of the game.

It is worth highlighting that – in contrast to an addiction – consumers can stop using such services after experiencing moments of immersion. They may not want to quit a service and continue to experience a yearning or longing for re-experience. Yet this thesis research emphasizes, and further clarifies in a later section, that the phenomenon of sticky experiences does not entail the pathological dependency, fixation, and enslavement associated with consumer addiction (see Russell and Levy, 2012). Considering the concept of immersion, an addiction seems to be an extreme form of becoming one with an experience paired with negative feelings over an undesirable 'home' and the inability to create distance between oneself and related situations. Whilst negative consequences typically loom on the horizon in the addiction scenario,

patterns of behaviour are commonly continued (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989). In other words, while consumers typically struggle to end pathological addictions, and tend to require (therapeutic) assistance to do so (e.g., Alter, 2017; Sussman *et al.*, 2011), consumers may be able to walk away from experiences of stickiness more easily.

When immersion is a key element of the nature and evolution of sticky experiences, it is reasonable to expect to encounter, in some form or shape, processes of nesting and investigating and an oscillation between proximity and distance in customers’ accounts of the experiential journeys they live through. The operation of stamping, in turn, is in line with the proposition of sticky experiences as experiences to which other meaningful things of the world can adhere and meaning accumulates over time. In this sense, deep immersion and a truly sticky kind of experience may include successful forms of stamping, that is, an attachment and accumulation of meaning that make sticky experiences more meaningful to individuals than other, non-sticky experiences. Such an accumulation of meaning and the dynamic nature of immersion as a process may also be an antidote to what Verhoef *et al.* (2009, p. 38) raise as a possible negative adaptation to customer experiences over time: ‘And may customers (to some extent) get ‘bored with’ or accustomed to the delivered experience? Perhaps this adaptation could be labelled as the ‘I have seen it, I have experienced it, what’s new?’ effect.’ While the current thesis does not aim to directly address this identified area of future research (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), the thesis investigates empirical contexts in which such an experiential adaptation is mostly, but not entirely, mitigated. The model of sticky experience management that emerged from the empirical analysis includes firm capabilities that can be used in order to keep customers excited and involved – or, in other words, to mitigate customer boredom with and adaptation to experiences.

Finally, the review of immersion also provides clues about characteristics of the opposite of sticky experience. As discussed previously, non-sticky (or Teflon) experiences may not be meaningful enough for individuals to warrant continuous engagement. The immersion concept adds to this the suggestions that non-sticky experiences may (a) not entail the degree of proximity at the heart of moments of plunging into something, and may (b) not include the often exciting, stimulating, and motivating consumer responses that a back-and-forth between proximity and distance along the consumer journey can evoke. Thus, separation from an experienced situation and what could be called ‘experiential stagnation’ or adaptation (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009) may be further markers of the opposite of sticky experiences.

Consumer involvement. Consumer involvement is a longstanding concept in consumer research that has been defined in foundational work by Zaichkowsky (1985, p. 342) as ‘a person’s perceived relevance of [a market offering] based on inherent needs, values, and interests.’ The concept of consumer involvement is useful to assess whether a person is drawn to a market offering, enjoys consuming the market offering, and whether that market offering holds a significant place in the person’s life. The usefulness of the concept of immersion for this thesis appeared only later during the research, after the initial round of data interpretation. Accordingly, involvement does not feature in the preliminary findings based on the initial round of data interpretation, but it is incorporated in the revised findings based on subsequent rounds of data interpretation. This thesis deliberately includes preliminary findings (in Appendix F) and revised findings to demonstrate the progress made from the initial to the final round of data interpretation.

In its early development, what differentiated low from high involvement was thought to be heavily reliant on information-seeking and comparison behaviours, as well as brand preferences. Zaichkowsky (1985, p. 346) synthesizes prior research on involvement that suggested the following description for a low involvement situation: ‘a relative lack of active information seeking about brands; little comparison among product attributes; perception of similarity among different brands; no special preference for a particular brand.’ Zaichkowsky’s (1985) Personal Involvement Inventory, a multi-item scale to measure a person’s involvement with a market offering, includes a broader spectrum of items that goes beyond the information-processing focus of prior work. Concretely, the scale includes the following items: important vs. unimportant; of no concern vs. of concern to me; irrelevant vs. relevant; means a lot to me vs. means nothing to me; useless vs. useful; valuable vs. worthless; trivial vs. fundamental; beneficial vs. not beneficial; matters to me vs. doesn't matter; uninterested vs. interested; significant vs. insignificant; vital vs. superfluous; boring vs. interesting; unexciting vs. exciting; appealing vs. unappealing; mundane vs. fascinating; essential vs. nonessential; undesirable vs. desirable; wanted vs. unwanted; not needed vs. needed (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 350).

Subsequent research divided involvement into two types (Kapferer and Laurent, 1985; Richins and Bloch, 1986), and recent research adapted the involvement concept to refer to the participation of consumers in innovation process and new product development (Chang and

Taylor, 2016; Cui and Wu, 2016; Storey and Larbig, 2018). Richins and Bloch (1986) describe two types of involvement. The first type, called Situational Involvement, refers to involvement that only occurs in specific situations, of which purchase is one such situation. The second type, called Enduring Involvement, refers not to a situational but to an ongoing concern with a market offering. Consequently, in a situation of high enduring involvement, a market offering can remain interesting to a consumer and occupy his or her thoughts without being stimulated by a purchase (Richins and Bloch, 1986). Consumer research suggests that enduring involvement captures, at its core, the long-term enthusiasm for an activity, and includes the degree to which a market offering or activity is relevant to the consumers (its importance, personal relevance, relation to the self) and the degree to which the consumers receives pleasure (or hedonism, enjoyment) from the market offering or activity (Funk *et al.*, 2004; Kapferer and Laurent, 1985; Richins and Bloch, 1986). More recently, in the context of innovation and new product development, customer involvement has been understood as the degree to which customers participate in the firm's innovation process (Storey and Larbig, 2018). Here, customers may become involved over the entire development process, for example as an information source, as co-developers, and innovators (Cui and Wu, 2016). What is measured in this context is often the breadth and intensity of the knowledge acquisition effort (Storey and Larbig, 2018). Accordingly, customer involvement in this context is less relevant for the purposes of the current thesis.

In summary, the concept of customer involvement – understood in terms of relevance of, pleasure received by, and investment in a market offering or activity – seems to be a relevant concept for conceptualizing sticky experiences and developing a model of its management across multiple service cycles along the customer journey. Without involvement, experiences are likely to remain non-sticky. In contrast, ongoing or increasing involvement may contribute to the stickiness of an experience. Based on the review above, customer involvement may be a helpful concept for this research to capture the importance and meaning of a sticky experience for customers, which is related to Lunenfeld's (2011) argument about stickiness and accumulated meaning over time; the value and appeal of sticky experiences for customers; as well as the excitement and emotional intensity that sticky experiences seem to evoke in customers on an ongoing basis.

The desire for repeated experiences. Consumer desire has been defined as 'a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomfoting and pleasurable' (Belk *et al.*, 2003, p. 326). Much more than need or want, desire can be a powerful motivator 'for something fantastic [...] something to drag

us out of our ordinary habits, practices, and lives into the chaos and unpredictability that we know is a part of our own deeper nature' (Kozinets *et al.*, 2017, p. 674). It is proposed that to understand sticky experiences, it is necessary to clarify how best to describe people's state regarding the likelihood of customer experience repetition. In other words, do customers repeat experiences that are sticky based on needs, wants, desire, or habit? A desire for repeated experience may be another key aspect of sticky experiences, as the many media articles on enthusiastically or 'obsessively' repeated consumer behaviour suggest.

Traditional marketing employs the notions of needs and wants to capture the motivational base for consumer behaviour at large (see, e.g., Grewal *et al.*, 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2006). Needs refer to basic human requirements that a person feels deprived of, ranging from needs for food, clothing, and shelter to needs for recreation and entertainment (Kotler and Keller, 2006). They are further differentiated into functional needs (pertaining to the performance of a product or service) and psychological needs (pertaining to personal gratification associated with a product or service), and commonly include the five needs leading up to self-actualization identified by Maslow (Grewal *et al.*, 2012). A want is the 'particular way in which a person chooses to satisfy a need, which is shaped by a person's knowledge, culture, and personality' (Grewal *et al.*, 2012, p. 6). Hence, wants are needs that are directed specifically to something, for example to a Mercedes car that is held to fulfil needs of transportation, safety, and/or social status.

Belk *et al.* (2003, p. 328) critique this conventional perspective and present the notion of desire as a 'more useful and conceptually rich construct for understanding contemporary consumer behaviour.' In the authors' view, disadvantages of the concept of need include its initial fixation on (the lack of) a certain category of objects and its tendency to naturalize the social forces shaping what is considered a human necessity. In contrast, desire is initially open to being directed toward anything; becoming focused on a culturally shaped entity, such as a market offering or customer experience, as people lived through it. Belk *et al.* (2003) contend that desire therefore addresses, instead of disguises, the social character of motivation. As to the limitations of the notion of want, Belk *et al.* (2003) find it to be overly controlled by the mind to properly cover the full range of consumer behaviour aspects (see, e.g., Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), especially intense emotions that are at the heart of desire. While societal factors are acknowledged in consumers' wants, they furthermore lament the notion's emphasis on personal preference structures as its primary expressive root.

Considering Belk *et al.*'s (2003) critique of the notion of need, it seems that need is not well suited to serve as the underlying motivational state in a model of frequently and enthusiastically repeated customer experiences. It is therefore suggested to disregard the notion of need for this thesis's core conceptual purposes. Combining the preliminary insights provided by popular cultural stories of 'addictive' experiential worlds of customers with Belk *et al.*'s (2003) critique of the notion of want, it also appears that want is not ideally suited as the motivational basis upon which repetition may be sought in sticky experiences. At this point, desire seems to be the motivational concept that comes closest to describing the motivation for frequently and enthusiastically repeated experiences. The current research therefore suggests using more general terms such as 'to enthusiastically seek,' and its twin notion of 'to yearn' interchangeable to describe the emotionally laden motivation to repeat sticky experiences.

When enthusiastically seeking or yearning are a key characteristic of sticky experience, it is worthwhile to also reflect on what might be characteristic of non-sticky experiences. On a singular scale of the degree of desire underlying (anticipated) repetition of an experience, an absence of desire may be appropriate to describe this end. Yet being without desire can be a highly motivational state in and of itself, given that consumers tend to associate it with death and may attempt to cultivate desire, or even a desire for desire as a sign of being alive (Belk *et al.*, 2003). Another approach would be to assume that the opposite of desire in sticky experiences is a state of not desiring or wanting something, in a repellent way. Here, a non-sticky experience would be one in which repetition is fully unwanted. Though to argue that non-sticky experiences, at their core, are those about which consumers feel in such a strong way, perhaps expressed through outright aversion, seems rather extreme and exclusionary. Perhaps the most fruitful way to think about what motivational state characterizes non-sticky experiences is to consider that consumers living through such experiences do not develop or entirely lose the desire to repeat the particular activity that led to the particular experience. Consumers in this view are not void of desire in general but solely regarding a particular activity and experience that they simply do not seek or yearn to repeat at all. In contrast, consumers experiencing non-sticky experiences may have a preference, or even a desire, not to repeat the experience ever again. To clarify, these reflections on the opposite of sticky experiences are of limited value in and of themselves; their purpose it is to more clearly carve out what potentially makes experiences sticky and what potentially sustains sticky experiences over time.

Before providing a summary of this subsection and eventually a conceptualization of sticky experiences, it is useful to clarify a form of consumer behaviour often held to drive repetition, namely habitual re-consumption. While Belk *et al.* (2003) review the notions of desire, need, and want, others have emphasized that much of consumers' repeated marketplace actions are driven by habit (see Russell and Levy, 2012). This raises the question of whether sticky experiences, as a frequently repeated type of customer experiences, are conceptually linked to habitually repeated behaviour. The following two paragraphs discuss this question.

Russell and Levy (2012, p. 342) aptly summarize that, '[h]abitual reconsumption refers to a form of regular and automatic repetition of consumption that develops through trial and error (Murray and Häubl, 2007) and that provides automaticity and cognitive efficiency (Wood *et al.*, 2002).' As habits develop, consumers save cognitive resources and become more passive by relying on action memory (see Russell and Levy, 2012). Consider the case of checking email to clarify desire and habit as motivators for customer experiences. As a common activity that occurs frequently, up to several times a day for many people, and in the realm of everyday life, email represents an ordinary experience. Concrete motivations and triggers for checking email can be manifold and may include feelings of anxiety or excitement over potentially upcoming news, boredom with the current state, and guilt about outstanding responsibilities, which may in turn be linked to individuals' sense of necessity that may arise from direct order at work or internalized, self-regulatory mechanisms. In addition, email systems share several elements with other services mentioned in this study (e.g., variability, novelty, uncertainty) that may help evoke sticky experiences.

However, cases in which consumers enthusiastically want to check their emails again and again are arguably rare. Instead, it seems central to the email experience that repeated consumption over time eases usage of email and enables more efficient and smoother but less aware behaviour (Verplanken, 2006). As habits of dealing with email develop, automation and regularity with little or no deliberate consideration may become central drivers of repetition (e.g., Eyal, 2014). Besides the above-mentioned concrete triggers and motivations, it is therefore reasonable to assume that the concept of habit captures motivations underpinning individuals' behaviour regarding services such as email (e.g., sorting through email, being reminded of email). In the context of services that tend to evoke more enthusiasm and even positively experienced

‘obsessions’ in consumers, the concept of desire seems to be a more accurate fit. Nevertheless, certain aspects of habitual reconsumption, particularly the learning of skills and automation (Murray and Häubl, 2007), while not at the core of what makes experiences sticky, may well play a role in customers’ evolving journeys of sticky experiences.

To sum up, this subsection adds three insights to the conceptualization of sticky experiences. First, it discusses the notion of consumer immersion to argue that sticky experience may be characterized by moments of immersion that may differ in their depth or intensity and that may motivate customers to continue immersing themselves again and again in a market-mediated experience. Second, the subsection discusses the notion of consumer involvement and similarly argues that it may be helpful to understand sticky experiences and develop a model of sticky experience management. In hindsight, the concept of consumer immersion informed the initial round of data interpretation and the preliminary findings presented in Appendix F, while the concept of consumer involvement was helpful in subsequent rounds of data interpretation and thus in the development of the final model of the sticky experience journey and its management presented in Chapter 4. Third, the subsection discusses the concepts of need, want, desire, and habit to shed light on the motivation underlying repeated sticky experiences. The subsection argues that a terminology of desire, yearning, and enthusiastically seeking to repeat is most helpful to understand what drives customers to repeat the phenomenon of sticky experiences. The next subsection provides a succinct summary of the main themes discussed in the previous subsections to conceptualize sticky experiences. The subsection provides a definition of the concept of sticky experiences in closing.

2.5.4 A conceptualization of sticky experiences

To conceptualize sticky experiences, this thesis takes an integrative perspective that draws insights from research on ‘sticky’ phenomena across the social sciences. While the following insights are interrelated, they are presented separately for clarity in this summary. Note that the previous discussion included more concepts and ideas than are represented here. This summary selects core ideas and synthesises those ideas in a comprehensible way.

First, sticky experiences are unpredictable. As Heath and Heath (2007) emphasize, ideas do not become sticky unless interest is created through ‘knowledge gaps’ (Loewenstein, 1994) and

unless surprise is evoked through unexpected content. Predictable ideas and stories rarely capture the audience or have a lasting impact by changing the audience's behaviour (Heath and Heath, 2007).

Second, sticky experiences foster intense emotions. For instance, Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant (2012) argue that creating a sticky experience involves fostering strong emotions that attach actors to an organization and inspire them to continuously act on behalf of the organization. This accords with Heath and Heath's (2007) argument that eliciting strong emotions is key to making people care.

Third, sticky experiences are increasingly meaningful. Lunenfeld (2011, p. 28) views sticky experiences as experiences that accumulate meaning over time: 'A truly sticky experience should offer the possibility of accumulation... [of] layers of meaning.' Stickiness involves 'wonderfully compulsive' (p. 28) effort that 'accretes into meaning' (p. 29). Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant (2012) also claim that meaningfulness is a key ingredient required for the creation of sticky experiences and stakeholder evangelism.

Fourth, sticky experiences sustain their appeal. Markusen (1996) likens stickiness to fly tape, describing it as the ability 'to attract as well to keep' (p. 294). In her study, 'sticky' industrial places are those that sustain their attractiveness despite the increasing mobility of capital, thereby anchoring and developing productive activities over time. For Schwartz and Arena (2013, p. 78), a sticky experience begins with interesting content, such as an interactive museum exhibit, which can 'create a small interest that helps further related information stick to that interest.' Lunenfeld (2011) notes that the term 'sticky' grew popular in the 1990s to describe Web sites that made users stick around and return repeatedly.

Integrating these insights, the current research proposes that Sticky Experiences are *unpredictable, intensely emotional, and increasingly meaningful experiences that customers frequently and enthusiastically seek to repeat over time*. As the findings will show, sticky experiences keep the customer involved across multiple service cycles. The preliminary findings will show how different immersive moments are key to cultivating and sustaining sticky experiences over time (Appendix F). The final version of the findings will provide a refined

conceptualization of the sticky experience journey and include higher-order categories (i.e., journey patterns) that show how customers start, continue, and end their sticky journey over time.

As discussed in the review of the customer experience management literature, sticky experiences fall into the area of repeated customer experiences that are relatively unpredictable, in contrast to the more predictable experiences characteristic of repeated loyalty loops and singular job-oriented customer experiences. On a dimensional level, like other human experiences (e.g., Dewey, 1922; Schmitt, 1999), sticky experiences may include sensorial, affective, intellectual, behavioural, and social responses to the environment. Like other customer experiences (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017, Meyer and Schwager, 2007), they may occur through direct (e.g., usage) or indirect (e.g., advertising) interaction with a firm that build up into an evolving journey consumers live through. The following section distinguishes the sticky experience concept from other concepts in marketing and consumer research and thereby demonstrates that sticky experiences sufficiently differ from existing concepts.

2.6 Contrasting Sticky Experiences with Other Marketing Concepts

This section differentiates sticky experiences from selected concepts in marketing. Before doing so, a quick reminder about the conceptual aims of this research might help the reader assess the importance of different parts of this thesis: The introduction of sticky experience as a concept is not the primary contribution of this thesis. Rather, developing a model of how sticky experiences manifest and are managed across multiple service cycles along the customer journey – and how this management approach differs from managing loyalty loops in the smooth experience model – is the primary contribution of this thesis. Accordingly, contrasting sticky experiences from other marketing concepts is not at the core of this thesis but can more appropriately be seen as a useful step toward generating a model of sticky experience management by creating more clarity about what sticky experiences are and how they overlap with and differ from extant concepts.

To demonstrate the conceptual distinctness of sticky experiences, this section now introduces selected related concepts and discusses how they overlap with and differ from the conceptualization of sticky experience. The first subsection (2.6.1) briefly contrasts sticky experience with consumer addiction that propels consumers to repeat their consumption behaviours in a pathological manner (Hirschman, 1992). The second subsection (2.6.2) discusses

one exemplary concept in the area of extraordinary experience. The third subsection (2.6.3) discusses one exemplary concept in the area of repeated consumer behaviour. Rather than discussing several concepts superficially, it is deemed more appropriate to contrast sticky experience from two relevant consumer behaviour concepts in depth. The two concepts are the infrequent extraordinary experience of transcendent customer experience (Schouten *et al.*, 2007) and the more frequently repeated experience of ritualistic consumption (Otnes *et al.*, 2012; Rook, 1985).

Three short subsections complete the differentiation of sticky experiences from related concepts in marketing and consumer research. The fourth subsection (2.6.4) briefly differentiate sticky experience from flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), the fifth subsection (2.6.5) from customer engagement (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Vivek *et al.*, 2012), and the sixth subsection (2.6.6) provides a succinct overview of how sticky experiences relate to several key concepts in marketing and consumer research (in tabular form), some of which are reviewed in more detail in a previous subsection. As this section will show, sticky experience is related but also conceptually distinct from related marketing concepts and types of customer experiences.

2.6.1 Sticky experience versus consumer addiction

Stories in popular culture about consumers' frequently and enthusiastically repeated experiences often draw on a vernacular of addictive forms of repeated consumption. In the case of CrossFit, for example, numerous media articles examine people's 'obsession' with the fast-growing phenomenon of CrossFit (e.g., Fry, 2013; Herz, 2014), list signs of CrossFit 'addiction' (e.g., Peacock, 2013; Pietrzak, 2016), and present success stories of people who became CrossFit 'addicts' (e.g., Davies, 2016). To illustrate, consider the following items from a CrossFit addiction list (Hrivnak, 2014): 'You check 10 CrossFit websites before beginning work,' 'You find true enjoyment in watching other people exercise,' 'You get nervous before workouts,' 'You've been known to film or photograph your own workouts,' 'You practice Olympic lifting technique with broomsticks or other household items,' 'You relentlessly attempt to recruit all of your friends and family into CrossFit,' and 'When Open Season comes around, you're a ball of anxiety for five weeks.' As Peacock (2013, p. 4) notes, 'the excitement never seems to wear off.'

These texts are indicative of the vernacular and the popular culture narratives told around customer experiences with services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go (e.g., Chamary, 2016), and Tinder (e.g., Rega, 2015), among others. They provide introductory insights into the experiential world of their customers. A closer look at addiction and related pathologies in scholarly work, however, reveals the limited use of these concepts to explain customers' enthusiastically wanting to repeat their intense experiences. To illustrate, in consumer research such pathological forms of behaviour have been 'termed 'addictive,' 'obsessive,' or 'compulsive,' all of which are characterized by a failure to control one's actions despite their undesirability (Goodman, 1990) and by an irresistible urge to repeat certain behaviours that provide short-term rewards but can lead to delayed negative consequences (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989)' (Russell and Levy, 2012, p. 342). In a similar vein, Rook (1985, p. 225) mentions that when rituals become compulsive, such as in the case of compulsive hand-washing rituals, they take on the quality of being 'excessively restrictive' to people.

An addiction is a biopsychosocial disorder that involves the compulsive usage of substances (e.g., alcohol) and/or the compulsive repetition of behaviours (e.g., gambling) despite detrimental consequences (Sussman *et al.*, 2011). It can certainly be difficult in individual cases, as well as for an individual, to draw a clear line between experiences related to pathological states and other (seemingly irresistible or hedonic) experiences in consumption contexts (see Schouten *et al.*, 2007). For the theoretical purposes in this thesis research, it may yet be helpful to differentiate between addictive experiences and sticky experiences: Addiction involves pathological experiential responses where the customer is undesirably 'stuck,' which can lead to feelings of enslavement and the need for therapy to overcome them, as in alcoholism (Hirschman, 1992). Sticky experiences involve non-pathological experiential responses where the customer 'sticks' to a market offering and frequently and enthusiastically repeats experiences over a certain time period yet may pause or stop to do so without the need for professional help. Accordingly, the current study argues that the phenomenon under investigation can be more accurately conceptualized as a sticky experience, rather than an addiction. Consequently, this research examines this latter kind of *sticky* experience.

2.6.2 Sticky experience versus transcendent customer experience

Sticky experience is related but conceptually distinct from other types of customer experiences. This subsection introduces a key concept – *transcendent customer experience* (Schouten *et al.*, 2007) – and discusses how it overlaps with and differs from the conceptualization of sticky experience.

Transcendent customer experience is a positive, extraordinary kind of experience that people have in a consumption context (Schouten *et al.*, 2007). Schouten and colleagues (2007) conceptualize transcendent customer experience based on the concepts of flow and peak experience (e.g., Privette, 1983) and an empirical investigation of annual marketer-facilitated activities around the use of recreational vehicles, especially national Camp Jeep events. The authors emphasize that commonalities of these two experience concepts in consumption contexts are intense enjoyment and a state of transcendence. Concretely, transcendent customer experiences ‘are characterized by feelings such as self-transformation or awakening, separation from the mundane, and connectedness to larger phenomena outside the self. TCEs [transcendent customer experiences] may also be marked by emotional intensity, epiphany, singularity and newness of experience, extreme enjoyment, oneness, ineffability, extreme focus of attention, and the testing of personal limits.’ (Schouten *et al.*, 2007, p. 358)

A closer look at the scale development effort of the authors provides clues into key similarities and differences between transcendent customer experiences and the concept of sticky experiences. To measure transcendent customer experiences, the authors initially used fourteen items to attempt to capture phenomena such as the ones listed above. For example, Schouten *et al.* (2007, 361) employed the items ‘Camp Jeep [the consumption context] caused me to feel differently about myself’ to capture an altered self-concept, ‘The experience was beyond words’ to cover ineffability, and ‘I felt like I was having the ideal Jeep experience’ to reflect the optimal state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). These items express the extraordinariness that certain consumption activities – such as river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), skydiving (Celsi *et al.*, 1993), and guided mountain climbing (Tumbat and Belk, 2011) – can invoke. It is unlikely, however, that the same phenomena are constituent to experiences that are repeated often and for which a prolonged, more everyday yearning is typical. This assumption is supported on a general level by work on issues of extraordinary versus ordinary or mundane experiences (see, e.g., Carù and Cova, 2003; Schmitt, 1999b). Most notably, the pioneer of experiential marketing, Bernd Schmitt (1999b, 251) argues that humans ‘have not been built to undergo intense, personality-

shaking experiences all the time,' which helps explain why most market-mediated situations do not evoke extraordinary responses in consumers.

Regarding the transcendent customer experience concept, Schouten *et al.* (2007) lend further support to this assumption and point at crucial differences between transcendent customer experiences and sticky experiences. In the analytical process, the authors decided to remove two items from the initial transcendent customer experience scale: 'I would like to have a similar experience again' and 'I still remember the feelings I had during the experience' (p. 361). Whilst the latter can be related to the understanding of sticky as memorable that was discussed in an earlier section, the former relates to two of the building blocks of the sticky experience conceptualization: desire and repetition. In the context of sticky experiences, this research argues that customers desire to repeat their experiences often, thereby creating meaningful exciting journeys over a certain period of time. In contrast, Schouten *et al.*'s (2007, p. 367) work indicates that in the transcendent customer experience context, 'customers desire to transcend mundane consumerism' and create a powerful yet short-lived 'alignment of fantasy and reality.' Given the above discussion and the fact that Schouten *et al.* (2007) removed the two items from the final scale, it is reasonable to argue that (a) consumers' experiential responses that make up the concepts of transcendent customer experience and sticky experience differ in important ways, and that (b) a conceptualization of sticky experiences must be sensitive not to overly rely on notions of extraordinariness.

Besides these differences, the two concepts may overlap along several elements: newness of actions, emotional intensity, focus, enjoyment, and testing of limits. For example, 'My actions during this experience were new' (Schouten *et al.*, 2007, 361) may also apply to the behavioural dimension of consumers' experiences in varied service settings or as responses to new challenges in sticky experience contexts. In addition, customers living through transcendent customer experiences and sticky experiences may both experience emotional intensity, focus their full attention on a situation, truly enjoy the experience, and (occasionally) test their limits. To what extent these elements occur in and are constitutive of the concept of sticky experience remains to be clarified through empirical analysis. Following reminders about the limited human capacity for extraordinary, potentially life-changing experience (Schmitt, 1999b), the current thesis research assumes this extent to be overall smaller in the case of sticky experiences compared to transcendent customer experiences. For individual consumers, it may also depend on where they

are in the immersion process oscillating between proximity and distance (Carù and Cova, 2006). For instance, total attention and a sense of oneness with an experience may be true only for some mini-immersion episodes in which a deep plunging into a situation is enabled.

Finally, some components of transcendent customer experiences seem to apply less to settings in which no singular object is at the centre stage of the activity, as is the case in constantly varied services. Consider the ever-changing array of potential dates on Tinder and the ever-changing workouts at CrossFit. As mentioned before, this changing and unpredictable nature of a service seems to be a key aspect in the creation of sticky experiences. Schouten *et al.* (2007, 361), in contrast, measure the oneness that consumers feel with a focal consumption object as an integral part of transcendent customer experiences by using the item ‘My Jeep vehicle felt like part of me during the experience.’ The point here is not to suggest that consumers having sticky experiences view no experience-related objects, people, and other elements as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988) or as partners in dyadic relationships (Fournier, 1998). Instead, he argues that the more stable, singularized character that these metaphors evoke may be less central and fitting to those market offerings that tend to facilitate experiences of stickiness – and hence to the conceptualization of sticky experiences.

2.6.3 Sticky experience versus ritual experience

This subsection introduces another key concept in consumer behaviour – *ritual experience* (Otnes *et al.*, 2012; Rook, 1985) – and discusses how it overlaps with and differs from the conceptualization of sticky experience.

Sticky experience is also distinct from ritual. Much marketing and consumer research has analysed rituals as an element of other customer experiences such as extraordinary experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993), or it has considered rituals in service of other theoretical interests, including the appeal of retail environments (e.g., Kozinets *et al.*, 2002), romance (e.g., Otnes and Pleck, 2003), and gift giving (e.g., Fischer and Arnold, 1990). For example, rituals are one of the three dimensions of consumer gift systems that exist around the giving practices of music downloaders (Giesler, 2006). As a dimension of consumer behaviour (Rook, 1985), ritual has nevertheless been a cornerstone in the development of interpretive, culturally oriented consumer research in the past decades. To compare and contrast the notion of experience in

general and the concept of sticky experience in particular with the one of ritual, it is therefore worth going back to Dennis Rook's (1985) seminal study on ritual experience that uses a customer perspective, as well as select other work.

Rook (1985, p. 252) offers the following definition of ritual: 'The term ritual refers to a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time. Ritual behaviour is dramatically scripted and acted out and is performed with formality, seriousness, and inner intensity.' In this understanding, ritual is a positive and meaningful behaviour that can be involved in human experiences ranging from mundane to extraordinary. Although the author sets out to develop a 'model of ritual experience' (p. 252), he does not arrive at a formulation of any kind of human or customer experience that denotes a ritual experience. Instead, Rook (1985) presents the key content elements (an episodic string of events, linked in an exact and fixed sequence, that is repeated over time) and structural elements (ritual artifacts, a ritual script, ritual performance roles, a ritual audience) characteristic of all kinds of ritual behaviour.

Rook's (1985) focus on generating a common model of ritual behaviour instead of ritual experience is perhaps because, as the author himself argues, individuals' experiences of rituals are extensive, complex and enormously varied. To illustrate, consider the rituals of Christmas and grooming. Both share the content and structural elements mentioned above, and hence qualify as rituals according to Rook's (1985) definition. Christmas can further be classified as a type of originally religious (yet increasingly secular) and family ritual that has its primary behavioural origin in cosmology and group learning, whereas grooming can be classified as a type of personal ritual that has its primary behaviour source in individual aims and emotions, such as the desire to look good and be successful (Rook, 1985). The experiences that these rituals evoke may be influenced by the complex forces at play and the behavioural sources mentioned. In the case of Christmas, for example, the gifts, the performance of a family member as Santa Claus, and the sequence of family dinner followed by gift unwrapping, as well as an emphasis on religion and appropriate behaviour around the family table may all influence individuals' experiences of Christmas.

However, the description of any kind of experience must pay analytical attention to the feelings, cognitions, sensations, and behavioural and social responses triggered by certain environments.

In addition, experiences related to rituals or any other event for that matter may not only occur during these events, let alone when individuals take active part in them. In contrast, they may occur whenever there is a direct or indirect interaction with related aspects in an individual's environment (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Meyer and Schwager, 2007). As Christmas sales, holiday planning, and gift giving issues usually start long before December, the actual ritual may in fact be but one of the last annual situations on a long experiential journey around Christmas; before the same procedure is repeated in the following year. To speak of any customer experience as a ritual, then, is not only to reduce its complexity and diversity onto narrower classifications, but also to confuse behaviour with the multidimensional concept of experience.

Nevertheless, sticky experience and ritual share an emphasis on two components: meaning and repetition. Regarding meaning, Rook (1985, 258) argues that rituals are meaningful and involving because 'they symbolically link the present with the past.' In the psychological view he adopts via Erikson's 1977 work, this refers to the linking of childhood experiences and (un)resolved crises to adult ritual behaviour. For instance, young adults' grooming rituals are motivated to large extents by crises of interpersonal intimacy and the lingering influence of individual identity crises that are typical of adolescence (Erikson, 1977; Rook, 1985). Subsequent research has enriched Rook's (1985) work to derive a more general relationship between meaning and ritual. In a fundamental study on the role and movement of cultural meaning in consumer society, McCracken (1986, p. 78) refers to ritual as 'a kind of social action devoted to the manipulation of cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization.' Through personal grooming rituals, for example, individuals release and capture the meaningful properties of goods that give them new powers of confidence, glamour, or defence to help them prepare for all kinds of social situations (McCracken, 1986).

Just like these rituals can be considered more or less meaningful as their symbolic efficiency and value is assessed by individuals (e.g., Have I felt better about myself during the romantic date?), so can individuals assess and value experiences as being more or less meaningful (Lunenfeld, 2011). Rituals, however, are typically both public and private in an explicit, scripted, formal, and often rigid way (Rook, 1985). It follows that rituals such as Christmas and grooming are unlikely to vanish for an individual simply because he or she perceives them as meaningless. Individuals may rather feel the need to engage, in some way or another, with (changing) cultural valuations and expectations pertaining to these rituals and their desirable outcomes (e.g., looking neat at

work; expressing a devout mood at Christmas). In contrast, sticky experiences appear to cease to exist when the stimuli that used to evoke them no longer fulfil this role and no other market-related interactions can instil feelings and perceptions of meaningfulness in individuals. Simply put, rituals tend to be much more prevalent, codified, and culturally visible than types of experiences. Rituals are collective and individual instruments of meaning transfer valued for their desirable outcomes (McCracken, 1986). To illustrate, consider that market actors can arrange *marketplace rituals* – a ‘planned, symbolic, performative and often repeated activity that [service] providers execute for and with customers’ (Otnes *et al.*, 2012, p. 367), for example through the strategic use of ceremonial language in greeting and parting situations. As *et al.* (2012, p. 367) argue, this is done in order ‘to enhance customer experiences and achieve marketing goals,’ which underscores the instrumental nature and value of rituals in contrast to the intrinsic value that consumers attend to desirable experiences (Schouten *et al.*, 2007).

These observations also have implications for the second element that rituals and sticky experience have in common, that of repetition. Russell and Levy (2012) present rituals in their overview on re-consumption as one of three categories (besides habits and addictions) that stand for behaviours that consumers seek to repeat. However, the base upon which repetition is sought in rituals tends to differ starkly from that in sticky experiences. Note that sticky experiences are experiences that customers yearn to repeat often. In contrast, rituals are typically repeated at predictable intervals and often driven by high degrees of stereotypy and rigidity (Boyer and Lienard, 2006). For example, they can be linked to the events, and accompanying normative expectations, in religious and public calendars (e.g., Christmas, Valentine’s Day), of social transitions (e.g., graduation, marriage), at the workplace (e.g., business negotiations, meetings), in the family setting (e.g., mealtime, birthday celebrations), and in the personal realm (e.g., grooming, housework) (Rook, 1985). Like habits, rituals may be more or less often repeated as sticky experiences, but the key difference lies in the motivational nature: Based on previously cited work in this thesis, it is argued that rituals are repeated largely based on external, fixed, and predictively recurring events, for the sake of creating specific experiential outcomes. Sticky experiences, in contradistinction, are repeated largely based on an internal (though also externally shaped), open, and fluctuating or varying desire for re-experience evoked through direct and indirect contact with market stimuli. To close, and drawing on Russell and Levy (2012), the former seems to be a more passive regularity, whereas the latter a more active process of (desiring) re-experience.

2.6.4 Sticky experience versus flow experience

Sticky experiences are related to but distinct from *flow experience*. Flow is characterized as a complete absorption or immersion in an activity achieved through the full involvement of a person's skills in overcoming manageable challenges in pursuit of clear goals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). It is expected that there are experiential moments of immersion during customers' focused service use in sticky experiences, as well as critical touchpoints encompassing aspects like challenges and goals. Whereas a flow experience is a highly cognitive, transitory experience requiring a sense of control over an activity, a sticky experience is an intensely emotional experience emerging from touchpoints that are less controllable to customers. Flow can motivate re-experience (Celsi *et al.*, 1993) leading to enduring involvement (McGinnis *et al.*, 2008) due to its autotelic nature, yet a yearning for or actual repetition is not a central component of the concept (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Schouten *et al.*, 2007). By contrast, sticky experiences are inherently cumulative and evolving, continuously creating a desire for repetition.

2.6.5 Sticky experience versus customer engagement

Sticky experiences also differ from *customer engagement*, which captures the ways a customer 'reaches out' (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 74) or contributes directly and indirectly (Pansari and Kumar, 2017) to the firm. Customer engagement typically includes the actual purchase as well as referral, influence, and knowledge-sharing behaviours (Kumar and Pansari, 2016). In contrast, sticky experiences appear to encompass cognitive, affective, sensorial, behavioural, and social responses (like customer experiences more generally [Schmitt, 1999]) that do not necessarily represent reaching out or contributing. If customer engagement does occur, the ensuing touchpoints evoke experiential responses that become part of the overall experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Customer experience and engagement are best viewed as overlapping yet separate concepts, with customer experiences influencing and being influenced by customer engagement (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). In this sense, stickiness and sticky experiences may function as motivational drivers, affecting concrete engagement behaviours, such as word of mouth, and the overall 'intensity of an individual's participation in and

connection with an organization's offerings or organizational activities' (Vivek *et al.*, 2012, p. 133).

2.6.6 Sticky experience versus selected concepts in marketing

The following table describes how sticky experiences are similar to and different from relevant concepts in marketing and consumer research. Table 2 summarizes the conceptual relationship between sticky experiences and selected previously discussed concepts (i.e., consumer addiction, consumer desire, customer engagement, customer involvement, and extraordinary experience, of which transcendent customer experience is an example), as well as the concept of loyalty. Note that the loyalty loop literature does not theorize the concept of loyalty in any substantial depth. This literature instead uses loyalty to refer to consumer bonding with a firm, consumer advocacy for the firm, and repeated consumption with little or no consideration of alternatives (Court *et al.*, 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015). Nevertheless, customer loyalty is listed in the table and the key conceptual difference to sticky experiences mentioned. Loyalty and stickiness will be further discussed in the Theoretical Implications section in Chapter 5. The last section of this chapter provides concluding remarks on the overall literature review.

Table 2: Sticky Experiences and Related Concepts in Marketing and Consumer Research

Related concepts	Brief description	Conceptual Relationship to Sticky Experiences
Consumer addiction	Consumer addiction is a biopsychological disorder involving compulsive usage of addictive substances (e.g., excessive alcohol or drug consumption) or compulsive repetition of addictive behaviours (e.g., excessive gambling or casual sex) in spite of detrimental consequences (Hirschman, 1992; O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; Shaffer, 1999)	Sticky experiences could be described as customer experiences that are ‘addictive’ in a non-pathological sense; sticky experiences remain appealing while pathological addictions become unappealing yet are hard to stop
Consumer desire	Consumer desire is ‘a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomforting and pleasurable’ (Belk <i>et al.</i> , 2003, p. 326); unlike need or want, desire is ‘for something fantastic... something to drag us out of our ordinary habits, practices, and lives into the chaos and unpredictability that we know is a part of our own deeper nature’ (Kozinets <i>et al.</i> , 2017, p. 674)	Sticky experiences could feed consumer desires for adventure in otherwise mundane lives; sticky experiences are motivated by desire rather than need or want
Customer engagement	Customer engagement is ‘the mechanics of a customer’s value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution’ (Pansari and Kumar, 2017, p. 295); customer engagement typically includes purchase and behaviours that go beyond purchase such as referral, influence, and knowledge-sharing behaviours (Kumar and Pansari, 2016)	Sticky experiences could sometimes entail or lead to increasing customer engagement across multiple service cycles; yet engagement behaviours are not a prerequisite for or key element of sticky experiences

Customer involvement	Customer involvement is ‘a person’s perceived relevance of the [market offering] based on inherent needs, values, and interests’ (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342); customer involvement is commonly measured using multiple terms around the areas of personal relevance and evoked pleasure (McGinnis <i>et al.</i> , 2008), including ‘valuable,’ ‘exciting,’ and ‘desirable’ (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 350)	Sticky experiences could entail increasing customer involvement across multiple service cycles; sticky experiences could occur in previously high-involvement and low-involvement service categories
Customer loyalty	Customer loyalty is ‘a deeply held commitment’ (Oliver, 1999, p. 34) toward a market offering; customer loyalty results in (an intention toward or actual) consistent repatronage of the market offering despite opportunities to switch brands; customer loyalty can be broken down into attitudinal (i.e., emotional commitment) and behavioural (i.e., consistent repatronage) components	Sticky experiences entail behavioural loyalty but only so long as the service remains exciting; customers primarily seek excitement not commitment; such excitement tends to be focused on an activity or service, rather than a brand
Extraordinary experiences	Extraordinary experiences are ‘intense, positive, [and] intrinsically enjoyable experiences’ (Arnould and Price, 1993, p. 25); in contrast to ordinary experiences, they are ‘uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond the realm of everyday life’ (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, 2014, p. 2)	Sticky experiences could include a range of negative-to-positive and ordinary-to-extraordinary experiences; sticky experiences typically occur more frequently than extraordinary experiences

Source: Author.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has reviewed relevant research on customer experience and customer experience management and situated the current thesis within this research space. It has sought to familiarize the reader with key concepts used in this thesis, including customer experience and customer journey (section 2.2). It has also introduced the dominant model of repeated customer experiences across the customer journey in this space, which is the smooth experience model (section 2.3). Discussing the smooth experience model in detail and reviewing key works on customer experiences and their management enabled the creation of a customer experience management matrix (section 2.4). This matrix has the dimensions of the scope of the customer experience (singular vs. repeated) and the predictability of the customer experience (low vs. high). The smooth experience model and the sticky experience model developed in this research are assumed to diverge on the dimension of experience predictability.

To better understand what sticky experiences can be as a consumer phenomenon, section 2.5 reviewed multiple streams of literature to conceptualize sticky experiences and provide a definition of sticky experiences. This section proposed that sticky experiences are unpredictable, intensely emotional, and increasingly meaningful experiences that customers frequently and enthusiastically seek to repeat over time. While this is not the primary goal nor contribution of this thesis, providing an understanding of sticky experiences based on prior literature was a useful step toward achieving the main goal of this research, which is to generate a model of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey over time. Section 2.6 contrasted this conceptual understanding of sticky experiences with other related concepts in marketing and consumer research. This section demonstrated that sticky experiences overlap with but also differ from other concepts, which are arguably not as suitable to capture the phenomenon described in the business press as sticky or addictive, in the lay sense of the term. The next chapter describes the methodology used in this thesis.

3 Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents the methodology deployed in this thesis. The first half of this chapter deals with the ‘philosophical’ background and the key methodological choices. This section broadly follows Belk *et al.*’s (2013) suggestions for beginning a research project. Concretely, the authors (p. 17) argue that researchers generally make choices around three key issues: ‘what research questions to answer drawing on what empirical phenomena; what [...] research traditions will underpin the work; and what kinds of data to be certain to collect.’ Section 3.2 explains that the research questions chosen in this study are aimed at theory building and reminds the reader that no readily applicable concept exists of the phenomenon of ‘sticky’ experiences. Section 3.3 provides a definition of qualitative research and notes how the tenets of qualitative research inform, and will be reflected throughout, the method section. Section 3.4 takes a broad perspective and introduces positivism and interpretivism as two central research paradigms, situating the current study in the paradigm of interpretivism. Section 3.5 briefly outlines popular research methodologies in interpretive marketing research and explains why market-oriented, multi-sited ethnography was chosen in this study. Subsection 3.6 provides a brief overview of interpretive research traditions and explains the main reasons hermeneutics was chosen in this study. The combination of ethnography and hermeneutics is well established in interpretive marketing research for its ability to produce mid-range theory, which the fields of marketing and consumer research primarily seek to achieve (Janiszewski *et al.*, 2016).

The second half of this chapter deals with the ‘procedural’ aspects of the methods and details the research journey. Section 3.7 presents the criteria for context selection and introduces the three selected contexts. Section 3.8 outlines the sampling strategy and offers a table with information on the interviewed informants. Section 3.9 presents the three sources of data collection, namely observations, interviews, and archival material. The data collection section will also encompass reflections on ethical considerations. The following section (3.10) outlines the data interpretation procedures. Section 3.11 discusses evaluation criteria and demonstrates that the current thesis meets criteria for research steeped within an interpretivist research paradigm.

It is worth mentioning that the choices around research methodology are not exclusively technical ‘if-then’ considerations but are also guided by the ‘biographically situated researcher’ and his or her worldview (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). In other words, choices of methodology do not start completely fresh with the research question but these research questions are already shaped by multiple factors such as the researcher’s interests, training, stance toward seeking knowledge, and overall experience – in the sense of ‘the sum total of the conscious events that make up an individual life’ (Gove, 1976, p. 800). For example, the author has received training in qualitative research methods and conducted immersive ethnographic research prior to starting this research project, which created an underlying preference for qualitative data and for going beyond an exclusive focus on interviews as the data collection method. Such considerations will be mentioned whenever necessary or useful throughout the method section. Generally, this chapter does not present the research process as a top-down approach starting with the historically derived paradigms but rather as a middle-ground approach inspired by Belk *et al.* (2013) that begins with a phenomenon and question and then links back, or up, into qualitative research, research paradigms, methodologies, and traditions, before discussing the procedural research journey of context selection, sampling, data collection, and data interpretation.

3.2 Research Questions Aimed at Theory Building

Following from this study’s overarching objective and research questions (restated in this subsection), a number of methodological decisions were made that guided this research. This study’s objective is to understand the evolution and management of a consumer phenomenon referred to as sticky experience. The two research questions that this study seeks to answer in its theoretical background chapter and its empirical findings chapter, respectively, are as follows: First, do sticky experience exist and if they do, how can sticky experiences be conceptualized? Second, how do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey? The first decision that follows from these questions is that the current thesis is about theory development, not theory testing. No theory of sticky experiences across the customer journey exists in prior literature, as has been discussed. In fact, no readily applicable theory of sticky experiences exists in adjunct fields of research, to the best knowledge of the author.

Therefore, the goal of this study is not to test a pre-existing theory or derived set of hypotheses. Marketing and consumer research are applied fields that primarily produce theory at a mid-range level in order to illuminate market(ing) and consumer phenomena (e.g., Janiszewski *et al.*, 2016). This is different in the base disciplines; for example, sociology aims to create knowledge about society at large and how collective, institutional processes shape individuals and their thoughts, words, feelings, and actions (e.g., Illouz, 1997). To build theory in the applied field of marketing, researchers often use theory from other disciplines and bring this theory to bear on data from marketing or consumption contexts (e.g., Belk *et al.*, 2013). In their work on transcendent customer experiences, for example, Schouten *et al.*, (2007) explicitly draw from work on flow and peak experience in psychology. Other studies employ a perspective to their work, such as an institutional theory lens to the study of access to mainstream markets (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013).

Researching experience means to research multi-dimensional responses of individuals to ongoing streams of environmental stimuli. Drawing on the above discussion, research on experience will not discover one truth or reality that (is out there and) can be grasped and seen by everyone until falsified by scientific method, as assumed by positivism (e.g., Prasad, 2005). Instead, research on experience will reveal personal interpretations of individual experiences that represent temporary insights into the evolving personal worlds of individuals. Hence, what is revealed is (one version of) personal truth or reality, as assumed by social constructionism (e.g., Berger and Luckmann, 1966/2001). In Clifford Geertz' (1973) metaphor, researchers interpret peoples' interpretations of their own lives, as they look them over the shoulder and attempt to decipher the texts that are presented. Building theory, then, actively involves the researcher as an instrument of knowledge creation. One consequence of this is that a certain degree of familiarity with the focal experiential settings and situations, as well as the capability to connect this familiarity to related broader societal and theoretical issues, is important in gaining understanding about experiential phenomena. Such research is inductive because it builds knowledge from emergent empirical findings. Yet it is deductive at the same time because it is based on prior knowledge, explicitly and implicitly formulates propositions that guide the research design and tends to build theory by using both empirical findings and other theory (e.g., Belk *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, the overall research process in this thesis can best be described as a process of *abduction*, a process 'in which empirical observations and surprises are connected to extant theoretical ideas to generate novel conceptual insight and distinctions' (Langley *et al.*, 2013, p. 11).

Following from the above discussion, this thesis did not attempt to generate and test hypothesis. Rather, it reviewed literature from within marketing and across the social sciences to develop a preliminary understanding of sticky experiences. Subsequently, through research processes outlined below, this thesis developed an in-depth understanding of the evolution and management of sticky experience across the customer journey. This understanding was emergent; it could not be derived entirely from extant research. Another important consequence of the goal of theory development is that it favours qualitative research, which is better suited for the purpose of theory development than the theory-testing focused quantitative research (Belk *et al.*, 2013; Goulding, 2005). Accordingly, this thesis adopts qualitative research to gather and use data.

3.3 Qualitative Research

Before discussing the research paradigm, research methodology, and research tradition relevant for this thesis, a general definition of qualitative research is provided. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3-4) offer the following 'generic' definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide-range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study.

Research in the customer experience and customer experience management areas have used a variety of data, from entirely qualitative data (e.g., Carù and Cova, 2006; Tumbat, 2011) to mixed methods data

(e.g., Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Arnould and Price, 1993) to largely quantitative data (e.g., Mathwick and Rigdon, 2004). Note that dominant research practices in mainstream marketing appear to rely more on quantitative (often referred to as conclusive) rather than on qualitative data (often referred to as exploratory; e.g., Grewal *et al.*, 2012). In contrast to this tendency, customer experience scholars and practitioners have repeatedly emphasized the value of qualitative research in order to arrive at the deep level of understanding the complexity of experience. After all, ‘the word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency...[Qualitative researchers] seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 8).

In line with the goal of theory building, foundational research such as Thompson *et al.*’s (1989) work on consumer experiences and Schmitt’s (1999) work on experiential marketing, as well as managerially-oriented work on customer experience management such as Carbone’s (2004) recommend the use of qualitative methods such as interviews and observations in order to gain deep insight into customers’ experiences. For example, analysing the experiential world of the customer, which is the first step in Schmitt’s framework for managing customer experiences, aims to create ‘customer insight’ through research that ‘can include focus groups, surveys and interviews but is frequently supplemented by ethnographic and interpretive research techniques’ (Schmitt, 2011, p. 88). Similarly, practitioners Meyer and Schwager (2007) argue that whilst surveys are the favourite of companies due to their low cost and ease of modification, other methods such as the ones mentioned by Schmitt (2011) as well as user-group forums and blogs can yield valuable insights into customer experiences beyond the limits of surveys. Based on these recommendations and common practices in the areas of customer experience and customer experience management, it seems logical to rely on qualitative data in this research.

The tenets of qualitative research as described in Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) definition run through the entire method chapter and the current research. For instance, the research methodology used for the ‘collection of a variety of empirical materials’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 4) will be introduced in section 3.5; the qualitative research tradition used for ‘attempting to make sense of or interpret

phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (p. 4) will be outlined in section 3.6; and the actual research journey of collecting and interpreting data to 'get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 4) will be elaborated on in sections 3.9 and 3.10. The next section on research paradigms (3.4) will situate the current research within the broader 'interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 3) that qualitative research is based upon.

3.4 Research Paradigm

Qualitative research is situated within an interpretive research paradigm. A paradigm, or interpretive framework, refers to a 'basic set of beliefs that guides action' (Guba, 1990, p. 17). A research paradigm commonly contains beliefs about *ontology* (What is the nature of reality? What is the nature of social beings?), *axiology* (What is the overriding goal? What is the role of values?), *epistemology* (What is relationship between the researcher and the known?), and *methodology* (How do we know the world and gain knowledge of it?) (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Beliefs around these four areas shape how researchers see the world and seek to understand and study it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Next, this thesis introduces two different sets of beliefs – positivist and interpretivist. Positivism and Interpretivism can be viewed as the two main 'summary labels that refer to general research approaches that differ in their philosophical assumptions and goals' (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p. 509).

3.4.1 Positivism

The positivist paradigm assumes a realist nature of reality and human beings ([realist] ontology), an overriding goal of value-free explanation (axiology), objective forms of knowledge creation ([objective] epistemology), and primarily quantitative research methods (methodology) (Creswell, 2007; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). First, regarding ontology, positivism assumes an objective, tangible reality that exists in a single form. This reality can be fragmented and divided into researchable entities. Within this world, social beings are assumed to be determined by, and reactive to their circumstances. Second, regarding axiology, positivism emphasizes the overriding goal of explanation, which is subsumed and expressed through general laws and prediction. In their

purest form, such explanations are held to be value-free, given that they identify truths based in a singular reality. Third, regarding epistemology, positivists seek to generate knowledge that is time- and context-free. They believe that real causes exist and seek to identify the causal relationships among variables. Their research relationship is characterized by a dualism, or separation between the researcher and what is being researched. Given this stance, they assume a privileged point of observation and knowing the world. Fourth, regarding methodology, positivists rely typically on experimental, quasi-experimental, and survey methodologies. The strict adherence to positivist beliefs has been weakened historically by the postpositivist variation of this paradigm, which for example assumes a critical realist ontology and uses rigorously defined qualitative methodologies as long as they serve the overarching goal of explaining the world. Nevertheless, both positivist and postpositivist beliefs differ much from interpretivist, naturalistic beliefs about the world and the researcher within it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), which are introduced next.

3.4.1 Interpretivism

The interpretive paradigm assumes there are multiple constructed realities ([relativist] ontology), an overriding goal of understanding that cannot be value-free (axiology), knowledge generation in which the research and the known interact and shape one another ([interpretive] epistemology), and primarily qualitative research methods ([interpretive, naturalistic] methodology) (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988;). First, regarding ontology, interpretivism assumes socially constructed realities; no single reality exists but multiple realities are constructed by social actors. These realities should be addressed holistically and contextually. Interpretivist researchers see little value in attempting to isolate fragments of a supposedly single reality. In contrast to the deterministic nature of social beings in the positivist paradigm, the interpretivist paradigm assumes that social beings are ‘more voluntaristic: people actively create and interact in order to shape their environment’ (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988, p. 510). In this thesis, for example, quotes and themes in the words of informants, participants, and external observers were carefully considered in the research to acknowledge the subjective and multiple realities as seen by different actors around the phenomenon of sticky experiences. One such word was ‘addictive,’ which was frequently used by customers to describe their experiences, and by CrossFit boxes as they viewed their clients’ behaviour and one of their service’s key selling points.

Second, regarding axiology, interpretivism emphasizes the overriding goal of understanding, rather than explanation. Interpretivists seek to move from a limited initial or pre-understanding of the world to a better understanding, which is necessarily value-laden, and biases are present. In this thesis, for instance, informants' quotes are typically presented first, and the researcher's interpretation of these quotes is laid out afterwards. Readers may critically assess whether they would have derived at a different understanding based on a different set of values and biases. The researcher's frame of reference is elaborated in the background chapter, which discusses key aspects of the researcher's pre-understanding. For instance, the researcher assessed actor's use of the word 'addictive' in light of existing models of behavioural addiction and inferred that 'addictive' was typically used in a lay, non-pathological sense. However, a researcher with a clinical background in addiction treatment, or a cultural sociologist interested in the discourses around late modern technologies might have interpreted this common occurrence differently.

Third, regarding epistemology, interpretivists acknowledge that generated knowledge is time-bound and context-dependent. They do not believe that real causes for events or processes can be isolated; rather, that there are multiple, simultaneously present forces that shape the world. Their research relationship can be described as interactive and cooperative, because interpretivists see themselves as being part of any research puzzle, as being a research instrument interlinked with what is being researched, and as being transformed through the process of making the world visible through research. Given this stance, they assume no privileged point of observation. In this thesis, for example, the researcher spent time in the 'field,' observing customers' experiences, the services' mechanism, and service providers' behaviour. The researcher sought to become an 'insider' in the phenomenon and its related marketing and consumption activities. In the interviews with informants, the researcher also sought to lessen the distance to the informants by sharing own experiences, among other techniques. This thesis acknowledges that the knowledge created is bound by time and context; it is generated based on research from three services providing intense, unpredictable experiences in a competitive, technology-focused 21st century Western marketplace, in which the researcher participates too.

Fourth, regarding methodology, interpretivists typically rely on one or more qualitative research methodologies, employed to enhance understanding from various perspectives. In this thesis, for

instance, the researcher employed ethnographic research methods in three services, as elaborated in the next section. This ethnographic investigation included data from observations, interviews, and archival material, all collected in order to make enough of the world of sticky experience visible to generate a new understanding of its evolution over time. The next section introduces this thesis' methodology of market-oriented, multi-sited ethnography.

3.5 Research Methodology

Popular research methodologies in interpretive marketing research are ethnography, grounded theory, and (existential) phenomenology. In this research, a market-oriented, ethnographic investigation was conducted in multiple sites to develop mid-range theory of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey; a mid-range theory that covers both the firm and customer sides and hence provides a holistic picture of the evolving phenomenon. Next, mid-range theory is briefly introduced as the appropriate theoretical goal of this research. Then, grounded theory and phenomenology are briefly discussed. Thereafter, ethnography is introduced, and reasons provided why this research methodology was chosen.

3.5.1 Mid-range theory

Mid-range theories go beyond empirical descriptions or theories as understood by social actors in their day-to-day life and work. At the same time, mid-range theories do not seek to capture the general workings of certain phenomena across all situations and contexts, or explain the status and evolution of society as a whole: 'Mid-range theories focus on a 'unique set of images' (Pinder & Moore, 1979: 100) that characterize observable aspects of separate social phenomena, rather than the more ambitious attempt to build 'grand theories' (Merton, 1968) that seek to explain activities and actions across all societies (Ritzer, 1975)' (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011, p. 576; Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988). For example, while a grand theory of acculturation for expatriates would seek to capture 'the modes by which members of a minority culture interact with those from the majority culture, a mid-range theory [would] finetune the categories of members of majority and minority cultures' and thus produce more nuanced and relevant insights into the process of *expatriate* acculturation (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011, p.

576). Put succinctly, mid-range theory seeks to ‘conceptualize contextual areas’ (Bradshaw and Dholakia, 2012, p. 125).

Marketing, consumer research, service research, and related fields value mid-range theories for various reasons. For example, a ‘more-specific, midrange theoretical level [can] connect more closely with everyday language and expressions of practitioners’ (Vargo *et al.*, 2017, p. 266) than grander theoretical approaches, such as the theory of Service Dominant Logic. In this way, mid-range theory can facilitate ‘explicit consideration of the critical issue of bridging theory and practice’ (Brodie, 2014, p. 6). Being situated ‘between the extremes of small-scale descriptive studies and grand theories’ (Bailey, 2006, p. 381), mid-range theory can help develop contextually-bounded, in-depth theoretical accounts of marketing phenomena, such as consumption communities, coproduction, or engagement (Achrol and Kotler, 2012; Vargo and Lusch, 2017). This research focuses on such a marketing phenomenon, one that is dynamic and entails the firm and customer side: customer experiences across journeys with a firm. More specifically, the research seeks to trace the evolution of customer experiences, namely sticky experiences, across the customer journey, and derive implications for the practice of customer experience management. Consequently, a small-scale study producing as its final report a description of consumers’ experiences will not be enough. Similarly, a grander theory on the sociohistorical shaping of stickiness as a general driving force for repeated consumer behaviour in late modernity will also not be ideally suited to achieve the research goals and to generate actionable insights for marketing practitioners. Thus, this research embraces mid-range theory as its most suitable theoretical goal.

3.5.2 Popular methodologies in interpretive marketing research

Early research on customer experience was often underpinned by phenomenological ideas and traditions. This early tendency can be seen in the pioneering works by Morris Holbrook and Elizabeth Hirschman (1982) on the experiential aspects of consumption, by Craig Thompson (with Locander and Pollio 1998, 1990) on the lived experience and meaning of consumers’ lives using existential-phenomenology, and by Bernd Schmitt (1999a, 1999b, 2003) on experiential marketing inspired by phenomenological insights (see Schmitt, 2011). Phenomenology refers to ‘the study of phenomena as they appear to the consciousnesses of an individual or a group of people; the study of things as they

appear in our lived experiences' (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011, p. 88). Phenomenological studies generally aim to illuminate the 'life-world' of people – that is, 'the unquestioned, practical, historically conditioned, pre-theoretical, and familiar world of people's everyday lives' (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011, p. 91). In other words, a phenomenological study 'describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon' (Creswell, 2007, p. 57).

Phenomenologists collect data from individuals who have experience with a phenomenon, primarily through interviews, and then seek to understand the overall essence of this experience (Creswell, 2007; Goulding, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). The description of the essence consists of a description of what the individuals experienced (i.e., a textural description) and how the individuals experienced it, referring to the conditions, situations, or context in which they experienced the phenomenon (i.e., a structural description) (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers generate these descriptions by analysing data for significant statements and developing clusters of meaning into themes, and then by writing and rewriting descriptions of the experience. In its final written report, a good phenomenology leaves the reader with a feeling to understand better what it is like for an individual to live through the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

While phenomenology was key in bringing consumers' experiences 'back into consumer research' (Thompson *et al.*, 1989) and marketing (Schmitt, 1999), the largely descriptive nature of phenomenological accounts have limited its value in the mid-range theory-oriented field of marketing over time. Reflecting on phenomenology and phenomenological studies in marketing and consumer research, Goulding (2005, p. 303) notes that phenomenologists 'do not label themselves as theorists in the strictest sense.' The primacy of the subjective experience is crucial for a phenomenologist, who 'has only one legitimate source of data, and that is the views and experiences of the participants themselves.' As researchers sought to develop more (mid-range) theoretical accounts of consumers' experiences and related phenomena, they either combined phenomenology with traditions such as hermeneutics and drew heavily on existing mid-range or grand theories from the social sciences to inform their theorizing endeavours (e.g., Thompson, 2005), or they used entirely other methodologies, such as ethnography (e.g., Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017). As will be discussed in the next subsection (3.5.3), ethnography additionally enables researchers to provide a more holistic picture not

only of individuals' experience of a certain phenomenon but also the shaping of this experience by other actors, including companies, technology, and other customers.

Grounded theory is another research methodology that has gained popularity in marketing and consumer research over time (Goulding, 2005). Examples include Houston and Venkatesh's (1996) on Asian immigrant's health care consumption practices, Goulding's (1999) work on consumer behaviour in the context of museums, and Epp *et al.*'s (2014) study on reassembling family practices through technology in situations of family separation. Grounded theory seems particularly suited to study marketing phenomena that are 'predicated on a behavioural component' (Goulding, 2005, p. 295). Grounded theory was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) and refers to a 'qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants' (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). This theory, however, is not supposed to be too far removed from people's language and everyday experiences. By contrast, it is meant to be 'grounded in the words and actions of those individuals under study' (Goulding, 2005, p. 296).

In its most used version, grounded theory entails systematic, analytical procedures (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998). While not presented exhaustively here, these procedures include the following steps. Researchers collect data in a chosen field on certain categories, which are units of information that may encompass events, happenings, and instances. Data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand, as the researcher gathers information, typically through interviews, analyses the data, then goes back into the field to gather more information, and constantly compares the incoming data with emerging categories in the so-called constant comparative method of data analysis. These categories form through open coding, in which the researcher forms categories of information about what is being studied by segmenting information. In axial coding, the researcher specifies relationships and delineates a core category or concept to focus on, drawing on prescribed types of categories around the core phenomenon. This is 'presented using a *coding paradigm* or *logic diagram* (i.e., a visual model) in which the researcher identifies a *central phenomenon* (i.e., a central category about the phenomenon), explores *causal conditions* (i.e., categories of conditions that influence the phenomenon), specific *strategies* (i.e., the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon), identifies the *context* and *intervening conditions* (i.e., the narrow and broad conditions that influence the strategies),

and delineates the *consequences* (i.e., the outcomes of the strategies) for this phenomenon' (Creswell, 2007, p. 67). Finally, in selective coding, the researcher develops propositions or hypotheses or writes a storyline that describes the interrelationships of categories.

Although some elements of grounded theory are undoubtedly useful for developing theory (e.g., constantly comparing emerging insights with new incoming data), the current research did not employ a systematic grounded theory methodology for the following two main reasons. First and foremost, as both Creswell (2007, p. 65) and Goulding (2005) note, grounded 'theory [...] might be viewed as a substantive, low-level theory.' Due to its prescribed proximity to the words and actions of its study participants, grounded theory is not only context specific but often has a low-level theoretical feel, as Creswell (2007) notes, which deviates from the mid-range theoretical ambitions of marketing research. Furthermore, the researcher found the prescribed categories of information in grounded theory (i.e., central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences) constraining and not ideal for the development of a theory about the evolution of experiences over time, with a view toward both the firm and the customer side. In other, and more personal words, the researcher sought more flexibility than the positivist-underpinned grounded theory methodology could offer, at least in its original, systematic form (Clarke, 2005). Next, multi-sited ethnography is presented as the most suitable methodology for the current research.

3.5.3 Market-oriented, multi-sited ethnography

Adopting a market-oriented form of ethnography. Ethnography is originally understood as a 'qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group (Harris, 1968). [...] As a process, ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants' (Creswell, 2007, p. 68). There are many forms of ethnography with different theoretical orientations and aims (Van Maanen, 1988), which has overall led to a lack of orthodoxy in the conduct of ethnography as originally understood. The spectrum includes confessional ethnography, realist ethnography, visual ethnography, online ethnography or 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2015), and critical ethnography, to name a few.

One form of ethnography frequently employed in marketing research and aligned with the theoretical goals of this research is ‘market-oriented’ ethnography (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Arnould and Price, 2006). Simply put, in market-oriented ethnography, a market or consumer phenomenon is studied, not a culture-sharing group per se (or a characteristic of this group). While the methods for data collection are like general ethnography, less time is usually spent in a site. Importantly, the goal of market-oriented ethnography is to make a theoretical and/or substantive contribution to marketing research based on an enhanced understanding of marketing- or consumption-related phenomena (e.g., collecting, word-of-mouth, consumption communities); the goal is not to create as the final product a holistic cultural portrait of a group of people (Creswell, 2007).

An ethnography that is oriented on such phenomena is well-suited for the theoretical goals of this research because such a methodology focuses on (a) ‘studying and interpreting the subjective experiences of the market segments served by specific marketing programs’ (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p. 484), and it (b) ‘provides [an] enhanced understanding of the place of firm-provided resources (products, services, symbols, slogans, environments, etc.) in the conduct of everyday consumers’ lives’ (Arnould and Price, 2006, p. 251). In addition, it seeks to go beyond describing the ‘context and subjective significance (emic) of experience’ for groups of persons to establish the ‘comparative and interpreted (etic)’ significance of an experience that implicates the market (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994, p. 485).

A defining characteristic of ethnography and market-oriented ethnography alike is the incorporation of multiple sources of data to gain insight into a phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Arnould and Price, 1994; Geertz, 1973; Wolcott, 2008). Wolcott (2008) describes three pillars of ethnography that ensure multiple sources of data are collected and different perspectives, or aspects of a phenomenon, are incorporated into the interpretive process. These three pillars, or ways of knowing, are *experiencing* (through direct observations of a phenomenon), *enquiring* (through interviews with focal actors), and *examining* (through the study of secondary data about a phenomenon) (Wolcott, 2008). These terms describe the essence of what a researcher does in each activity, as well as what it is that he or she is supposed to accomplish.

Experiencing captures what is gained through (participant) observation, which in turn is based on first-hand experience in naturally occurring settings. The label *experiencing* also acknowledges that what researchers observe is less about objective reality and more about their subjective experience in the field. Through *experiencing*, especially seeing and hearing, researchers gain a valuable view on a phenomenon and focal actors' behaviour in a natural setting, whether this setting is offline or online (Belk *et al.*, 2013; Kozinets, 2015).

Enquiring is basically interviewing. When researchers enquire about something, they take an active role and ask about what is going on in a setting. This is different from the more passive observation of what is going on. In *enquiring*, researchers intrude on or initiate conversations and activities of those whom they study, interjecting their own (research) agenda. In *experiencing* through observation, researchers attend to the flow of more naturally occurring activities and conversations in a setting.

Examining describes the researchers' attention to what has been produced by others, which may refer to classical archival documents stored in physical archives to letters, photographs, videos, and other things that the people one studies use, possess, or otherwise point to as relevant things of their experienced world. Potentially relevant documents in market-focused ethnography may also include press releases, branding material, websites, and press articles about consumers and/or firms. As in any qualitative research, the three basic fieldwork procedures of *experiencing*, *enquiring*, and *examining* are variously emphasized during the research process, in accordance with the purpose of the research project (Wolcott, 2008).

In summary, to maximize familiarity with and insight into the phenomenon of sticky experiences, this thesis adopts this three-pillar approach from ethnographic research. Accordingly, like previous studies on experiential journeys (e.g., Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017), the thesis uses three sources of data (observations, interviews, secondary data) for the purpose of developing a model of sticky experiences across the customer journey.

Doing an ethnographic investigation in multiple sites. This research chose ethnography in multiple research sites and focused on the market as its methodology. The primary reason for this choice is the fact that ethnography enables the development of mid-range theory better than other popular research

methodologies in qualitative marketing and consumer research, namely phenomenology and grounded theory, as discussed in the previous subsection (3.5.2). The second reason for the choice of ethnography is that it more openly embraces multiple methods for collecting data compared to phenomenology and grounded theory. Importantly, such data from multiple methods makes visible different aspects of a phenomenon that enables the researcher to develop more holistic theory around a phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The current research seeks to develop a theory that encompasses both the firm-side and customer-side of a phenomenon. Concretely, it seeks not only to better understand consumer experiences of stickiness over time, but to develop a model of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey that interrelates firm actions and consumer responses. Therefore, a single view on the world (e.g., the consumers' view) and a single method (e.g., interviews) is likely insufficient.

The approach taken here accords with Denzin and Lincoln's (2011, p. 12) claim about making the world visible by using a variety of methods of collecting and interpreting empirical materials: 'Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts or stories about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Consequently, qualitative researchers deploy a wide-range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience that have been studied.' Consequently, the collection of data from multiple sources better equips the researcher to examine a phenomenon from different perspectives, or to see and interrelate different aspects of the phenomenon. This research seeks to develop a better understanding of the evolution of sticky experiences along the customer journey by making firm's facilitation of sticky experiences as well as consumers' experiences of this evolving phenomenon visible. This goal is best achieved using both firm-side and consumer-side data, which can be collected through methods such as observations, interviews, and archival material.

This research undertook an ethnographic investigation in multiple research sites (e.g., Gollnhoffer *et al.*, 2016; Hietanen and Rokka, 2015; Perren and Kozinets, 2018). As a general clarification, the research did not study these research sites per se (e.g., Tinder), but it studied a phenomenon in these research sites (e.g., the facilitation and experience of sticky experiences through Tinder) (Geertz, 1973). To further clarify, the researcher did not choose multi-sited ethnography to examine issues of

flows, power, and appropriation in globalization and the world system (e.g., Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2005; Marcus, 1995), but rather for theoretical and pragmatic reasons within this PhD research in marketing. Early study of archival material about the phenomenon of ‘addictive’ experiences, typically understood in a lay sense as exciting experiences that customers cannot seem to get enough of, reported about these kinds of experiences in a variety of sites. The researcher considered various of these sites as potential research contexts for this study. Eventually, the researcher settled on three sites from different industries: CrossFit in the group fitness industry, Pokémon Go in the mobile gaming industry, and Tinder in the online dating industry (more information on the context selection is provided in section 3.7).

The choice of three, rather than one, research sites, helped the researcher avoid the pitfalls of ‘going native,’ that is, of becoming so immersed in one research sites that the researcher temporarily loses sight of his or her research goals and of the ability to examine a phenomenon from the position of a professional stranger, who completes the study and produces a report that makes a contribution (Creswell, 2007). Relatedly, examining three instead of only one research site helped the researcher develop a more generalizable and more broadly applicable model of sticky experiences. Constant comparisons between the three contexts in the interpretation process ensured that no peculiarities of any one research site dominated the findings, and hence, that the findings would be generalizable beyond any one industry (e.g., the dating industry). At the same time, choosing three research sites over, for example, ten or 20 research sites helped the researcher avoid the pitfall of a superficial investigation, one that only scratches the surface of a phenomenon. This decision also had an important pragmatic component because the researcher only had a certain amount of resources for this research project. Being part of a PhD thesis, the research had to be completed within a certain timeframe, and with the resources available to a PhD student. Frankly, the researcher feared that choosing too many contexts would (a) derail precious attention from understanding the core phenomenon to becoming familiar with several contexts, and (b) simply not be doable within the given time of a PhD.

In summary, this thesis uses interviews and observations, as well as archival material, to develop a model of sticky experiences across the customer journey. In so doing, it follows an ethnographic approach in which researchers seek to experience a phenomenon (through observation), enquire about a phenomenon (through interviews), and examine a phenomenon (through archival materials) to gain an

in-depth, holistic understanding of a phenomenon (Wolcott, 2008). The procedures of doing ethnographic research have not been outlined in this subsection, because these procedures, as they have been employed in this research, will be described in detail in the following sections on the research journey, covering context selection, data collection, data interpretation, and research evaluation. After that, the Findings Chapter will reflect that interviews were key to conceptualize experiential patterns across sticky customer journeys, and observations (and to a lesser degree, archival data) were key to conceptualize the firms' facilitation of these experiential patterns – apart from the fact that iteratively tacking back and forth between data sources as well as emergent findings and prior literature characterized the overall process of data interpretation (Belk *et al.*, 2013), as will be discussed in the sections that follow.

3.6 Interpretive Research Tradition

Frequently adopted interpretive research traditions in marketing research include phenomenology, postmodernism, critical traditions, semiotics, neopositivism, and hermeneutics (Belk *et al.*, 2013). Following Belk *et al.* (2013), a research tradition refers to a set of philosophical assumptions and associated research practices that are in accordance with these assumptions. This research draws on the interpretive research tradition of hermeneutics to develop mid-range theory. The hermeneutic approach seeks to move researchers toward an enhanced understanding of a phenomenon by, for example, circling among data, emerging findings, and prior theory; comparing emergent and prior models; and refining a model for simplicity (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Based on the rich data collected through ethnographic methods, such an interpretive research tradition is well suited for the purposes of this research, namely to develop a mid-range theory, in the form of a journey model that captures firm and customer sides, of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey. Next, popular interpretive research traditions in marketing and consumer research are briefly discussed. After that, the chosen tradition of hermeneutics is introduced in the context of this research.

3.6.1 Popular research traditions in interpretive research

Marketing and consumer research draw upon multiple qualitative research traditions, including phenomenology, postmodernism, critical traditions, semiotics, and neopositivism (Belk *et al.*, 2013).

These traditions are now introduced in brief and the main reason given why they are not adopted in this research.

Phenomenology, in particular existential phenomenology in consumer research (Thompson *et al.*, 1989), focuses on the life-worlds of individuals and seeks to gain a deep understanding of the meanings of the lived experience of these individuals. The final report in existential phenomenology is typically a description of key themes in individuals' lived experience that make up the contextualized experiential essence, or gestalt. This research did not adopt phenomenology because of its overall descriptive nature that hinders theorizing at the mid-range level, and from multiple perspectives.

Postmodernism, as a research tradition rather than an overall label for recent qualitative research (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), seeks to challenge taken for granted understandings of phenomena and offer, if at all, less authoritative or universal accounts for those phenomena. Some tenets of postmodernism include the critique of meta-narratives, which are widely shared cultural accounts about how society works and why, the assumption that all knowledge is socially constructed and hence contestable, and that meta-narratives and other unquestioned understandings are never value-neutral and need to be acknowledged as such and be unsettled. This research did not situate itself squarely in a postmodern tradition because these assumptions and research goals are not aligned with the overarching goal of this study, which is to develop theory about an undertheorized phenomenon (sticky experiences), not to unsettle taken for granted understandings about this phenomenon.

Critical traditions, like postmodernism, focuses on taken for granted assumptions and practices in society, yet critical traditions also seek to show how these contribute to the oppression of marginalized groups and identify how the situation for marginalized groups could be enhanced. Other tenets of critical traditions include that the social constructed reality acts upon individuals in ways that shape their selves and sustain patterns of privilege and oppression; that individuals can become aware of the conditions of oppression and work toward alleviating them; and that research should identify emancipatory strategies (e.g., Kozinets, 2002). This research did not adopt a critical research tradition because it is not guided by an emancipatory research agenda. However, a follow-up research project on the ways in which individuals can emancipate themselves from the addictive potential of contemporary sticky services may be worthwhile.

Semiotics deals with the structures of meaning-producing events and typically asks how anything from words to gestures to myths to images acquires meaning within a system of symbols. Research in the semiotic tradition is concerned with the production and interpretation of signs or symbols as they appear in these forms of communication (e.g., Mick, 1986). Tenets include the assumption that language and sense making are intimately connected, that signs are arbitrarily associated with what they signify, which ends up uniquely structuring conceptual categories in each language. This research did not adopt a semiotic tradition because it is not primarily concerned with issues around language and sign or symbol systems, but with the evolution of an experiential phenomenon over time.

Neopositivism is also listed by Belk *et al.* (2013) as a frequently used (but rarely acknowledged) qualitative research tradition, despite its common association with positivism. Neopositivist work typically focuses on explanations around certain phenomena, in the sense that it seeks to clearly specify antecedents, characteristics, and/or consequences of a phenomenon (e.g., Fournier, 1998). The tenets of neopositivism include the assumption that relational and probabilistic explanations around phenomena are possible, clear constructs need to be specified to explain patterned regularities in phenomena, and researchers should strive to identify relationships among constructs and conditions for their occurrence. This research is not situated within a neopositivist research tradition because the assumptions and goals of this tradition do not fully accord with this research's goal. While mid-range theory development is possible with this approach (e.g., Fournier, 1998), the current research seeks to develop a novel understanding of an evolving phenomenon, one that goes beyond the focal concern of antecedents-characteristics-consequences that neopositivists typically address. However, a follow-up study within this tradition might be worthwhile, given that it could further specify constructs and clarify their relationships across sticky customer journeys. Next, hermeneutics is presented as the most appropriate qualitative tradition for this research.

3.6.2 Hermeneutics

Before presenting hermeneutics as the most suitable research tradition for the current research, a disclaimer is appropriate. As Belk *et al.*, (2013) and others (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) highlight, there is much flexibility and variety in qualitative research, which also applies to the adherence to

research traditions. Concretely, Belk *et al.*, (2013, p. 25) emphasizes that: ‘First, it is extremely common for work to span two or sometimes even three research traditions, emphasizing some but not all elements of each. Second, research traditions aren’t fixed in stone [and] evolve over time.’ In other words, research traditions are not rigid orthodoxies that researchers must adhere to in a restrictive manner if they hope to produce credible and convincing research reports. Rather, provided that no major philosophical flaws or inconsistencies underpin the research, methodologies and traditions are employed in order to best answer a research question and fulfil a research goal, particularly in an applied field such as consumer research and marketing (Belk *et al.*, 2013). In this research, hermeneutics was chosen because it fits best to this research’s theoretical goal of mid-range theory, to answer the research questions aimed at developing a new, comprehensible understanding of an undertheorized phenomenon (sticky experiences), and to truly develop this new understanding in constant engagement with the dominant understanding (the smooth experience model).

Hermeneutics, broadly described, is an interpretive tradition that seeks to move researchers from a pre-understanding to an enhanced (self-)understanding (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Like other interpretive research traditions, hermeneutics assumes that all understanding is based on language. Three tenets of hermeneutics helped the researcher conduct the research and appropriately address the research questions: pre-understanding, hermeneutic circle, and fusion of horizons to develop a new understanding.

First, unlike some traditions, hermeneutics emphasizes that researchers should not attempt to bracket *pre-understanding* during the research process. Such pre-understanding refers to the researcher’s own personal biography (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) and what is shared among researchers and those that they study; and, importantly, it accounts for ‘existing theory and research findings’ (Arnould and Fischer, 1994, p. 55). In this way, pre-understanding describes what is understood about a phenomenon prior to or throughout the initial stages of a research project.

In the current research, the idea of grounding the interpretive process not only in the data but importantly in the understanding of the researcher about the phenomenon was key to developing a model of sticky experiences across the customer journey. As Chapter 2 elaborated, prior research on customer journey models is converging around the smooth experience model, advising smooth

journeys through consistent and predictable experiences. Engaging with this model, questioning its assumptions, and comparing its findings and managerial recommendations with the data and emerging findings was key to arrive at a model of sticky experiences, which differs much from the dominant pre-understanding in marketing on designing and experiencing customer journeys over time.

Second, the *hermeneutic circle*, refers to an iterative spiral of understanding in which researchers tack back and forth between examining the specific and the general: ‘The term ‘hermeneutic circle’ represents the idea that the meaning of a whole text is determined from the individual elements of a text, while, at the same time, an individual elements is understood by referring to the whole of which it is a part’ (Arnold and Fischer, 1994, p. 63; Thompson, 1997; Bernstein, 1983). Through this dialectical process, over time an increasingly comprehensive account of both the specific elements (e.g., specific words, phrases, descriptions used by an informant) and the text as a whole (e.g., an entire interview with an informant) can emerge. Unlike other traditions, such as critical traditions (e.g., Murray and Ozanne, 1991), the goal of the hermeneutic circle is an understanding free of contradictions, which enables the researcher to craft a coherent interpretation.

In this research, the dialectical tacking of the hermeneutic circle was critical to develop an account of how sticky experiences evolve across the customer journey. By going back and forth between specific data snapshots from across the data sources (i.e., from interviews, observations, and archival material) and the whole of each text as well as the entire body of data, the researcher was able to develop a coherent model that encompasses customer and firm sides. The objective to arrive at an understanding free of contradictions helped the researcher focus on commonalities, understand and integrate differences across the data (e.g., differences among informants with different life projects and conditions) and, ultimately, to develop a comprehensible, mid-range theory.

Third, hermeneutic interpretation involves a *fusion of horizons* and a *new (self-)understanding*, which refers not only to the understanding of the researchers themselves but of a more collective self of human community (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). A horizon is whatever is visible from a specific point of view (Gadamer, 1989); the researcher’s horizon is his or her pre-understanding, a text’s horizon is what can be discerned as the sense of the text through iterative interpretive movements of the hermeneutic circle. On the path toward a new understanding, eventually a fusion of horizons occurs: ‘Fusion of

horizons implies that the horizon of the interpreter comes to encompass or integrate the discerned horizon of the text. In the process, [pre-]understanding is changed until it is able to account for the sense of the text. [Pre-]understanding becomes understanding' (Arnould and Fischer, 1994, p. 64). This understanding goes beyond the idea of, I (researcher) understand them (researched individuals) better. The understanding concerns not only the researcher 'self' but a more collective self, in the sense that 'we' as a (e.g., academic, practitioner, consumer researcher, human) collective better understand something and may adjust our thoughts, words, and actions.

In this research, arriving at a sustainable fusion of horizons was the result of multiple rounds of data interpretation. This thesis presents findings from an initial round of data interpretation (see Appendix F) and the final round of data interpretation (see Chapter 4). As the reader will realize, the results of the final round of interpretation are an enhanced model that offers a more complete, encompassing, and coherent picture of the phenomenon under study than the initial round of interpretation. In this sense, what the researcher thought to be a fusion of horizons after the initial round of interpretation turned out to be only a preliminary understanding, not yet capable of truly integrating the horizon of the multiple texts.

For example, it could be argued that the theme of 'earned progress' in response to the firms' capability of 'layered expansion' did not seem to be the ideal interpretation across all three research contexts for the sense of the texts around notions of consumer progression, learning, mastery, increasing involvement, among other notions, in response to the variety and increasing complexity that the firms offered to their customers. Moving from examining more granular to higher-order patterns in the data was a critical change in the researcher's horizon, which required the researcher to change the importance of some elements of the theoretical vocabulary (e.g., touchpoints) that were held more centerstage during the beginning of the research. With this new view on the text, the themes of earned progress and layered expansion soon lost their once held explanatory power. In their place emerged the journey pattern of increasing 'experiential involvement,' encompassing far more than merely earned progress and proving to be a more suitable conceptual component in the revised emergent theory.

In addition to these adjustments regarding the theoretical vocabulary of customer experience management, the researcher also continuously sought to use extant theory to make sense of the

phenomenon. Throughout the research, concepts including consumer immersion (Carù and Cova, 2003), consumer addiction (Sussman *et al.*, 2011), and harmonious and obsessive passion (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003) were reviewed and considered as possibly contributing to a new understanding. Eventually, a more home-grown theory was developed based on insights from the data and theory from within marketing and consumer research, rather than an existing theory from an adjunct field applied, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The final understanding presented in this research report bears the potential to contribute to the understanding of at least four groups of human collectives. While the contributions of this research will be elaborated on in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter 5), it is worthwhile briefly reviewing them here: First, the researcher and his supervisory team. In particular, the researcher learned incredibly much about journeys that keep us, as consumers, yearning for more. For instance, the researcher realized that such near-addictive journeys are much more common than he thought, and that it is easy to get swept up in these journeys, and that breaking the spiral might require more than a hitherto, naively assumed belief in one's rational willpower (e.g., to just not check one's phone again for updates). Second, it is the researcher's hope that the thesis is also, at least somewhat, 'enlightening' (Arnold and Fischer, 1994, p. 64) for other consumers reading it. This may be consumers of the three brands studied here, or other brands that facilitate seemingly irresistible services. Third, it is the researcher's hope that other academics in marketing and consumer research may find the study insightful. For instance, scholars with a pre-understanding focused on the smooth experience model may begin to question the dominance of this model and begin to consider other models as more suitable for certain categories or segments. Fourth, it is the researcher's hope that practitioners may also find this research useful. For example, practitioners engaged in the design of customer journeys and the management of customer experiences may turn to either of the two models for inspiration or consider combinations of the recommended firm actions to facilitate desirable customer and firm outcomes, such as making customers return again and again and achieving a competitive advantage over their competitors.

3.6.3 Combining hermeneutics and ethnography

The last subsection (3.6.2) has presented hermeneutics as the most suitable qualitative research tradition for this research. The section before that (3.5) has presented market-oriented, multi-sited

ethnography as the most suitable research methodology for this research. The combination of hermeneutics and market-oriented, multi-sited ethnography is well suited for the theoretical goals of this research, each of which have been discussed in detail previously. To recap briefly, adopting this research methodology and research tradition facilitates the collection of data from multiple sources, from customer and firm perspectives, which can be used to generate coherent, mid-range theory through interpretive hermeneutic processes.

In fact, ethnography and hermeneutics can and often are combined in marketing and consumer research. Three aspects might contribute to this observation. First, ethnography is not bounded by any single set of philosophical assumptions. Rather, it entails a set of research practices (observation, interviews, archival research) that can provide useful data for a variety of research projects in various research traditions (Belk *et al.*, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Second, research in the hermeneutic tradition is enriched by texts from multiple sources, unlike other traditions, for example because those traditions assume the primacy of certain data over others based on philosophical assumption, like phenomenology (Goulding, 2005). Developing a coherent interpretation from such texts might be more challenging, but ultimately can lead to more insightful new understandings. Third, and related, the combination of ethnography and hermeneutics is well established in interpretive marketing research for its ability to produce mid-range theory (Belk *et al.*, 2013). Examples of such research include Belk *et al.*'s (2003) multi-sited work on consumer desire, Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli's (2015) work on brands' navigation of multiple institutional logics of markets, and Giesler's (2012) work on the evolution of a branded innovation and consumers' ensuing responses over time.

The next sections (3.7-3.10) cover the 'procedural' aspects of the methodology. In other words, they capture the research journey from selecting contexts to collecting data to interpreting the data. Concretely, the next section presents considerations around and criteria for context selection (section 3.7). The section that follows introduces the sampling strategy and presents the sample group profiles (3.8). After that, the data collection will be presented in detail (3.9). The data collection section will encompass reflections on ethical considerations and the author's (mis)adventures of collecting data. Finally, the data interpretation is introduced for the initial interpretation (3.10.1) and the final interpretation of the data (3.10.2). This also introduces the structure for the findings, which present the

results from the final rounds of data interpretation (Chapter 4). The final section assesses the research using common criteria for evaluating qualitative research (3.11).

3.7 Context selection

The purpose of this study is to trace the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey, from initial service cycles through subsequent service cycles to termination trajectories. The study seeks to understand this evolution from both the firm-side as well as the customer-side. In the initial round of data interpretation, the firm-side findings were captured via the notion of key firm capabilities and customer-side findings were captured via the notion of key experiential (customer) responses. In the final round of data interpretation, the firm-side findings were captured via the notion of firm capabilities and customer-side findings were captured via the notion of customer journey patterns.

To achieve the research objectives, qualitative research was conducted in a sample of three service contexts: CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder (see also table 3). To select empirical contexts for this study, firms that manage customer experiences that were frequently and enthusiastically repeated were considered. From an experience predictability standpoint, each of the selected services features unusually low predictability as a main feature of their core service offering. Additional criteria that influenced the sampling were seeking category leaders, global brands, and a mix of largely offline (CrossFit), online (Tinder), and hybrid (Pokémon Go) services across different industries (i.e., fitness, gaming, dating) to develop a more widely generalizable conceptual model. Accordingly, firms that manage infrequently repeated experiences (e.g., annual festivals, such as the Glastonbury music festival), habitual or routine experiences (e.g., email services, such as Microsoft Outlook), and more predictable experiences (e.g., standardized coffee shops, such as Starbucks) were excluded. Note that it is not suggested that only the leading firms in a particular category may be able to design sticky experiences, nor that only customers of these firms are able to live through sticky experiences, but business success is assumed as one indicator of an appealing customer experience for experience-centric services. Most data on these services and customers' experiences with these services was collected in the United Kingdom, with some additional data collected in North America and Europe.

CrossFit is a group fitness regimen founded by Greg Glassman in 2000. The signature ‘constantly varied’ workouts include gymnastics, weightlifting, and body weight exercises in well-equipped, indoor-outdoor servicescapes called boxes. Athletes are encouraged to strive toward increasingly higher levels of fitness measured in terms such as repetitions, weight, and time (CrossFit, 2019). *Pokémon Go* is a mobile video game released by Niantic in 2016. Drawing on Google Maps data and the global positioning system (GPS), the app reveals a dynamic augmented reality world in players’ local surroundings. Players are invited to catch elusive virtual creatures called Pokémon that pop-up unpredictably and marshal those creatures in subsequent gaming activities such as battles and raids (Niantic, 2019). *Tinder* is an online dating app launched by Hatch Labs in 2012. Using users’ geographical location as well as their Facebook data, Tinder presents them with a seemingly unlimited supply of other users’ profiles. Tinder users can swipe right on profiles to express interest, or swipe left to express disinterest, and chat with users who have expressed interest in one another called matches (Tinder, 2019).

As noted in the Introduction, these three services are widely regarded by their customers and the marketing press as providing exciting, fun, and sticky experiences that customers are eager to repeat (Barrett, 2018; Fry, 2013; Hern, 2019). As discussed previously, this vocabulary denotes the ways in which many consumers speak in an experience-near, or emic fashion about what they live through when in contact with such services. This may be pathological for some individuals. However, it is argued based on personal observations, media reports, and the literature on consumer addiction that this terminology more commonly refers to consumers’ emic expressions of what may in a more abstract, theoretical, or etic fashion be referred to as stickiness and sticky experiences. It is therefore proposed that the three selected contexts, therefore, offer rich opportunities to build theory on this repeated customer experience.

Table 3: Overview of Selected Contexts

Name	Description and Website	Industry	Scope	Founded	Main mode of consumption	Scope of Data Collection
CrossFit	Fitness regimen founded by Greg Glassman. Offers group workouts and competitions based on a variety	Fitness	Global	2000	Offline (physical	CrossFit brand; core data collection

	of movements from gymnastics, Olympic weightlifting, and body weight exercises, among others (Stoddard, 2011). (www.crossfit.com)				locations called CrossFit boxes)	in three CrossFit boxes in the United Kingdom; additional data collection in North America and Europe
Pokémon Go	Augmented reality, free-of-charge video game developed by Niantic. Uses Google data and GPS to provide players a virtual world mapped onto the physical world. Key feature is the collection and use of virtual creatures named Pokémon (Chamary, 2016; Dilger, 2016). (www.pokemongolive.com)	Gaming	Global	2016	Hybrid (application for mobile devices that requires users to physically move around in the ‘real’ world)	Pokémon Go brand; core data collection in the United Kingdom; additional data collection in North America and Europe
Tinder	Online dating platform developed by IAC. Free-of-charge service using geographical location and data from Facebook. Offers users to create profiles, view and select other profiles, and communicate with mutually interested users. (Bilton, 2014; Lapowsky, 2013). (www.tinder.com)	Dating	Global	2012	Online (application for mobile devices and desktop version for computers)	Tinder brand; core data collection in the United Kingdom; additional data collection in Europe

Source: Author.

3.8 Sampling

Sampling refers to the action or process of taking samples of something for analysis (Creswell, 2007). Quantitative research intends to produce generalizable claims for a population, where a statistically reliable and representative sample is sought. Such research follows a logic of ‘selecting a truly random and representative sample which will permit confident generalisations from the sample to a larger

population' (Patton, 1987, p. 51). However, this is not the theoretical aim of the current thesis. Instead, the theoretical aim of this thesis is to produce mid-range theory that provides a new understanding about a phenomenon, namely sticky experiences and their evolution across the customer journey.

For this research goal, a purposive sampling strategy is more appropriate. In purpose sampling, the researcher uses his or her sound judgement, and typically sampling criteria related to the research question or objective, to select informants (Black, 2010). These informants are supposed to be knowledgeable about or experienced with the research phenomenon, and they need to be available, willing, and able to participate in a research project (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1987). Purposive, non-probability sampling encourages collecting information-rich data about a phenomenon of interest, using sampling criteria that help fulfil this purpose, and letting the research progress determine how much data needs to be collected until a new in-depth understanding is reached, rather than aiming to meet a pre-defined, appropriate quantity of data (Shaw, 1999). In this way, purposive sampling accords with qualitative research's general emphasis on saturation, described as the moment of reaching a comprehensive new understanding achieved by continuing to collect and interpret data until no new information that would substantively alter this understanding is acquired (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The three services chosen as contexts for this study have been introduced in the previous section (3.7). According to marketplace evidence, customers of the three services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder often report having sticky experiences; in customers' own words, they have 'addictive' experiences, are obsessed with the services, or yearn to keep using the services (Barrett, 2018; Fry, 2013; Hern, 2019). Consequently, to inquire about sticky experiences and fulfil the aims of this research, it was decided to interview enthusiastic customers of these services. The assumption is that these customers are likely to have experienced stickiness in their use of the service. The sampling is therefore purposive (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It followed the concrete purpose of inquiring about sticky experiences, with informants chosen based on their relevance to achieve this goal; more concretely, informants were selected for interviews when they had experience using one or more of three services, for example being or having been an excited athlete at CrossFit, a regular player of Pokémon Go, or a repeated user of Tinder. Next, the recruitment of informants and the sample group profile are presented.

The sample group consisted of active and former customers of the three services based upon informants: (a) having experience with one of the three services, and that (b) they were truly enthusiastic about these services, at least at some point in their customer journey. Consumer stories about their enthusiastic, positive experiences were crucial for the analysis. Yet consumer stories about experiences and reasons that prompted them to stop using a service also harboured valuable content for the analysis. To select informants, personal contacts of the author, online and offline networking, and the snowball method was used, that is, the author asked his personal contacts and interviewees for their recommendations of further appropriate service customers. To enquire about customers' evolving experiences and journeys from their point of view, the author interviewed 40 informants who have customer experience with one or more of the three services. Five of these 40 informants are also CrossFit service providers and four of these informants are also either gaming or technology experts. These informants are more likely than other informants to use industry jargon in their stories but their journeys in a customer role are no different than those of other informants. Of a total of 43 distinct customer journeys culled from the interviews, 13 relate to CrossFit, 19 to Pokémon Go, and 11 to Tinder. At the time of the interview, some informants had just begun using the services a few weeks prior, while others had been customers for several years. Eleven of the 43 journeys included discernible termination trajectories. The majority of informants are white and middle-class but vary in terms of age (16–59) and gender (18 female, 22 male).

Table 4 provides information about the sample group profile. This table includes the alias of each informant used in this research report, the gender of each informant, their age, occupation, and primary country in which they used the service. All services are global services that can be used in many countries around the world. Some informants reported having used services in several countries (e.g., using Tinder in the United Kingdom, Spain, and Greece; playing Pokémon Go at home in the United Kingdom and during a vacation in Italy), while other have only used a service in their country of residence. Informants who used more than one service are marked with the letter 'a.' Informants who were active customers and service providers or industry experts are marked with the letter 'b.' The table gives the reader an overview of who was interviewed. All informants quoted in this thesis are assigned an alias for anonymity and quotes of non-native English-language speakers are edited for clarity. The following section (3.9, subsection 3.9.2) will give the reader detailed information about how the interviews were conducted.

Table 4: Profiles of Informants

	Alias	Gender	Age	Occupation	Primary Country of Activity
Customers of CrossFit	Adrian	Male	26	IT analyst	UK
	Alan	Male	16	Carpentry and joinery apprentice	UK
	Charles ^a	Male	26	Project manager	UK
	Christine	Female	32	Visiting professor	Canada
	David	Male	39	Commissioned officer in the armed forces	UK
	Emily	Female	26	Trainee paramedic	UK
	Jenny	Female	26	Lawyer	UK
	John	Male	35	Veterinary director at pharmaceutical company	UK
	Karen ^b	Female	36	Personal trainer	UK
	Martin ^b	Male	32	CrossFit box owner and health and fitness professional	Germany
	Olivia ^b	Female	29	Health and fitness professional	UK
	Peter ^b	Male	25	Rotary mechanic and police officer	UK
Tara ^b	Female	35	CrossFit box co-owner and fitness coach	UK	
Customers of Pokémon Go	Aron ^b	Male	31	E-sports agent	UK
	Charles ^a	Male	26	Project manager	UK
	Daniel	Male	46	Spanish lecturer	UK
	Dave	Male	30	Software developer	UK
	Esther	Female	59	Educational advisor	UK
	Gloria ^b	Female	59	Educational technology research fellow	UK
	Gordon	Male	51	Development and operational specialist	UK
	Jill	Female	58	Staffing assistant	UK
	Joanne	Female	35	Project coordinator in marketing	UK
	Julia	Female	45	Administrative assistant	UK
	Kadir	Male	16	Pupil in college	UK
	Marco ^{a, b}	Male	32	Project officer	UK
	Martha	Female	56	Engineering lecturer	UK
	Ruth ^b	Female	56	Educational technology lecturer	UK
	Ryan	Male	41	Lawyer	UK
Sahib	Male	22	Medical student	UK	

	Sarah	Female	29	Project officer and post-doc	UK
	Timothy	Male	26	Planetary sciences student	UK
	Tobias	Male	50	Software developer	UK
Customers of Tinder	Alexander	Male	35	Social policy student	UK
	Anna	Female	31	Business development associate	Germany
	Charles ^a	Male	26	Project manager	UK
	Donna	Female	38	Psychotherapist	UK
	Dora	Female	31	Media lecturer	UK
	Enrico	Male	29	Computer science student	UK
	Marco ^{a, b}	Male	32	Project officer	UK
	Obasi	Male	23	Unemployed (recent graduate)	UK
	Roberto	Male	29	Economics student	UK
	Sebastian	Male	36	Consultant	Germany
	Sophia	Female	32	Educational technology student	UK
Service Providers and Industry Experts	Aron	Male	31	Gaming industry expert	UK
	Gloria	Female	59	Technology and gaming expert	UK
	Karen	Female	36	Personal trainer	UK
	Marco	Male	32	Computer science expert	UK
	Martin	Male	32	CrossFit box owner and health and fitness professional	Germany
	Olivia	Female	29	Health and fitness professional	UK
	Paula	Female	33	Mobile technology expert	UK
	Peter	Male	25	CrossFit coach	UK
	Ruth	Female	56	Technology and gaming expert	UK
	Tara	Female	35	CrossFit box co-owner and fitness coach	UK

a Participants who used more than one service.

b Participants who were active customers and service providers/industry experts.

Source: Author.

3.9 Data collection

This thesis is the result of a three-year-long market-oriented ethnographic investigation (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994) in three contexts. Data was collected using an ethnographic combination of *experiencing* via participant observation (3.9.1), *enquiring* via in-depth interviews (3.9.2), and *examining* via archival research (3.9.3) (Wolcott, 2008), both offline and online (Kozinets, 2015). The majority of this data collection occurred in the United Kingdom between 2016 and 2019. Some data were also collected in North America and Continental Europe.

3.9.1 Observations

Ethnographic participant and non-participant observations are valuable means through which researchers can increase familiarity with cases and contexts, gain insight into environmental stimuli and behaviour as it happens (as opposed to retrospective accounts through interviews, for instance), as well as get access to potential interview participants. Besides archival data and interviews with service providers and industry experts, participant and non-participant observations were a critical way through which firm-side data on the design and management of customer experiences could be collected. In the case of CrossFit, observations also allowed the author to have informal conversations with service providers and customers. Observations enabled the author to gain first-hand experience with potentially sticky services and raised the awareness for customer experience management elements that facilitate sticky experiences (e.g., service providers' communication with customers).

From 2016 to 2018, the author ethnographically engaged with the three services. To observe the services first-hand, the author worked out at three CrossFit boxes (in a big city and two mid-sized cities in the South of the United Kingdom) and went to social CrossFit events (in the big city in the South of the United Kingdom); played Pokémon Go to a moderate degree of proficiency (level 33 of 40), alone and in groups, took part in special Pokémon Go events such as Community Day and limited-time group raids; and swiped through dozens of Tinder profiles. In their Tinder profile, the author displayed their real name, university affiliation, and research intent and all communications were limited to research purposes. More information on the procedures and ethical considerations of the ethnographic observations, especially in the case of Tinder, are provided in the next few paragraphs of the current subsection. During the experiencing phase, the author also observed brand marketing communications (e.g., event announcements via email), social media posts (e.g., a CrossFit Facebook page), user

comments on news articles (e.g., about Tinder dating experiences), a Pokémon Go customer-to-customer listserv, and app notifications on his own smartphone. Field notes on these activities, the accompanying experiences and impressions, and emerging research ideas amounted to 185 single-spaced pages. Notes on in situ conversations with customers of all three services and service providers of CrossFit were included in the field notes.

All three services primarily target young adults who are interested in having exciting, varied experiences. Accordingly, most customers encountered during this research were between 18 and 40 years of age. The biggest age range among users was observed with Pokémon Go. During observations of Pokémon Go consumption, it was not uncommon to encounter users spanning three generations, ranging from young children to people in their 50s and 60s. All emic descriptions in the findings and discussion chapters are based on field notes, except where otherwise noted.

Procedures and ethical considerations on the observations. To ensure ethical conduct throughout this research, common ethics guidelines in qualitative research (e.g., Belk *et al.*, 2013; Kozinets, 2015) were followed and university approval on the project's detailed ethical procedures was sought. Given its sensitive nature, data collection in the context of Tinder required particular care. To ensure proper ethical conduct and common procedures of data collection, guidelines for online ethnographic work, or 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2015), were consulted. Netnography refers to the study of consumer collectives or networks in online environments (Belk *et al.*, 2013). Data sources for this form of ethnography online can include, for example, online forums, blogs, social media, and virtual worlds. Collecting and analysing consumer expressions and social interaction in computer-mediated environments was deemed to be a useful addition to this research project. With its focus on another, distinguished realm of the everyday life of consumers (who are active online), online ethnographic activities offered a path toward gaining further insight into consumers' experiences with the three services, beyond the context of Tinder alone.

Regarding the permission of 'legitimate gatekeepers' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 153), for example, verbal permission from the owners of three CrossFit boxes to conduct (participant) observation and recruit members was received. CrossFit coaches were aware when the author participated in one of their classes in the roles of athlete and researcher. Regarding closed online groups, for instance, access was

granted to a CrossFit Facebook group for members by the group's informed administrator (an interviewed CrossFit coach), and the author was invited to participate in and recruit informants from a Pokémon Go listserv by the list's informed administrator (an interviewed Pokémon Go player).

Because of the sensitivity of the context of Tinder, ethical considerations strongly shaped the use of the app for data collection purposes (Kozinets, 2015). To mitigate institutional and legal risk, the author carefully read Tinder's Community Guidelines (Tinder, 2017a), Safety Guidelines (Tinder, 2017b), and Terms of Use (Tinder, 2017c). Tinder does not permit usage 'for any commercial purposes without [the firm's] written consent' (Tinder, 2017c, p. 4), for example by attempting to sell products or services to users, soliciting money from users, or defrauding users. Tinder does not explicitly mention the academic use of its services, however. In consultation with the primary supervisor, the author used Tinder as follows for the purposes of this research study, which predominantly were participant observation of how the service works, as well as the recruitment of one additional informant.

First, an existing Facebook profile was used to sign up for Tinder and the same profile photo was chosen for both accounts. Second, to disclose the researcher accurately, the real first name was used and the university affiliation and purpose of being 'Interested in Tinder for PhD research' were stated in the visible profile categories, as well as repeated in the visible About section. Any identity deception (e.g., using an inaccurate gender, sexual orientation, or photo) was avoided at all time. The author's profile was presented by Tinder's algorithm to other users and used by the author to swipe other users' profiles and become familiar with the app. Tinder users are by design unaware of whether, and which, other users swipe their profiles. This is only revealed to a user when another user swipes right on their profile (to signal interest) and the user either has a Tinder Gold subscription enabling them to check who liked them, or the user also swipes right on the same user and each user's profile appears in their list of Matches. To render the process of matching more efficient and effective for this research purpose, the author paid for a Tinder Gold subscription for six months. This enabled the author to deliberately swipe right on users who had previously swiped right on him, which instantly produced a match and the opportunity to interact with the actual human beings behind their online doubles (Kozinets, 2015).

Third, to openly and accurately describe the purpose for contacting and communicating with other users, an unambiguous introductory message was sent to matched users. This message repeated the identity description from the profile, stated a brief description of the research, and inquired about the user's willingness to talk about her experience with Tinder. The message was written in the spirit of an easily understandable, 'satisfying handshake' (Kozinets, 2015, p. 151), which is recommended for describing one's research to potential participants. The latest version of this message read as follows: 'Hi [name of potential participant as used on Tinder profile], would you be willing to talk to me about your experience with Tinder? I'm curious to hear about how you came to start using the app, what you like about it, and so on. It's part of my PhD research at Newcastle Uni London. Thanks, [first name of researcher]'

Fourth, to avoid any deception or confusion in the communication with other users, communication was kept focused on the research purpose and was otherwise terminated. For instance, flirtatious communications in response to the introductory or other messages were not continued and such users were unmatched so that no further communication could take place and the messaging history disappeared for both users. Some users briefly commented about their experience with Tinder via the app's messaging service, but these comments were not used as data in this research, and such users were also eventually unmatched after communication had stalled. A few users signalled interest in talking about their Tinder experience. Three users provided their mobile numbers and/or email addresses and the communication with these users moved to the messaging service WhatsApp and/or email.

Fifth, to offer a more detailed explanation of the researcher and the research study, a one-page information leaflet was shared either through a link in the Tinder messaging service, through WhatsApp, or as a pdf copy attached to an email. Please see Appendix D and E for the information leaflets. At this stage, the ethical recruitment practice was the same for potential participants from all three contexts. After potential participants had received an email with relevant details (including links to the researcher's online profiles and an attached information leaflet), and expressed interest in being interviewed, appointments were made for interviews at a distance or in person. A consent form was shared with these potential participants (see Appendix C) and written informed consent was sought and saved securely on the author's password protected computer. In the end, one of the 11 Tinder users in

this research were recruited through the Tinder app and an interview was conducted over the phone. No Tinder-facilitated potential participant was met in person. All remaining Tinder users were recruited through personal contacts and the snowball method. No incentives were offered to participate in the research.

3.9.2 Interviews

Interviews are a primary means through which to collect in-depth accounts of individuals' personal descriptions and interpretations of their life and phenomena of interest to the researcher (e.g., Thompson *et al.*, 1989). Interviews can vary in the degree of structuration. Semi-structured interviews were used to make sure (a) to be open and flexible enough to allow for a conversational flow guided to large extents by the interviewee, and (b) to provide enough structure so that aspects held to be relevant to this research (e.g., experiences from moment-to-moment and over time) were covered. Interviews with 40 informants were conducted in person, by Skype, or by telephone, ranging from 30 to 172 minutes (average 83 minutes). Interviews conducted in person took place in various locations, including university meeting rooms, college study/computer rooms, and outside. No face-to-face interviews were conducted in private spaces such as the author's home or the interviewees home. Data collection through interviews took place from June 2017 to November 2018. Most interviews were conducted over the course of 2017. The audio-recorded interviews yielded 1,464 single-spaced pages of transcribed text.

In the remainder of this subsection, the areas of inquiry in these interviews are introduced and reasons given for the inclusion of these areas. After that, this subsection provides detail on the interview procedure and reflections thereof. The appendix includes the interview guide for the group of consumers and the group of makers, employees, service providers, and industry experts (Appendix A and B). In addition, the appendix includes the information leaflets for potential research participants (Appendix D and E) and the consent form used to seek informed consent from interviewees (Appendix C).

Interview guide. Using an interview guide, interviews were loosely structured around five areas of inquiry: (i) the informant's daily experiences with the focal service (e.g., how the service enters and

exits their day); (ii) their long-term journey with the service (e.g., how they began, their ups and downs, what brings them back); (iii) their experiences with competing services if any (e.g., CrossFit versus conventional gyms); (iv) their recollections of any significant moments (e.g., their best and worst experiences); and (v) their life contexts surrounding these service experiences (also see Appendix A).

This interview guide was informed by the academic conversation within which this thesis is situated (i.e., customer experience and customer journey); by the research question about the evolution of sticky experiences across the beginning, middle, and end of the customer journey (research question 2, see Chapter 1); and by the qualitative nature of this research. Examining customer experiences across the customer journey requires customer input, simply because the experience and the journey is something that the customer lives through (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). For researchers and practitioners alike, the overall journey is of great interest (Rawson *et al.*, 2013), because it provides insight into how such customers begin, continue, and potentially end a journey with a firm. This is captured in the second area of inquiry (ii) in the interview guide.

The moment-to-moment customer experience within this overall journey also matters, because it reveals how customers interact with a firm on a daily basis, or in each service encounter, however frequent it is. This is captured in the first area of inquiry (i). The customer experience and customer journey literature has also emphasized the importance of significant touchpoints, or so-called moments of truth (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), along the customer journey. Consequently, the interview guide contains an area of inquiry around significant moments for customers (iv). Customers have journeys with many firms, and some of their journeys include multiple firms (Hamilton and Price, 2019). Therefore, inquiring about competing firms with which customers had ongoing or past journeys was a way to elicit comparisons between firms and customers' experiences with those firms (e.g., about which experience was stickier and why?), and to capture their overall experience with firms from certain categories (e.g., gaming). This is reflected in the third area of inquiry (iii).

Finally, following the premise of qualitative research to understand informants' accounts embedded within their life histories and circumstances (Thompson, 1997), the fifth area of inquiry was dedicated to gathering input about this aspect of informants' lives (v). This information helped the author to view informants' stories from within the perspective of their lives. For example, an informant's decision to

quit Pokémon Go after a single day despite being excited about the game can be better understood when embedded within the informants' life context; here, being an avid gamer trying to keep one's playtime in check and knowing from past experience how addictive such fun video games can become, even to the point of causing conflicts in other areas of the informant's life (see Aron's story in Chapter 4, section 4.4)

Procedures and reflections on the interviews. During the process of arranging interviews, the author provided potential participants with an information leaflet and consent form (which are provided in this appendix). These documents informed potential participants about the purpose of the research, their potential role in the research, and what would happen with the recorded interviews, among other ethically and organizationally relevant topics. At the beginning of the interviews, the author went through an introduction, which repeated parts of the information leaflet and consent form to reassure informants that the interviews would be conducted in accordance with ethical and legal standards of academic research. Concretely, the author typically (a) informed the interviewees who he was; (b) mentioned the reason why he was collecting the data; (c) assured them that the data would only be used for research purposes; (d) informed them that the data would form part of an anonymised report; and (e) assured them that the data would not be passed on to any third party. Furthermore, the author typically mentioned at the beginning of interviews that he would not be judging them and that he has an interview guide but would enjoy going with the flow of the conversation.

The author initially planned to begin interviews with a number of demographic questions in order to find out about personal basics such as an interviewee's name, age, occupation, education, as well as basic lifestyle information such as his or her hobbies and other activities besides the focal service. In practice, however, interviews began with various topics and conversations. In many interviews, the interviewer asked the general question 'Tell me about yourself,' which was recommended by the thesis supervisor. This question led interviewees to respond either by covering some of the aspects mentioned above, to clarify which aspects about themselves they should focus on, or to talk about themselves in the context of their current or prior service consumption. The interviewer ensured that all demographic and lifestyle aspects listed above were covered at some point during the interview. In rare cases, such information was sought by email or messaging shortly after the interview. Other interviews started with conversations about recent events that the interviewer and the interviewee experienced together, such

as a Pokémon Go raid or a joint CrossFit workout. In these situations, the recent event was used to find common ground early in the interview and build rapport. Again, other interviews began directly with a conversation about the experience of the interviewee with the service. Here, the interviewees often provided a brief summary of their overall experience, which allowed the interviewer to probe for more details, examples, descriptions, interpretations, changes over time, and other interesting aspects of the informants' experience. The interviewer also asked informants about basic usage information including the length of service usage, frequency of use, and start date of use, among others.

Throughout the interviews, the interviewer probed informants to talk about their experience in detail (e.g., covering experiential dimensions of sensations, feelings, emotions, and behavioural and social responses) and over time (e.g., how their interest in and feelings toward a service emerged and evolved). Specific questions that served this purpose included questions about concrete points of interaction with a service (i.e., touchpoints) that evoked noteworthy experiential responses (e.g., what did this situation make you feel?); questions about informants' own understanding or interpretation of their experience (e.g., other people have talked about being a little bit addiction to the service; what is your take on this?); questions about informants' behavioural practices (e.g., what else do you do that is related to the service?); as well as questions about their service-related knowledge and classifications regarding their service-related experiences (e.g., how do you describe your service usage to a friend or family member who does not engage in the service?) (see Schlehe, 2003). To capture the dynamic and iterative nature of experiences, the interviewer probed informants to talk about their experience with the service at different points in time, from the very beginning to the current state of either continued or terminated service usage. During the interviews, the interviewer attempted to provide space for interviewees to talk about the moments that mattered most to them throughout their journey with a service. Importantly, the interviewer paid close attention to what informants said about the services that evoked certain experiences in them and prompted them to engage in certain kinds of behaviour (e.g., increased vs. reduced usage). Follow-up questions were asked to elicit further details on the informants' view of, and experience with, the services and their evolving features. Overall, this process enabled the interviewer to capture rich stories about consumers' experience with the three services.

The interviewer relied on standard types of questions, probes, and techniques used in ethnographic interviews and more broadly in interviews in qualitative research (Schlehe, 2003). Examples of such

types of questions, probes, and techniques include (a) demographic and biographical questions; (b) descriptive questions about the who, what, where, when, how, and why of events; (c) follow-up questions to descriptive questions that aim to elicit examples, explanations, experiences, denotations, and connotations; (d) follow-up questions that aim at further and deeper elaboration; (e) structural questions on classifications that the participants use; (f) summing up and mirroring what the informant said to ask for his or her own explanations; (g) contrasting and confrontational questions where the interviewer offers alternative views; (h) discussion of preliminary results; (i) echo probes (affirmative probes to show interest, understanding, acceptance; e.g., by picking up what the participant says and asking him to proceed); (j) bringing in oneself as a person to build rapport and trust (e.g., by talking about one's own experiences or impressions from prior interviews and observations); (k) supportive body language (e.g., nodding, interested look, confused look); and (l) strategic pauses and silence (Schlehe, 2003).

The interviewer also attempted to incorporate the advice he received from his thesis supervisor and other mentors. For instance, the author attempted to understand informants' worlds to better understand their narratives and thereby understand their service usage in the context of their personal worlds. For example, the author encouraged interviewees to speak not only about service usage in a strict sense but also about their lives in a broader sense, about their daily routines, their likes and dislikes, their families, and other aspects of their lives. The author made a great effort to let participants do the great majority of the talking, to listen carefully, to become comfortable with moments of silence, and to go with the flow of the conversation, while also ensuring that key aspects of the interview guide and the research focus were covered. In the interviews, the author tried to reduce any unease related to the difference between him as an academic and participants who were not academics, for instance by sharing own experiences and (mis-) adventures of using the services. The author reminded himself before and during the interviews to be a pleasant conversational partner, for instance by smiling or laughing when appropriate, being laid-back, and not interrupting informants unless required. The author also took the advice seriously to truly capture the human side of informants' experiences, rather than focusing excessively on the practical aspects of behaviour, for instance how often or where a service-related behaviour or experience occurred.

Furthermore, the author adopted suggestions from his mentors and incorporated them either directly in the interview guide or used them to enhance his interview skills. An example of a suggestion that was incorporated in the interview guide are comparative questions. One mentor emphasized the importance of comparative questions that probe interviewees to compare the focal service with other services they previously used or were still using at the time of the interview. In doing so, the author was able to better understand what made some of the services more attractive and other services less attractive from the perspective of the informants themselves. It also helped the author better understand whether an entire category (e.g., group fitness programs) or a specific service within this category (e.g., CrossFit) was sticky for informants. An example of a suggestion that was incorporated during the interviews rather than in the interview guide was to encourage informants to talk about other things or experiences that were sticky for them. This meant not cutting interviewees off when they talked about other services, they were excited about and repeatedly used. Rather, the author often probed informants to compare such services to the three services examined in this study. This yielded insights into informants' experiences with, and views of, available market options that were often in the same service category (e.g., Super Mario Bros. and Pokémon Go in the category of mobile games; regular gyms and CrossFit in the category of fitness services; and more traditional and/or non-app dating platforms such as Match.com and Tinder in the category of online dating).

The author must admit that he struggled with two pieces of advice, at least during the first few interviews. The first piece of advice was to keep questions short and simple and to avoid jargon. The author believes that this improved over the course of doing 40 interviews, as he felt increasingly comfortable during the interviews and became increasingly familiar with the service-related vocabulary and the language people were using to describe their experiences. This enabled the author to more easily leave the 'safe haven' of academic language and terminology while keeping the research purpose and preliminary theorizations in mind. It also led to adjustments to the interview guide in order to make questions more easily understandable and to reduce the amount of questions to a more manageable number. This process, which was akin to a 'forced prioritization' (Heath and Heath, 2007), was a generally useful learning for the author, one that he attempted to apply to the theorizing and writing phases of the thesis research as well. The second piece of advice that the author struggled with, at least during the initial interviews, was to avoid questions that could be answered with a simple yes or no (e.g., do you enjoy taking your dog for a walk while playing Pokémon Go?), and to avoid questions

that give informants a choice between two or more things (e.g., is the service for you more like x or more like y?). As mentioned above, the author believes that he was able to avoid these kinds of questions more and more over the course of the data collection phase. However, this required a conscious effort by the author during interviews. The temptation to slip back to these kinds of questions that are common in everyday conversations and the news did not entirely go away but was better regulated with time. If and when the author used a question that interviewees answered with a simple yes or no, the author then used follow-up questions to elicit more detailed descriptions and probe informants to share their emic understanding (e.g., their experience, interpretation, classification).

To prepare for interviews with makers, employees, service providers, and industry experts, the author also sought advice from his thesis supervisor and mentors. One practical piece of advice was that there can hardly be a single, perfectly fitting interview guide for all people who fall into this group of interviewees, and that the interviewer should be flexible to tailor questions to interviewee's roles and the flow of the conversation. For example, some questions (e.g., how do customers get in contact with you?) are only relevant to people in customer service roles, but not in design roles. The author also received the recommendation to keep in mind that firm representatives are people first and that they have many roles. The author was advised to talk to them at first as what they self-identify (e.g., a CrossFit trainer). This is not a firm representative exactly, but a firm's intermediary or an employee of a CrossFit affiliate. People in these roles and positions typically were consumers themselves early on, might be believers in the service, yet might also have reservations and be critics of some aspects, and hence change subject positions continually in their narratives. This became apparent in one interview with a CrossFit box owner and head coach of his CrossFit box. He was a frequent and enthusiastic consumer of CrossFit before becoming a trainer and owner of a CrossFit box. He is convinced of the benefits of CrossFit and enthusiastically coaches clients in this studio. At the same time, as a pacifist, he is critical of the links of some CrossFit workouts of the day to topics of the military and of war. A case in point is a workout of the day called 'Murph,' an intense workout that was posted for the first time on the CrossFit website in 2005 and that is one of the special workouts that is repeated on certain occasions. The accompanying text to the workout on the CrossFit website reads: 'In memory of Navy Lieutenant Michael Murphy, 29, of Patchogue, N.Y., who was killed in Afghanistan June 28th, 2005. This workout was one of Mike's favorites and he'd named it 'Body Armor'. From here on it will be referred to as 'Murph' in honor of the focused warrior and great American who wanted nothing more in

life than to serve this great country and the beautiful people who make it what it is.’ (CrossFit, 2005). The CrossFit box owner interviewed strongly de-emphasizes the workout’s military roots. In fact, he reported that he does not mention that this or other workouts have military roots to avoid fostering associations between the workouts in his studio and the military of the United States, or any military action and war for that matter.

During interviews with the first group (consumers) and the second group (makers, employees, service providers, and industry experts), the author attempted to pay close attention to and to probe interviewees’ stories about the creation of their sticky experiences. This included capturing stories about what the second group of interviewees does to facilitate desirable consumer journeys. In interviews with consumers, this meant asking them specifically about how their journeys started and evolved. The emphasis on this aspect of the overall customer journey was the result of a recommendation from the thesis supervisor to explore who creates the sticky experience, whether it is the consumer or the market or a combination of the two. While experiences themselves only occur within individuals, customer experiences are multidimensional responses to direct or indirect points of contact with a firm or its offerings. These points of contact may be firm-controlled or non-firm-controlled or be a combination of firm-controlled and non-firm-controlled elements. As Lemon and Verhoef (2016) discuss, firms seek to identify those touchpoints that have a significant influence on customer experiences and firm-relevant behavioural outcomes, and then optimize these touchpoints. Consequently, it is critical for firms to know whether points of contact that they control or points of contact out of their control propel consumers to embark on sticky journeys with the firms. The Findings Chapter will address these and other issues of customer experience management and journey design.

3.9.3 Archival data

Archival types of data refer to secondary data that exist in various sources, such as newspaper and magazine articles, books, documentaries, firm and industry reports, and secondary interviews, among others (e.g., Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Holt and Thompson, 2004; Giesler, 2012). One purpose of archival data is to enhance a researcher’s background knowledge about a phenomenon or context (Thompson, 1997). For this thesis, for instance, archival material contained valuable information about how firms attempt to enhance their services over time, an example being Niantic’s official website for

Pokémon Go or media reports about changes Niantic makes to the game (e.g., Etherington, 2016; Their, 2016).

The archival data includes publicly available material about the three services, including websites, press releases, and news articles from mainstream media (e.g., The Guardian, the BBC, and The New York Times) as well as niche media (e.g., Wired, Kotaku, TechCrunch). To receive the latest news about the services in real-time, the author also created a custom Google feed that presented daily news about the services and their customers. The archival data enabled the author to keep up to date on the three services (e.g., introduction of new features); learn from interviews with key market actors, such as founders and chief executive officers (which would otherwise be hard or impossible to access); and take note of newsworthy customer experiences. The total archival data set amounts to more than 200 documents, more than 40 of which are cited in this article.

3.10 Data interpretation

This section describes both the interpretive process used in the initial round of data interpretation and the interpretive process used in the final round of data interpretation. Each round of data interpretation led to a different outcome. The outcome of the initial round of data interpretation is presented in Appendix F and the outcome of the final round of data interpretation is presented in Chapter 4. The initial round of data interpretation focused on conceptualizing sticky experiences across the customer journey on a more granular level (i.e., experiential customer responses). This initial round of interpretation was inspired by Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) understanding of 'customer journey analysis,' which is a method that seeks to capture key (or sometimes all) touchpoints between a customer and a firm along the customer journey. After reflecting on and incorporating the feedback from several academics, including the supervisory team, the subsequent rounds of data interpretation sought to conceptualize sticky experiences across the customer journey on a higher-order level (i.e., customer journey patterns). This shift also enabled the development of a simpler model of sticky experiences, in terms of a model with fewer but stronger concepts and relationships among them (Tellis, 2016). In both interpretations, the goal of this research was to generate insights into the nature of sticky experiences across the customer journey from the firm and the customer side over time.

3.10.1 Initial round of data interpretation

In the initial round of data interpretation, a customer journey analysis (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) was conducted, which maps out the customer journey to identify key experiential outcomes for customers as they interact with a firm. As Lemon and Verhoef (2016) outline, ‘Customer journey analysis should understand and map the journey from the customer perspective and, therefore, requires customer input’ (p. 79), and ‘Although it is a complex and difficult endeavour, it is important to identify critical touch points (‘moments of truth’) throughout the customer journey that have the most significant influence on key customer outcomes.’ (p. 82). Simply put, the author aimed to understand ‘what actually happens from an individual’s point of view over time’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 388; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Following this premise, he neither focused on a priori, firm-centric categories of analysis (e.g., pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase phases) and pre-defined outcomes such as onboarding (e.g., Rawson *et al.*, 2013), nor on mapping the full spectrum of touchpoints available to the customer. Instead, the author focused on how firms shape the moments along customer journeys that matter most to consumers (Hamilton and Price, 2019; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010).

The interpretive process in the initial round of data interpretation included three iterative steps informed by common protocols in qualitative research, especially hermeneutics (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Belk *et al.*, 2013; Thompson, 1997). On a pragmatic level, Thompson (1997, p. 441) argues that in a hermeneutic approach, interpretations are conducted through a series of part-to-whole iterations that entail two stages: ‘The first is an intratext cycle in which a text (such as an interview transcript) is read in its entirety to gain a sense of the whole [...] The second part-to-whole movement is an intertextual one whereby the researcher looks for patterns (and differences) across different interviews.’ Through these iterative processes, findings emerge that may in turn be brought into relationship with and be further interpreted considering extant theory in order to derive conceptual and managerial implications (Thompson, 1997).

First stage of hermeneutic interpretation. First, the author conducted the first stage of the part-to-whole process that is characteristic for hermeneutics. In this stage, informant interviews were read in full to gain a sense of the whole text. In so doing, the author familiarized himself with each informant’s service-related experiences contextualized within their shared personal history. This was done in order

to gain an understanding of each informant's evolving journey with a firm. This idiographic analysis (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson *et al.*, 1990) entailed exploring emerging relationships within individual's sticky journeys, such as their idiosyncratic beginnings, subsequent usage periods, and breaks or terminations, if any. Drawing initial relationships among experiential responses along individual's journeys, and embedding those journeys within their broader life histories, was a key step toward developing an understanding of sticky customer experiences across the customer journey.

The carefully chosen areas of inquiry in the interview guide proved valuable in this stage. These areas of inquiry prompted interviewees to talk about the big picture of their journeys, the moment-to-moment experiences they had as they interacted with a firm, their most notable experiences, both positive and negative, comparing the focal service with competing service they had or were using, and about themselves and their hobbies, life situations, and life changes that impacted their use of the focal service. Most informants' stories revolved around these five areas of inquiry and therefore provided a relatively comprehensive picture of their experiences with a service over time.

Second stage of hermeneutic interpretation. In the second stage, the author identified common experiential themes across informants' journeys and aggregated those themes into (preliminary) higher-order claims. Concretely, in the nomothetic analysis (Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson *et al.*, 1990), emerging *themes* and relationships among these themes from individual interview transcripts were contrasted to other informants' narratives and data sources to identify common experiential themes. Particular attention was given to what informants were experiencing when they began using a service, how they experienced using a service subsequently, and how they experienced the last few times they used a service, if that had occurred for an informant. The author examined customer responses ranging from frequent, ordinary experiences that shaped informants' everyday lives to infrequent, extraordinary experiences (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, 2014). Close attention was paid to informants' voiced experiences from one moment to the next, to decipher what prompted informants to keep using a service during a session (e.g., a session of using Tinder in the evening) and what prompted them to use a service again (e.g., a session of using Tinder the next morning).

For example, informants described their moment-to-moment experiences with the services in emotional terms, using a variety of intense emotions. These descriptions brought to light the excitement that

informants lived through as they used the services. Informants referred to their experiences as being much ‘fun,’ very ‘exciting,’ but also at times ‘incredibly hard’ or even ‘horrible.’ These varied experiences were typically part of the same service encounter, for example one CrossFit workout, one Pokémon Go playtime, and one session of swiping through Tinder. These experiences occurred frequently for informants, up to multiple times a day in the cases of Pokémon Go and Tinder. They typically took place during the everyday life of informants, for instance, as they went for a daily walk after lunch, or in the evening on the couch. As such, they seemed rather ordinary experiences. Yet they also had elements of extraordinary experiences. Informants described them as being intensely emotional and bearing the potential to provide moments that are out of the ordinary, for instance when a CrossFit athlete reaches a new personal best, when a Pokémon Go player immerses themselves in the world of the game and explores new neighbourhoods, or when a Tinder user imagines that the person behind a Tinder profile is ‘the one’ for the rest of their life. Consequently, the categories of ordinary versus extraordinary experiences were considered but eventually dismissed as an explanatory mechanism for the stickiness of these kinds of frequently repeated experiences. Rather, the theme that emerged as most appropriate to capture these kinds of moment-to-moment experiences was the theme of the emotional rollercoaster.

The general theme of the rollercoaster captures the fun and thrill that informants describe across all the contexts. Like people literally riding rollercoasters, our informants experience the seductive qualities of suspense – of not foreseeing what comes next and being in a state of excited anticipation or even anxious anticipation. Popular writers acknowledge that keeping people in suspense is an effective strategy to keeping them hooked: ‘The car rises slowly to the top, then suddenly hurtles you into space, whips you to the side, throws you upside down, in every possible direction. The riders laugh and scream. What thrills them is to let go, to grant control to someone else, who propels them in unexpected directions. What new thrill awaits them around the next corner?’ (Greene, 2003, p. 107)

Building on these interpretive steps, (preliminary) *higher-order claims* were developed. These claims incorporated themes such as the rollercoaster into two types of relationships: a temporal relationship, identifying when along the customer journey the themes were most relevant; and a customer-firm relationship, identifying what aspects of a service facilitated the moments of interaction between a firm

and a customer that led to the key experiential customer responses (i.e., themes such as the emotional rollercoaster).

Regarding the temporal relationship, the customer journey was divided into the three broad phases of introduction, continuation, and termination. These three phases were intended to simply capture the beginning, middle, and end of a customer's experience with a service. They were not the result of elaborate interpretive processes but rather a general way of dividing the journey in the three most general phases. In marketing terms, they refer to the phases of winning new customers, keeping those customers, and losing those customers. Themes were allocated along the customer journey, drawing on the sense of each whole interview derived in the first stage of hermeneutic interpretation and the similarities across interviews.

For instance, informants technically experienced emotional rollercoasters from the very beginning of their active usage of a service. However, at the beginning, other experiential responses seemed to be more central and more meaningful to informants. At the beginning, the services were new to informants, and many informants described their initial experiences in terms of being drawn into a service and of exploring the exciting world of a service. As such, themes around the concept of immersion (i.e., quick dips, deep dives, intentional immersion) were interpreted as being more crucial at the beginning than the theme of the rollercoaster. In other words, while informants' rollercoaster ride technically started from the very beginning (e.g., when swiping the first few profiles on Tinder), at this point in informants' journeys, the allure of the immersive process of exploration and discovery (Carù and Cova, 2006) was more centerstage in their experiential horizon. Consequently, the introduction phase of the sticky experience model was interpreted as being about a progressive immersion into the service. The theme of the emotional rollercoaster was interpreted as being crucial to keeping customers excited over time, when the initial allure of new or 'shiny' services, as one informant put it, has waned. Accordingly, the theme of the rollercoaster appears in the continuation phase of the initial model of sticky experiences across the customer journey (Appendix F).

Regarding the customer-firm relationship, in this second phase of the hermeneutic interpretation, cues were taken from informant interviews about what facilitated their experiential responses. In the third stage of the interpretation described below, the higher-order claims about the customer-firm

relationship were fully developed. In the second stage, the author ensured these claims are anchored in the customer's view in order to develop a model that truly represents what is key from the customer's perspective along his or her journey (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). For example, informants' descriptions captured via the theme of the emotional rollercoaster were typically linked by informants to something unpredictable happening in the service, and that something unpredictable was not only a singular event but something that happened regularly, or on an ongoing basis, in the service.

In the case of CrossFit, informants link rollercoaster rides to not knowing what the next workout will be and having to do new and challenging workouts each time they do a class. Pokémon Go players link their rollercoaster rides to not knowing what Pokémon are going to appear, what Pokémon are going to be hatched from eggs, whether they will beat a raid boss or not, and the like. Tinder users link their rollercoaster rides to the unpredictable stream of profiles, matches, and conversations with matches, as well as the naturally unpredictable nature of off-platform dates. These cues helped the author formulate preliminary higher-order claims about the customer-firm relationship, which were then further developed using firm-side data in the third stage of the interpretive process. For instance, at this second stage, a preliminary claim was that firms continuously vary the service for customers and that this enables customers' emotional rollercoaster rides in the continuation phase.

In the first and second stage of the hermeneutic interpretation, the author drew on interview data as well as field notes based on ethnographic observations. These analytical steps generated an overall picture of what happens from the customer perspective over time. These steps also highlighted the moments of firm-customer interaction that sparked, invigorated, or diminished customers' experienced stickiness with the firm's service. The interpretive process was done manually, without using any data analysis software. The author wrote down ideas and created numerous drawings of emerging findings on paper. These drawings ranged from boxes with arrows connecting the boxes to graphs along x- and y-axes to journey maps including key themes, which ended up being the most useful kind of drawing. In addition, online documents such as Microsoft Word and Google Docs were used to make notes of new ideas and emerging themes.

Third stage of hermeneutic interpretation. In the third step, the author more closely analysed the firm side of the three services to identify the customer experience management capabilities used to

optimize customer experiences. During this step, he primarily consulted the archival data set, the interviews with service providers and industry experts, and the author's field notes that resulted from his ethnographic engagement with the services. The author analysed data on each service and across the three services, focusing on the management of those experiential responses that mattered most to customers along their evolving journeys, as mapped out in the first two analytical steps. This anchored the analysis to what was crucial to the customer and to what was key for the evolution of his or her experienced stickiness pertaining to a firm's service over time.

For example, the preliminary claim that varying a service enables customers to experience emotional rollercoasters was refined through an analysis of firm-side data. In the case of Tinder, several data sources (e.g., news articles, the brand's own blog, firm-side field notes based on the use of the app) pointed to the deliberate presentation of one user profile after another in an unpredictable, non-categorized order. The algorithm selecting profiles for users is not informed by any users' answers to compatibility questions, as is common practice in more traditional dating services (e.g., eharmony; Finkel *et al.*, 2012). Rather, the algorithm is much more 'open' (Tinder, 2019) compared to those of other dating services. The ability to provide customer with varied service encounters in which customer do not know what is coming next is conceptualized in the initial round of data interpretation as the key firm capability of randomization. The higher-order claim that was derived from (a) the firm capability of randomization, (b) the experiential customer response of the emotional rollercoaster, and (c) the relationship between the two along the customer journey was as follows: the firm capability of randomization enables customers to move from intentional immersion to emotional rollercoasters (Appendix F). This movement along the customer journey was, more fundamentally, based on the general link between unpredictability on the one hand and excitement and prolonged engagement with an activity on the other hand (e.g., Alter, 2017; Eyal, 2014).

Together, the three interpretive steps described here formed an ongoing, iterative process of analysis in which the author went through multiple rounds of data collection and analysis, as well as back-and-forth movements between examining theory and data. During this process, the author dropped initial notions and ideas (e.g., addiction, passionate activities, meaningful structure of experience) in favour of other ones (e.g., stickiness, immersion, suspense) that helped make better sense of the emerging patterns. This analysis allowed the author to systematically develop a model of sticky experiences that

links key firm capabilities to experiential customer responses throughout the customer journey. This model of sticky experiences traces the links between key firm capabilities and experiential customer responses over time, from initial experiences that spark stickiness to repeated, stickiness-enhancing experiences that keep customers enthusiastically involved with a service. Appendix F will present the key findings of this initial interpretation process supported by a range of data including consumer verbatim, field notes from observations, archival material, and other data.

3.10.2 Final round of data interpretation

The final round of data interpretation built on the understanding developed in the initial rounds of interpretation. Although the final round of data interpretation required countless hours of deep work, frustration, and delight, it benefitted from the careful interpretation conducted in the initial phase of this research. In the final round, the author was more familiar with the theoretical vocabulary of customer experience management and customer journey design, had read additional literature, and was able to develop a better sense of the different ways in which scholars study customer experiences and customer journeys. Interestingly, Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) more granular customer journey analysis approach became less useful to the theoretical goals of this research and was consequently dropped as an approach to be adhered to. Nevertheless, this research owes much to overview articles such as Lemon and Verhoef (2016), as evidenced across this thesis. Because the final round of data interpretation benefitted from, and built on, previous rounds of data analysis, the description of this round of interpretation is much shorter than the previous description.

The author used recommendations from hermeneutic research tradition (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) to interpret the data set in this final round: (i) making constant comparisons among the parts and wholes of informants' journeys across the three service contexts; (ii) tacking back and forth between prior customer journey literature and the empirical materials; and (iii) making visual and textual memos to discuss with the supervisory team. To understand the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey, the author compared the journey patterns in initial, subsequent, and terminating cycles across the three service contexts. He drew on firm-side fieldnotes and archival materials to understand the firm capabilities. In parallel, the author drew on the customer-side fieldnotes and interview transcripts to discern the resulting customer journey patterns. He routinely returned to the

literature on the extant smooth experience model to further clarify the differences between the extant and emergent models. Furthermore, the author presented his emergent model to fellow PhD students and academics at Newcastle University London and Newcastle University Business School for additional feedback. He finally terminated the hermeneutic interpretive process at theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989), when new rounds of data interpretation did not meaningfully alter the emergent model.

3.11 Research evaluation

Evaluating qualitative research, including research combining the methodology of ethnography with the tradition of hermeneutics such as this research, is less straightforward than evaluating quantitative research in a positivist research paradigm (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Hirschman, 1986). The criteria of validity and reliability that are critical to typical quantitative research may be considered by researchers working in a neopositivist tradition (Belk *et al.*, 2013), however, in research such as the current PhD thesis that rests on the nonobjectivity of hermeneutics and ethnography, other criteria are more appropriate (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993).

For example, the criterion of *reliability* traditionally seeks to evaluate the temporal stability and consistency of measurements of a variable, with an emphasis on developing instruments ensuring this criterion (Hirschman, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Yet, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, a human being who draws on data from interviews, observations, or other methods to craft an interpretation and generate a revised or new understanding of a phenomenon of the world. As Arnold and Fischer (1994, p. 64) emphasize: ‘Anyone attempting to evaluate a hermeneutic interpretation must accept that there may be a multiplicity of equally good or better readings.’

The criteria of internal and external *validity* are also inappropriate to evaluate qualitative research. Hirschman (1986, p. 244; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) emphasizes that regarding internal validity, when considered outside of positivism, ‘there is no longer the assumption of one true world composed of discrete causal processes [and] thus there is no concrete benchmark for validating one’s interpretation, either in principle or by technical adjustment using the falsification principle.’ Similarly, regarding

external validity, qualitative researchers working within the interpretivist paradigm are less concerned with the generalizability of their findings across, for instance, populations. Rather, these researchers are concerned with the boundary conditions of their work and critically assess how far their insights might be transferable to other manifestations of a phenomenon (Hirschman, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this thesis, for example, the boundary conditions for the sticky experience model are recreational service categories, within which customers seek adventures and respond positively to unpredictability. Sticky experiences and sticky journeys may occur in other recreational service contexts not studied in this thesis. However, this argument must remain somewhat speculative, because *‘the only way the transferability of a particular interpretation can be assessed is by comparing it with interpretations constructed in other contexts’* (Hirschman, 1986, p. 245; italics in original).

Morgan (1983) nicely summarizes the argument that this thesis builds on, which is restated below. Concretely, Morgan (1983, p. 395-396) along many others argues that applying criteria grounded in the positivist paradigm is inappropriate for research grounded in interpretivism (see section 3.4 for an overview of positivism and interpretivism):

The idea of obtaining a generalized form of objective knowledge based on the positivist ideal of systematic, comparative, replicative observation and measurement is often used as a point of reference against which all research should be judged. These are the criteria that are often used to disparage the worth of a single case study or of qualitative research, in which the researcher as participant in the situation is really the only research instrument used. Such an approach to evaluation is based on a major fallacy and logical error in that rules for conducting research are mistakenly seen as rules of justification to be used in the evaluation of knowledge. The protocol and aims of positivist research [...] have no logical claim to serve as general standards for the evaluation of knowledge [...] Hence, research strategies that abandon the positivist viewpoint of the detached, neutral observer cannot be fairly judged in terms of the evaluative criteria normally applied to positivist research, for they seek a different kind of insight, adopt different methodologies, and favour different criteria for judging their knowledge claims.

The next subsection introduces three points that a critical reviewer of a hermeneutic interpretation might consider (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) and comments on how the current thesis fulfils these points (3.11.1). The subsection thereafter considers three criteria for evaluating ethnographic research (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008) and shows how the current thesis satisfies these criteria (3.11.2).

3.11.1 Evaluating a hermeneutic interpretation

This research highlights three points through which a reader of a hermeneutic interpretation might judge the quality of the research (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Bernstein, 1983; Gadamer, 1989). First, the interpretation in the research report should be coherent, free of contradiction, its themes should be documented, and observations supported with relevant examples. The current research fulfils all these points: The interpretation, the final one more so than the initial one, is a coherent model of sticky experiences across the customer journey. It applies to and is grounded in all three contexts, containing some room for variety among these contexts but no noteworthy contradictions, at least to the knowledge of the researcher. Furthermore, the model is described in detail and all its concepts and relationships among them are supported with data.

Second, relevant literature and the salient pre-understanding should be evident. This research reports describes in detail the dominant understanding of repeated experiences across multiple service cycles of the customer journey in the marketing literature (a.k.a., the smooth experience model). It acknowledges the usefulness of this model in certain contexts, but also questions its underlying assumption of experience predictability. Conceptualizing sticky customer experiences, it reviews related literature in marketing, consumer research, and related disciplines, before moving to the methodology and empirical analysis of the research. Relevant literature and the pre-understanding will be discussed again in the Discussion Chapter of this thesis.

Third, the interpretation should be both comprehensible to the reader and be fruitful by revealing new aspects of a problem. By reading such an interpretation, the reader's pre-understanding is revised. This research, it is hoped, is easily understandable and surprising, shining a light on an undertheorized area of repeated customer experiences across the customer journey that cannot be explained by the dominant understanding of the smooth experience model. In fact, the extant and emergent models are in stark contrast to one another in many ways, from the assumption of experience (un)predictability to how their journeys begin, continue, and end, as the Findings Chapter will show. These differences, but also some commonalities, are discussed in detail, given readers familiar with the dominant model an easy entry point into the comparison and the differing model of sticky experiences. In summary, while no

objective measurement of the quality of this research – or any other hermeneutically inspired research – is possible, it is hoped that any reader familiar with marketing and/or consumer research might find this research valuable.

3.11.2 Evaluating ethnographic research

This written research account is based on ethnography as its research methodology, building on data from observations, interviews, and archival research, which relate to the three tenets (i.e., experiencing, enquiring, examining) of the ethnographic way of seeing (Wolcott, 2008). Accordingly, criteria for evaluating qualitative research and ethnographic work (Belk *et al.*, 2013; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008) are also relevant for this thesis. These criteria are introduced next. The criteria are authenticity, plausibility, and criticality (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). The following paragraphs discuss how this thesis meets each of the criterion.

Authenticity. Authenticity refers to the ability of a research report to provide an interpretation that is based on the researcher's genuine experience in the field: 'Through authenticity, ethnographic texts appeal to readers to accept that the researcher was indeed present in the field and grasped how the members understood their world' (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993, p. 595). The immersion of a researcher in the field can be conveyed by particularizing the life of those studied and by describing the relationships of the researcher in the field. Whether a researcher has drawn on what he or she genuinely encountered in the field can be conveyed by detailing the pursuit and interpretation of data and by personally reflecting on the research process (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008).

This thesis satisfies the criterion of authenticity in many ways. To demonstrate that the researcher was indeed present in the field and achieved a sufficient degree of immersion into the field, the study describes its findings not only in etic, experience-far vocabulary of concepts and theory, but also in the emic, experience-near vocabulary used by informants and those that were observed in this research. One example of this is that people often speak of their experiences as being 'addictive,' in a lay sense, which rarely meets the criteria of pathological addictions as defined in addiction research (e.g., Sussman *et al.*, 2011). The study provides countless quotes from the interviews and describes

observations made in the field, using the language particular to each of the services (e.g., AMRAP in CrossFit, referring to ‘as many repetitions as possible’). In addition, the length of time spent in the field is mentioned in the data collection section (3.9, subsection 3.9.1), as well as an estimate of how close the author got to understanding the field site and its members (e.g., playing Pokémon Go to a moderate level of proficiency; see section 3.9.1). To demonstrate that the researcher was genuine to the field experience, this thesis details the type of data collected and the processes of data collection and data interpretation in detail (sections 3.9 and 3.10.). The thesis also provides reflection on some of the ethical consideration during observational activities (subsection 3.9.1), as well as the learning curve of the investigator regarding interviewing. In addition, the overall research process is described not only in technical terms but also addresses the researcher’s personal history and preferences in conducting research (see especially the beginning of Chapter 3).

Plausibility. Plausibility refers to the ability of a research report to connect the world of what is depicted descriptively and conceptually, and the world of the readers’ personal and disciplinary experience: ‘Through plausibility, ethnographic texts make claims on readers to accept that the findings make a distinctive contribution to issues of common concern’ (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993, p. 595). The issue of whether a study makes sense to the reader can be satisfied, including normalizing methodologies and making the case for coherent theory. Convincing readers that the study has something distinctive to offer can be achieved by differentiating the findings and offering a singular contribution, and by building anticipation (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008).

This thesis satisfies the criterion of plausibility in several ways. To make sense to the reader, this research has situated itself into established research paradigms, traditions, and methodologies (sections 3.4–3.6). No unorthodox methodology or philosophical assumptions have been chosen, and examples are given of other studies in marketing and consumer research that have made similar methodological choices. Furthermore, this thesis prepares the reader throughout the first chapters of the manuscript that a model of sticky experience experiences across the customer journey will be developed. The thesis uses prior theory to conceptualize sticky experiences (see Chapter 2) and builds on what other highly regarded scholars in the field have done in the area of customer experience. To demonstrate that the study has something distinctive to offer to the marketing community, the thesis differentiates the

findings. More specifically, it critiques the convergence in the customer experience management literature on the smooth experience model and assesses the underlying assumptions of the model. It also seeks to develop a singular contribution – to develop a model of sticky experiences across the customer journey. By continuously comparing this new emergent model with the extant model, it juxtaposes the old with the new (see especially Chapter 4). The thesis has also aimed to build the readers' anticipation for this new model. For instance, it uses quotes and examples from the archival data to convey the excitement and unpredictability characteristic of sticky journeys in the introduction (see Chapter 1). The thesis delivers on the anticipated development of the sticky experience model in the findings in chapter 4, on the anticipated contribution to the discipline of marketing and consumer research in the theoretical discussion in Chapter 5, and on practitioners' potential interest in the findings' practical implications in the second part of Chapter 5 on practical implications.

Criticality. Criticality refers to the ability of a research report to elicit a reader's reconsideration of prevailing assumptions and believes: 'Finally, through criticality, ethnographic texts endeavour to probe readers to re-examine the taken-for-granted assumptions that underly their work' (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993, p. 595). Criticality can be achieved via strategies such as carving out room to reflect, probing readers to recognize and examine differences, and encouraging readers to imagine new possibilities (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Hogg and Maclaran, 2008).

This thesis addresses the criterion of criticality as follows. The thesis seeks to carve out room to reflect by providing in-depth reviews of the literature and phenomenon, for example taking readers back to a definition of human experience (Chapter 2, section 2.2) before reviewing key early works on customer experience and experiential marketing. Likewise, readers may pause and reflect on the assumptions underlying their own work when this thesis critically interrogates the assumptions underlying the smooth experience model, which is the dominant model in customer experience management. Some of the underlying dimensions, such as a focus on consistency and predictability, reach back to long-lasting marketing thought (see Chapter 2, sections 2.3 and 2.4) and may thus lead readers to pause and reflect on such well-established assumptions in the marketing literature. Throughout the manuscript, readers are pointed to differences between the existing and the emergent models. This is crafted in a way as not to dismiss long-lasting views held regarding experience predictability and the goals of smooth and streamlined journeys. Rather, the dominant model is contextualized and its boundary conditions (i.e.,

instrumental service categories wherein customers are jobbers seeking to get jobs done, see also the Discussion Chapter) are delineated. Finally, the thesis encourages readers to keep exploring the fascinating world of repeated experiences along long-term customer journeys and provides a table of sample avenues for future research (see table 8). The thesis does not argue that the smooth experience model and the sticky experience model are together exhaustive. Rather, these are two of the many possible models of how customers experience ongoing journeys and how firms can facilitate desirable journeys over time.

3.12 Summary

This chapter has laid out and justified the philosophical and procedural choices made regarding the methodology of this thesis. It has taken the reader through multiple sections: on the research questions aimed at theory building (section 3.2); on a general understanding of qualitative research in which this thesis is situated (section 3.3.); on the two research paradigms of positivism and interpretivism, the latter in which the thesis is embedded (section 3.4); on popular research methodologies in marketing research and the chosen methodology of market-oriented ethnography at multiple sites (section 3.5); on popular interpretive research traditions in marketing and the chosen tradition of hermeneutics (3.6); on the context selection (section 3.7); on the sampling strategy and sample group profiles (3.8); on the data collection via observations, interviews, and archival research (3.9); on the initial and final phase of data interpretation procedures (3.10); and finally, on the evaluation of this research using criteria for assessing both ethnographies and hermeneutic research (3.11). All the data were collected and analysed by the author.

The following chapter (4) presents the findings of this study. The aim of the Findings Chapter is to answer the following research question: How do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey? Accordingly, the findings section is structured to reflect these three phases of the overall customer journey. The section presents a model of sticky experiences that connect firm-side with customer-side themes into sets of higher-order claims across the customer journey.

4 Chapter 4. Developing the Sticky Experience Model

The overarching aim of this research was to better understand the evolution of sticky customer experiences across the customer journey. The marketing press uses the term sticky experiences to describe experiences that customers yearn to repeat (see Chapter 1). Based on the literature review presented in Chapter 2, this research has further described sticky experiences as relatively unpredictable, intensely emotional, and increasingly meaningful customer experiences.

This chapter presents the findings on how sticky experiences began, continued, and ended across the customer journey in the three research settings of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. The chapter explores both the firm and the customer side: on the firm side, it explores how the three services facilitated sticky experiences for their customers over time; and on the customer side, it explores how informants experienced their sticky customer experiences within the three services over time.

The data analysis revealed three critical, broad phases of the customer journey for informants. The first phase was about how and why informants started using a service, which typically included becoming aware of and curious about a service and rapidly getting a taste of the service's excitement. The second phase was about how and why informants continued using a service, which typically included an ongoing excitement about the varied nature of the service and an increasing involvement (e.g., interest, investment) in the service over time. The third phase was about how and why informants terminated a service, which typically included wellbeing related concerns about the overly consuming nature/potential of the service, or issues specific to the service (e.g., finding an exclusive partner on Tinder).

Accordingly, the chapter outline is as follows. At the core of the chapter are the research's findings on the beginning of sticky experiences (section 4.2), the continuation of sticky experiences (section 4.3), and the termination of sticky experiences across the customer journey (section 4.4). The beginning is referred to as the *initial service cycle*, which captures the first time someone uses a service. It is the part of the overall journey in which potential customers become aware of a service and have their first, initial, service encounter. The continuation is referred to as *subsequent service cycles*, which capture the second and all the following service encounters. Subsequent service cycles, in a traditional

understanding of the customer journey, capture the postpurchase phase and all the following purchase cycles throughout the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Finally, service termination is referred to as *termination trajectories*, which capture markedly reduced usage or termination of a service, and hence ends the sticky experience journey.

The next section (4.1) provides an overview of the key empirical outcome of this research, which is an emergent model of sticky experiences across the customer journey, or the sticky experience model in brief. This model spans the initial service cycle, subsequent service cycles, and termination trajectories of the customer journey. All four sections in this chapter compare the proposed model with the extant smooth experience model (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019), which is the dominant model on ongoing customer experiences across the customer journey in marketing. As will be shown, the sticky experience model and the smooth experience model are remarkably different in each of the three phases. It is hoped that revealing the similarities and differences between the two models might help to redress marketing's strong reliance on the smooth experience model and its focus on consistency and predictability at the expense of other customer experience management ideas, such as the emergent sticky experience model (see the Discussion Chapter).

The next section provides a big picture overview of the emergent model (and the extant model) for those readers who seek to see the whole before moving to the parts and the build-up of the model. The following three sections build up each stage of the proposed, emergent model, capturing how sticky experiences emerge, how they evolve, and how they terminate. (For a sticky experience model based on the preliminary findings from the initial round of data interpretation, see Appendix F).

4.1 Overview of the Sticky Experience Model

This section provides an overview of the emergent sticky experience model, which will be developed in detail, phase by phase, in the following three sections. The proposed sticky experience model traces the evolution of sticky experiences across three phases of the customer journey. These phases are called: initial service cycle, subsequent service cycles, and termination trajectories, as described in the introduction of this chapter. The model uses the conceptual vocabulary of *key firm capabilities* and

customer journey patterns to capture the firm and the customer side of the evolution of sticky experiences.

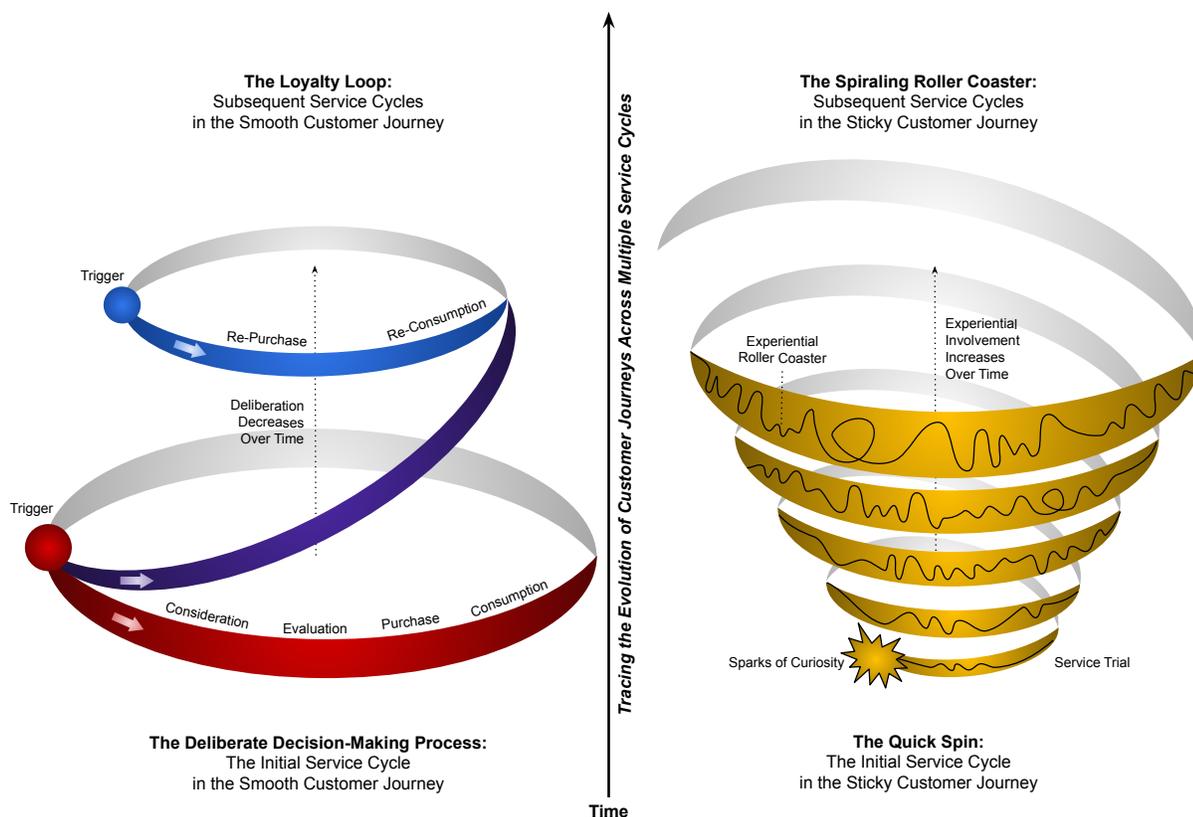
Firm capabilities are organizationally embedded patterns of processes and routines (Homburg *et al.*, 2017), which are widely held to be critical to successfully managing customer experiences (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Research on generalized customer experience management (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017) has included firm capabilities as a key layer of an overall management approach toward customer experiences. Research on more specific models of customer experience management, such as the smooth experience model (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015), has conceptualized key insights at the level of firm capabilities. The current research adopts the notion of firm capabilities to continue this well-established conceptual path and to enable a comparability of findings across customer experience management studies.

Customer journey patterns are experiential patterns that capture what customers live through across a certain phase of their customer journey. Customer journey patterns is an emergent term, that is, the term was not derived from prior research but was chosen over the course of this research as the most suitable term for the arising patterns in the customer-side data. This research began focusing on more common concepts such as touchpoints and moments of truth (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; see the findings from the initial round of data interpretation, Appendix F). However, seeking to understand the evolution of sticky experiences across multiple service cycles, the author realized that a higher-order concept was required to capture what informants were experiencing over time. In other words, attempting to understand repeated sticky experiences through the lens of more granular, lower-order concepts (e.g., touchpoints, service encounters) alone was not sufficient. The notion of customer journey patterns could better capture what happened from the customer's perspective over time (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010).

This section offers an overview of the emergent sticky experience model and outlines how it differs from the smooth experience model. Whilst the smooth experience model focuses on making customer experiences as easy and smooth as possible (Fleming, 2016), the emergent sticky experience model focuses on making customer experiences exciting and thrilling along the customer journey. These differences are illustrated in Figure 1, which provides a visual overview of the key customer journey

aspects of these two models. Figure 1 is followed by a description that supports understanding of the visualization. More detail on the parts of the model, including the key firm capabilities and how they are related, is provided in the next three sections on the three customer journey phases.

Figure 1: The Customer Journeys in the Smooth and Sticky Experience Models



Source:

Left side: Author’s visualization based on Court *et al.*; 2009; Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; see also Fleming, 2015; Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019.

Right side: Author.

Notes.

- (1) The lines represent customer journeys.
- (2) The continuity of these lines does not imply that customers are always continuously involved in the journey. Customers regularly switch among service journeys (e.g., using Tinder) and many other

daily activities (e.g., working, sleeping, eating). The continuous lines simply represent those times when customers are engaged with the focal service. Customers typically resume a service journey where they left off last.

- (3) Termination trajectories are not included in this visualization of smooth and sticky customer experience journeys for the sake of reducing the visualization to the active customer journey and thereby simplifying the model's visual depiction. For an overview of termination trajectories in each model, please see table 7.

To better understand this visualization of the customer journeys in the smooth and sticky experience models, the different firm capabilities and customer journey patterns can be summarized as follows. In the initial service cycle, the smooth experience model advises firms to *provide customers with informational support* to guide customers' experiential journey pattern of a *deliberate decision-making process* (Court *et al.*, 2009; Leboff, 2014; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). By contrast, this thesis reveals that the three hedonic services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder *provide customers with rapid entry* into the service to enable customers' key journey pattern of a *quick spin*, a spontaneous and quick process in which customers move from sparks of curiosity to personally experiencing a service.

In subsequent service cycles, the smooth experience model proposes that firms *streamline the customer journey* to lock customers within an ongoing journey pattern of a *loyalty loop*, an increasingly seamless cycle of consistent service experiences (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, the thesis reveals that the three hedonic services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go and Tinder use *endless variation along the customer journey* to enable customers' journey pattern of a *spiralling roller coaster*, a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement. The component of the experiential roller coaster is visualized in Figure 1 as the squiggly black line set against the yellow ribbon.

Finally, the smooth experience journey literature suggests the termination trajectory of *brand switching triggered by loyalty-weakening incidents* (Court *et al.*, 2017; Fleming, 2015; Hyken, 2018). By contrast, the thesis finds that, besides brand-specific reasons, the main termination trajectory is *service usage fluctuations fuelled by well-being related dissonance*, as sticky experiences can and often become overly consuming for customers. In the smooth experience model, customer deliberation

decreases over time (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Hyken, 2018). In the sticky experience model, customers' experiential involvement increases over time.

It is worth noting that the synthesis of the smooth experience literature and related customer experience management research was updated along the author's research journey. New literature was incorporated (e.g., Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019), and the entire body of research was reviewed again in light of higher-order concepts that could better capture key firm capabilities and experiential journey patterns in each phase of the customer journey. As a result of this refined review of a broader set of studies, higher-order concepts could be identified and the model simplified compared to the preliminary sticky experience model (Appendix F). Concretely, the more granular notions of the smooth experience model used to contrast the preliminary sticky experience model against, made way for higher-order concepts that encompassed several more granular notions. This provided not only a better understanding of the smooth experience model *per se*, but also enabled a more meaningful and refined comparison between the two models, one that reflected the latest state of customer experience management research.

The three tables (5–7) in the next three sections incorporated this enhanced understanding of both the literature and the refined model of sticky experiences. The comparison between the two models in these tables will show that the management of sticky experiences over time requires a specific set of customer experience management capabilities that are largely unaddressed by the smooth experience literature. The tables summarize these key capabilities and the corresponding customer journey patterns. The final round of data interpretation showed persistent patterns across the three cases and across the three phases.

The following three sections build the sticky experience model in three phases, the initial service cycle that begins the customer journey, subsequent service cycles that sustain the customer journey, and termination trajectories that end the customer journey. Data from all three research contexts (CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder) and from the three data sources (observations, interviews, and archival research) is used in these sections to unpack the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey.

4.2 The Initial Service Cycle

This section addresses the first part of the research question: ‘*How do sticky experiences emerge [...] across the customer journey?*’ In answering this question, this section begins to build the sticky experience model across the initial service cycle of the customer journey. To recap, the initial service cycle captures the first time someone uses a service; it is the part of the overall journey in which a potential customer becomes aware of a service and tries the service personally for the first time.

The first subsection (4.2.1) unpacks the firm-side finding that rapid entry is the key firm capability in the initial service cycle to facilitate sticky experiences. The following subsection (4.2.2) unpacks the customer-side finding that quick spin is the key customer journey pattern in the initial service cycle that entails sticky experiences. Together, the two findings provide an answer to the first part of the research question of how sticky experiences *emerge*, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey. The last subsection (4.2.3) summarizes the findings and contrasts them with the smooth experience model.

4.2.1 *Rapid entry: the key firm capability in the initial service cycle*

The finding of rapid entry describes a firm’s capability of rapidly on-boarding curious customers by focusing on mechanisms, such as easy account set-ups, minimal information requirements, and free service trials or free full service. The capability of rapid entry removes barriers to entry, enables ease of access and thereby helps to create personal, core service experiences fast.

The firm capabilities that facilitate the initial service cycle of smooth and sticky experience journeys are rather different—the former seeks to support the customer’s decision-making process, the latter attempts to circumvent that process altogether. The smooth experience model advises firms to provide customers with relevant informational support at each phase of their deliberate decision-making process, such as content marketing during the initial consideration phase and educational websites for the active evaluation phase (Court *et al.*, 2009).

By contrast, as the data presented in the next, customer-focused subsection reveals, sticky experiences typically begin with a spontaneous urge to try the service and a direct experience of the service shortly afterwards. The three firms in the data set typically gave informants a taste of the excitement as soon as their curiosity was sparked. In other words, these firms sought to facilitate a core service experience for the potential customer as instantly as possible. The three services removed many barriers to entry and made it easy for informants to access the service, as the description below illustrates. (For additional analysis of this theme, please see the findings from the initial round of data interpretation in Appendix F.)

For example, **CrossFit** gyms typically enable potential customers to enter their service rapidly by providing them with free taster sessions, low-cost beginner programs, and minimal paperwork. Some CrossFit gyms even offer potential customers a same-day orientation with coaches. The beginner service plan in the CrossFit gyms included in the data set was a low-cost one-month membership with no automatically renewing commitment, or a reduced-fee introductory program including a fixed number of one-on-one sessions with a coach (field notes). Based on the author's observations, and unlike traditional gyms, CrossFit gyms did not greet newcomers with gym tours, salesperson interactions, or a complex menu of service plans that necessitate deliberate decision-making. As CrossFit box owner Martin notes on his first interaction with potential customers, 'People already know that they want to do CrossFit' when he first interacts with them. His potential customers rarely seek detailed information such as available membership options. Accordingly, Martin focuses on providing newcomers with rapid access to sessions that leave them 'convinced to continue.'

The core CrossFit service begins when a new customer does a CrossFit workout with other existing athletes. The author observed several times that trainers introduce new customers to other athletes by name to begin their socialization process, which was also experienced directly by the author. It took the author a couple of days at most to go through this entire process in each of the CrossFit gyms included in this study. Feeling intensely sore after the gruelling first workouts always lasted much longer for the author. As the quotes from CrossFit athletes such as Karen and Jenny will illustrate in the next subsection, informants highly valued the rapid entry into the service experience that their CrossFit boxes had designed for them.

Pokémon Go enabled the informants in the data set to enter the actual game quickly and easily by providing a free mobile app, quick in-app set-up, and brief tutorial by the character Professor Willow who ends his introduction with ‘It’s time to GO!’ Professor Willow briefly explained the game’s mission for new users, introduced new users (each called ‘Trainer’) to the basic ideas of the game (e.g., that they have an avatar, that they can walk around in their physical surrounding to explore the game’s map, and that virtual fictional creatures called Pokémon exist), and illustrated how to catch one of three Pokémon that appear in the first gameplay session (field notes and screenshots).

The core Pokémon Go service begins when the new player sees their own avatar with a few PokéBalls to throw at one of three Pokémon nearby, making the first play very simple. Finally, before new players are encouraged to ‘GO’ and explore the game, new players choose their avatar’s style. The author chose the standard avatar style and quickly moved on, knowing that he could make changes at any point during gameplay. The entire process of understanding the basics of the game and getting ready to start playing the game took the author about 20 minutes. Informant stories such as Gordon’s (see the next subsection), who started playing the game on the go, outside, following his partner’s curiosity, show how the game’s reduced barriers to entry and fun introduction enabled even non-gamers without any background in other Pokémon games or merchandise to rapidly and easily embark on the gaming adventure.

Tinder enabled informants interested in the service to enter the service rapidly by, first, providing an application that could be downloaded for free on app stores and set-up anywhere, just like Pokémon Go. Moreover, Tinder ‘doesn’t ask for much from you as a user, aside from your current location and gender, it’s just your age, distance and gender preferences to start’ (Tinder, 2019, p. 1-2). All biographical information was and still is, at the time of this writing, optional. The app allowed informants (and still allows new users) to easily transfer Facebook photos into their Tinder profiles and gave them a quick introduction into the basic ideas and techniques of using the service (e.g., a swipe right indicates interest, a swipe left indicates disinterest, and a swipe up indicates much interest). This quick and easy set up enabled informants, including Anna, Charles, and Sebastian, to begin swiping through other users’ profiles within minutes and without much ado. (See next subsection.)

The core service begins when a new user sees a profile of another compatible user (i.e., a user fitting within the user's age, distance, and gender preferences; for example, being a woman in their 40s living within a ten-kilometre radius from the user). The author still remembers, and wrote down in his field notes, how he set up his Tinder profile in a hotel lobby waiting on a bus and started swiping during the bus ride between two cities in the United Kingdom. Even though the author had to set up the profile in accordance with ethical requirements of the research (see Chapter 3), the entire process took him less than 30 minutes. In stark contrast to how more deliberate customer decisions are typically made (e.g., Spenner and Freeman, 2012), downloading Tinder and starting to swipe can easily be done in various conditions, including coming home in the early morning after a long Saturday night party, as Sebastian shared informally before his interview.

As this subsection shows, the three brands have in common that they made it easy and fast for informants to have a personal experience of the actual service. CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder reduced barriers to enter the service, which also becomes clear when it is considered what these brands did not ask of their potential new customers. For example, CrossFit gyms did not ask potential customers to make complex purchase decisions about membership options before allowing them to have a taste of the service. Pokémon Go did not require new users to already be familiar with the Pokémon world, know much about gaming, nor to spend hours getting started. Tinder did not ask their users to answer dozens of questions (like previous generations of online dating services tended to do; Finkel *et al.*, 2012), craft detailed biographies, nor to find or edit suitable photos on their computers. In short, all three brands allowed curious potential customers to get what these customers wanted without much ado: have a personal, core service experience.

The service techniques that help to translate sparks of curiosity about a service into actual service trials (see the next subsection for a customer-side analysis) are conceptualized here as the firm's 'rapid entry' capability. This conceptualization highlights a speedy welcome of potential customers at the outset of a sticky experience journey. As soon as informants visited a service entry point, the three brands in the data set rapidly facilitated exciting service experiences by eliminating the tedious entry practices of most service industries (e.g., complex service plans, extensive questionnaires, servicescapes tours).

As the next subsection will show, informants highly sought to personally experience the service. The capability of enabling potential customers to enter a service quickly, easily, and freely made it possible for informants to do just that, without requiring them to worry about any substantial deliberate decision-making (e.g., Which 12-month subscription shall I choose?). In other words, reducing barriers to enter each service helped to facilitate the informants' desired experiences at the very beginning (i.e., of having a personal taste of the exciting service). In this way, rapid entry fits the phenomenological flow of the customer journey in the initial service cycle by removing barriers that might otherwise interrupt the movement from curiosity to action and service trials. The next subsection unpacks the customer-side findings on the initial service cycle.

4.2.2 Quick spin: the customer journey pattern in the initial service cycle

The finding of quick spin describes the customer journey pattern of quickly moving from curiosity to explore a service, sparked by enthusiastic third-party reviews, to the first service experience. The customer journey pattern of the quick spin is typically spontaneous and focused on personally experiencing the observed fun and excitement that a service offers according to others' reviews.

Customer experiences at the outset of smooth and sticky experience journeys are also different—the former is generally deliberate, the latter spontaneous. In the initial service cycle of the smooth experience model, the customer undertakes a deliberate decision-making process, beginning with an initial consideration of multiple brands (Court *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, at the outset of this research, it was expected that informants would have similarly deliberative beginnings of their sticky experiences.

For example, it was expected that athletic informants might consider multiple fitness services (e.g., Equinox, Orange Theory, Nuffield Health Gym) before signing-up for CrossFit. Yet, the author observed virtually no deliberate decision-making process in the data set. As Tinder user Dora said, 'I didn't do proper research about Tinder.' Rather, a 'really happy [friend] who met her husband through Tinder' prompted Dora to use the app. In fact, most of the informants' journeys began rather suddenly.

Informants' journeys with CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder often began with sparks of curiosity about the focal service rather than any deliberate comparative or evaluative decision-making. These sparks of curiosity were typically prompted by highly enthusiastic reviews from friends and acquaintances, who were often themselves existing customers of the focal service. For example, informant curiosity was sparked by a service provider and neighbour (Karen), the brother (Aron), or friends (Charles), all of whom offered enthusiastic focal service reviews. Informants were also sometimes exposed to these services through news, social media, and advertising, but what repeatedly stood out in their stories was the highly enthusiastic word-of-mouth.

Of course, such vicarious enthusiasm only affected the informants if the service complemented their own current life projects. For example, Karen was already a fitness enthusiast before she heard about CrossFit and Aron was already a passionate gamer before he heard about Pokémon Go. However, Charles heard about Tinder when he was in a relationship, so his exploration of the service was delayed to when he was single again. Regardless of the source (word-of-mouth, news, social media, or advertising), informants received enthusiastic reviews from social and external touchpoints like a 'Call to Adventure' (Vogler, 2007, p. 10). Informants were eager to follow the call because the promise of excitement was strong, the stakes seemed low and, importantly, the threshold of adventure (Vogler, 2007) was minimized through rapid entry.

For almost all informants, CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder delivered on the promise of excitement. Most informants felt a rush of excitement during their very first core service experience. For example, Karen discovered that 'there's no hiding or whining' in CrossFit, Aron discovered new places in his neighbourhood through Pokémon Go, and Charles saw Tinder as 'a game changer' for his dating life.

Next, the customer journey pattern of the quick spin will be explored in more detail in each of the three service contexts, using a selection of quotes from informants (including Karen, Aron and Charles) who talked about how they began their journeys as customers with CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. Informants' quick spins at CrossFit are considered first.

CrossFit. Most CrossFit informants (such as David, Jenny, John, Karen, Martin and Tara) became curious about the group fitness service following conversations with other people, including their

neighbours, friends, co-workers, and others in their existing fitness networks. These conversations were often the first-time informants heard about CrossFit. For example, Karen hears about CrossFit from her fitness instructor:

[My Bootcamp instructor] said to me: 'CrossFit, that's something you'll like' ... So, I said, 'Yes, all right!' And then a neighbour told me she had started at [a particular CrossFit box] and invited me to come by and give it a try... I went. (Karen, CrossFit athlete)

Karen was an active and sporty person who participated in Bootcamp fitness sessions (i.e., a group fitness programme that includes a variety of types of exercises and is typically done outdoors) when she heard about CrossFit. It is her instructor who told her that CrossFit was something that she would like, knowing her interest in fitness programmes that are intense and combine different sports. The conversation with her instructor about CrossFit made her curious to try the group fitness, and she replied 'Yes, all right!' to her instructor. In her interview, Karen said that she did not do a comparison or evaluation of CrossFit and other fitness options in her area. Rather, when a neighbour (a CrossFit newbie herself) shortly afterwards invited her to a CrossFit box nearby, she went along and had her first direct experience with CrossFit.

The theme of becoming curious to try a service based on the recommendations of others is common among CrossFit informants. In Karen's case, it was her Bootcamp fitness instructor at the time who made the recommendation and, as a result, lost her as a customer. Another enthusiastic CrossFit athlete, David, said: '[a friend] really went on about how good [CrossFit] was and he said I should try it. So, I decided I wanted to give it a go.' In Jenny's case, it was her co-workers from overseas who told her about the fitness service, as her quotes below will show.

The second key theme of the quick spin was excitement, which is a feeling of great enthusiasm and eagerness. CrossFit informants experienced an eagerness to try the service after receiving enthusiastic reviews, and personally experienced excitement in their service trials, as will be discussed later in this subsection. In CrossFit, excitement typically revolved around the intensity and variability of workouts for informants, which was often already mentioned in the word-of-mouth they received. Jenny recalled: 'The way I went about it was that I had heard a few things... mainly from Americans and Canadians who had basically said like this is the hardest workout they had ever done, and it really combines all

components of fitness.’ Jenny’s North American co-workers strongly suggested her to try the service for herself:

People are like, ‘Oh my God, you’d love it!’ [and] I was like, ‘Okay, cool, I’ll look into it.’ And you know with other gyms, it’s not normally that people do it all on recommendation, but this is really like, you can buy into it really quickly. So, then I just found one that was near work, and just dropped by, and was like, ‘Can I come and check out the gym?’ (Jenny, CrossFit athlete)

When Jenny heard about CrossFit through her co-workers, she frequently went to the gym and typically worked out between one to two hours, several times a week. Her colleagues at work told her that she would love doing CrossFit, knowing that she was interested in improving her fitness levels. This sparked her curiosity about the group fitness service, and she replied that she would investigate it, which she did shortly afterwards. Her co-workers’ enthusiastic reviews of CrossFit convinced her (‘you can buy into it really quickly’) to find a CrossFit box nearby, visit the box, and book a free class. Like Karen, David, and many other CrossFit informants (e.g., John, Martin and Tara), Jenny started her CrossFit journey rather spontaneously, on a whim, following enthusiastic word-of-mouth.

Informants’ excitement did not stop there but also included the personal service experience with the fitness service: the actual workout. Consider the following two quotes from Karen and Jenny.

I went [to the box] and was a little bit thrown into it and encouraged to join in the rough world of CrossFit... It’s a tough and honest sport where there’s no hiding or whining... we received an introduction, which was great, had to answer a few questions, and then we were set free. (Karen, CrossFit athlete)

When I saw the workouts, I was like, ‘Wow, that looks really tough!’ So, I wanted to do it. Because I think with CrossFit, it’s like a step up from fitness, so you could go to the gym and go on the running machine, or you could go cycling, or you know, you can lift a few weights, but CrossFit combines all of those things. (Jenny, CrossFit athlete)

In Karen’s initial personal experience at the local CrossFit box, she took a regular class with other members, but with some preparation and under special supervision of the trainer. She recalled being somewhat thrown into it and encouraged to join the ‘rough world’ of CrossFit. To her, this was a great start into her CrossFit adventure. She was drawn to the ‘tough and honest’ nature of CrossFit and enjoyed the fact that she was ‘set free’ to join in the action without much ado. The author had a similar

experience at Karen's CrossFit box, participating in a thrilling trial workout in which the coaches supported the author when needed but also encouraged him to work out as hard as he could (field notes).

When Jenny saw the workouts at her local CrossFit box, she was further intrigued. To her, the workouts looked 'really tough', and she could not wait to participate in a class. For CrossFit informants, the enthusiastic third-party reviews had evoked what consumer researchers have called vague expectations (Price and Arnould, 1993), which are unclear but emotionally charged expectations about what a service encounter will be like. In the hedonic unpredictable contexts of Price and Arnould's (1993) and the current research, these expectations included anticipated thrills, or uncertain states of excitement and fun. Vague expectations propel people to action as they seek to find out what an anticipated experience will be like. In this way, such expectations have a similar function as curiosity, which propels people to action by prompting them to fill knowledge gaps (Loewenstein, 1994) – here, to explore whether CrossFit delivers on the promise of excitement, as described in the enthusiastic reviews by third parties.

CrossFit primarily created excitement among the informants around the intensity and variability, or combination, of workouts. It is worth noting that CrossFit is generally known for its intense workouts (Fry, 2013), and the brand calls the winners of their global fitness competition (CrossFit Games) the fittest man/women on earth. CrossFit also highlights how varied its workouts are on their website (CrossFit, 2019), and local CrossFit boxes commonly incorporate such brand material on their own websites (field notes). These themes are associated with CrossFit in popular culture (Fry, 2013), and they are frequently communicated in the enthusiastic third-party reviews that informants received, as has been shown above.

As Karen further described later in her interview (see subsection 4.3.2 on the theme of roller coaster rides), the mixture of exercises and the intensity of the workouts proved to be two cornerstones of her immediate (and continued) excitement about the fitness regimen. As a result, she stopped doing Bootcamp classes and started dedicating time and energy toward CrossFit. Jenny's experience from the very beginning was that CrossFit is 'like a step up from fitness', a combination of so many things you can do at the gym and outdoors, in one exciting fitness format. Jenny was instantly excited to become

part of a group fitness programme that offered such mixed, intense, and shorter workouts than she was used to doing on her own at the gym. When the author did a workout together with Jenny a few months after she had started CrossFit, she had left the gym behind and had become a truly involved CrossFit athlete (see subsection 4.3.2).

Enthusiastic word-of-mouth about CrossFit sparked informants' curiosity about the fitness regimen when it resonated with informants existing life projects. For instance, the 'tough and honest' nature of CrossFit resonated with Karen, who was a sporty and strong person that had moved from specific sports (e.g., football) to more combined fitness programmes (e.g., Bootcamp) and who sought time and attention away from her difficult personal situation of the time. Jenny 'wanted to do' the combined and 'really tough [CrossFit workouts],' being a fit person who was becoming bored at the gym despite training hard and long hours, and who plateaued in her fitness more often than she liked to. Christine was a former competitive athlete who sought to stay fit over the colder months to successfully do her summer outdoor sports (e.g., downhill mountain biking). Martin was an athlete who sought to stay fit over the warmer months to successfully do his winter outdoor sports (e.g., downhill skiing). And one of David's life projects was to improve his fitness for his leading job in the British Army. As CrossFit coach Olivia said, many new athletes have a background in diverse sports and are excited about the (anticipated) effective combination of exercises in CrossFit.

Finally, informants' narratives illustrate how the quick spin is enabled by the fast and easy entering of the core service provision. Most CrossFit informants went from the initial spark of curiosity to a personal experience of an exciting CrossFit class on a whim. Almost none of the CrossFit informants reported a deliberate decision-making process about which fitness option to choose, nor a need for informational support from CrossFit. Besides brand-specific customer experience management activities (e.g., designing the CrossFit box), the capability of providing potential customers with a rapid entry into the core service experience was critical in the customer journey pattern of the quick spin. Informants such as David, Emily, Jenny, John, Karen, Martin, or Tara all started CrossFit shortly after they received word-of-mouth, either alone (Jenny) or together with others, including neighbours (Karen) and family members (Emily, Tara). The rapid entry capability ensured that they could get started on a whim, without much ado, and to join CrossFit members in free classes. One CrossFit box explicitly advertised this on its website, writing that CrossFit could only be experienced, followed by a

‘Book Your Free Session’ button. CrossFit’s rapid entry capability enabled informants to stay in the phenomenological flow of the quick spin – in the spontaneous urge to explore a service and get a taste of the anticipated excitement.

To sum up, CrossFit informants began their journeys rather spontaneously, following recommendations from their environment that made them curious about the service. It commonly did not take long until they arranged to have a personal experience of a CrossFit class. Informants described their experience of starting their CrossFit journeys as being exciting, which typically revolved around the themes of the intensity and combination of different fitness and sports elements in CrossFit, promising more exciting and effective workouts. Informants’ quick spins of CrossFit were enabled by CrossFit’s capability of rapid entry, facilitating the speed and ease of quick spins and minimizing interruptions of customers’ spontaneous, non-deliberate flows toward service trials. The customer journey pattern of the quick spin is considered next in the context of Pokémon Go.

Pokémon Go. In the context of Pokémon Go, informant interviews were also ripe with stories about the themes of curiosity and excitement about the game early on. Pokémon Go came out in the summer of 2016, first in North America and two weeks later in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. Aron, for example, heard about the release of the game through his brother, who lived in Canada and could play the game before most people in the United Kingdom could.

My brother tells me, ‘Pokémon Go is out in Canada. You walk around the city. And you pick up Pokémon.’ I’m like, ‘That is amazing. I definitely want to do that...’ There’ll be other people in the streets, like in a park, beside a lake looking for Water Pokémon, up a mountain looking for Rock Pokémon, ‘Amazing, let’s do it...’ (Aron, Pokémon Go player)

Aron and his brother share a passion about technology, and Aron was an avid gamer who was familiar with the Pokémon world (e.g., earlier Pokémon games and many of the virtual creatures called Pokémon) when he heard about the mobile game the first time. Interestingly, he was among the minority of informants with a background in other Pokémon games or activities. This familiarity, and his brother’s description, enabled him to imagine what it could be like to play the game: a social, ‘amazing’ experience in which players would explore their environment in search of Pokémon. Having enjoyed previous Pokémon games, receiving enthusiastic word-of-mouth from someone close to him,

and vividly imagining what the game could be like all contribute to sparking his curiosity and eagerness to play the game. His body language during the interview showed his excitement about this time, as he grinned from ear to ear, had his eyes wide open, and lifted his hands above his head.

Such private channels of word-of-mouth were not the only way through which informants became aware of and curious about the game. In the summer of 2016, the release of the game created a major buzz in the media and on the streets. (This buzz even surprised the company behind the game, Niantic, which did not expect the game's immediate massive success [Webster, 2017].) Part of Pokémon Go's early appeal was its novel combination of aspects: it was a mobile, augmented reality, online game that built on a relatively non-violent, existing world of virtual creatures (Pokémon) and required players to walk around outside (Lynley, 2016). The recent tendency in digital gaming to offer less violent mobile games that can easily be played on the go has contributed to creating a much larger target market for such games, including many more female players and older players than previous generations of digital games had (Alter, 2017). Pokémon Go added augmented reality to this mix (which made some informants like Tobias additionally curious at the beginning) and based its virtual game map on Google Maps' representation of the actual physical world, promising all players a locally grounded gameplay experience (see Aron's quote later in this subsection).

Informants received enthusiastic personal word-of-mouth (Aron) but also read about the game on the news (Ruth) and in their social media feeds (Marco), and couldn't help but notice the masses of people that seemed to be playing the game outside (Gordon). As Daniel recalled, '[Pokémon Go] was all over the media, it was all over the place.' In other words, informants noted a collective buzz and excitement around the game, way beyond Niantic's owned touchpoints (e.g., press releases) or expectations (Webster, 2017). Consider the following two quotes from Marco and Gordon:

I tend to follow like-minded people on Twitter and on the social network in general. For these people it was a big thing and it started to be really highly popular. I think it got released first in US and then it moved to other countries. So, the people I was following from the US were posting lots of pictures and it looked like they were having lots of fun and it was the killer app. So, after that I was just encouraged to try it, to be honest. And when it came out here, I put it up to see what it was about.' (Marco, Pokémon Go player)

[Pokémon Go] was just suddenly in the popular culture in my hometown. The street was full of people, walking around staring at their phones. My girlfriend's a teacher, and she wanted to know what [Pokémon Go] was like because all her kids were into it... So, we both installed it. (Gordon, Pokémon Go player)

Marco's quote nicely illustrates how the (social) media buzz around the game ('For these people it was a big thing and it started to be really highly popular', 'it looked like they were having lots of fun and it was the killer app') sparked informants' curiosity about the game ('I was just encouraged to try it') and prompted them to download the game to explore it for themselves ('to see what it was about'). Gordon started his Pokémon Go journey together with his girlfriend. In their case, it also was not a personal recommendation that propelled them to try the service, but their own observation that something was in the 'popular culture' and was being used by many people at different ages. Gordon's girlfriend sought to find out what the game was like and relate to her pupils, and his curiosity about the game was sparked as he became aware of the widespread adoption of it, and his partner's interest. Without giving it much thought, they both installed the game and started playing together.

Note that neither Marco nor Gordon, nor many other informants (e.g., Charles, Daniel, Joanne, Martha) were familiar with the Pokémon world. They picked up the game out of curiosity, eager to fill their knowledge gaps (Loewenstein, 1994) about what the game would be like, and whether it would be as much fun and as exciting as it looked like on the streets (Gordon), on social media (Marco), and on the news (Ruth). The author also noted the extraordinary buzz around the release of the game. A case in point where the thousands of videos posted within days of its release on the video platform YouTube, in which players described how they were 'addicted' to the game and ran into all kinds of (often humorously) depicted issues, such as partners wondering where they were and dogs being tired of the many walks (field notes).

Some informants (e.g., Julia, Tobias, Timothy) were so eager to play the game, and technologically savvy, that they did not wait until it was released in the United Kingdom. These informants created Apple or Google accounts in the United States to be able to play the game as soon as possible before its official release in the United Kingdom. Apple or Google accounts in the United States allowed these informants to play the game two weeks before most other people in their country, which provided them with an additional source of excitement. Julia was one of these informants.

I heard [Pokémon Go] was coming out as a game. But of course, it was coming out in America first. And [I thought] 'okay, I have to wait until the UK version comes out'... I made myself up an American iTunes account so I could get it [laughs]. So, I've been playing since the 13th July 2016... As soon as the UK version came out, I got it. I went back using my normal Apple ID... It was brilliant [laughs]. It was brilliant, yeah, it was... It was about two weeks before the UK came online... Then, everyone in the UK got it, and all the servers crashed. [Laughs]. And then it was fine, after that. It took a couple of weeks... Some people at [work] already had done exactly the same as I had, so we could get together at lunchtime and go on walks. (Julia, Pokémon Go player)

Julia shared in her interview that she was so excited when the game came out that she could not wait two more weeks before the game was released in the United Kingdom. She found it 'brilliant' to play the game, before most people around her did, and enjoyed the company of other players who had done the same at her workplace. Curiosity can create a strong urge to do something, not unlike an itch that wants to be scratched (Alter, 2017). Independently, Julia, others at her workplace, and informants such as Tobias and Timothy found a creative solution that enabled them to scratch their itch: to find out what it is like to play Pokémon Go and enjoy the fun of gameplay.

Enthusiastic third-party reviews about Pokémon Go sparked informants' curiosity about the game and motivated them to start playing it when it resonated with informants' **life projects** and/or circumstances. For instance, several informants (e.g., Aron, Julia, Gloria, Marco, Sahib, and Timothy) frequently played digital games in their spare time and were generally interested in exploring fun new games. Others were interested in new technologies more broadly (e.g., Dave, Jill, Martha, and Ruth), and Tobias was additionally interested in the augmented reality feature of the game. Daniel started the game on a family vacation as another joint activity with his son. Gloria had many leisure activities when the game came out and initially resisted downloading it ('You know, I know how addictive these things can get. And I thought Pokémon Go looked addictive. I know what that's like so I tried to resist it.). Eventually, as more and more people around her picked up the game, including her partner, she joined in the action and dedicated less time to other leisure activities. Despite their idiosyncratic differences, all informants shared a curiosity to get their first personal experience of the game, embedded within their social situations and life projects.

Once the game was released in the informants' area or made available through the informants' creative actions as described above, the actual set up of the game was easy and fast. Pokémon Go's rapid entry

capability enabled informants to access the actual game on the go, within minutes, only requiring them to have a smart phone and an account with one of the app store providers. In fact, most informants kept their descriptions of how they went from downloading the app to playing the game very short, if they described the process at all. Again, this illustrates what informants were truly interested in, which was getting a taste of the anticipated fun and excitement that they had read about, heard, or seen, as fast as possible. Making the ‘right decisions’ (Court et al., 2009) that are so central at this stage of the smooth experience model seemed to be of little relevance to them. What mattered was personally experiencing the game. Take Gordon and Aron’s continued stories.

We both installed it, went out playing, and carried on playing. But yeah, she wanted to relate to teenage kids. I didn’t expect this to happen! [laughs] Because I’m not a game player normally... I [had] read that [if] you walk away three times from the starters, then Pikachu [the game’s mascot] will appear. So, my first ever Pokémon was a Pikachu... then you do more walking and start evolving... (Gordon, Pokémon Go player)

Despite his unexpected, spontaneous picking up of the game, Gordon had become among the top ten players in the United Kingdom about two years after the game was launched (TL40 Data Team, 2018). As his quote above illustrated, Gordon applied a systematic approach to the game from the beginning. Before having his first playtime of Pokémon Go with his girlfriend, he read an online article about how to get started and found out about a way to catch the games’ mascot Pikachu first. Information and guidance about the game was readily available on the Internet, including in the technology and gaming sections of media outlets such as Forbes, gaming news sites, such as Kotaku.com, user-generated pages, such as Silph Road on Reddit.com, and user-generated videos on YouTube (e.g., Trainer Tips). Gordon’s exciting initial experience motivated him to explore other aspects of the game too, such as more walking to hatch eggs, powering up Pokémon to make them stronger, and evolving Pokémon (e.g., a pigeon-like Pokémon called Pidgey to a bigger bird Pokémon called Pidgeotto). These were the beginnings of his increasing involvement with the game, a finding that is unpacked fully in the next section on subsequent service cycles. The next vignette from Aron illustrates that the game was also appealing to informants beyond the virtual creatures themselves.

I walked around London for the whole afternoon and I was, like, I’ve never seen that statue before, I live five minutes away from it... did the little spinning thing, tell me about the avenue, and that was super cool. Thank you, Pokémon Go for that, interaction

with my environment and all that. Yeah, definitely. Tell me more. (Aron, Pokémon Go player)

During his initial playtime in London, Aron was excited not only about what he had envisioned (i.e., catching Pokémon along other players), but he emphasized in his interview that it was the things he learned about his neighbourhood that he appreciated the most. To properly play the game, players need to collect items from so-called PokéStops and Gyms, which are located at general places of interest in one's surrounding geographical area. An obvious example would be Tower Bridge in London. Another example would be a small statue, as Aron described above, or a restaurant or café. The author still remembers the joys of learning about the small statues situated at his workplace; it not only made him learn about things he did not know before, but also more mindful in general about his immediate surroundings.

The author also still remembers playing Pokémon Go in New York and almost shouting out loud when passing the café of the 1990s sitcom 'Friends,' being very excited to spin the PokéStop's disc, read the description about the café, and add the place to his visited PokéStops. To Aron, becoming more aware and learning about his neighbourhood was an unexpected aspect of the game that he found 'super cool'. While he had imagined discovering and catching Pokémon, he and other informants (e.g., Gloria, Jill, and Tobias) were surprised about the enhanced interaction with their environment enabled by the game. Aron's final words in the quote above, ending with 'tell me more', even express his gratitude toward the game to present him with such learning opportunities, and his eagerness to continue the adventurous journey.

To sum up, Pokémon Go informants also began their journeys on a whim, motivated by enthusiastic third-party reviews that made them curious about the service. They received such reviews through personal word-of-mouth (e.g., Aron from his brother), saw others playing the game (e.g., Gordon and his girlfriend), or read about the (upcoming) fun game online (e.g., Marco and Ruth). Informants tended to download and play the game as soon as they could, and some informants created foreign Apple/Google accounts to reduce the time they had to wait. Informants' quick spins were driven by an eagerness to find out what the game was like – to close this exciting knowledge gap (Loewenstein, 1994), with or without a background in gaming or the Pokémon world. Pokémon Go enabled them to quickly and easily flow along their quick spin journey by providing a rapid entry into the core

gameplay activities. Informants excitement at this stage tended to revolve around the virtual creatures (e.g., finding and capturing them), as well as the interaction with their actual environment (e.g., other people and places of interest) at a time of great public interest in the game. The customer journey pattern of the quick spin is considered next in the context of Tinder.

Tinder. The customer journey pattern in the initial service cycle in the context of Tinder was also what is conceptualized in this research as a quick spin. Informants who had experience with Tinder began using the online dating app in similar ways to how informants began using CrossFit and Pokémon Go, having similar experiences around the themes of curiosity and excitement. For example, Charles shared how he became curious to try Tinder.

When Tinder first came out, I was still in a relationship, so I never really played it, but I saw my mates play it, and I thought the idea of it was amazing in the sense that, you literally just swipe, 'Yeah, I think she's hot!' or 'No, not for me!' And then if you did get a match out of it, I think that's hilarious, but I wasn't able to [try Tinder at that time]... When I became single, [I] was able to actually try Tinder for myself. I was like, 'Alright, let's see what the hype's about' (Charles, Tinder user)

Charles recalled that he was still in a relationship when Tinder came out and his friends started using it, so he had to delay using the app until he was single again. Nevertheless, his **curiosity** was sparked considerably when he observed his friends' use of the app, finding the idea of swiping through one profile after another 'amazing' and 'hilarious' at the same time. While his moral standards prevented him from personally using the app during his relationship, he eagerly checked out the app after his relationship ended.

Charles's curiosity and anticipated excitement about Tinder was focused on the app's provision of profiles that could be checked out and assessed through the simple mechanism of swiping left and right, as well as the chance to receive matches and proceed with dating activities. In other words, part of his and many other informants' (e.g., Anna, Donna, Roberto, and Sebastian) fascination with Tinder was based on the visual thrills of looking at pictures of potential dating and mating partners. While Tinder differs from more sexualized adult online dating/mating apps or websites that often show (half-)nude pictures of users, Tinder users' photos often depict users in swimwear and in potentially arousing settings, such as on beds, at the beach and at bars or night clubs. In this sense, Charles' and other

informants' curiosity about Tinder illustrates a certain level of anticipated voyeurism, of being eager to experience the pleasures of screening pictures of 'hot' (and not so hot) and potentially available singles on the dating market, all through one's smart phone. Sebastian's quote below speaks more directly to the second part of what made informants eager to try the app, namely the chance to date and mate with others.

I've always thought [Tinder] was funny and I saw that there was such an interest among girls and boys. Sounds exciting... I don't know if it was romanticized but I first heard from [a friend] that he has quite a few friends that ended up in a relationship via Tinder. And then there were these stories of one-nightstands. And both are interesting...
(Sebastian, Tinder user)

Sebastian was aware that Tinder existed before he eventually tried the service himself. While being in an exclusive relationship for a long time, he thought Tinder was 'funny' and found it exciting that there seemed to be such an interest in the app, also from women. Like for most informants, enthusiastic stories from friends and acquaintances as well as personal observations prompted Sebastian to try the app himself, after being single again. Friends had shared stories about relationship-formations and one-nightstands, both of which triggered his curiosity. He approached his Tinder journey with an open mindset and only vague expectations (Arnould and Price, 1993) at best of what to expect.

Charles's quote, above, illustrated more clearly the allure of the somewhat voyeuristic thrills of seeing and swiping through potentially attractive profiles. Sebastian's quote in turn illustrates more the allure of the outcomes of these activities, which may range from exclusive relationships to one-nightstands. Stories about these romantic and/or sexual outcomes proved 'sticky' to many informants, as understood by Heath and Heath (2007): they were easily understood, remembered, and influenced informants' behaviours as they often prompted them to try the app. For instance, Dora was eager to try Tinder after observing and hearing her married friends' stories about how they met on Tinder. Enrico was encouraged by his friends to 'go on Tinder and try to have fun' after being rejected by someone he had fallen in love with. And Roberto recalled that he was 'Fascinated by that facility that [his peers] had to find dates and people to go out with,' and he tried the app almost immediately after becoming single again.

These examples from Tinder informants also illustrated that their sparks of curiosity about Tinder only led to actual service trials when they resonated with their personal circumstances and life projects. For example, Charles, Obasi, Sebastian, and Roberto waited until their exclusive, long-term relationships had ended before using the app, even though their curiosity had been sparked previously and they were eager to use Tinder. Enrico was single when he became aware of the hype around Tinder and tried the app almost instantly to find out what it was like: ‘At some point [Tinder] was becoming trendy... It was all over the place, in the voice of everybody. So, I decided, okay, let me try this thing, let’s see how it goes.’ Others, like Anna and Donna, ‘had a lot of reservations at first’ (Anna) due to Tinder’s reputation as a ‘superficial’ (Anna) hook-up app. They only became excited and motivated to try the app when they received more positive word-of-mouth that resonated with their life projects. Donna recalled:

I remember when Tinder first came along, I wasn’t interested in it because its reputation was for being like a hook-up [service]. I wasn’t looking for that. So, I didn’t use it. But then I think, word of mouth got out that people were actually using it to date and it was the one that everyone was using. So, I gave it a shot. And I remember when I first started using it ... It was like candy. It was like being in a candy store. I remember matching with like hundreds of guys, all super-hot and I was getting a million messages and it was really addictive. (Donna, Tinder user)

Donna’s quote illustrates, once again, how word-of-mouth made informants curious to try a service. Donna moves swiftly from receiving resonating word-of-mouth to using the app without comparing and evaluating different options, as the smooth experience model would predict (Court *et al.*, 2017). Her description of what it was like when she first started using Tinder highlights the allure of both themes discussed above: the somewhat voyeuristic pleasures of seeing others’ profiles (‘like being in a candy store’) and the thrilling (potential) outcomes of using Tinder (‘matching with like hundreds of guys, all super-hot’). The arousing/stimulating nature of these experiences made Tinder ‘really addictive’ for her (see also Donna’s quote in the next section on subsequent service cycles). In the next vignette, Sebastian described what it was like for him to set up and use Tinder the first time.

You simply log in via Facebook and then you upload photos, write something in your profile and you’re done!... I was not on any other [dating site]... It was exciting, because you see a lot of different people, very pretty people... and then also totally not pretty people too... It’s very diverse. (Sebastian, Tinder user)

Sebastian explained that the actual process of downloading and setting up Tinder was fast and easy, which enabled him to start swiping almost instantly. He did not use any other dating apps at the time, nor did he compare different options before starting his Tinder journey. Tinder's rapid entry capability enabled Sebastian to stay within the exploratory, spontaneous flow of his initial service cycle. The steps along his journey included logging in via Facebook, uploading photos from Facebook, writing something in this profile (which is not mandatory), and, as required of all users before they can start swiping, setting his dating preferences (age range, gender, and distance; field notes). He did not have to answer dozens of questions, as was common for many other dating services (Finkel *et al.*, 2012), nor find photos on his computer, nor provide an elaborate description of himself. Tinder's rapid entry capability removed all those barriers to a quick and easy entry into the core service experience. In a similar vein, Anna described getting started on Tinder as 'user-friendly', because it only requires a 'Facebook-profile' and access to an app store and installing and opening Tinder can be 'done in 5 minutes'. Other tasks of adding information and material were mostly 'optional', and she was done with the standard tasks of preference selection quickly and easily.

In his quote above, Sebastian also succinctly summarized his initial personal experience using Tinder: 'it was exciting'. He described the source of this excitement as the 'diverse' nature of the people he saw on Tinder. This notion of exciting diversity of Tinder profiles is echoed in CrossFit informants' stories about the exciting combinations of exercises (e.g., Jenny and Karen) and Pokémon Go informants' stories about the exciting appearance of different Pokémon and surprise learnings about ones environment (e.g., Aron and Ruth). Moreover, Sebastian saw a lot of 'very pretty people', which speaks to the appeal of seeing and swiping through stimulating visual content, as the quotes from Donna and Charles above have illustrated.

Charles had downloaded the app, set up his profile, and started swiping to 'see what the hype's about'. Like Sebastian and Donna, he was not disappointed. In fact, picking up Tinder was 'definitely a game changer' for his dating life. While Charles is a good-looking, social young man with several circles of friends and opportunities to meet new people, he was excited that Tinder enabled him to check 'what's out there' in his hometown and elsewhere. He summarized his experience with Tinder from the very beginning by describing the app as a 'very, very good idea'. (For more about his Tinder journey, see Appendix F).

To sum up, the findings indicate that Tinder informants also began their journeys as a quick spin: enthusiastic and resonating third-party reviews (including direct observations that amazed informants like Charles, and word-of-mouth that convinced informants like Donna) sparked informants' curiosity about the dating app and led them to personally use the app when their circumstances allowed it (e.g., when they were single). Informants' curiosity and excitement about Tinder revolved around the possibility of checking out potentially attractive user profiles, which evinced a dash of voyeurism, and the potential to have romantic and/or sexual encounters with matched users. Tinder's rapid entry capability enabled curious informants to get a taste of the core service provision quickly and easily, without having to deliberate over membership options or personality questions, and thereby enabled informants to follow through on their eagerness to 'see what the hype's about' (Charles).

This subsection has presented the customer-side findings on the initial service cycle of the customer journey in the three hedonic contexts of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. The findings indicate that the initial service cycle for customers is a quick spin. The quick spin describes a customer journey pattern of quickly moving from curiosity about a service, which is typically sparked by enthusiastic third-party reviews, to an initial personal service experience. This initial experience is typically exciting and mostly positive, fulfilling customers' vague expectations about getting a taste of an exciting new service.

The journey pattern of the quick spin is illustrated by informants' stories, the author's observations, and archival material, as presented in this subsection. The content of informants' curiosity and excitement differed among the three contexts. For instance, it revolved around varied and intense workouts in CrossFit, numerous Pokémon and fun of exploring one's surroundings in Pokémon Go, and diverse and potentially arousing profiles and fruitful encounters in Tinder. Yet what these informants shared was a heightened level of curiosity and excitement that entailed an eagerness to try something that they anticipated as being exciting and fun, and to try it on a whim, without much or any deliberation. With vague expectations (Price and Arnould, 1993), they sought to close gaps in their knowledge (Loewenstein, 1994) and find out what a (hyped and/or enthusiastically recommended) service was like. The next subsection summarizes the initial service cycle in the emergent sticky experience model and contrasts the findings with the smooth experience model.

4.2.3 Summary of the initial service cycle

To summarize the initial service cycle in the ‘sticky’ experience journey, this subsection first offers descriptions of the key concepts of rapid entry and quick spin. The concept of **rapid entry** denotes a firm’s capability of rapidly on-boarding potential customers by focusing on mechanisms such as easy account set-ups, minimal information requirements, and free service trials or free full service.

Providing rapid entry removes barriers to entry, enables ease of access and thereby helps to swiftly facilitate core service experiences. Evidence of the rapid entry capability in the contexts of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder was presented in subsection 4.2.1.

The concept of the **quick spin** denotes the customer journey pattern of quickly moving from a curiosity to explore a service, sparked by enthusiastic third-party reviews such as word-of-mouth, to the first core service experience. The quick spin is typically focused on directly experiencing the observed fun and excitement that a service seems to offer. As illustrated by informant data from all three service contexts in subsection 4.2.2, the concept of the quick spin is characterized by spontaneity, speed, enthusiasm and eagerness, and actions on a whim. Beyond emphasizing the lack of deliberate decision-making, this label emphasizes the rapid escalation of customer interest, from enthusiastic third-party reviews (observed excitement) to the sparks of curiosity (anticipated excitement) to the first service experience that delivers on the promise of excitement (realized excitement). Although customers only intend to try the service, once they personally experience the excitement and fun, they are often swept up into subsequent service cycles, again without much deliberation. The mechanisms of this ongoing journey will be fully examined in the next section.

The initial service cycle with its key customer journey pattern of the quick spin is illustrated below in figure 2 which is a cropped version of figure 1 that only depicts the initial service cycle.

Figure 2: The Initial Service Cycle in the Customer Journey



With its two concepts of rapid entry and quick spin, the initial service cycle conceptualized here is remarkably different from the initial service cycle in the smooth experience model (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). In the smooth experience model, customers live through a deliberate decision-making process, seeking to make the right decision on a typically complex task (Court *et al.*, 2009). This research has revealed that future customers of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder live through a quick spin, seeking to get a taste of the service, often on a whim.

In the smooth experience model, firms are advised to provide customers with relevant support, from content marketing to evaluation tools and informative packaging (Court *et al.*, 2017; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). The current research has revealed that CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder provide above all a rapid entry into their core service provision, free of charge and with minimized barriers to enter the service. The differing concepts of the smooth experience model and the emergent sticky experience model are summarized in table 5 below.

Table 5: The Initial Service Cycle in the Customer Journey: Smooth versus Sticky Experience Model

The Extant Smooth Experience Model	The Emergent Sticky Experience Model
Key Firm Capability: Providing Customers with Relevant Support. To win over customers during	Key Firm Capability: Providing Customers with Rapid Entry. To rapidly

<p>their decision-making process, firms primarily focus on providing customers with relevant informational support at each phase of the process. Examples include (1) content marketing during the initial consideration phase, (2) educational websites for the active evaluation phase, (3) in-store advertising at the moment of purchase, and (4) informative packaging and brand news to enhance the consumption experience (Court <i>et al.</i>, 2009, 2017; Court <i>et al.</i>, 2017; Spenner and Freeman, 2012).</p>	<p>on-board customers as soon as their curiosity is sparked, firms primarily focus on rapid entry mechanisms such as easy account set-ups, minimal information requirements, free service trials or full service, special beginners' offers, or low-cost subscriptions for new customers.</p>
<p>Customer Journey Pattern: A Deliberate Decision-Making Process. The initial service cycle is conceptualized as a highly deliberate customer decision-making process with four competitive phases or 'battlegrounds' (Court <i>et al.</i>, 2009, p. 98): (1) initial consideration of multiple brands; (2) active evaluation of those brands; (3) moment of purchase; and (4) consumption experience. This highly deliberate beginning is visualized in the smooth experience model as a large outer circle (see figure 1 left-hand side).</p>	<p>Customer Journey Pattern: A Quick Spin. The initial service cycle is often spontaneous. Enthusiastic reviews from external touchpoints, especially from other customers, spark customer curiosity to explore whether the service delivers on its promise of excitement. This customer journey pattern is conceptualized as the 'quick spin.' This low involvement beginning is visualized in the sticky experience model as the narrow bottom end of a widening upward spiral (see figure 1 right-hand side).</p>

To sum up, the first building blocks of the sticky experience model are the concepts of rapid entry and quick spin. Rapid entry is the key firm capability used to enable potential customers a direct core service experience quickly, easily, and freely. Quick spin is the key customer journey pattern experienced by customers as they quickly move from a spark of curiosity about a service to directly experiencing the excitement of the service. Both of these concepts differ from their counterparts of

relevant (informational) support and the deliberate decision-making process in the initial service cycle of the smooth experience model.

This section has addressed the first part of the research question, ‘*How do sticky experiences emerge [...] across the customer journey?*’ Sticky experiences emerge through quick spins in the initial service cycle. Quick spins are facilitated by the capability of rapid entry, which enables customers to rapidly move along the initial service cycle toward exciting service trials. The first subsection has unpacked the firm-side finding of the rapid entry capability. The second subsection has unpacked the customer-side finding of the quick spin. Finally, this subsection has provided succinct descriptions of these two key findings and outlined the differences between the initial service cycles in the smooth and emergent sticky experience models. The next section presents the findings on the subsequent service cycles of the customer journey in the three research contexts.

4.3 Subsequent Service Cycles

This section addresses the second part of the research question: ‘*How do sticky experiences [...] evolve [...] across the customer journey?*’ In answering this question, this section continues to build the sticky experience model across the subsequent service cycles of the customer journey. To recap, subsequent service cycles capture the second and all the following service encounters; in a traditional understanding of the customer journey, subsequent service cycles encompass the postpurchase phase and all the following purchase cycles in the overall journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Simply put, this section examines what made informants use the three services again and again, and what did the brands do to keep informants using the services again and again. At this point in the customer journey, informants had experienced a quick spin, having moved quickly and easily from a spark of curiosity to a personal and typically exciting first experience of the core service (i.e., doing a CrossFit workout, playing Pokémon Go, and swiping through Tinder profiles the first time). The three brands had provided informants with a rapid entry into the service by removing barriers to entry, such as up-front payments, complex options, and lengthy questionnaires. The excitement and fun of the first core service experiences was typically enough to motivate informants to use the service again a second

time. Yet, it remained unclear what kept informants coming back again and again over days, weeks, months, and even years of their customer journey. This is explored in the next two subsections.

Subsection 4.3.1 unpacks the firm-side finding that endless variation along the customer journey is the key firm capability in the subsequent service cycles to facilitate sticky experiences. Subsection 4.3.2 unpacks the customer-side finding that the spiralling roller coaster is the key customer journey pattern in subsequent service cycles that entails sticky experiences. Together, the two findings provide an answer to the second part of the research question of how sticky experiences emerge, *evolve*, and eventually conclude across the customer journey. Subsection 4.3.3 summarizes the findings and contrasts them with the smooth experience model.

4.3.1 Endless variation: The key firm capability in subsequent service cycles

The finding of endless variation describes a firm's capability of perpetuating experience unpredictability for customers by using an expansive and evolving system of service elements and foregrounding a unique configuration of service elements at every (core) service encounter.

Accordingly, the capability of endless variation includes three key features: an expansive service system, a dynamic service system, and unexpected service encounters. Together, these features ensure low experience predictability and provide customers with multiple learning opportunities and challenges across the customer journey.

The capabilities that firms use to manage subsequent service cycles of smooth and sticky experience journeys are remarkably different. The smooth experience model advises firms to focus on streamlining the customer journey using techniques that collectively ensure high experience predictability for the customer over time (Edelman and Singer, 2015, Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). These techniques include making customer interactions as easy as possible (simplification), tailoring aspects of the service to customers' established preferences (personalization), and providing customers with just-in-time support at each journey touchpoint (contextualization).

In contrast, the (firm-centred) data analysis revealed that CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder focused more on providing customers with infinitely variable configurations of the core service. This rendered

the service experience hardly predictable for customers over time. Viewed from the smooth experience model, such unpredictability is not desirable and likely counterproductive to keeping customers (Fleming, 2015; Hyken, 2018). However, the allure of unpredictable experiences has been demonstrated in many areas of research on hedonic, leisure market offerings, such as entertainment (Alter, 2017), gambling (Schüll, 2004), gaming (Calleja, 2011), outdoor adventures (Arnould *et al.*, 1998), and stock market investing (Zwick and Dholakia, 2006). This research suggest that unpredictability creates a sense of adventure that keeps customers excited.

For example, viewers become ‘hooked’ more easily on dramatic TV serials with unpredictable and complex plotlines that leave them with unresolved issues after each episode (Alter, 2017); gamblers keep coming back for the continued thrills of intermittent wins facilitated by the purposively designed variable-ratio (and hence unpredictable) reward schedules of machine and online gambling (Schüll, 2004); and gamers find that the ‘unpredictability of outcomes leads to meaningful and compelling experiences’ (Iacovides *et al.*, 2015, p. 224), which contributes to keeping them involved and returning to the game (Calleja, 2011; see Chapter 2) These various streams of research indicate that experience unpredictability can keep customers ‘hooked’, even addicted in the pathological sense (Schüll, 2004), and that an exciting variability of the market offering can be a key contributing factor.

The data analysis in this thesis revealed three unpredictability-creating techniques that are common among CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. Together, these techniques are conceptualized herein as the endless variation capability, and the remainder of this subsection describes and illustrates them within each context. (The finding of endless variation is related to the theme of randomization, which resulted from the initial round of data interpretation and is described in Appendix F.)

One technique across the three case studies is a highly expansive set of service system elements (i.e., *expansive service system*). For example, the CrossFit experience typically involves innumerable exercises adapted from global sports and fitness traditions (Glassman, 2002) in a large, gymnasium-style, indoor-outdoor work-out space (‘box’) equipped with considerable work-out gear from jump ropes to kettlebells to pull-up bars. The Pokémon Go game involves hundreds of virtual creatures for players to catch (‘Pokémon’), countless real-world locations to collect game-relevant tools (‘PokéStops’) and battle rival teams (‘Gyms’), and an elaborate reward structure that includes coins,

medals, and points. The Tinder service involves profiles of millions of registered users that are presented to other users, one by one in Tinder's 'Discovery' section, and a list of matched users along with potentially unlimited personal messages that can be exchanged among matched users (compiled based on filed notes).

A second common technique is an open-ended service system that keeps evolving through the addition, subtraction, and transformation of firm-owned, customer-owned, and external service elements (i.e., *dynamic service system*). For example, CrossFit boxes design novel workouts daily, coaches add their own flair, and athletes collaborate with changing work-out partners at different skill levels across time. Pokémon Go's service system keeps evolving with new Pokémon, items, features, and events, some of which are time-limited (e.g., Halloween Pokémon events), linked to environmental forces such as the weather (via a dynamic weather gameplay system; Pokémon Go, 2017), and dependent on communal efforts (e.g., group raids and global challenges). Tinder's pool of registered users is constantly changing as new users join the app and existing users take a break from the app. The dating platform itself evolves through the introduction of new features such as a daily renewed list of ten available profiles ('Top Picks') and new subscription models (e.g., Tinder Gold) (compiled mainly based on field notes).

A third common technique is actively maintaining low experience predictability to create unexpected service encounters, even for seasoned customers (i.e., *unexpected service encounters*). Firms perpetuate such unpredictability by foregrounding a unique configuration of service elements for the customer at each and every service cycle. For example, each CrossFit workout of the day is a unique mix of aerobic/anaerobic, individual/partner, and often indoor/outdoor exercises. Playing Pokémon Go involves an unpredictable journey of catching Pokémon with different individual values ('IVs'), hatching eggs, battling other teams, and sometimes doing group raids. Using Tinder involves swiping through a fresh set of profiles, advancing conversations with matches, and potentially setting-up new off-platform dates (compiled based on field notes). In this manner, no two CrossFit workouts (Fry, 2013), Pokémon Go walkabouts (Lynley, 2016), or Tinder sessions (Bosker, 2017) are ever the same.

Together, these three service techniques are conceptualized as the firm capability of endless variation. The capability of endless variation ensured that informants' experiences with the services remained

hardly predictable over time. As will be shown in the next subsection, this experience unpredictability was highly exciting for informants. It provided informants with countless learning opportunities and challenges to overcome, facilitated thrilling states of suspense (i.e., states of excited and at times anxious expectation or uncertainty about what may happen), and thereby turned informants' journeys into ongoing adventures. Next, the capability of endless variation is illustrated in more detail in each research context, to offer a more comprehensive picture of what informants encountered in the services.

CrossFit creates experience unpredictable mainly through the brand's 'constantly varied' (Glassman, 2002, p. 2) workouts. These workouts typically include a dynamic warm-up, a skills development module or weight-lifting segment, and a high-intensity workout-of-the-day (WOD). Each of these modules can include countless different exercises (e.g., box jumps, cleans, push-ups, running, squats) from different fitness and sport traditions. Workout modules are further varied by repetitions and their temporal ordering (e.g., 10 clean-and-jerks every minute on the minute [EMOM] or a trio of exercises for as many reps as possible [AMRAP]). As CrossFit Chief Executive Officer Greg Glassman (2002, p. 1) said, 'Five or six days per week, mix these elements in as many combinations and patterns as creativity will allow. Routine is the enemy.'

Accordingly, the core service at CrossFit for the informants was a 45 minutes to one-hour, constantly varied, group-training class. As the author observed during his CrossFit classes, the warm-up was customized and changed daily to prepare athletes for the segments that followed (field notes). Warm-ups included static stretches (e.g., the hip-flexor stretch), dynamic stretches (e.g., the side shuffle), and other creative activities. For example, during one class, a coach had athletes do a push-up challenge to the Moby song 'Flowers.' When athletes heard 'up,' they pushed up and stayed up, and when they heard 'down,' they returned to a basic plank position. The challenge stemmed from the song's main lyric, 'green Sally up and green Sally down,' which repeated about 30 times in 3 minutes, making for an extraordinarily challenging warm-up.

Next, the weight-lifting or skills development segment could focus on one compound exercise (e.g., back squat, clean and jerk, power snatch), or combine multiple exercises. The number of rounds and repetitions were posted on a large screen (in one CrossFit box in the data set) or written on a white-

board (in two CrossFit boxes in the data set). Athletes could scale the weights and seek the coach's suggestions if needed, which the author regularly did.

Finally, the WOD is the most fast-paced segment of the class. A WOD can include not only weight-lifting movements, but also gymnastics (e.g., pull-ups, rope climbs, lunges) and metabolic conditioning (e.g., running, biking, rowing). Some work-outs felt harder than others, depending on the author's and the informants' unique abilities and other contextual factors such as the camaraderie or competition with one's partner, the coach's demanding or easy-going demeanour, and even just the hot or cold weather conditions. Coaches often encouraged athletes to beat their personal record, and sometimes adjusted athletes' weights during the workouts. The author observed one of these instances in a class together with informant Jenny, who recalled:

In my mind I was doing that workout and I was like 'do you know what, I'm killing it' And then I come in and [coach and informant Olivia] increases the weight and you think, 'Okay, now this is really tough'. And, you know, I could do it, I could get through that workout. But it's only because someone pushed me in a way that I didn't even think of doing. That's a prime of example of what you'll have in every class. And maybe that's how you get better and progress and train. Whereas if you turn up to the same class week in week out in a gym and you do the same thing, your body, your muscles will get muscle memory and you'll just plateau and your fitness won't change and your body won't change and you'll get bored, you'll get so bored of it. Whereas CrossFit changes all the time so. It keeps it fresh. (Jenny, CrossFit athlete)

Jenny's quote illustrated how many informants responded to the experience unpredictability facilitated by CrossFit: they were excited and happy (at least in retrospect) about being challenged and given the opportunity to make progress, as will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection. All informants, including Alan, Jenny, John, and Karen, highly valued that CrossFit 'keeps it fresh' (Jenny) and prevented them from becoming 'bored' (Jenny), which many did at other sports (e.g., at the gym [Jenny] or playing football [Karen]).

Additional experience unpredictability can arise from the inherent variability of social touchpoints such as the CrossFit coaches [see Jenny's story above], training partners, team competitions, social events, and ever-changing membership. Given that CrossFit boxes and workouts often span the outdoors, the weather is yet another source of unpredictability. A workout that includes several 100m runs can feel like an extraordinary challenge on a hot summer day. But even doing an unexpected run can be an

extraordinary challenge and offer great rewards, as Emily experienced: It was a really nice feeling finishing one of the workouts... One of our workouts one day was literally just run 5km, and I was like, 'oh my God, you must be joking'. I've never run 5km in my life. I can barely run 800m when you make me do that.

Finally, some CrossFit boxes posted the WOD online while others revealed them only inside the box before classes started (field notes). Some athletes sneaked a peek at the WOD on their way to the gym after work, because knowing what's coming can jump-started the excitement. Many others, like Alan and Emily, took pleasure in maintaining the suspense until they arrive (see next subsection). As discussed here, key informant experiences at CrossFit, such as suspense, excitement, overcoming challenges, and making progress, were closely linked to CrossFit's provision of endless variation at their core service encounters. (The next subsection will discuss these customer themes in more detail.)

Pokémon Go created experience unpredictability for informants through various means. To begin with, the game draws its titular creatures from the existing Pokémon universe of more than 800 Pokémon across seven generations. Pokémon Go offered informants and other users an elaborate game structure, including 40 levels, rewards such as bronze, silver, and gold medals, and different points for in-game actions. The game's tagline, 'Gotta catch 'em all,' refers to the goal of catching every Pokémon type by throwing PokéBalls at them. When informants spoke about filling their Pokédex (such as Ruth below), they referred to this aspect of the game.

The author took many field notes and collected secondary data about how the company behind Pokémon Go (i.e., Niantic) kept the game interesting. For example, Niantic kept releasing new Pokémon into the game as well as new items (e.g., raid passes) and features (e.g., 'Dynamic Weather Gameplay' [Pokémon Go, 2017, p. 1] that adapts the game according to local weather conditions). Niantic also changed existing features (e.g., the gym structure) and regularly released special Pokémon for a limited time (e.g., Legendary Pokémon), and organized events for players (e.g., Safari Zone events in European, US, and Asian cities). These changes to the game over time were a topic of much discussion among informants and the player community more broadly (Barrett, 2018; Chamary, 2016; Webster, 2017). Take the following vignette from player and technology expert Ruth, who reflected on what makes players continue playing Pokémon Go, instead of moving on to the next 'shiny' thing:

I think it is because of clever marketing. The way they've structured it so there are new things. So, when you begin to get bored, something new comes up. So, if you're beginning to think, 'oh I've collected all the Pokémon around here, perhaps I'm going to give up', then they add on this new thing where there's different Pokémon you haven't seen, and, you think, 'oh that's exciting, I'll do that'. People did say to me, 'oh I've been playing it for a year now, that's probably enough. Oh, hang on, raids [laughs]. Why don't we go and do that?' That gets people over that hurdle, and then they just think, 'hey, I could actually get to level 40, that would be cool'. At the beginning, you see people fill up their Pokédex. So, obviously, the strapline is, I 'gotta catch 'em all'. And, people are beginning to say, 'well, of all the ones you can catch in the UK, I've only got one to go. That's like, why would I have got 249 out of 251 without catching that last one'. It's going to be interesting to see what [Niantic] does next. Cause you can see that people are completing their Pokédex, people are to hit level 40, just about. What are they going to do to keep us in? Or are they gonna say okay, this was just a year or so phenomenon, and then they do something else. I would think they've got so much invested in it; they've probably got something up their sleeves. I mean, they'll bring out generation 3 Pokémon, and that's why it's nice that they've got all these assets, you know because they've got over 20 years. Um, here's the generation 1, here's the generation 2, here's the generation 3. So, they can wheel those out without having to do too much work, I would guess. But whether they could keep people involved solely by going, and here are some more Pokémon to catch. At some point you go, 'oh yeah, okay, I've got enough'. (Ruth, Pokémon Go player)

Ruth's reflections illustrate the importance of providing endless variation of gameplay activities over time. Perhaps even more than in the other two research contexts, informants were seeking novel experiences to keep their excitement and motivation to play the game ongoing ('What are they going to do to keep us in?'). In fact, sensing that one nears the completion of a key part of the game (e.g., completing the Pokémon collection) raised doubts among several informants, including Gloria, Ruth, Timothy, and Tobias. This theme is picked up again in the findings on the last phase of the customer journey, the termination trajectories, and especially the brand-specific concerns (section 4.4.2). As will be shown in that section, boredom around gameplay was the main context-specific issue that turned once enthusiastic players away from the game.

Besides this desirable dynamic service system over time, Pokémon Go also facilitated experience unpredictability through unique gameplay session based on the game's expansive service system. The game's service system was (and still is at the time of this writing) a massive virtual world, based on Google Maps of the physical world, in which Pokémon appear unpredictably and for relatively short time spans (e.g., 15 minutes) in a player's surroundings, prompting players to catch them immediately.

It happened many times to the author that he would catch some nearby Pokémon first, only to realize that others had disappeared in the meantime.

The game's interface reveals virtually infinite sites at which players can collect items (PokéStops) and battle other teams for control over 'Gyms' to receive coins. These Pokémon Go sites are situated at real-world locations around the world but can only be seen through the app when players were geographically close to the location. Pokémon Go varies the timing, location, and number of spawning Pokémon that players can try to catch. Each Pokémon has distinct characteristics (e.g., weight, height, combat power) and a distinct individual value (IV; ranging from zero to 100 percent). There are male and female versions of some Pokémon, rare 'shiny' versions of Pokémon (since March 2017), and special features around holidays (e.g., a Christmas hat). Informants like Gordon and Julia shared in their interviews how the introduction of these features posed new challenges to them and prompted them to reorganize their Pokédex. Gordon recalled: 'I tell you, the changes, they come out male and female versions. So, I now have to get a male and female version of everything... And now I've got them all, I'm [collecting a] 90% [individual value] version of everything'.

Players can take some actions without walking around (e.g., reviving fainted Pokémon, reorganizing their Pokémon collections, creating strategies for the next day). However, most play required informants and all other users to walk around or use other modes of travel to capture Pokémon, hatch eggs, collect items, battle rival teams, and participate in group raids. Observers noted that 'each capture session is unique' and 'each walk a player goes on... is unique' (Lynley, 2016, p. 4). In each of these sessions, players interact with an unpredictably unfolding virtual world (e.g., spawning Pokémon) and physical world (e.g., other players). This endless variation generated considerable excitement and suspense for players, as the informant vignettes in the next subsection will illustrate.

Tinder also perpetuates experience unpredictability through endless variation of the service over time. Tinder's service system includes millions of active users, each of whom creates a profile with typically multiple attractive images of themselves. Due to its fast growth from its release onwards, Tinder has been able to offer countless profiles of other users to any one user, in a growing number of cities around the world (Bilton, 2014). That fact alone provided considerable excitement for informants, such

as Sophia and Roberto, to use Tinder on vacations (e.g., on Sophia's trip with her girlfriends to France) or upon returning to their home countries (e.g., during Roberto's visits of his family in Italy).

Tinder presents each user with the profiles of other users via tabs labelled Discovery, Top Picks, and Likes, some of which are for premium subscribers only. The core Discovery feed shows the user only one profile at a time. The next profile was (and still is at the time of this writing) revealed only after the user chose one of the following actions: swipe right to signal interest (Like); swipe left to signal disinterest (Nope); or swipe up to signal considerable interest (Super Like). The user only sees profiles that meet their age, gender, and distance preferences. However, Tinder did not order these along any dimensions that would make the sequencing feel predictable to informants, nor present profiles ordered according to any detailed preferences of what users were looking for. Roberto shared the following observation:

On Tinder, actually you get really everything, I think. It's a very good sample of what [kinds of] people really are out there... you can find people who really just want to get laid, people who want to get married, people who want to have a[nother's] body, people who want to date forever, who want to chat forever, people who just say okay come to my house. (Roberto, Tinder user)

In fact, Tinder takes their users on exciting explorations via an 'open' flow of profiles (Tinder, 2019), one that is primarily based on the three preferences of age, gender, and distance of each user, as well as some internal mechanisms. Anna echoed Roberto's observations and left no doubt that this unpredictable variety of presented profiles added value to her Tinder journey: 'Tall men, small men, fat men, thin men, poor, rich, doctors and gardeners and everything... You really see a big cross section of society. And that was super exciting!' As Reich (2014, p. 2) observed, 'Tinder's most revolutionary aspects were to nix the web [sites] and questionnaires,' departing from conventional matching services' promise of effective pairing based on compatibility (Finkel *et al.*, 2012) and making it both more exciting and challenging for its users.

Customer experience unpredictability on Tinder is further increased by the all-day flow of messages between the user and their continually increasing number of matches as well as the freedom to unmatch a match, which instantly eliminates the entire communication history from the apps of both users. The Tinder service system keeps evolving thanks to new users who join or re-join the app and other users

who leave the app, either temporarily or permanently ('there is constant renewal', Roberto). In addition, there is a steady stream of new features. One recent new feature was 'Swipe Night' (Hern, 2019, p. 6), an interactive video series wherein users choose what happens next to be ultimately matched with other users who chose similarly.

Together, the two main channels of app-user interaction (swiping and messaging) generated most of informants' excitement about using Tinder, as the customer-focused examination of Tinder experiences across subsequent service cycles in the next subsection will show. The customer-focused analysis will reveal that Tinder's endless variation capability not only facilitated exciting and suspenseful experiences in the moment-to-moment usage of the app, but that the capability also created opportunities for learning and attempting to improve one's usage of the app. Improving one's chances on Tinder was not an easy task, however, and filled with much unpredictability, as many informants acknowledged, including relatively successful informants such as Charles, Donna, Roberto. To illustrate, take Charles' comment on his experience with Tinder: 'Tinder is an absolute wealth on itself. I mean, whether it's people just literally meeting up for a one meet or whether they're looking for a relationship, it's complete wild fly, you never know what you're going to get or if you met someone to be fair'.

As this subsection shows, the three brands have in common that they facilitated experience unpredictability and sustained such unpredictability over time. The firm-focused analysis revealed that CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder had three things in common: they built on an extensive number of service elements that could potentially be highlighted during service encounters (i.e., expansive service system); they were open to, and actively sought additions, subtractions, and changes of those service elements over time (i.e., dynamic service system); and they presented unique configurations of those service elements at each (core) service encounter (i.e., unexpected service encounters). Together, these three service techniques are conceptualized in this research as the firm capability of providing endless variation across the customer journey. This capability made it nearly impossible for customers to predict what would happen next (e.g., what will be the next CrossFit workout, what Pokémon will appear next and which ones will be introduced to the game next, what Tinder profile will be shown next and which matched user will communicate further).

In a nutshell, CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder perpetuate experience unpredictability across subsequent service cycles via expansive and evolving service systems that continually foreground new service elements for the customer. The impact of this experience unpredictability on informants is considered next. As foreshadowed in the current section, informants' customer journey patterns in response to endless variation revolved around themes of continued excitement, suspense, thrilling and challenging experiences, and an increasing involvement with the services over time. Or, as Sebastian called it: an 'adventure'!

4.3.2 The spiralling roller coaster: the customer journey pattern in subsequent service cycles

The finding of the spiralling roller coaster describes a variegated customer journey pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement. The spiralling roller coaster feels like riding a roller coaster from moment to moment along the customer journey and entails an increasing involvement in the intricacies of a service experience across multiple service cycles over time.

In the smooth experience model, subsequent service cycles are conceptualized as an increasingly seamless cycle of consistent service experiences known as a loyalty loop (Edelman and Singer, 2015). By contrast, subsequent service cycles at CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder evince a variegated and unpredictable pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences, which engenders increasing involvement in the service experience. Together, this is conceptualized herein as a 'spiralling roller coaster'. From a conceptual standpoint, the spiralling roller coaster has two noteworthy patterns, one in the moment-to-moment timescale of the evolving customer experience, the other in the long-term timescale of multiple service cycles.

This subsection presents data and interpretations of informants' experiences for these two timescales from each of the three service contexts. For example, CrossFit athlete Alan, Pokémon Go player Ruth, and Tinder user Sophia all described how their moment-to-moment interaction with the service is an emotionally arousing process containing an uncertain mix of experiences, including intense moments of suspense, delight, and frustration. The conceptual metaphor of the 'roller coaster' was chosen to capture these moment-to-moment experiences because the roller coaster metaphor includes experiential

peaks and valleys, the stress of steep climbs and the thrill of deep dives, and the exciting suspense, joyful anticipation, or sheer dread of what's around the next turn (Greene, 2003)

Further analysis of the dataset revealed that informants' experiences with a service acquired deeper significance over the longer timescale of days, weeks, and months. For example, CrossFit athlete Jenny, Pokémon Go player Daniel, and Tinder user Roberto all described how they also became more actively involved in the intricacies of the service experience over time, be it an increasing appreciation of the effect of compound physical movements (Jenny), the strengths of different Pokémon (Daniel), or new communication styles with matched users (Roberto). These journey patterns are conceptualized herein as increasing 'experiential involvement' to capture the upward 'spiralling' nature of sticky experience journeys over multiple service cycles.

Taken together, the data from all three service contexts highlighted that sticky experiences – facilitated by the firm capability of endless variation across the customer journey – provide unpredictable excitement in the moment-to-moment timescale of the customer journey and increasing experiential involvement across the longer-term timescales of weeks or months. The next paragraphs further unpack the conceptual building blocks derived from the data analysis and supported by relevant literature on exciting customer experiences and related phenomena.

In the moment-to-moment timescale of the customer journey, the spiralling roller coaster entails a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences that is described herein as an *experiential roller coaster*. Such an unpredictable pattern of positive and negative experiences, including emotions of anticipation, dread, amazement, disappointment, and enjoyment, keeps customers in a state of high psychological arousal (Arnould and Price, 1993; Blaszczynski and Nower, 2002; Calleja, 2011).

In the long-term timescale of multiple service cycles across weeks, months, or even years of the customer's life, the spiralling roller coaster entails an upward trend in customer involvement that is described herein as increasing *experiential involvement*. Such increasing experiential involvement builds up because, in their highly aroused state, customers become more highly attuned to the multidimensional intricacies of service experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Blaszczynski and Nower, 2002; Calleja, 2011). The composite notion of experiential involvement refers to customer

involvement (i.e., interest, excitement, and investment) in the customer experience (i.e., the cognitive, emotional, sensorial, behavioural, and relational responses to a service) (Schmitt, 1999; Wild *et al.*, 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Greater experiential involvement does not necessarily mean that the customer is spending more time on the service each day. Rather, it implies that customers become more deeply invested in the multidimensional intricacies of their service experiences. With each successive cycle of the customer journey, customers also acquire new service-relevant competencies, including new insights, mindsets, and skills (Alter, 2017; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Eyal, 2014).

Next, this subsection provides examples and analyses of the spiralling roller coaster in the three contexts of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. A selection of quotes will be used from informants who spoke about how and why they continued their journeys as customers of the services. Informants' spiralling roller coasters with CrossFit are considered next.

CrossFit. CrossFit informants shared vivid accounts of their thrilling and challenging experiences with the fitness service. Informants' stories highlighted exciting states of suspense (i.e., states of excited and sometimes anxious expectations or uncertainty about what might happen next; Alter, 2017), which contributed to prompting them to return again and again to their CrossFit box. A major source of suspense and excitement for informants were the constantly varied workouts, which CrossFit boxes posted online the night before a class, or in the morning of the same day, or revealed to athletes at the start of a class. Irrespective of the timing, the suspense of not knowing what the next workout would be until it was revealed was part and parcel of informants' roller coaster rides. Take Alan's vignette below:

Interviewer: *What makes you want to go to CrossFit again?*

Alan: *It's the un-knowing of what you're going to do that night, because you're not really supposed to know. So, you go to the gym the night before, you do a horrible workout, but you love it... It makes no sense because why would you love something that's horrible?... But you've worked up a sweat because it's horrible. And then you're like, well I'm going to book [a class] because if I know what it's going to be tonight I won't turn up and that's why, that's the beauty of it, because you don't know so you've got to go to find out. It's like a present. If you get a present, if they just tell you, you're not going to be excited, so if you don't know, if it's a surprise, then when you open it,*

you're excited. You're amazed by what you've got. And that is literally the beauty of just going to a CrossFit class because every day you're like I'm going to go tonight because you are so excited to see what the workout is. It could be amazing, it could be bad, but you still get excited... It's like swings and roundabouts really. (Alan, CrossFit athlete)

Alan's words vividly illustrated why the unpredictable variability in CrossFit experiences could feel like a roller coaster ride. Classes could be 'horrible' or 'amazing,' but regardless, they always got him 'excited.' A personally 'horrible' workout was Emily's 5km run (see the previous subsection) during which she even felt sorry for everyone who had to watch her struggle. Most CrossFit mentioned some exercises that they were not good, did not like, or even outright 'hated' (Jenny's story about squatting later in this subsection). To the author, classes with many dynamic overhead movements from weightlifting (e.g., snatches, thrusters) were daunting, and only rewarding afterwards, while classes with many bodyweight movements felt great throughout the classes and afterwards.

Both undesirable or horrible classes and 'amazing' (Alan) classes typically left informants and the author excited, making them feel they had 'worked up a sweat' (Alan) and 'achieved something' (Emily). For example, Emily noted that, 'finishing 5km was just the best feeling in the world for me. And it's things like that that make you want to come back.' On her general experience with CrossFit classes, Emily said the following:

I do get quite psyched up and excited when I'm there. This new box posts their WODs on their website, but I make a point of not looking because I know that will put me off going if it says something horrendous on it. But I won't let myself look at it. Once you're there, I feel like 'yes, I'm here, I'm doing something good for myself'. I'm ready to go and you get in everything that... everything starts... I still get that excitement to work out and feeling like I'm doing something good for myself. (Emily, CrossFit athlete)

Emily's quote illustrates a common reason for why CrossFit informants were excited about their workouts from day to day. In Emily's words, this was the feeling of 'doing something good for myself'. Exercise was generally perceived as a beneficial activity that contributed to informants' wellbeing (see John's quote later in this subsection). It enabled informants to feel active and become fitter over time. To ensure these positive feelings and outcomes, Emily had to discipline herself to not check the upcoming workouts posted online ('I won't let myself look at it'), and instead extended the suspense until she arrived at the box. Being aware that some workouts could be 'horrendous' (e.g., the

5km run), she used this technique to ensure she would show up. And even after many years of doing CrossFit, being in the box and working out still got her 'psyched up and excited'.

For most informants, including Adrian, Alan, Emily, and Karen (see below), the thrilling experiences with CrossFit extended the core service provision, the 45-minutes to one-hour fitness classes. To make this point, Alan described the pre-core service experience as a suspenseful mystery ('it's the unknown'), a surprise gift ('it's like a present'), and an idiom that means a mix of gains and losses ('it's like swings and roundabouts'). In a suspense novel, for example, the reader is taken along a storyline that arouses excited expectation or uncertainty about what might happen next. In CrossFit, athletes themselves are the main characters experiencing the mystery and suspense about what the next workout would be.

This exciting uncertainty prompted Alan again and again to book the next class, and to go to the class to find out what it would be like. He sought to receive the next 'present', be surprised, and 'amazed' about what he received. Marketing and consumer research have demonstrated that surprising customers, and hence contributing to states of customer delight, produces value for customers and can enhance the chances of recurring customer behaviour (Oliver et al., 1997). In line with this finding, Alan described the ever-surprising service provision of CrossFit as 'the beauty' of going to CrossFit. For Alan, this beauty included the exciting anticipation of workouts, the present-like surprises at the CrossFit box when the workouts were revealed, and the love for even dreadful workouts, all of which kept him enthusiastically returning to CrossFit.

As a final data point regarding the theme of suspense, consider an informally shared experience of a CrossFit box owner and coach who, like most coaches, was an active athlete himself. In preparation for a competition, this coach had designed his own workouts for a period of several weeks. He eventually realized that his excitement about the workouts started to wane, and he intuitively switched to using pre-designed workouts from other sources, for example the official CrossFit website that posted one new workout per day. He told the author that this switch rekindled his excitement about working out again and helped him to improve his performance in preparation for the competition. He, too, emphasized the allure of his increased excited anticipation about novel exercise configurations (compiled from field notes).

The next vignette from Karen illustrates the key themes discussed so far, going into more detail on the varied nature of CrossFit workouts that made it more compelling than other sports.

The [CrossFit] mix includes everything that I like, a little bit of weightlifting, a bit of gymnastics and endurance, and the mix. You never know what's going to happen the next day, and you're active and work really hard... that's what I like the most, that there are so many different things, that it is so variable what you do there... I'm bored really fast and [CrossFit] doesn't bore me. I don't feel like, 'Oh it's the same again!' which I did feel about football... [in CrossFit,] it's always thrilling. (Karen, CrossFit athlete)

As a reminder, Karen is the CrossFit athlete who started her journey after her Bootcamp instructor had told her about the fitness service. She had joined a neighbour to check out a nearby CrossFit box and was excited to quickly and easily access CrossFit workouts and explore the world of CrossFit. In the above quote, Karen described what she liked most about CrossFit ('that there are so many different things, that it is so variable what you do there'), and why she continued to go to CrossFit and be excited about it ('doesn't bore me' ... 'it's always thrilling'). She compared her experience with CrossFit over time with that of other sports she did in the past, such as football, which eventually bored her because she began to feel that 'it's the same again!' Like literally all other informants, Karen enjoys the inherent variability of the workouts, and the suspense of not knowing 'what's going to happen the next day' at CrossFit. Unlike with other sports, Karen experienced an ongoing roller coaster ride with CrossFit, made up of exciting suspense, thrills, and challenging workouts that were so variable and mixed that they never got boring.

Informants' stories illustrated how the CrossFit's capability of endless variation facilitated roller coaster rides with the fitness service. CrossFit's expansive and dynamic service system containing, for instance, countless exercises, potential combinations thereof, other members, coaches, the fitness equipment, and the landscape of competitions, which was all subject to changes and updates over time, provided the foundation for informants' exciting observation that 'there are so many different things, that it is so variable what you do there' (Karen) in CrossFit. Most important, the unexpected service encounters, in which informants continuously encountered unique configurations of the service elements, facilitated challenging and thrilling experiences (e.g., Alan's anticipated and realized excitement about 'horrible' or 'amazing' workouts; Emily's suspense before workouts and her states of

being ‘psyched up’ and ‘excited’ at the box). In other words, informants responded to CrossFit’s ‘constantly varied’ (Glassman, 2002, p. 2) and intense workouts, revealed at short notice if at all, by living through roller coaster rides including arousing states of suspense, thrills, and facing ever-new challenges.

It is worth mentioning that CrossFit’s philosophy of preparing athletes for the unknown or even the unknowable (CrossFit, 2019) by providing constantly varied and challenging workouts also applies to the CrossFit Games, an initially small and informal event that has developed into a professional, global, and sponsored sports event (Bergeron, 2017). For example, in one year, athletes were woken up early in the morning to be informed that they would be taken to an unknown location by airplane, where an unknown challenge awaited them. As it turned out, athletes flew to the location where the CrossFit Games had started many years prior and did a gruelling workout outdoors under the hot midday sun, before they flew back to where the remainder of the CrossFit Games took place (Bergeron, 2017).

Informant interviews also encapsulated the ‘spiralling’ component of the customer journey pattern of the spiralling roller coaster. To recap, the concept of the spiralling roller coaster is the key finding in this research to conceptualize customers’ ongoing, sticky experiences across subsequent service cycles. The term ‘spiralling’ was chosen to express the increasing experiential involvement fuelled by the moment-to-moment roller coaster rides that customers of the three hedonic contexts lived through. Broadly defined, experiential involvement refers to customer involvement into a customer experience (Schmitt, 1999; Wild *et al.*, 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985). It could be observed across the data set that informants became increasingly involved (e.g., interested and invested) in their service experiences over time.

CrossFit informants, for example, were not only enthralled by the adventure of thrilling and challenging experiences on a regular basis, but they also developed increasing psychological and physical mastery (i.e., comprehensive knowledge or skill, as well as accomplishment) through CrossFit’s constantly varied workouts. Consider the following quote by Jenny, who shared one of many instances of growing mastery of, and appreciation for CrossFit.

If you are not good at something, it takes a lot for you to dedicate your time to want to be better at it. And I think CrossFit is the only one that has made me do that. I hate

squatting, I hate doing anything like that. And I am forced to do it at CrossFit... [and] that's really good for my hips and my back, and as I get older, that movement is really important... When you are like, 'I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what this activity is?' watching [other CrossFit athletes] do it sort of helped me remember the technique, so I was like 'Okay, so when I need to squat, for example, I should be getting that low'... The more you watch it and understand the rules of it... the better you'll be.'
(Jenny, CrossFit athlete)

In this vignette, Jenny described one meaningful trajectory of her CrossFit journey as overcoming her psychological barriers to the compound exercise of squatting. Jenny was an intermediate athlete at the time of the interview who had much to learn, but unlike a beginner, she had become aware of the general importance of good form ('I should be getting that low'), the specific functions of different exercises ('good for my hips and my back'), and the potential linkages between her current activities and long-term goals (staying fit as she ages). In this way, Jenny had gained a certain level of mastery on an important and frequently used movement in CrossFit, and that exercise – and with it, CrossFit ('the only [fitness service] that has made me do [squats]') – became more relevant and valued in her life ('is really important').

In fact, Jenny became more involved in the CrossFit world more broadly, beyond the core service experience of workouts. Reflecting on her daily life, she said: 'I wake up [and] go to CrossFit every morning. Normally throughout the day I'll check Instagram and I'll watch a CrossFit video or see CrossFit pictures.... It's become quite embedded.' The embeddedness of CrossFit in Jenny's life had many sources, including the workouts, social events at her local box where athletes gathered together to celebrate and do friendly workout competitions (field notes), online material, which she used to learn about the workouts and improve her technique, and more advanced and professional athletes on social media, which she followed in her pursuit to 'do more positive social media' and 'aspire to be like someone who is fit and active'.

For informants, the embeddedness and relevance of CrossFit in their lives was, beyond the core service provision of workouts, related to aspects such as: the feeling of belonging to a 'community' (Jenny), even a CrossFit 'family' (Alan) that gets together for more social events than any regular gym would do; the potential to take their CrossFit practice to higher levels by participating in competitions (e.g., Charles, Emily, Karen, Peter); or additional service benefits such as celebrating children's birthday parties at CrossFit boxes or having a local hairdresser offer haircuts in a box on the weekend (Tara's

box; field notes). Such aspects represented added layers of value for informants. They enjoyed going to social events, having a chat before and after workouts, and adopted CrossFit, to varying degrees, as a 'positive lifestyle' (Jenny) that enabled them to become stronger, healthier, and often feel better (see Emily's quote above and John's quote below).

In the world of CrossFit, a common pattern of becoming increasingly involved could be tracked as follows: beginner athletes took CrossFit classes to pursue vaguely defined goals such as weight loss or muscle gain; intermediate athletes also took more specialized classes focused on stretching, weight-lifting, and metabolic conditioning to pursue more granular goals; advanced athletes trained daily to compete at CrossFit competitions and to find out how fit and strong they can possibly become. As Charles noted, 'I feel like, from first stepping into doing CrossFit to where I am now, I picked up so much and I've worked so hard on getting better at the movements... week in week out, that I feel like I'm ready to prove myself in a competitive arena.'

On their journeys, informants became more attuned to the intricacies of their service experiences over time, be it the effect of compound movements, the ideal execution of different exercises, or the best way to prepare and recover from work-outs. As John's quote below illustrates, these spiralling trajectories of increasing interest, investment, and mastery kept customer coming back to CrossFit again and again.

So, I've been doing [CrossFit] for a year now... Within the first month, I thought, you know, I'm really addicted now, I just want to go and do it almost every day and try something new and try and improve on this and that. I think then it became a case that I was seeing real improvements. You know, I was lifting heavier weights, I was doing movements that before, I had to do scaled or perhaps do an alternative movement, so that just feeds into it even more, you know, it gets even more and more addictive because you're like, I'm seeing real changes, I'm getting slimmer, I'm getting stronger, I can do things that are... doing things around the house are much easier, and just out and about, you just see the fact that your body's getting stronger and you're getting better at doing specific movements, and you feel good. You know, every day you feel stronger, you feel healthy. You know, I didn't feel sluggish. Even though I train at six o'clock in the morning and probably getting up at five to get ready and get to the gym on time, you know, I just felt great, you know, felt like I had more energy than I had at any time before... Over time, you realise that even if you're able to grow stronger that there's still room for improvement there. There are always steps, there's always something to work on. It never feels like you ever get to the point where you've nailed it and you're perfect. So, there's always either a different movement or a more advanced

movement or a bigger weight or there's always something new to try... I got more and more into it. I suppose there's a different level of dedication or a different level of motivation, so initially it was just a case of, yeah, I'll do that again, I could do better next time, but then gradually over time it's like, I really want to go back. (John, CrossFit athlete)

In this quote, John described how he 'got more and more into [CrossFit].' Rather than becoming boring or routine over time, he stated that doing CrossFit became 'even more and more addictive' as he increasingly invested time and energy into it ('I train at six o'clock in the morning' almost every day) and reaped the rewards of his increased levels of 'dedication,' 'motivation' and mastery ('I'm seeing real changes, I'm getting slimmer, I'm getting stronger'). Over time, John was able to lift heavier weights, do movements he could not do previously, and do more advanced movements.

Prior consumer research has shown that mastery, especially when it is related to activities that are meaningful to consumers, is inherently pleasurable and valuable to consumers (Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017). This work suggests that increasing mastery across challenging, hedonic consumer journeys can make those journeys more appealing to customers. In other words, it makes those journeys stickier, or more likely that consumers will enthusiastically want to continue them. CrossFit informant's stories (e.g., from Charles, Emily, Jenny and John in this subsection) vividly illustrate this tendency.

John's increasing mastery not only showed in his CrossFit workouts but also made his work 'around the house [...] much easier.' He realized that his improvements at CrossFit had positive effects in other areas of his life, including work at home, his perceived sense of health ('you feel healthy') and overall energy ('I just felt great'). In this way, CrossFit's relevance in John's life increased over time, to the point where it became an integral part of his life interlinked with other areas and feelings of health and wellbeing.

John's quote is also an interesting example of how the firm capability of endless variation and the customer-related finding of increasing involvement are intertwined. For instance, John's quote encapsulated that his CrossFit journey is variable, dynamic, and open-ended ('there's always either a different movement or a more advanced movement or a bigger weight or there's always something new to try'). This expansive and varied fitness service provision turned his journey into a seemingly never-

ending adventure: 'There's always steps, there's always something to work on. It never feels like you ever get to the point where you've nailed it and you're perfect.' Like most other informants, John continuously tried new things and felt good about his improvements. His comments were echoed in many other informants' stories. For instance, Emily emphasized the 'addictive feeling like you've accomplished something and bettered yourself at something' (Emily), and how these moments of mastery shifted her focus to the open-ended goal of 'see[ing] how strong I can get'.

To sum up, the findings presented above show that CrossFit informants' experienced spiralling roller coasters across the subsequent service cycles of their customer journeys. Facilitated through CrossFit's endless variation capability, especially the fitness service's constantly varied workouts, informants lived through roller coaster rides that were thrilling, challenging, and suspenseful. The data analysis revealed that most informants embraced CrossFit's unpredictable variety as both as source of exciting anticipation and of ensuring their continued participation in a wellbeing-enhancing activity (i.e., working out). The analysis also revealed that informants became increasingly well-versed in the intricacies of their service experiences over time, developing mastery and enjoying the rush of accomplishments (e.g., new personal bests) along the way. In addition, CrossFit became increasingly embedded into their daily lives beyond the workouts themselves, for example through social activities and social media consumption. This increasing experiential involvement, fuelled by the sticky roller coaster rides, ensured that informants kept coming back to CrossFit's core service provision. Informants' spiralling roller coasters with Pokémon Go are examined next.

Pokémon Go. In each Pokémon Go playtime sessions, informants interacted with an unpredictably unfolding virtual world (e.g., spawning Pokémon) and physical world (e.g., other players). This unpredictable variety generated considerable excitement for informants like Ruth.

When I went out with my daughter, and we go, 'Oh there's an egg about to hatch.' And, we gather round and look at it and go, 'Oh no, it's a [common Pokémon]' [laughs]. And then, we get excited about another one. It's the medals. I have walked 1,502km... [There's] a lot of unique goals and different routes you can go through. [Niantic] keeps releasing new features... They have Pokémon only released in certain countries, so when I'm in America, I'm catching American Pokémon. It's quite exciting... Some are incredibly difficult to find, and you get very excited when you find one. And, some are legendary. The legendary ones you couldn't find anywhere... It's really exciting cause it's time-limited, so if you want to complete your Pokédex... you've got to get [the

released Legendary Pokémon]... You've got to find a Gym that's got one in, you've got to take part in a Raid. The Raids themselves are time limited. And, you can't win a Raid unless you've got about ten people there. (Ruth, Pokémon Go player)

Ruth derived great pleasure from varied playtime activities (e.g., hatching eggs, catching Pokémon, participating in group raids), in varied social constellations (alone, with her daughter, in groups), and at different real-world locations in the United Kingdom and the United States). Like other informants, she experienced thrills (e.g., ‘Oh there’s an egg’) as well as challenges (seeking ‘incredibly difficult to find’ Pokémon), making for a suspenseful journey overall. Her roller coaster ride was intensified by the game’s quests and time-limited opportunities that made it ‘really exciting.’ Ruth’s excitement along her journey was sustained by Niantic’s customer experience management activities to sustain unpredictable variety – from providing ‘unique goals and different routes’ that players can take to the introduction of legendary (i.e., rare and strong) Pokémon that only appeared in Gyms and required the joint effort of multiple players to be caught. Yet even simple unpredictable experiences, like Ruth’s responses to the hatching of a Pokémon from an egg, provided repeated thrills that helped to sustain her excitement along her journey with the game. The next vignette by Martha provides further evidence for the themes of excitement and thrills.

It was quite exciting at the time because I was new to the Pokémon world... So, it was quite a vicarious thrill in seeing all these new Pokémon popping up. I didn't really know a lot about them... So, it added a little thrill to every day seeing the Pokémon and going out to different places... and where were these PokéStops et cetera, mapping out the world, I suppose... I caught [a powerful Pokémon], and you know, it was one with all the question marks, and so I didn't know how big it was because it was its first appearance. So, I think that probably really took me over the edge that day. I suddenly realised, ‘Oh how exciting!’ and that by branching out and going to different places, I could make the world very exciting. And make the walking exciting... I was out for a walk and we caught [a very common Pokémon]... And it turned into [a very rare Pokémon]. I was so excited, I nearly jumped up and down on the spot. ‘Oh my God that's so brilliant!’ (Martha, Pokémon Go player)

Like many of the informants (e.g., Tobias, Gordon, Charles, Daniel), Martha was a complete newcomer to the world of Pokémon Go. By contrast, Ruth was one of the informants with a background in other Pokémon products through her daughter, who played prior Pokémon games and collected Pokémon merchandise. Despite these differences, Ruth and Martha have very similar experiences along their journeys with the game. Both experience great excitement, suspense, and thrills, captured herein as a

roller coaster ride. This unpredictable ride was emphasized by informants like Ruth and Martha as a key to understand what kept them coming back for more again and again.

In the above quote, Martha mentioned that exploring the entirely new game ‘was quite a vicarious thrill.’ Martha described the initial process of ‘mapping out the [Pokémon Go] world’ as an exciting adventure. Importantly, this initial excitement did not wane as she became increasingly familiar with the Pokémon Go world. By contrast, the game remained exciting because of many experiences linked to the unpredictable variety that the game created. For example, she experienced suspense related to catching certain Pokémon, excitement about her continued exploration of ‘different places,’ and the thrills of unexpected transformations of Pokémon. These experiences prompted her to ‘nearly jump[] up and down’ out of excitement, and to realize that playing Pokémon Go could be ‘brilliant!’

Pokémon Go informants’ interviews also illustrated how they became increasingly involved with the game. As a reminder, increasing experiential involvement builds up because, in their highly aroused state, customers become more highly attuned to the multidimensional intricacies of service experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Blaszczyński and Nower, 2002; Calleja, 2011). Consider Daniel’s quote below.

I walked past a PokéStop...and... I was like ‘Oh, let me try and catch [a Pokémon], see what happens,’ and before I knew it, I was catching them, and then trying to figure out which ones were better to catch and which numbers were good... and learning that stuff. I went back to work after the summer and there were lots of PokéStops and [other players] wanted to get walking so that they could hatch the eggs. I thought, ‘I walk a lot while I’m at work, I go from one building to the other and back again.’ So, when I’m out... I can have it on... Every night when I get home, [my son] would check how much I’d walked, and which Pokémon I’d got. I found myself using it more and more... Because there are still challenges in Pokémon Go, because new Pokémon appear, because there’s rare ones, or trying to get one to the maximum level, that stuff, it gets me interested... I’m not done with this, there are Pokémon to get, there are achievements to achieve, medals to get... (Daniel, Pokémon Go player)

Daniel’s vignette illustrates how informants got swept up into the increasing involvement of sticky experience journeys. He initially downloaded the game as a pastime activity with his family on vacation in early summer 2016, showcasing once again a rather low involvement beginning with the game, or gaming more broadly. He then continued with basic game activities by himself and quickly

became more involved in the intricacies of the game ('before I knew it, I was catching them' and 'learning that stuff').

Like most informants in the data set, Ruth and Martha included, he soon incorporated playtime into his daily walking routines, connected with fellow players, and found himself playing Pokémon Go 'more and more.' Although his time spent on the app does not increase indefinitely, his involvement during his playtime kept increasing. Specifically, he actively pursued in-game 'challenges,' hunted for rare and new Pokémon, powered them up to the 'maximum level,' and continually learned new ways to earn rewards. Similar to John's CrossFit journey in the previous subsection, Daniel's end game in Pokémon Go is a 'moving target' (Lynley, 2016, p. 5); one that continuously encouraged him to dedicate time and energy and become increasingly well-versed in the service's numerous intricacies. The next informant vignette provides further evidence for this key theme across the data set.

[In the beginning,] I needed [my son's] knowledge in order to access the raid system... He was my guru, he was showing me what to do... and he would then talk about tactics of only powering up the best [Pokémon], and I'd just power up anything! [laughter] No, that's not the best way to do it! So, we discussed tactics... [In time,] I was pulling the game apart and trying to understand it, but I was approaching it from how I saw the game, which was different from some of the other ways... It was interesting to see the different strategies, and even now that [my son's] at university and I'm on my own doing this with my raid group, I do find it interesting that we all have different tactics... I was just turning up randomly at places... waiting to see if somebody would turn up, and I started seeing the same people. And they said, now you've got to join in... And it's interesting how you can just turn up at a place with random strangers and within the space of ten minutes you are working together to achieve a goal. And it's quite sophisticated at times. Things like, you'll have to all agree to go in at the same time, or if there's enough of you to split into separate teams... is the strength of the whole better than splitting it up? (Esther, Pokémon Go player)

In this vignette, Esther shared how she evolved from being a Pokémon Go beginner to becoming an experienced Pokémon Go player who went to raids alone, formed a raid group, discussed tactics with fellow players, and achieved goals through collaborations that are 'sophisticated at times.' She described her son as her 'guru' who explained to her how to be successful at the game, for instance how the raid system worked, which Pokémon to power up, and what guiding tactics and strategies to use. In her own words, Esther was 'pulling the game apart and trying to understand it,' and her son was a great companion and resource along the earlier months of her journey.

Esther's leanings and increased mastery (Scott *et al.*, 2017) gave her the confidence to play more and more on her own. Her son's departure to university did not make her stop playing the game. Instead, she continued to play on her own, found fellow players in her neighbourhood, and became part of the local network of Pokémon Go players. Over the course of many months, Esther, Daniel, and other players became increasingly aware of, and kept enjoying, the game's intricacies (e.g., 'interesting to see the different strategies,' Esther), and the game became an important part of informants' lives. Informants' spiralling roller coasters with Tinder are outlined next.

Tinder. To recap, Tinder takes their users on roller coaster rides via an 'open' flow of profiles (Tinder, 2019). In addition to its profile swiping function, Tinder also offers a messaging service for matched users to communicate further. These two main channels of app-user interaction generated Tinder's roller coaster for informants.

I was going back home and instead of sleeping, I was spending an hour and I was saying 'Okay, it will be the next one that I might like, it will be the next one,' but no, it wasn't... In the morning if someone liked my profile, if I was finding it interesting, I would say 'Hello, good morning,' stuff like that and then I would try to initiate a discussion... It was really addictive. In the morning I might lose like 10-15 minutes to see what's happening, who liked me. Perhaps I was waiting for it as well to see, 'Would this person like me?' And if it was, I would talk with them... sometimes the application shows you profiles first and then if the other person likes you it will appear in your profile as a match. But there were times that I would like someone, and he had liked me first, so I will talk with them straight away. That was when I would text someone more often. (Sophia, Tinder user)

Tinder users like Anna and Sophia only saw one profile at a time in the standard ('Discover') swiping feature. They had to swipe right ('Like'), left ('Unlike'), or up ('Super Like') before a new profile was revealed. In Sophia's journey pattern of 'obsessively swiping through Tinder' (Dickson, 2015, p. 1), Sophia followed each 'Unlike' swipe with some hope that it 'will be the next one' that she might like, followed by a near immediate revelation of whether her desired outcome came true or not. In this way, Sophia remained in a state of suspense almost throughout her entire swiping sessions, with experiences of frustration and occasional delight.

Matching with a few users and communicating with them further added to her thrilling roller coaster ride, rendering the overall experience ‘really addictive.’ Tinder informed a user about a match as soon as two users had liked one another. Sophia’s urge to check the app in the morning ‘to see what’s happening, who liked me’ since her last session illustrates how the suspense that she experienced while swiping from profile to profile also extends to the matching and messaging process. These intense feelings of excited uncertainty could occur for informants even before they had scheduled any off-platform dates (BBC Newsbeat, 2015). The following quote by Donna provides further support for the theme of roller coaster rides.

You go on Tinder and you see these images of these men who are often really attractive... like, ‘Wow, this guy, he’s [hot]’ And you look at his profile, look at his photo, and it’s like ‘Yep, I want that!’ And then it’s like, ‘Oh, another!’... Whatever your perfect partner is, you start projecting on complete strangers... And then you might get a conversation... And more often than not, there’s a level of disappointment which is the difference between reality and fantasy... and it’s so sad when there’s the disappointment factor. It feels horrible... It feels like you’re actually losing something, which is ridiculous really because it’s just a fantasy... And I don’t know, it’s probably the romantic in me, but that keeps me doing this, even though on 99.9% of dates that I’ve gone on Tinder, and I’ve been on a lot, there has not been chemistry, there hasn’t been a mutual kind of, ‘Wow! Like, this is incredible for me, this is incredible for you, let’s explore it...’ I would say on most [dates], more often than not, that’s the experience. And you know it within the first second... But, there have [also] been a few times where the magic has happened... The build-up has been incredible, and the expectations are quite high and I’m excited and I’m thinking, ‘Could this be my next partner? Is this the person I’ve waited for my whole life.’ And then I meet them and I’m like, ‘Wow, actually, like, this is nice! He’s attractive and interesting and kind,’ and I think, those few times, like that’s enough for me to keep doing it. (Donna, Tinder user)

Donna provided a detailed description of what her Tinder journey was like: an unpredictable, exciting, and challenging journey that included moments of desire and ‘projecting on complete strangers,’ ‘disappointment,’ ‘horrible’ feelings, but also ‘times where the magic has happened’ that reinvigorated the ‘romantic’ in her and led her to continue using the app. Implicit in Donna’s description is the notion that swiping through Tinder was the most enjoyable aspect of the overall Tinder experience, because it allowed her to imagine what it could be like to be with an attractive Tinder date and potential partner, without the reality check of actually meeting that person and finding out how ‘reality and fantasy’ did or did not match.

Donna's description shows not only that the process of swiping from profile to profile was thrilling for her, but that that was also true for the process of moving from swiping to communicating with a match to meeting that person. This process could entail a 'disappointment factor' or an 'incredible' build-up with high expectations and excitement and even more imagining about a magical future with 'the person I've waited for my whole life.' And while romantics that lived prior to the age of modern dating services might have been devastated for a long time when imagined romantic futures did not manifest (Illouz, 2007), Donna had the option of opening the app again after failed dates and swipe through profiles thinking 'Oh, another!'

As informants swiped through Tinder profiles, communicated with matches, and went on real-world dates, their continual use of Tinder gave rise to the second critical theme of becoming increasingly involved in the service experience. Certainly, "'success' in online dating can mean many things to many people' (Reich, 2014, p. 3), and Tinder user's progress was not measured by a service reward structure. In contrast to Pokémon Go, Tinder did not include levels of experience or points for successful actions, and unlike CrossFit, Tinder did not chart performance metrics on scoreboards or organize competitions for more seasoned users. Yet, even so, the informants' Tinder journeys were rife with implicit rewards, such as the sheer quantity and perceived quality of one's matches, chats, and dates. Most informants revealed personally meaningful developments in their uses of Tinder over time, such as growing self-awareness about their relational desires and increasing competence in their dating skills.

[The] fruits from Tinder come out only with constant use... At the beginning I would invest more time chatting with some specific people, while now, I'm much more direct. Also, because it's a matter of numbers in the sense that after a while you get more matches. You basically spend less time on average with every person... My philosophy is chatting a little bit and if you see that there is some kind of common ground and chemistry that you can feel at the very beginning, just by texting someone, then my next proposal is 'Okay, let's meet!'... How people reply, how people write you, you can really get an idea, more or less, of the kind of person it is. There are people who are very funny and start making jokes, or tell you something different, or something cleverer, while other conversations [are] more standard, boring ones. (Roberto, Tinder user)

Over the course of his Tinder journey, Roberto refined his approach (e.g., he started swiping during the week to arrange a real-world date on the weekend). He changed his way of communicating on the app

from lengthy conversations with matches to a ‘more direct’ style. He acquired a more sophisticated intuition about the ‘kind of person’ a match might be through their texting style. Finally, he received more matches. This increasing involvement in the intricacies of the Tinder journey allowed him to become more efficient, effective, and even philosophical about dating—which is also recognized by his friends. Tinder users’ involvement increased as they responded to the varied flow of profiles and messages. This flow seemed limitless, was described as ‘an absolute wealth on itself’ (Charles), and encouraged users to refine their usage (Roberto). The next quote by Enrico lends further support for the theme of becoming increasingly involved.

As soon as you have the first match you say oh great, I have the chance to speak with a girl, let me start. And you know, then you’ll say hi, how are you and the conversation goes on. But then you know, you feel greedy and you go on and you’re non-stop until you reach the second match, or third, or fourth. And then you start having five conversations at the same time and then you don’t understand whom you were talking to about what. You just become; your phone becomes a mess because it’s a disorganised set of conversations... And then you try to reduce the amount of conversation... select a few... that you really think, ‘They are the good catch.’ You throw back in the sea all the fish that you don’t want... The difference between that [initial] time and this time was that first of all, I believe I was more mature in the use of the application. So, I really knew what I wanted. (Enrico, Tinder user)

Enrico vividly described how his use of Tinder evolved from receiving the first match, to becoming ‘greedy’ and using Tinder ‘non-stop’ to receive more and more matches, to figuring out ways to deal with the ‘disorganised set of conversations’ on his phone, to finally becoming what he called ‘more mature in the use of the application.’ His Tinder journey illustrates an increasing investment of time and energy into the use of the app, if only to stay on top of all the matches and conversations he had. Over the long-haul of his Tinder journey, he gained more and more mastery to manage the self-created ‘mess’ on his phone and found out more about his dating preferences (‘I really knew what I wanted’). In this way, the service was more than merely a pastime activity; it became an important part of his dating life and romantic efforts. Enrico finally found a steady partner through Tinder, which he attributed to both luck and his mature use of the service that he acquired over many months of using the app. As informants like Enrico, Roberto, and Sophia kept swiping through profiles, communicated with matches, and went on dates for several weeks or months, they also became increasingly involved in the ‘#swipelife’ that Tinder facilitated.

To sum up this subsection, CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder informants responded to the firm capability of endless variation across the customer journey by living through exciting experiences that were like a roller coaster ride in the moment-to-moment timescale of their journeys. These roller coaster rides included various experiences, most importantly intense states such as suspense, fun, and thrills. These experiences kept customer excited and yearning to repeat their experiences, typically on a day-to-day or at least weekly basis (e.g., to book the next CrossFit class and go to that class [Alan], to hatch the next egg in Pokémon Go [Ruth]; to continue swiping and messaging Tinder matches the next day [Sophia]).

The subsection has also outlined the second piece in the puzzle of what kept informants using a service again and again. The second customer finding of becoming increasingly involved across weeks and months referred to the longer-term timescale of informants' journeys. The themes are interlinked: Roller coaster rides prompted informants to repeat their experiences, and as they repeated their experiences, their awareness of the service intricacies grew and the service typically became a more important and meaningful part of their lives, which additionally motivated informants to keep using the service. In other words, the data analysis suggested that sticky experience journeys are unique sorts of roller coaster rides, ones that acquire deeper significance over the longer timescale of weeks and months, which add to their overall enjoyment.

This relationship between the customer themes also highlights the importance of the firm theme of creating unpredictable variety simply because this variety facilitated roller coaster rides in the first place, which in turn encouraged increasing involvement, and so the dynamic went on and on. Informants' enhanced involvement in the service experiences commonly manifested in an increased interest and investment in the service, a growing mastery of the service usage, and a higher perceived relevance of the service in one's life compared to the beginning of informants' journeys with the services, as has been illustrated in this subsection. In brief, informants' sticky experiences in subsequent service cycles of the customer journey are conceptualized herein as spiralling roller coasters, which are thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement over time. The next section continues to build the sticky experience model, before the section afterwards

4.3.3 Summary of the subsequent service cycles

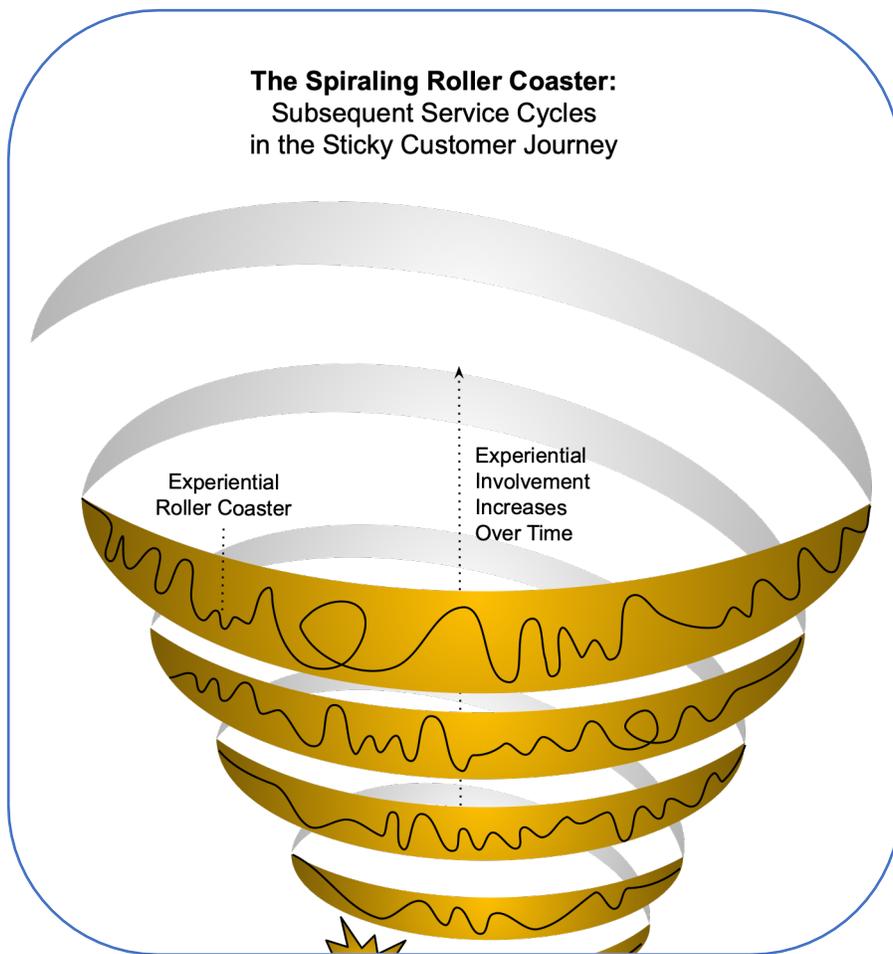
This subsection summarizes what kept informants coming back for more across subsequent service cycles. As a reminder, informants typically had low involvement with a service at the beginning, often not knowing anything about the service, or even that the service existed, before becoming curious about it and trying it shortly afterwards.

To recap, endless variation describes a firm's capability of perpetuating experience unpredictability for customers by using an expansive and evolving system of service elements and foregrounding a unique configuration of service elements at every (core) service encounter. Accordingly, the capability of endless variation includes three key features: an expansive service system, a dynamic service system, and unexpected service encounters. Together, these features ensure low experience predictability and provide customers with multiple learning opportunities and challenges across the customer journey.

The customer-side finding of the spiralling roller coaster describes a variegated customer journey pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement. The spiralling roller coaster feels like riding a roller coaster from moment to moment along the customer journey and entails an increasing involvement in the intricacies of a service experience across multiple service cycles over time.

The subsequent service cycles with their key customer journey pattern of the spiralling roller coaster are illustrated below in figure 3, which is a cropped version of figure 1 that only depicts the subsequent service cycles.

Figure 3: Subsequent Service Cycles in the Customer Journey



With its two concepts of endless variation and the spiraling roller coaster, the subsequent service cycles conceptualized here are remarkably different from subsequent service cycles in the smooth experience model (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). The smooth experience model proposes that firms *streamline the customer journey* to lock customers within an ongoing journey pattern of a *loyalty loop*, an increasingly seamless cycle of consistent service experiences. In contrast, the thesis reveals that the three hedonic services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go and Tinder use *endless variation along the customer journey* to enable customers' journey pattern of a *spiraling roller coaster*, a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement. The component of the experiential roller coaster is visualized in figure 3 as the squiggly black line set against the yellow ribbon. The different concepts of the two models are summarized in the table below.

Table 6: Subsequent Service Cycles in the Customer Journey: Smooth versus Sticky Experience Model

The Extant Smooth Experience Model	The Emergent Sticky Experience Model
<p>Key Firm Capability: Streamlining the Customer Journey. The capability of ‘streamlining’ (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 90) the customer journey involves service system techniques such as making customer interactions as easy as possible (<i>simplification</i>), tailoring aspects of the service to customers’ established preferences (<i>personalization</i>), and providing customers with just-in-time support at each journey touchpoint (<i>contextualization</i>), which collectively ensure high experience predictability over time (Fleming, 2016; Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl <i>et al.</i>, 2019). High experience predictability within and across multiple service cycles makes customers’ lives easier by reducing the need for deliberate decision-making over time (Edelman and Singer, 2015).</p> <p>Customer Journey Pattern: A Loyalty Loop. The customer journey pattern of subsequent service cycles is conceptualized as a ‘loyalty loop,’ a seamless cycle of consistent, personalized, and often regularly triggered service experiences (Edelman and Singer, 2015). The firm capability of streamlining the customer journey removes pain</p>	<p>Key Firm Capability: Endless Variation across the Customer Journey. The capability of ‘endless variation’ across the customer journey involves service system features such as starting with a multitudinous set of firm, customer, and external elements (<i>expansive service system</i>), allowing frequent additions, subtractions, and changes to those elements (<i>dynamic service system</i>), and foregrounding a unique configuration of service elements at each service encounter (<i>unexpected service encounters</i>), which collectively ensure low experience predictability and multiple learning opportunities over time. Low experience predictability within and across multiple service cycles makes customers’ lives exciting and increases their experiential involvement over time.</p> <p>Customer Journey Pattern: A Spiralling Roller Coaster. The firm capability of endless variation along the customer journey keeps injecting new challenges and opportunities to ensure a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences that feels like riding a ‘roller coaster’ (<i>experiential roller coaster</i>). As</p>

<p>points and unnecessary steps to ensure an effortless and frictionless flow of exclusively positive experiences (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2016; Hyken, 2018). The customer begins to trust the service to anticipate their needs and becomes less actively involved in decision-making (Court <i>et al.</i>, 2009); hence, the smaller inner circle of the smooth experience model (see figure 1 left-hand side).</p>	<p>the customer rides the roller coaster, their experiential involvement in the intricacies of the service also increases (<i>increasing experiential involvement</i>); hence, the widening upward spiral of the sticky experience model (see figure 1 right-hand side). This customer journey pattern is conceptualized as a ‘spiralling roller coaster.’</p>
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To sum up, further building blocks of the sticky experience model are the concepts of endless variation and spiralling roller coaster, which capture the phase of subsequent service cycles. Endless variation is the key firm capability used to ensure experience unpredictability via expansive and evolving service systems that continually foreground new service elements for the customer. Spiralling roller coaster is the key customer journey pattern in response to endless variation, described herein as a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences in the moment-to-moment timescale, with increasing experiential involvement over the long-term timescale of the customer journey.

This section has addressed the second part of the research question: ‘*How do sticky experiences [...] evolve [...] across the customer journey?*’ In answering this question, this section has continued to build the sticky experience model across the subsequent service cycles of the customer journey. Subsequent service cycles capture the second and all the following service encounters. The first subsection has unpacked the firm-side finding that endless variation along the customer journey is the key firm capability in the subsequent service cycles to facilitate sticky experiences. The second subsection has unpacked the customer-side finding that the spiralling roller coaster is the key customer journey pattern in subsequent service cycles that entails sticky experiences. The next section explores the last few service interactions before some informants in the data set markedly reduced or terminated their service usage.

4.4 Termination Trajectories

The termination trajectories mark the phase of reduced usage or termination of a service. As such, this phase ends the exciting, involving, and sticky customer experience journey. The first subsection unpacks the finding that service usage fluctuations fuelled by well-being-related dissonance are the primary termination trajectory. The second subsection unpacks the finding that service usage fluctuations can also occur for brand-specific reasons.

4.4.1 Service usage fluctuations fuelled by well-being-related dissonance

Across the three research contexts, it could be observed that informants developed dissonance towards repeating sticky experiences when those experiences began to feel addictive in the pathological sense (i.e., the service discernibly conflicts with the customer's personal sense of well-being (Hirschman, 1992; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Sussman *et al.*, 2011)). This dissonance encouraged service usage fluctuations with customers gradually or suddenly withdrawing from the service, sometimes re-patronizing the service, then withdrawing again, in some cases multiple times over. Consider Christine's gradual withdrawal from CrossFit because of its 'fanatic' culture, Aron's sudden withdrawal from Pokémon Go after realizing that it would take over too much of his life, and Sophia's sudden withdrawal from Tinder to end this 'addictive game.'

The theme explored here is that of arising inner conflict about service usage. Such inner conflict typically arose for informants when they were feeling overwhelmed with a service within the context of their lives, including other responsibilities and perceptions about what is appropriate for them. Informant's customers journeys at times became near addictive, and some informants were put off by the service's potential to facilitate obsessive experiences, both in themselves and other customers. At these junctures, some informants decided to quit the service as a way to resolve the unbearable conflict and restore their wellbeing, immediately or gradually. This theme is explored in each of the three service contexts, using a selection of quotes from informants who terminated their customer journeys. Informants' inner conflict regarding CrossFit is considered first.

CrossFit. As an example of arising inner conflict in the context of CrossFit, consider how Christine's dissonance about continuing her CrossFit journey stemmed from its overly enthusiastic culture.

I kind of did it quite intensively until Christmas ... And then it kind of got a bit less, somehow, I could not motivate myself to go as often... But for four months really intense, and then I have again three months... not quite so intense. Then, when I went home, I actually stopped it... What rather scared me a little bit is the fanaticism that many have. You know, with the Paleo diet, somehow, at the end of the session, they all tell everyone what they are eating and what they are not eating. I thought then, 'Okay, that's not my world, as far as I'm concerned...' It's very important to me to become fit and stay fit, but only to a certain level. (Christine, former CrossFit athlete)

Christine described CrossFit athletes as being ‘fanatic’ about exercise and their nutrition. Indeed, CrossFit athletes are often highly enthusiastic about the latest nutritional trends, including intermittent fasting, the Keto diet, and the Paleo diet. Christine is a former competitive athlete who is well aware of what it means if a passionate activity increasingly takes over one’s life, to the point where it conflicts with other priorities, such as her social life. For Christine, the CrossFit journey was fun ‘to a certain level,’ but she reached that upper limit after several months of being an enthusiastic participant. Martin, a CrossFit coach and owner of a CrossFit, shared a story about a former member who suddenly quit after becoming a highly involved and frequent patron of his box.

I talked to one of my athletes who did two classes per week after the trial month, then three classes per week, and who then chose an unlimited class package. [He] tends to overdo things, and eventually he says to me, 'It is more important to me to make eleven million in sales a year with my work as a salesman and that's why I want to invest my time there and therefore no longer come to CrossFit.' ... His girlfriend now wants to go into family planning, he has to manage his time better and he has chosen to reduce CrossFit and not the work. So that's his issue. He thinks CrossFit is not the right thing for him. He thinks he is wasting his time here, because it is more important to earn more money. (Martin, CrossFit coach)

For Martin’s former member, an inner conflict arose as he sought to invest his time into his professional activities as a salesman and at the same time prepare for ‘family planning.’ With increased responsibilities and a perceived shortage of time, this former member decided to quit CrossFit – despite the fact that he had continuously increased his usage of and involvement with the fitness service. Martin views this member as someone who ‘tends to overdo things’ and was not entirely surprised by the member’s decision, given his circumstances. In fact, overdoing CrossFit workouts is an inherent danger known among more experienced CrossFit athletes and within the wider fitness industry, as will be explored in the next subsection. Arising inner conflict regarding the (potentially) ‘addictive’ use of Pokémon Go is considered next.

Pokémon Go. While Christine reached her upper limit in the CrossFit journey within a ‘fanatic’ service environment after a few months, that upper limit came very early in Aron’s journey with Pokémon Go.

Downloaded it, walked around, saw the historical sites that are within it, the PokéStops, it tells you little things about what might be on the street. Loved it, did it for four or five hours and deleted it, because... I will do this way, way too much... I definitely need to consume fewer video games. (Aron, former Pokémon Go player)

Aron’s concerns about the addictive potential of Pokémon Go arose within a few hours of him playing the game. He deleted the app on the very same day he started. To put this episode in perspective, Aron was an avid gamer who had pre-existing and pervasive concerns about keeping his playtime in check. Following this episode, Aron downloaded the app again and played the game for a few weeks before giving it up a second time. Whether users took months or merely hours to reach their upper limit of sticky experiences, they nonetheless evinced the same general concerns about inner conflict due to the obsessive potential of sticky experiences. The following quote by Marco emphasizes Pokémon Go’s potential to become overwhelming, comparing his journey of playing the game to taking drugs.

It's like drugs... You're just like ‘Oh yeah, I checked only two hours ago, let me check again if there's something new,’ you know? ... It kind of gets obsessive... I also lost interest because I cannot keep up with these things. You play, and then you realise that if you want to become better, you need to spend lots of time on it... [Super Mario Run] was perfect for casual gaming, you have five minutes, you play. [With] Pokémon Go, at some point, I realised that five minutes are not enough. Like it requires more commitment [and] I cannot be bothered, and it stops there...’ (Marco, former Pokémon Go player)

Marco described how he was initially hooked by the game (‘It kind of gets obsessive’). In fact, he likens his experience with Pokémon Go to the mechanism of drug use, highlighting the addictive potential inherent in both activities. More recent work on pathological addictions has indeed argued for a broadened understanding of addictions beyond substance use, to include behavioural addictions such as pathological gaming (Alter, 2017; Sussman *et al.*, 2011). Reflecting on his obsessive use of Pokémon Go, Marco realised that he would not be able to ‘keep up’ with the game in the long term. As a busy person with multiple interests, he decided to put himself first and not ‘spend lots of time on it’

and make the ‘commitment’ required to play the game successfully. Taking up this challenge, in his view, would be an overwhelming endeavour, and he resolved his inner conflict by deleting the app. The theme of arising inner conflict leading to the termination of the customer journey is considered next in the context of Tinder.

Tinder. Whether users took months or merely hours to reach their upper limit of the increasingly involving roller coaster ride, they nonetheless evinced the same general concerns about the addictive and overwhelming potential of the services. Tinder was no exception for informants.

It's very addictive... I would spend a lot of time [on Tinder] ... It was like... an addictive game, so in order to stop using it, at some point, I just deleted it, and it worked fine... if I don't want to do something, I'm trying to not have sirens around me. (Sophia, former Tinder user)

Sophia tried to use the Tinder app less at first, but eventually she decided that deleting the app is the only way to keep herself from using it further. In telling her story, Sophia drew on the myth of the Sirens – dangerous creatures with beautiful voices luring sailors to shipwreck themselves on their island. In some versions of the myth, sailors plug their ears so as not to hear the Sirens’ call. In a similar vein, blocking out the call of Tinder by permanently deleting the app was Sophia’s means of coping with its addictive quality, which resolved her inner conflict about using the dating app too much and more impulsively than she would like to. In the next quote, Anna talked about why she eventually quit her Tinder journey; though only temporarily, which she revealed later on in her interview.

I had a queasy feeling... You have such bizarre conversations with people you do not know. And of course, that's funny and exciting and that can be positive too... Swiping these photos was certainly two-sided. For one thing, it seemed to be taken for granted to shop for men like in the supermarket. And on the other hand, I thought, 'Oh, it's super interesting to see who is there, what people are doing, what they are thinking now about what is desirable?' So, I found it all really exciting... I felt a bit like a snooper, where I thought, 'That's none of my business!' Of course, it was also really exciting. Well, and what I found frightening, there were many people, whom I actually just eliminated [swiped left] immediately because I just did not find them attractive. Then I thought 'That's harsh!' ... That shocked me about myself... I had my seventh date and then I quit, I thought, 'It's enough.' (Anna, former Tinder user)

Anna ended her Tinder journey because of a highly intense mixture of ambivalent feelings that eventually led her to conclude that she had to quit to restore her sense of wellbeing and personal integrity ('It's enough'). She was hooked on Tinder for quite a while and experienced using the app as 'funny,' 'super interesting' and 'really exciting.' At times, however, she had a 'queasy feeling' and felt like a 'snooper' who inappropriately engaged in the business of other users. After using the app for several months and going on multiple dates, she could no longer ignore what she found 'frightening' about her own, superficial, shopper-like behaviour on Tinder ('shocked me about myself'). She ended this inner conflict about who she had become over time by being so absorbed with Tinder's unpredictable excitement (see her quote in section 4.3 on roller coaster rides) by completely withdrawing from the app.

This subsection has begun to explore what led informants to terminate their customer journeys. Arising inner conflict was shown to be one of the reasons for either gradually or suddenly withdrawing from a service. Such inner conflict typically arose for informants when they became aware of the addictive potential of the service, or when they were overwhelmed with a service within their life circumstances. For example, using Tinder felt 'addictive' (Sophia), playing Pokémon Go became 'obsessive' (Marco), and doing CrossFit within a 'fanatic' service culture became overwhelming (Christine). To resolve their inner conflicts and enhance their wellbeing, informants quit the service. The next subsection examines the theme of brand-specific issues that also arose for some informants and led those informants to terminate their journeys.

4.4.2 Service usage fluctuations for brand-specific reasons

The data analysis also indicated that service usage fluctuations could be fuelled by brand-specific reasons related to experiential challenges specific to each service context. In CrossFit, sticky experiences sometimes came to a sudden stop or pause because athletes got injured while participating in high-intensity workouts with inadequate care. For example, Olivia took a two-year pause from CrossFit after breaking her elbow in an environment that motivated her to do 'too much too soon.' In Pokémon Go, periods of boredom about gameplay tended to be the primary brand-specific reason for service usage fluctuations. For example, both Aron (after picking up the game again after his first sudden withdrawal) and Timothy stopped using the game as they became bored because 'it is just like

you're doing the same thing over and over again' (Timothy). In Tinder, service usage fluctuations appeared when users aspired to find a life partner rather than experience the never-ending romantic-sexual adventure of #swipelife, but either did not find that person despite significant effort or did find that person. For example, Enrico withdrew from Tinder twice, the first time feeling 'disengaged with the application' and deleting it, and the second time falling in love with a Tinder date and happily uninstalling the app.

The subsection continues to examine what led some informants to terminate their customer journeys. The theme explored here is that of arising brand-specific issues, in other words, issues related to the usage (and culture) of a specific service. When these issues became unbearable, or literally forced informants to stop doing an activity (e.g., injury in CrossFit), informants withdrew from the service. Informants' brand-specific issue with CrossFit is considered first.

CrossFit. In CrossFit, injury was the most common brand-specific reason for quitting the fitness service among the informants and their fellow athletes. For example, Olivia recalled becoming an athlete 'surrounded by individuals who were a hell of a lot fitter than me' and 'looking at them as my role models and icons, going, I can do that if I want to.' However, her journey came to a sudden stop: 'I did too much too soon... And then as a result, I got injured... I fell off the rig and broke my elbow.' It took her two years after this 'breaking point' to be physically and mentally ready to resume to CrossFit, this time not only as an athlete but also as a coach to other athletes. In the media, controversy over the 'cultish' nature of CrossFit often centres on 'overuse injuries [that] are not uncommon among CrossFitters,' (Fry, 2013, p. 2) leaving many in the industry 'wary' of the program because of its 'risk of injury and drop out.' (Denoris, in Fry, 2013, p. 2). More mindful trainers seek to prevent their athletes from such overuse injuries, as the next quote shows.

I'd always want to keep training and training, but I think with experience, I've learnt just to say, you know what, just take a week, let your body recover a little bit. And our coach is quite good at that. He's quite good at saying if you're tired... or your body is aching a little bit, then take the week off. It's not going to do any harm and, if anything, you'll benefit from it. (John, current CrossFit athlete)

Unlike Olivia, John simply took time off occasionally although he felt like he wanted 'to keep training and training.' He is rather capable of taking a bit of time off and is even encouraged to do so by his

service provider, who supported him in these admittedly difficult decisions to take breaks from something he loved and had become more and more involved in (see his quote in the previous section). Without detailed data on John's health, it can only be assumed at this point that the ability to take breaks under the guidance of his coach contributed to sustaining his health and performance as an athlete over time. The brand-specific issue in the context of Pokémon Go is considered next.

Pokémon Go. In Pokémon Go, boredom was the most common brand-specific reason for quitting the game among the informants and other players that the author talked to. For instance, Aron said after picking up the game and playing it for a while a second time: 'I never found a Pokémon that excited me, that was really upsetting, I was like, 'I'm really tired of the same [curse]. I've put enough hours into this, every egg that hatches is the same, every Pokémon I find is the same, I'm bored.'" Timothy stops playing (for several months) when he approached completion of his Pokémon collection and the journey eventually lost its appeal:

I walked a 100 kilometres to get a [specific Pokémon]. And it was not even a good Pokémon but it's in the Pokédex now. It's done. That was 100 kilometres walking for something I will not use, but it's now completed. And that was a chore and that did feel boring... These games can feel like chores when you get to the grinding stage, where it is just like you're doing the same thing over and over again because you have to. You don't have to, but... that was the choice I made. I was like, 'No, I don't have to do this,' and so I stopped. (Timothy, Pokémon Go player)

Informants' waning interest in the first year corresponded with Niantic's delay in effectively creating unpredictable variety across the customer journey, ironically due to the overwhelming success of the game (Webster, 2017). As Niantic Chief Executive Officer John Hanke noted, 'We had to redirect a substantial portion of the engineering team to [work on] infrastructure versus features. That switched off things like extending gyms, it pushed out things we still want to have, like player-versus-player and trading. I'd say we're about six months behind where we thought we would be' (p. 2). When Niantic launched Generation 2 and subsequently introduced new central features, many of these informants enthusiastically returned to the game. Jill recalled:

My interest waned heavily at the end of Generation 1, when [my Pokédex] started to get full up and there weren't that many [remaining Pokémon] to get. And it didn't look like you were going to get them anyway... For what it's worth, I have to give Niantic their due, they introduced Generation 2 just at the right moment for me because it piqued my

interest again. And then the revamp of the gyms and the [group] raids definitely got my interest. (Jill, Pokémon Go player)

Tinder. In the context of Tinder, relationships were the most common brand-specific reasons for quitting the online dating service. Issues around relationships manifested in two ways: informants sought exclusive intimate relationships and did not succeed at finding them on Tinder, or they did find them on Tinder and subsequently deleted the app.

For example, former Tinder user Enrico experienced both of these manifestations of relationship issues and uninstalled the app twice over the course of more than two years. The first time, after many ‘dead [end] conversations’ with matches, he ‘felt disengaged with the application, as I was not achieving anything in particular,’ and ‘at some point I decided to uninstall the application.’ Enrico re-joined Tinder about 18 months later when his friends encouraged him to ‘go on Tinder and try to have fun.’ This second time, as he was ‘more mature in the use of the application’ and had ‘fate’ or ‘chance’ on his side, he matched with someone he texted, dated, and fell in love with. This prompted him to uninstall the app a second time: ‘since things were almost done, I also decided to uninstall Tinder.’

This subsection has continued to examine what led some informants to terminate their customer journeys. The subsection has explored the theme of arising brand-specific issues. The brand-specific issue that led some informants and their peers to quit CrossFit was injury. In the context of Pokémon Go, boredom about gameplay was the main brand-specific reason to terminate service usage. For Tinder, it was the continued failure – or success – of exclusive intimate relationship, if and when they were sought by informants. The next subsection summarizes the termination trajectories and completes the build-up of the sticky experience model.

4.4.3 Summary of termination trajectories

The current section completed to build the sticky experience model by presenting the termination phase of sticky experiences across the customer journey. The termination phase captures markedly reduced usage or termination of a service, and hence ends the exciting, involving, and sticky customer journey. Its first subsection has presented the finding that service usage fluctuations fuelled by well-being-related dissonance are the primary termination trajectory. The second subsection, above, has presented

the finding that service usage fluctuations can also occur for brand-specific reasons. Both of these termination trajectories can gradually or suddenly end a customer’s journey with a firm, as has been shown.

There are remarkable differences between the emergent findings in the sticky experience model and the smooth experience model regarding the final service cycles. In their ideal-typical form, smooth experience journeys consist of never-ending loyalty loops of triggers, purchases, and consumption experiences (Court *et al.*, 2009). However, in actuality, loyalty loops can end (Court *et al.*, 2017). Loyalty-weakening incidents such as poor service encounters with the current brand and competing brands’ service offerings can trigger customers to re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and either tentatively repurchase the incumbent brand (‘vulnerable repurchasers’) or actively choose another brand (‘switchers’) (Court *et al.*, 2017, p. 66). By contrast, as the data and analysis presented in this section indicates, sticky experience journeys’ prototypical termination trajectory is not quite an on-off process of brand switching, so much as a pattern of service usage fluctuations fuelled by well-being-related dissonance or brand specific reasons. These findings are also summarized in the table below.

Table 7: Termination Trajectories in the Customer Journey: Smooth versus Sticky Experience Model

The Extant Smooth Experience Model	The Emergent Sticky Experience Model
<p>Brand Switching Triggered by Loyalty-Weakening Incidents.</p> <p>Loyalty-weakening incidents such as poor service experiences with the current brand or better service offerings from competing brands prompt customers to re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and either tentatively repurchase the incumbent brand (vulnerable repurchasers) or actively choose</p>	<p>Service Usage Fluctuations Fuelled by Well-Being-Related Dissonance.</p> <p>Customers develop doubts about continuing sticky experience journeys when those journeys discernibly conflict with their personal well-being. These doubts often lead to fluctuating usage trajectories of gradually or suddenly withdrawing from the service, then re-patronizing the service, sometimes multiple times over.</p>

another brand (switchers) (Court <i>et al.</i> , 2017, p. 66).	
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To sum up, the final building blocks of the sticky experience model are two termination trajectories of service usage fluctuations. The first threat to sticky experiences is conflict between the thrills of the spiralling roller coaster and well-being concerns about becoming over-committed to one activity. This dissonance can lead to periods of gradual or sudden withdrawal (quitting ‘cold turkey,’ Rega, 2015) and periods of re-patronizing the service (temporarily). The second threat to sticky experiences is that customers sometimes withdraw from a service because of brand-specific reasons associated with its usage circumstances, such as injury in CrossFit, boredom in Pokémon Go, and exclusive relationships in Tinder. The next section concludes the current chapter.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has developed a sticky experience model that traces the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey. The chapter has also contrasted this emergent model with the extant smooth experience model and identified considerable differences between the two models across the customer journey. The first section has provided an overview of the smooth and sticky experience models. The following three sections have developed the key concepts of the model and their relationships in more depth. These sections have gradually built up the model, from the initial service cycle to subsequent service cycles to termination trajectories. In each section, the key emergent insights were contrasted with the smooth experience model.

In a nutshell, the sticky experience model focuses on attracting customers through the firm capability of providing rapid entry in the initial service cycle (section 4.2), and on keeping customers through the firm capability of providing endless variation across the customer journey (section 4.3). This model facilitates desirable customer journey patterns of a quick spin in the initial service cycle (section 4.2), and a spiralling roller coaster across subsequent service cycles of the customer journey (section 4.3). In so doing, the sticky experience model seeks to keep customer experiences exciting and thrilling such that customers yearn to repeat them. The final section (4.4) has presented two termination trajectories

of service usage fluctuations, which are either due to well-being concerns or brand-specific reasons. The next chapter provides the theoretical contributions and practical implications of this research.

5 Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

The main purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of how the thesis answers its research questions posed in Chapter 1 (Introduction). The chapter also presents additional theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations and opportunities for future research. Concretely, section 5.2 summarizes how sticky experiences can be conceptualized and provides a succinct summary of the sticky experience model. Section 5.3 presents additional theoretical contributions that this thesis hopes to make to marketing research on customer experience management and marketing research more broadly. Section 5.4 makes suggestions to customer experience management practitioners on how to manage sticky customer experiences across the customer journey, and how to deal with managerial concerns at the intersection of the two models, with an emphasis on the sticky experience model. Before concluding the chapter, section 5.5 discusses limitations of this thesis and provides questions for future research on customer experiences and customer journeys in different areas of marketing research, such as Consumer Culture Theory and Transformative Consumer Research.

5.2 Research Summary

This research has sought to advance customer experience management research on the evolution of customer journeys across multiple service cycles. The thesis has synthesized literature on what is referred to as the smooth experience model, which focuses on making customers' lives easier with high experience predictability. The thesis has then developed an alternate, emergent sticky experience model, which focuses on making customers' lives exciting with low experience predictability. The current section summarizes the answers to the thesis' research questions, which are listed next:

- Do sticky experiences exist and if so, how can sticky experiences be conceptualized?
- How do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey?

Answering these research questions has guided the thesis toward developing a model of sticky experience across the customer journey, which is the primary theoretical contribution of this research. The current chapter offers additional theoretical contributions to customer experience management research, as well as practical implications for customer experience management practice. Before that, the current section provides a summary of the answers to the research questions stated above. The next subsection summarizes how sticky experiences are situated within the area of customer experience management research, how they are conceptualized, and how they relate to other concepts in marketing and consumer research. The following subsection offers an overview of the sticky experiences model.

5.2.1 Conceptualizing sticky experiences

The purpose of this subsection is to summarize the answers given in this thesis to the first research questions: do sticky experience exist and if so, how can sticky experiences be conceptualized? The first part of the question (i.e., do sticky experiences exist?) could be answered early on in the thesis, in the Introduction Chapter. Numerous business press articles report on the phenomenon of experiences that customers' yearn to repeat along their journey with a firm. Some of these articles use the term 'sticky' experience (e.g., Lynley, 2016; Miller, 2011; Reich, 2014), others use related terms such as 'addicted' and 'obsessed' in a lay sense to describe customers' frequent and enthusiastic repetition of consumption activities (e.g., Chamary, 2016; Fry, 2013; Rega, 2015). The thesis adopted the term 'sticky' from the business press to describe this customer experience phenomenon. According to this marketplace evidence, including recent popular business books (e.g., Alter, 2017; Eyal, 2014), sticky experiences typically occur in hedonic marketplace offerings in which customers are excited about their activities (see also Chapter 1).

The second part of the research question (i.e., how sticky experiences can be conceptualized) was answered in three steps. The first step was to develop a customer experience management matrix that succinctly situated the current research – and the phenomenon of sticky experiences – in the area of customer experience management research (Chapter 2, section 2.4). The second step was to review research from multiple disciplines on stickiness and sticky (experiences) to develop a definition of sticky experiences (Chapter 2, section 2.5). The third step was to contrast this newly generated understanding of sticky experiences from other related concepts in marketing and consumer research

(Chapter 2, section 2.6). The following paragraphs briefly summarize how each step contributed to the conceptualization of sticky experiences.

The first step toward conceptualizing sticky experiences was to develop a customer experience management matrix encompassing four areas of customer experience management research and practice.

Table 1: Customer Experience Management Matrix

	Singular customer experience	Repeated customer experiences over time
High predictability of the customer experience	Job-oriented customer experience	Loyalty loops
Low predictability of the customer experience	Adventure-oriented customer experience	Sticky experiences

Source: Author.

The dimensions of this matrix are the scope and the predictability of the customer experience. Across the dimension of customer experience predictability are two distinct ways of managing desirable customer experiences: one focuses on more predictable experiences enabling customers to complete their ‘jobs,’ and one focuses on less predictable experiences enabling customers to embark on adventures. The labels *job-oriented customer experience* and *adventure-oriented customer experience* are used to capture the customer experience management of a singular experience that is more predictable in the former case and less predictable in the latter case.

The work on *loyalty loops* and the current study of *sticky experiences* capture the customer experience management of a series of multiple, cumulative experiences evolving along customers’ journeys. In essence, the management of loyalty loops aims to facilitate useful, predictable experiences and

increasingly streamlined customer journeys to make customers' job-completing processes easier over time (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015). By contrast, this research has found that the management of sticky experiences aims to facilitate exciting, unpredictable experiences and increasingly engaging customer journeys to enable escalating adventures for customers.

The main contribution of the matrix was to reveal an important assumption underlying job-oriented customer experience research and the smooth experience model, namely that customers seek high experience predictability. The matrix challenged the dominance of this assumption in customer experience management research by listing research on adventure-oriented customer experiences, which tends to show that customers in hedonic consumption contexts seek the thrills of less predictable experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi *et al.*, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the matrix reveals a paucity of research in the fourth quadrant, that is, low predictable repeated customer experiences. In this way, it carved out an important gap in customer experience management research that this thesis has sought to fill through the development of the sticky experience model.

The second step toward conceptualizing sticky experiences was to review related academic literature and generate an understanding, and offer a definition, of sticky experiences. No single applicable theory from an adjacent research field could be identified, and the thesis took an integrative perspective instead, drawing on insights from research on 'sticky' phenomena across the social sciences. The following core ideas could be synthesised: First, sticky experiences are unpredictable (e.g., Heath and Heath, 2007). Second, sticky experiences foster intense emotions (e.g., Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant, 2012). Third, sticky experiences are increasingly meaningful (e.g., Lunenfeld, 2011). Fourth, sticky experiences sustain their appeal (e.g., Markusen, 1996). Sticky experiences have, in other words, the ability 'to attract as well to keep' (Markusen, 1996, p. 294).

Integrating these insights, the thesis proposed that sticky experiences are *unpredictable, intensely emotional, and increasingly meaningful experiences that customers frequently and enthusiastically seek to repeat over time*. The thesis further proposed that these types of experiences keep customers involved with a market offering across multiple service cycles of the customer journey. Considering the customer experience management matrix summarized in the previous subsection, sticky experiences fall into the area of repeated customer experiences that are relatively unpredictable, in contrast to the

more predictable experiences characteristic of the smooth experience model and singular job-oriented customer experiences.

Building on previous customer experience research (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017, Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Schmitt, 1999a,b), it was argued that sticky experiences include sensorial, affective, intellectual, behavioural, and social responses to the environment; that sticky experiences can occur through direct (e.g., usage) or indirect (e.g., advertising) interactions with a firm across the customer journey; and that sticky experiences are not merely repetitive experiences with clear-cut beginnings and endings but iterative experiences in the sense that they accumulate and evolve over time.

The third step toward conceptualizing sticky experiences was to distinguish the sticky experience concept from other concepts in marketing and consumer research and thereby demonstrate that sticky experiences sufficiently differ from existing concepts. Chapter 2 (section 2.6, subsection 2.6.6) summarized the conceptual relationship between sticky experiences and the related concepts of consumer addiction, consumer desire, customer engagement, customer involvement, customer loyalty, and extraordinary experience. The relationships among sticky experiences and these six concepts have been described as follows.

Regarding consumer addiction (e.g., Sussman *et al.*, 2011), sticky experiences are described as customer experiences that are ‘addictive’ in a non-pathological sense. Regarding consumer desire (e.g., Belk *et al.*, 2003) sticky experiences can feed consumer desires for adventure in otherwise mundane lives. Regarding customer engagement (e.g., Pansari and Kumar, 2017), sticky experiences can sometimes entail or lead to increasing customer engagement across multiple service cycles; yet engagement behaviours are not a prerequisite for or a key element of sticky experiences.

Regarding customer involvement (e.g., Zaichkowsky, 1985), sticky experiences can entail increasing customer involvement across multiple service cycles; high-involvement is not a prerequisite for sticky experiences to emerge. Regarding customer loyalty (e.g., Oliver, 1999), sticky experiences entail behavioural repatronage but only so long as the service remains exciting; customers primarily seek excitement not commitment. Finally, regarding extraordinary experiences (e.g., Arnould and Price,

1993), sticky experiences can include a range of negative-to-positive and ordinary-to-extraordinary experiences; sticky experiences typically occur more frequently than extraordinary experiences.

This summary demonstrates that sticky experiences overlap with but also differ from other concepts, which are less suitable to fully capture the phenomenon described in the business press and conceptualized in this research as a sticky experience. Note that the emergent sticky experience model that traces the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey has helped to further clarify the similarities and differences among sticky experience *journeys* and the six related concepts, which is presented later in the chapter. The next subsection briefly summarizes the sticky experience model.

5.2.2 The sticky experience model

The purpose of this subsection is to present the sticky experience model. This model offers an answer to the second research question of how sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and conclude across the customer journey. The proposed sticky experience model traces the evolution of sticky experiences across three phases of the customer journey. These phases are called: initial service cycle, subsequent service cycles, and termination trajectories, as described in the introduction of this chapter. The model uses the conceptual vocabulary of key firm capabilities and customer journey patterns to capture the firm and the customer side of the evolution of sticky experiences.

Developing new customer experience (journey) models is important because customer experience management research is prematurely converging around the smooth experience model (Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2016; Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019), without adequately interrogating its underlying assumptions. The emergent sticky experience model begins to question the smooth experience model's hyperrational ideals of making customer journeys as consistent, effortless, and predictable as possible. The extant smooth experience model is undoubtedly 'effective' (Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019, p. 554) but only in terms of maximizing hyperrational outcomes such as convenience, ease, and satisfaction. As the findings highlight, customers also yearn for the suspense, fun, and excitement of unpredictable leisure pursuits, if only to temporarily escape their otherwise hyperrational lives (Scott *et al.*, 2017).

This thesis has developed an alternate customer experience model that is premised on the excitement of unpredictability. This emergent model shows how firms can design exciting experiences that customers yearn to repeat across the customer journey. Each of the two models advocates for a unique set of firm capabilities and customer journey patterns across service cycles. The smooth experience model helps customers to make an informed decision at first, then fall into a comforting reconsumption routine, or the loyalty loop. By contrast, the sticky experience model lures customers onto a roller coaster ride of thrilling and challenging experiences, without much information at first; and this exciting ride becomes layered with meanings, investments, and life goals.

The different firm capabilities and customer journey patterns in the smooth and sticky experience models can be summarized as follows. In the initial service cycle, the smooth experience model advises firms to *provide customers with informational support* to guide customers' experiential journey pattern of a *deliberate decision-making process* (Court *et al.*, 2009; Leboff, 2014; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). By contrast, this thesis reveals that the three hedonic services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder *provide customers with rapid entry* into the service to enable customers' key journey pattern of a *quick spin*, a spontaneous and quick process in which customers move from sparks of curiosity to personally experiencing a service.

In subsequent service cycles, the smooth experience model proposes that firms *streamline the customer journey* to lock customers within an ongoing journey pattern of a *loyalty loop*, an increasingly seamless cycle of consistent service experiences (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, the thesis reveals that the three hedonic services of CrossFit, Pokémon Go and Tinder use *endless variation along the customer journey* to enable customers' journey pattern of a *spiralling roller coaster*, a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences with increasing experiential involvement.

Finally, the smooth experience journey literature suggests the termination trajectory of *brand switching triggered by loyalty-weakening incidents* (Court *et al.*, 2017; Fleming, 2015; Hyken, 2018). By contrast, the thesis finds that, besides brand-specific reasons, the main termination trajectory is *service usage fluctuations fuelled by well-being related dissonance*, as sticky experiences can and often become overly consuming for customers. In the smooth experience model, customer deliberation

decreases over time (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Hyken, 2018). In the sticky experience model, customers' experiential involvement increases over time.

To sum up, this section has provided a summary of the key findings and primary contribution of this thesis. It has provided succinct answers to the thesis' research questions. It has first summarized the argument that sticky experiences exist; that sticky experiences can be conceptualized as unpredictable, intensely emotional, and increasingly meaningful experiences that customers frequently and enthusiastically seek to repeat over time; and that they differ from related concepts in marketing and consumer research. The second subsection has provided an answer to the second research question by summarizing the revised sticky experience model.

In a nutshell, the sticky experience model challenges the dominance of the smooth experience model in current customer experience management research by (i) revealing its underlying dimension of experience predictability, by (ii) providing a coherent theoretical account of what keeps customers coming back again and again in hedonic service settings, and by (iii) identifying how firms can facilitate desirable exciting experiences across the customer journey in such settings. As has been elaborated in this thesis, the sticky experience model differs much from the smooth experience model and begins to redress the tendency in customer experience management research to focus mainly on firms as facilitators of customers' problem-solving in utilitarian settings. The next section offers four additional theoretical contributions of this research to the area of customer experience management research.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

The primary contribution of this research is the development of a sticky experience model that challenges the dominance of the smooth experience model. This primary contribution has been outlined in the previous section about how this thesis answers its research questions. By developing the sticky experience model, this thesis makes additional theoretical contributions to extant research on customer experience management and marketing more broadly. These contributions are presented in the current section.

Concretely, this section offers three theoretical contributions to customer experience management research and one theoretical contribution to marketing research more broadly. First, this thesis provides a more nuanced understanding of ‘customer journey orientation’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017) by identifying a previously neglected type of journey orientation and differentiating it from the prevailing journey orientation in prior research (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009). Second, the thesis extends the previously identified factors that shape customer experience management patterns by demonstrating the importance of the predictability of customer experience in terms of the emphasis on different firm resources for effective customer experience management. Third, the thesis extends the commonly assumed goal of customer experience management in extant work by revealing the relevance of *stickiness* as an alternative outcome to loyalty.

The fourth subsection discusses how sticky experience *journeys* differ from related concepts in marketing and consumer research, making a contribution to the field of marketing more broadly. Chapter 2 discussed how the conceptually derived understanding of sticky *experiences* overlaps with and differs from related concepts. The discussion in this section moves beyond the focus on sticky experiences to contrasting the newly developed understanding of sticky experience journeys with selected concepts in marketing.

5.3.1 Types of customer journey orientations

The first contribution to customer experience management research pertains to the mindsets that capture the essence of a management approach focused on customer experience. Such mindsets are crucial to capturing and communicating throughout a firm what customer experience management means and what an organizational culture should embrace to achieve long-term growth (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Among the few marketing studies squarely focusing on customer experience management, Homburg *et al.* (2017, p. 379) develop an empirically grounded, ‘generalized [customer experience management] understanding across firm and industry contexts,’ as introduced in the Literature Review Chapter. This general understanding identifies specific cultural mindsets as high-level operant resources that can help firms conduct effective customer experience management.

Homburg *et al.* (2017) find that it is important to focus market-facing decision making across a firm on the creation of touchpoints journeys that capture sequential customer processes. In this mindset called ‘customer journey orientation,’ journeys are established across multiple touchpoints in prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase situations. This orientation accords nicely with the tenets of the smooth experience model, which explicitly builds on the related customer decision journey (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). It also largely accords with the emergent sticky experience model, which deviates from the standard purchase journey but captures evolving customer experiences from pre-usage to repeated consumption.

Importantly, the current research shows that successfully managing customer experiences in these two models requires firms to employ a set of specific resources aimed at optimizing the typical journeys and experiences in each model. Such specific resources go beyond general firm resources for customer experience management such as an orientation toward experiential responses, a thematic cohesion of touchpoints, or touchpoint journey design (Homburg *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, the smooth and the sticky experience models can be understood as entailing different *types* of customer journey orientations, each of which has implications for the exact focus of market-facing decision making and the specific resources employed to facilitate desirable customer experiences.

To illustrate, the smooth experience model orients decision-making processes in a firm toward streamlining customer journeys to make life easier for customers (Edelman and Singer, 2015). By contrast, the sticky experience model orients firm-wide decision-making toward turning the customer journey into an adventure to make life more exciting for customers. This orientation of the sticky experience model is further developed in the managerial implications section, where the specific cultural mindset and its accompanying key managerial task for successfully managing sticky experiences are described. The next subsection discusses the contribution of this research to the factors shaping customer experience management patterns.

5.3.2 Factors shaping customer experience management patterns

The second contribution to customer experience management research pertains to the criteria that shape managerial decisions about which resources to emphasize to facilitate desirable experience and

journeys for customers (Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Schmitt, 1999a). Homburg *et al.* (2017) provide one of the few, recent, and systematic analyses of this issues, asking how customer experience management manifests across different types of firms. Homburg *et al.* (2017) identify two contingency factor that shape customer experience management patterns. The first contingency factor is the size of the firm (small- to medium-sized vs. large). The second contingency factor is the exchange continuity of the firm's core business model, capturing whether the firms' revenue-dominating core business model rests on singular, short-term exchanges with a clear beginning and ending (i.e., transactional exchange) or on exchanges that are linked together in an ongoing process in which current events trace back to previous interactions (i.e., relational exchange).

Based on these two factors, Homburg *et al.* (2017) then develop a matrix showing different customer experience management patterns employed by various types of firms. For example, their study examines large firms that generate the majority of their revenue through single, short-term exchanges that are not part of ongoing relational process (i.e., transactional exchange continuity), such as large food and clothes retailers. For these types of firms, the customer experience management pattern encompasses a focus on strategic directions (e.g., thematic cohesion of touchpoints) and firm capabilities, (e.g., a prioritization of touchpoints). This focus enables large firms with a transactional core business model to leverage the ubiquity of touchpoints and craft compelling journeys for their customers.

This thesis develops the contingency factors identified by prior customer experience management research by offering a customer experience-based criterium beyond the scope of Homburg *et al.* (2017) and others' firm-centric investigations. Concretely, the thesis finds that the emphasis on some customer experience management resources over others is also contingent on the level of predictability of the desired customer experience. For example, firm resources such as 'context sensitivity of touchpoints' (Homburg *et al.*, 2017) and 'proactive personalization' (Edelman and Singer, 2015) are more useful in the realm of predictable customer experiences – or at least to make customer experiences more predictable and plannable (e.g., Disney's magic band). These customer experience management resources focus on addressing a customer's situational context and individual preferences for value-adding experiential responses of seamlessness and customization (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

By contrast, the desirable and valued customer experience in the emergent sticky experience model is much less predictable than in the smooth experience model. Whether fully intentional or not, firms that facilitate sticky experiences cater to and exploit their customers' yearning for continuous exploration and the thrills characteristic of adventures. For example, by randomizing selected service elements, firms make it almost impossible for customers to anticipate what is going to happen next in subsequent or even the ongoing interaction, thereby enabling recurring and intrinsically valuable experiences of emotional rollercoasters. In other words, the current research finds that firms facilitating sticky experiences exhibit a strong reliance on other specific customer experience management resources rather than the ones mentioned in prior research (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019).

On a deeper level, applying the dimension of predictability on customer experience management research also brings to light a latent tendency in much of this work to prioritize customer problems and jobs (Christensen *et al.*, 2005) over other, less directed but equally powerful behavioural drivers, such as a general sense of desire (Belk *et al.*, 2003) or the fun and thrill of adventures (this research; Arnould and Price, 1993; Scott *et al.*, 2017). What is referred to in the customer experience management context as job-oriented customer experiences versus adventure-oriented customer experiences has been conceptualized similarly for different units of analysis in the past. For instance, marketing scholars differentiate between utilitarian and hedonic products, arguing that consumers seek low-utilitarian or hedonic products because they are 'fun, exciting, delightful, thrilling, and enjoyable' and high-utilitarian products because they are 'effective, helpful, functional, necessary, and practical' (Schulze *et al.*, 2014, p. 4; Voss *et al.*, 2003). Early, seminal work in consumer research introduced an experiential view of consumption contrasted with the prevailing information-processing view (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), and Schmitt (1999a) outlined an experiential marketing approach against standard marketing scholarship. Both articles explicitly urged researchers to consider customers as more than logical thinkers who make purchasing decisions by weighing (functional) benefits toward solving problems.

However, firmly rooting customer experience in dominant marketing scholarship of the 20th century, as Lemon and Verhoef (2016) do, has resulted in a conceptualization of customer experience and the

customer journey that is arguably more in line with the customer as problem-solver and informed decision-maker aiming to ‘get the job done’ (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 84). Similarly, developing a customer experience management framework based on managerial input from industries that predominantly reside outside of what Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) identified as fruitful contexts for the experiential perspective (i.e., entertainment, arts, leisure) has resulted in frameworks that arguably accords more with the information-processing view of customers and their desired experiences in primarily high-utilitarian contexts (e.g., financial services and insurance, health care, information and communication; see Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 383).

The current thesis aims to begin to redress this imbalance by developing a model for managing sticky experiences along adventure-oriented journeys grounded in three more hedonic contexts in the fitness, gaming, and dating industries. This model reveals a number of specific moments of truth and journey patterns for customers and specific customer experience management capabilities that facilitate these desirable experiential responses. Most of these insights are overlooked by extant research, including the smooth experience literature (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Hyken, 2018) and Homburg *et al.*’s (2017) general customer experience management framework. The next subsection discusses the contribution of this thesis to the goals of customer experience management.

5.3.3 Goals of customer experience management

The third contribution pertains to the goals commonly associated with customer experience management. Much research argues that customer experience management primarily aims to ‘enhance customer loyalty – in other words, the customers’ intentions to live again through a touchpoint journey of a given firm or brand by transitioning from postpurchase to prepurchase’ (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 386; Berry *et al.*, 2002; Frow and Payne, 2007; Grewal *et al.*, 2009; Pullmann and Gross, 2004). As the name ‘loyalty loop’ suggests, this is also true for the smooth experience literature (Court *et al.*, 2009).

Assuming loyalty as the default outcome and driver for repeated behaviour can be theoretically misleading and costly in practice, however. This has been demonstrated regarding loyalty and habit, which refers to behaviour that is consistently repeated in the same contextual situation and that is activated by recurring context cues and typically without conscious deliberation or intentions (e.g.,

Carden *et al.*, 2017; Neal *et al.*, 2012). For example, when presumably loyal but habitual shoppers did not follow the shift from advertised sales and discounts to everyday low pricing at J.C. Penney in 2012, sales plummeted and a loss of nearly \$1 billion ensued (Mattioli, 2013). Recent marketing research demonstrates that the use of incentives can backfire by prompting customers with strong habits to deliberate and consider other options (Liu-Thompkins and Tam, 2013). Similarly, research shows that a positive response toward a brand (i.e., attitudinal loyalty) facilitates cross-selling to repeat customers, whereas habits can negatively affect cross-selling attempts (Shah *et al.*, 2012).

The findings of this thesis depart from the assumption that loyalty should be the primary goal of customer experience management, instead suggesting that the most suitable goal of customer experience management depends on what customers seek when engaging in a journey with a firm. The current research agrees that loyalty can be an appropriate goal for customer experience management when customers seek to complete jobs in a service category. For instance, customers may become loyal to buying a specific milk shake of a particular brand on the way to work because it is viewed as the best solution to a boring commute and upcoming hunger later in the morning (Christensen *et al.*, 2005).

However, the findings suggest that when customers seek adventure in a service category, *stickiness* can be a more appropriate goal for firms' customer experience management. Stickiness refers to the emotionality and meaningfulness of the customer's experiences as well as the time and space that a service occupies in the customer's life. Stickiness differs from loyalty (and habit) in at least two ways: First, loyal customers intend to repeat an experience, habitual customers automatically repeat an experience when cued, and sticky customers *yearn* to repeat an experience. Contrasted with the smooth experience model, stickiness emerges from exciting, unpredictable experiences that customers yearn to repeat along increasingly engaging journeys, rather than the more practical, predictable experiences that customers intend to repeat along increasingly streamlined journeys.

Second, loyal and habitual relationships between customers and firms tend to centre around stable associations of meanings. Take the example of buying the same milkshake on the way to work each day. When this loyal behaviour becomes consistent and develops from a 'must-have' to an automatic 'must-do' response (Everitt, 2014), it takes on a habitual character. In either way, it centres on the stable and increasingly cementing meaning association between the milkshake and the reward, which is

to help deal with a boring commute and solve the problem of upcoming hunger later in the morning (Christensen *et al.*, 2005).

By contrast, stickiness builds on evolving, accumulative meaning associations, rather than on stable, reproductive associations of meaning that foster loyalty to the best solutions for concrete jobs. Consider the invigorating novel goals that informants associate with CrossFit after reaching personal success (e.g., Emily) or how group raids in Pokémon Go energize challenges (e.g., Ruth), both of which require meaning-making efforts. These findings empirically support Chandler and Lusch's (2015) contention that ongoing meaning-making and alignment efforts keep people engaged in market-based activities. In service categories where customers yearn for continuous thrills, pleasures, and discoveries through adventures, stickiness is a more experientially consistent goal than loyalty. It is therefore proposed that shifting the customer experience management goal from loyalty to stickiness can help firms aiming to facilitate sticky experiences better focus on what their customers seek and what drives their ongoing journeys. The next subsection moves beyond the field of customer experience management to discuss how sticky experience journeys differ from extant concepts in marketing and consumer research.

5.3.4 Sticky experience journeys and related concepts in marketing

The fourth contribution pertains to the similarities and differences among sticky experience journeys and related concepts such as addiction, desire, and engagement. As a reminder, the sticky experience model has traced the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey over time, revealing key firm capabilities and customer journey patterns. Therefore, building on this journey-spanning model also allows for comparisons between the sticky experience *journey* with related concepts in marketing and consumer research, which build on but go beyond prior comparisons among the sticky *experience* concept and related concepts (also see Chapter 2 and the beginning of the current chapter). While all the concepts discussed here point to customers' yearnings for something more exciting than efficient service experiences, the emergent sticky experience model begins to address how firms can fulfil customer yearnings for sustained excitement across multiple service cycles.

Sticky experience journeys are related to several other marketing concepts, namely customer involvement, customer engagement, customer loyalty, extraordinary experience, consumer desire, and

addiction. Among these concepts, customer involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985) is the most central to understanding sticky experience journeys because, as the findings have shown, customers become increasingly involved in the service experience as sticky experience journeys evolve. Since involvement is a decades-old construct with several variants (e.g., product, brand, and purchase involvement; Beatty *et al.*, 1988), it is emphasized that experiential involvement is the most appropriate construct for the model and customer experience management research more broadly. Over the course of the customer journey, customers may also become increasingly engaged with the service in the sense that they begin to contribute direct and indirect value to the firm, but such customer engagement (Pansari and Kumar, 2017) is not necessary for experience journeys to be sticky. Loyalty and stickiness are distinguishable in affective terms. When customers repatronize a brand out of a sense of commitment, faith, or trust, that repatronage is best conceptualized as loyalty (Oliver, 1999). However, when customers repatronize the brand out of craving, desire, or excitement, that repatronage may be better conceptualized as stickiness.

Extraordinary experiences are highly positive and infrequent experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993). Sticky experience journeys, by contrast, entail a variegated pattern of positive and negative experiences in quick succession. Consumer desire is a type of consumer motivation that is much more energetic, passionate, and urgent than need or want (Belk *et al.*, 2003). The current study indicates that customers do not need or want to continue sticky experience journeys, but rather that customers urgently desire such continuity, in part because the embodied experience of desire is itself enlivening (Belk *et al.*, 2003). However, when sticky experience journeys become all-consuming or pathological, they may be better conceptualized as a behavioural addiction (Sussman *et al.*, 2011). All these interrelated concepts point to customer interests in something more than efficient service experiences, but that ‘something more’ varies across these seven concepts. Only the model of sticky experience journeys focuses on a cyclical pattern of unpredictable customer experiences with increasing experiential involvement that customers yearn to continue.

To sum up, this section has presented four additional theoretical contributions that this research makes to customer experience management research and marketing research more broadly. The thesis hopes to have extended current thinking about customer experience management by developing understanding of different types of customer journey orientations (first subsection), broadening

understanding of the factors that shape customer experience management patterns (second subsection), and enhancing understanding of key goals for customer experience management (third subsection). The section has also given a succinct overview of key similarities and differences among sticky experience journeys and related concepts in marketing and consumer research (fourth subsection).

The next section presents implications for customer experience management practitioners. It makes suggestions to those practitioners on the cultural mindset for managing sticky experiences (first subsection); how to choose between the smooth and sticky experience models (second subsection); when to encourage purchases in the smooth and sticky experience models (third subsection); and how to combine loyalty loops and spiralling roller coasters to sustain customer journeys (fourth subsection).

5.4 Practical Implications and Applications of the Findings

Firms seeking to enhance the customer's experience journey face a challenging problem based on a simple yet powerful observation: The effective management of differing types of journeys and desired experiences requires specific resources, including cultural mindsets and capabilities. Managerial research (Court *et al.*, 2009, Edelman and Singer, 2015) presents several specific capabilities that firms should develop and master in order to lead customers into the loyalty loop and keep them as returning customers, as has been described in detail. Homburg *et al.*'s (2017) research on customer experience management finds several general customer experience management resources of cultural mindsets, strategic directions, and capabilities to manage customer experiences across industries that offer, as has also been argued, largely high-utilitarian products and services.

Yet overall, and unfortunately for managers, '[r]esearch on these capabilities is very scarce' (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 84). More research is needed on 'specific capabilities and mindsets' and how they influence customer experience management (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 87). Through an empirical investigation of the management of repeated, unpredictable customer experiences over time, this thesis has identified customer experience management insights relevant to managing increasingly involving experiences along the customer journey. Specifically, these insights can be useful to managers of businesses that aim to facilitate involving, adventure-oriented experiential journeys, as

well as to managers of businesses that intend to enhance their customers' journeys and experiences by adding adventure-oriented touchpoints.

Fundamentally, the current research shows that different models of customer experience management, including the sticky experience and smooth experience models, are oriented toward different customer experiences and journey trajectories, and that each customer experience management model requires distinct firm resources to be executed successfully. Managers' decisions about their firm's resources should be aligned with what customers are seeking from their firm, whether that is help to complete jobs or invitations to embark on adventures. Managers can detect these customer motivations by monitoring the desired experiential responses of their customers. Customer motivations are apparent at every phase of a model's prototypical customer journey, starting with deliberate consideration in the smooth experience model and sparks of curiosity in the sticky experience model. Although a customer may not be exclusively job-oriented or exclusively adventure-oriented at every single touchpoint, firm awareness of what drives customers overall is key to effective customer experience management.

The following subsections make practical suggestions at the intersection of the smooth and sticky experience model. The first subsection offers marketers guidance for managing sticky experiences in terms of cultural mindsets. The next three subsections offer marketers guidance on how to choose between the smooth and sticky experience models, when to encourage purchases along the two experience journeys, and how to sustain each experience journey.

The second to fourth subsection address several questions that arise at the intersection of the two experience models: (i) How can customer experience management practitioners choose between the smooth and sticky experience models? When and why does each model make most sense?; (ii) How can customer experience management practitioners optimize purchases in each model? At which moments in the customer journey are purchase opportunities most appropriate and why?; (iii) How can customer experience management practitioners combine customer journeys in multi-service systems? How can multiple loyalty loops and spiralling roller coasters be interlinked and to what end?

5.4.1 Cultural mindsets for managing sticky experiences

One caveat for customer experience management practitioners is that both smooth and sticky experiences are ideal types (Weber, 1904/1949), stylized abstractions to accentuate patterns in messy realities. Real-world customer experiences across customer journeys are never perfectly circular loyalty loops nor perfectly spiralling roller coasters, nor are customer experiences ever wholly predictable or wholly unpredictable. Furthermore, all journey types are interrupted and interwoven in the lived experience of customers' daily lives. Nonetheless, ideal types are practically useful as 'cultural mindsets' for coordinating customer experience management activities across organizational stakeholders (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, p. 385).

Awareness of the specific higher-level cultural mindsets is a critical first step to effective customer experience management. This goes beyond an appreciation of the general resources necessary for making customer experience the firm-spanning object of decision-making (Homburg *et al.*, 2017) or for designing 'experience-centric services' (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010, p. 67). Importantly, as has been argued above, different customer experience management models focus on specific desired experiences and have specific ways of value creation over time. In other words, models such as the sticky experience and smooth experience models entail different specific cultural mindsets such as different touchpoint journey orientations that guide market-facing decision-making across firms toward specific managerial tasks.

It is equally critical for firms to create a firm-wide understanding of the resources required for effective customer experience management. Firms need to disseminate pertinent cultural mindsets to achieve this task because customer experience management does not merely concern specific procedures but is fundamentally an issue of corporate culture (Homburg *et al.*, 2017). The sticky experience model entails a specific cultural mindset—an orientation toward facilitating repeated but unpredictable customer experiences that foster escalating or 'spiralling' customer journeys over time.

For instance, the sticky experience model could help Customer Experience Officers to coordinate all customer-facing departments in a firm toward a shared vision of the customer experience and overall journey. If that vision is a sticky experience, then firms could shift the relative emphasis on low customer experience predictability in accordance with this vision. The notion of a spiralling roller coaster can help Customer Experience Officers to emphasize the importance of keeping experiences

unpredictable in the moment-to-moment customer journey and increasing opportunities for engagement and adventure over time. The metaphor of sticky experiences' spiral can assist managers in communicating this mindset. The spiral captures the journey trajectory from customer curiosity to broadening initial service usage to increasingly rich and meaningful experiences that keep customers engaged over time.

Importantly, the spiral can serve as a reference point regarding the overarching task for effective sticky experience versus smooth experience management. The loop metaphor stemming from the loyalty loop in the smooth experience model highlights the key managerial task of creating increased simplicity of decision-making, enabling customers to experience seamlessness, customization, and quick results pertaining to their repeated tasks. In contrast, the spiral metaphor points to the key managerial task of facilitating increased complexity and unfolding adventure, enabling customers to experience emotional rollercoasters, and earned progress along their ongoing journeys. Managers can prioritize the firms' relevant capabilities accordingly and focus on creating the value sought by customers. The key capabilities of both models have been summarized in section 5.2 in this chapter.

The next set of subsections shift the focus from following the *customer* journey to following the *managerial* decision journey. Concretely, the subsections address how practitioners can decide when and why each model makes the most sense, during which cycles are purchase opportunities most appropriate, and how the insights from each model can be combined to sustain customer journeys.

5.4.2 Making a strategic choice between the smooth and sticky experience models

The dominant smooth experience model in customer experience management theory and practice (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) may not be the best choice in all service systems. The smooth experience model's underlying assumption that customers typically seek consistent and predictable experiences is in stark contrast to substantial marketplace evidence on hedonic service suggesting that customers sometimes seek the thrills of unpredictable experiences (e.g., Bosker, 2017; Fry, 2013; Lynley, 2016). In such circumstances, the sticky experience model may be better at meeting customer expectations, given its focus on fun, exciting, and unpredictable experiences with increasing customer involvement.

To guide the strategic choice between smooth and sticky experience models, customer experience management practitioners could take two key factors into account: (i) consider the function of the service category—does the service primarily support a ‘job to be done’ (Christensen *et al.*, 2005) or facilitate an ‘adventure’ (Scott *et al.*, 2017)?; (ii) if necessary, consider the disposition of the target market—does the brand’s typical customer approach the service category as a job or an adventure? The second factor is more relevant in hybrid service categories that evince characteristics of both jobs and adventures.

Does the service category facilitate a Job-to-be-Done or Never-Ending Adventure? One factor that could inform the choice between journey models is whether the service category has a primarily utilitarian function of supporting a customer job to be done or a primarily hedonic function of facilitating a customer adventure. Examples of utilitarian service categories are appliance repair (e.g., Mr. Appliance), automobile insurance (e.g., State Farm), commercial banking (e.g., Citibank), household supplies (e.g., Procter and Gamble), pharmacies (e.g., Walgreens), mobile carriers (e.g., Verizon), and transportation services (e.g., Amtrak). Brands in such service categories tend to be ‘hired’ to ‘resolve’ a ‘problem’ (Christensen *et al.*, 2007, p. 38). Accordingly, customer journeys in such categories are like ‘jobs to be done’ (Christensen *et al.*, 2007) including a series of tiresome search tasks (e.g., which Amtrak train or Greyhound bus offers the best departure and arrival times for one’s work schedule?), difficult purchase decisions (e.g., should one buy a cheap but non-refundable ticket or expensive but refundable ticket?), and significant consequences if the customer makes a decision error (e.g., arriving late or losing money).

These customer journeys can be cognitively exhausting during the initial service cycle as customers learn about competing ‘job candidates’ (Christensen *et al.*, 2007, p. 41) for the first time, make sense of the options, and evaluate whether they wish to be loyal to their purchased brand or try another one on the next cycle. In these instances, the extant smooth model of customer experience management is a fine choice. Firms should indeed battle other candidates for the job, which may come from the same or another service category (Christensen *et al.*, 2016), during the initial service cycle. Furthermore, firms should learn as much as possible about their customers’ jobs and streamline the customer journey across subsequent service cycles with simplification, personalization, and contextualization techniques to reduce the customer’s work over time (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Kuehnel *et al.*,

2019). Given the tediousness of customer journeys in utilitarian service categories, customers would indeed welcome a loyalty loop with one trusted service provider that they can hire repeatedly to do the job (Christensen *et al.*, 2016). With that job done, customers can turn their attention to other important things that need to be accomplished.

The smooth experience model is less suitable for service categories with a primarily hedonic function such as bars and clubs (e.g., Dave and Buster's), fast fashion (e.g., Zara), meal kits (e.g., Foodist), music discovery (e.g., Spotify), and television programming (e.g., HBO). Brands in such service categories tend to be selected when customers seek excitement, challenge, and encounters with the unexpected (Arnould and Price, 1993; Schouten *et al.*, 2007; Scott *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, customer journeys in these categories are like never-ending adventures, beginning with a call to something extraordinary, a series of unexpected twists and turns, and a sense of mission to keep customers moving forward, overcoming challenges in the process.

These customer journeys often begin spontaneously, just for fun, without much research, then gradually evolve into more intentional pursuits as customers discover new layers of meaning. In these instances, the emergent sticky model of customer experience management makes more sense. In the initial service cycle, firms should focus on rapidly translating a customer's sparks of curiosity into an immediate first-hand service experience, as those sparks of curiosity may fade quickly as the next new thing comes along. Across subsequent service cycles, firms need to focus on sustaining a continuous sense of customer excitement. Conceptualizing the ideal-typical journey in hedonic service categories as a spiralling roller coaster may help customer experience management practitioners to remember that sustaining customer excitement requires high experience unpredictability in the moment-to-moment timescale of a service encounter as well as increasing experiential involvement across the longer-term weekly or monthly timescale of the customer journey.

In a nutshell, the smooth experience model is more appropriate in utilitarian service categories wherein customers typically choose a single brand and services help customers with jobs to be done (Christensen *et al.*, 2005) to make their lives easier (Edelman and Singer, 2015). By contrast, the sticky experience model is more appropriate in hedonic service categories wherein customers often use

multiple brands and services invite customers to never-ending adventures that make their lives more exciting.

In hybrid service categories, is the target customer a Jobber or an Adventurer? Some service categories may evince the characteristics of both jobs and adventures. As one example, many beauty salon chains (e.g., Supercuts) offer head-to-toe treatments that are sometimes in service of customer jobs (e.g., weekly grooming to look professional) and sometimes in service of customer adventures (e.g., trying on new looks for fun). As another example, many casual dining chains (e.g., Au Bon Pain) offer extensive menu offerings sometimes in service of customer jobs (e.g., working adults' breakfast routines) and sometimes in service of customer adventures (e.g., college students' social gatherings). For such hybrid categories, another factor that could inform the choice between experience models is whether the firm's focal customer segment approaches the service category like a job to be done or a call to adventure. Customers who seek considerable information during the initial service cycle and repeat their purchase behaviour at regular intervals are probably approaching the service category like a job and may thus be labelled as Jobbers. By contrast, customers who try the service spontaneously with vague expectations (Arnould and Price, 1993) and have no discernible patterns across purchase behaviours are probably approaching the service category like an adventure and may thus be labelled as Adventurers. The next subsection provides practical suggestions on when to encourage purchases along the customer journey in each experience model.

5.4.3 Fitting purchase opportunities into the flow of smooth and sticky experience journeys

Many firms offer customers a wide array of service access options. For example, to entice customers, some firms offer free samples of the service (e.g., CrossFit), free basic versions (e.g., Tinder), or free full versions (e.g., Pokémon Go). Next, some firms offer customers options to purchase limited access to the service, such as a single service encounter (e.g., a drop-in CrossFit pass), a fixed number of service encounters (e.g., a 20-class CrossFit pass), or a limited-duration membership (e.g., a 7-day, 2-week, or 3-month CrossFit membership). For customers who are ready to make longer term commitments for an indefinite time period, firms typically offer tiered membership plans with increasing service benefits (e.g., Twice Weekly/Unlimited CrossFit memberships and Plus/Gold Tinder memberships). Some firms also offer customers one-off opportunities to purchase access to special

items, facilities, or events (e.g., Pokémon Go's additional raid passes, team-switches, and Safari Zone events). Firms providing free access to the full-service offering, such as Pokémon Go, often rely on these one-off opportunities to generate revenue.

It would be unwise to suggest that certain purchase options belong in the smooth experience model and others belong in the sticky experience model. Both types of models could include the aforementioned purchase options, and recent marketing research provides guidance on how to increase revenue in 'freemium' business models (Gu *et al.*, 2018). However, purchase opportunities must be distributed or timed differently across the initial and subsequent service cycles of smooth and sticky experience journeys to fit those purchase opportunities into the flow of each journey type. The next paragraph emphasises that purchase should come first in the case of smooth experiences across the customer journey. The following paragraph suggests that consumption should come first in the case of sticky experiences across the customer journey.

Purchase first in the flow of smooth experience journeys. Firms seeking to facilitate smooth customer experiences in utilitarian service categories generally showcase their complex menu of purchase options or tiered subscriptions in the initial service cycle. One reason is that customers approach utilitarian service categories with the mindset of a job-to-be-done, such that customers are already highly motivated to do the work of a deliberate decision-making process (Christensen *et al.*, 2005). Another reason is that once customers re-enter subsequent service cycles known as the loyalty loop; they do not want to be bothered with another complex menu of purchase options. From a customer's point of view, the phenomenological value of a loyalty loop is to avoid the tediousness and effort of deliberate decision-making a second time (Hyken, 2018). Customers want to glide through the loyalty loop and reserve their decision-making labour for other tasks. Accordingly, these firms should only offer customers new purchase opportunities when the customers themselves signal a desire to reconsider their routinized purchase or subscription plan. When firms unnecessarily showcase a new purchase opportunity, they run the risk of triggering the customer to re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and switching to a different brand altogether (Court *et al.*, 2017).

Consumption first in the flow of sticky experience journeys. By contrast, firms seeking to facilitate sticky customer experiences in hedonic service categories should not highlight purchase opportunities

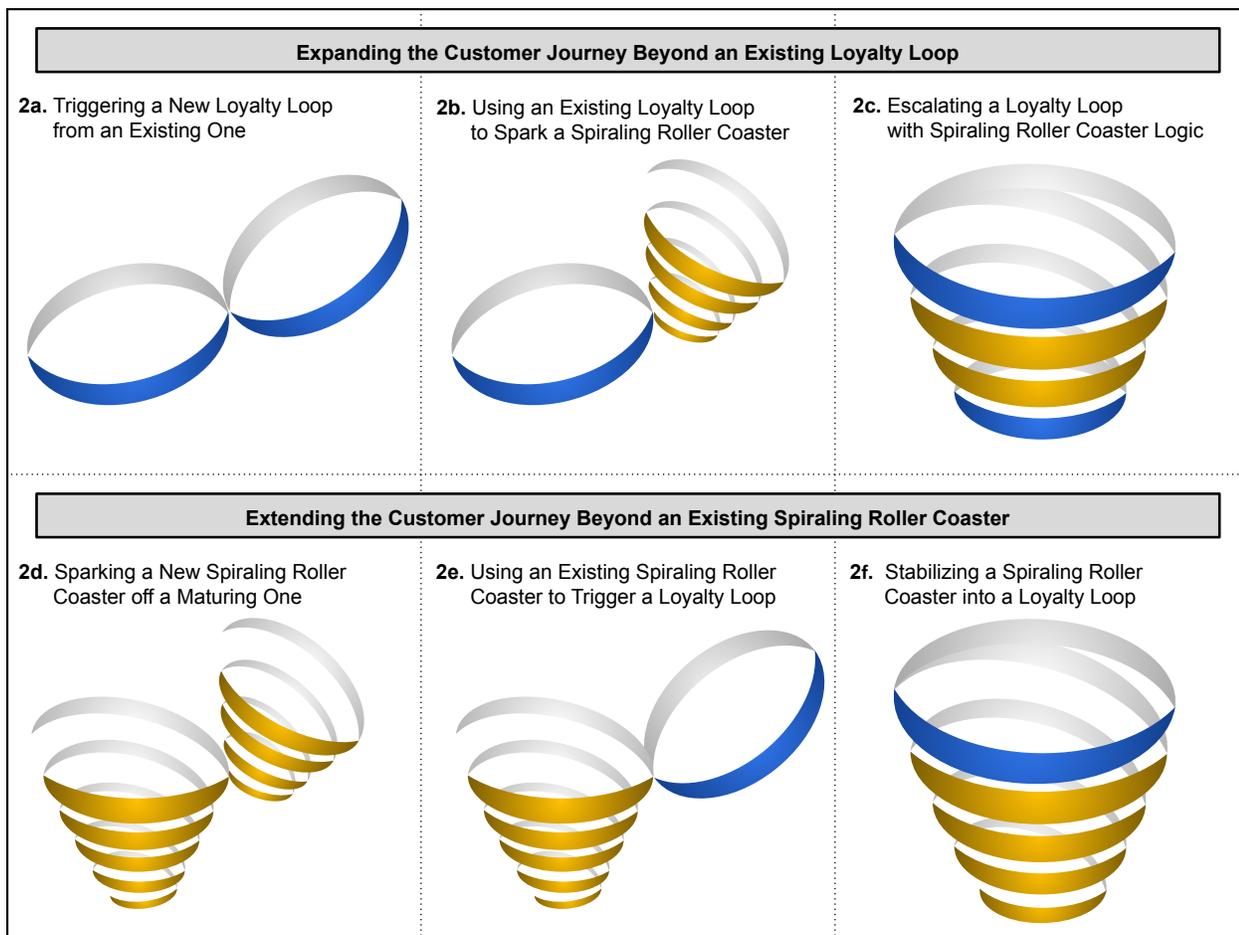
until after the initial service cycle. One reason is that highlighting a complex menu of purchase opportunities during the initial service cycle will likely douse customers' sparks of curiosity. Navigating a menu of purchase options necessitates deliberate decision-making that is antithetical to the promise of excitement. Another reason to wait until after the initial service cycle is that customers are most likely to begin making purchases or commit to long-term subscription plans when they are already caught up in the excitement of subsequent service cycles, that is, the spiralling roller coaster. Brands such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder recognize that customers feel ready to commit to hedonic services at different points along the spiralling roller coaster. Accordingly, these firms tend to welcome new customers to use either free basic services or short-term memberships if they wish, with limited sales pressure to upgrade to long-term subscription plans. These firms recognize the value of non-paying, low-paying, and short-term customers in the aggregate, because hedonic service categories thrive on having a great number of customers. For example, CrossFit thrives on a sense of 'hypercommunity' (Kozinets, 2002), which requires a significant number of core and peripheral community members to be physically present at daily workouts. Likewise, playing the game of Pokémon Go is much more exciting when catching Pokémon alongside fellow players and raiding together for rare Pokémon (Barrett, 2018), or reading about players' worldwide contributions to global game missions. Tinder too can only offer paying users hundreds of potential matches if there are indeed hundreds of other paying and non-paying users. The sheer volume and steady turnover of customers adds to the excitement of CrossFit, Pokémon, and Tinder.

To sum up, firms that seek to facilitate smooth customer experiences prioritize complex purchase decisions in the initial service cycle and avoid bothering customers with service plan reconsiderations during subsequent service cycles known as the loyalty loop. However, firms that seek to facilitate sticky customer experiences are conversely advised to avoid purchase considerations altogether during the initial service cycle and let customers make purchase decisions at their own pace when they are caught up in the spiralling roller coaster of subsequent service cycles. These firms are also advised to recognize the value of having non-paying, low-paying, and short-term customers who directly contribute to the experiences of high-paying customers. The next subsection outlines how customer experience management practitioners can sustain customer journeys by interlinking loyalty loops and spiralling roller coasters.

5.4.4 Sustaining customer experience journeys beyond single loyalty loops and spiralling roller coasters

Unlike most start-ups and small businesses that provide customers with a single service, most mid-sized and large firms tend to provide customers with multiple inter-related services. Some of these services may be more instrumental, supporting customer jobs, while others may be more recreational, facilitating customer adventures. A key question for customer experience management practitioners is how to design customer journeys in multi-service systems, or how to sustain customer journeys beyond a single loyalty loop or spiralling roller coaster. To address this concern, six pathways by which loyalty loops and spiralling roller coasters can be expanded or extended are suggested in this subsection. The first part of this subsection presents three ways in which the customer experience journey can be expanded beyond an existing loyalty loop. The second part of the subsection offers three ways in which the customer journey can be extended beyond an existing spiralling roller coaster.

Figure 4: Combining Loyalty Loops and Spiralling Roller Coasters to Sustain Customer Journeys



Source: Author.

Expanding the customer experience journey beyond an existing loyalty loop. When a multi-service firm already has customers enrolled in one existing loyalty loop, customer experience management practitioners can expand upon that customer journey pattern using three possible journey expansion pathways (see figure 4, panels 2a-c). To illustrate these three pathways, consider the example of customers of quick service chains (e.g., Dunkin Donuts, Pret a Manger, Starbucks) who use the chain’s app to purchase a medium-sized cup of coffee every morning on their way to work.

One way to expand an existing loyalty loop is to add another new loyalty loop by triggering a new deliberate decision-making process during the existing loyalty loop (panel 2a). For example, on a special occasion such as a customer’s birthday, the chain could gift the customer a free breakfast sandwich of his own choosing for the next three service encounters. The customer is thus invited to

enter a new deliberate decision-making process about which breakfast sandwich might best suit his needs every morning (e.g., chorizo, egg, and cheese sandwich). When the free one-week offer ends, this tactic could result in the customer purchasing not only a cup of coffee every morning but also a breakfast sandwich to get the energize-me job done even better.

A second way to expand upon an existing loyalty loop is to spark a spiralling roller coaster during the existing loyalty loop (panel 2b). For example, on the customer's birthday, instead of gifting a single self-selected menu offering, the chain could surprise the customer with a varied food offering at each of the next three service encounters. One morning the customer might receive a cranberry scone, and another morning a protein lunchbox. When this free week-long adventure ends, the customer's experiential involvement with the food menu may be sufficiently elevated such that the customer wishes to continue the adventure on his own by sampling other breakfast, lunch, and snack food offerings, all of which are updated seasonally.

Adventurous tasting of other options of a food and beverage menu might be limited by the nature of the service. In other words, there might be limits to how challenging and thrilling experiences can be at a quick service chain or related services until the service becomes overly chaotic and frustrating, with customer never knowing what they are going to receive and switching to other, more predictable services. Therefore, if firms seek to enable customers to truly experience spiralling roller coasters, another tactic could be to provide the customer with gift cards of free extended trials of high hedonic services, such as a three-month free trial of Netflix. These inter-firm alliances can be mutually beneficial to firms (Homburg *et al.*, 2017), potentially strengthening the loyalty of the customer to the quick service chain and leading to a paid subscription of Netflix after the free trial period ends.

A third way to expand upon an existing loyalty loop is to escalate that very same loyalty loop with spiralling roller coaster logic for a short-term period (panel 2c). In this case, the chain's customer who purchases a basic cup of coffee every morning could be invited to enjoy any beverage at the same cost for the next three days. In this scenario, the customer may upgrade his orders to different beverages each morning (e.g., a caramel macchiato, an iced-coffee with cookies and cream). The chain could even exploit the allure of 'blind tastings' (Ghoshal *et al.*, 2014), in which the chain remains in control of what beverage it will serve to the customer, within certain boundaries set by the customer (e.g.,

allergies). This tactic more purely evokes suspense, or the exciting anticipating of what comes next, in this case a sophisticated beverage one may never have tried before. Exposure to the chain's non-basic drinks may encourage customers to permanently expand the energize-me job to an energize-and-indulge-me job, upgrading their loyalty loop from a basic order to a more sophisticated and expensive one.

Extending the customer experience journey beyond an existing spiralling roller coaster. When a multi-service firm already has customers swept up in one spiralling roller coaster, customer experience management practitioners can extend that customer journey using three journey extension pathways that mirror the conceptual logic that was employed to expand upon loyalty loops (see figure 4, panels 2d-f). To illustrate these three pathways, consider a common scenario of seasoned athletes at group fitness services (e.g., CrossFit, Orange Theory, SoulCycle) who have attended 3-4 flagship classes per week for several months. Until recently their experiential involvement in the varied workouts has been steadily climbing, but lately their interest has waned, and the membership systems have noted that their attendance is declining.

One way to solve the problem of a spiralling roller coaster that is losing steam is to simply begin a new one (panel 2d). At CrossFit, for example, the most enthusiastic members may reach a level of fitness at which the flagship classes are not as much of a challenge. At this juncture, CrossFit boxes invite those members to begin attending special classes for advanced athletes such as Barbell Club or Strongman. As the new class has a significantly different structure, membership, and level of challenge, athletes can be understood as entering a new spiralling roller coaster. Eventually, some of these athletes may go on to be competitive CrossFit athletes. Similarly, other group fitness services may encourage their advanced athletes to try new high intensity, special classes and view such training as an adventurous journey enabling them to approach novel challenges such as Weightlifting competitions or the 'gruelling' Tough Mudder (Scott *et al.*, 2017).

A second way to expand a spiralling roller coaster is to add-on a loyalty loop (panel 2e). For example, some CrossFit boxes also offer members protein smoothies. While the athletes primarily come into the box for the spiralling roller coaster of constantly varied CrossFit workouts, many can also become locked into the loyalty loop of purchasing protein smoothies on their way out to conveniently get the

job of post-workout-recovery done. These protein smoothies could include the latest ingredients held to be especially suitable for a quick and sustainable recovery of the body after intense workouts. In this way, CrossFit boxes and other group fitness services could scientifically support not only the advantages of their ever-challenging workouts but also of the recovery-job-solutions they offer. Following this pathway, group fitness services could benefit from also knowing their customers' fitness-related jobs and seeking to create consistent and predictable experiences addressing those jobs that are more appealing than those of other candidates for the recovery job, such as quick service chains.

A third way to sustain a customer experience journey when a spiralling roller coaster is losing steam is to convert that customer journey into a loyalty loop (panel 2f). In the data set, the author noted that at least some informants eventually tire of the CrossFit ethos of relentlessly challenging themselves, but rather than terminating their usage of the service, they convert their upwardly spiralling journey into a stable cyclical one, like a loyalty loop. For example, Emily (CrossFit athlete) says: 'I'm doing it at a much lesser level now... just [to] keep a certain level of fitness.' Customers like Emily typically scale back their CrossFit attendance from an intense period of five to six times a week to one to two times a week with a distinct mindset of maintaining rather than increasing their current level of fitness. These customers typically choose a low-cost limited membership of two classes per week versus the high-cost unlimited membership. The lesson from these customers is that although the original service's intention of low-cost limited memberships might be to enrol uncertain newcomers, these memberships could also appeal to seasoned customers who might prefer to approach exciting workouts within the stability of a loyalty loop (given their current life situation), even while they may have previously enjoyed a spiralling roller coaster.

To sum up, the second to fourth subsections have provided recommendations to customer experience management practitioners interested in exploring the opportunities lying at the intersection of the smooth and sticky experience model. These practical implications seek to assist practitioners in their decision-making processes. Specifically, the subsections have sought to assist practitioners in issues of making a strategic choice between the smooth and sticky experience models, of fitting purchase opportunities in the flow of each experience journeys, and of sustaining customer experience journeys

beyond singular loyalty loops and spiralling roller coasters. The next section presents selected limitations of this thesis as well as future research opportunities.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

This section contains two brief subsections that look back at the current research and look forward at potential future research. The first subsection discusses limitations of the thesis. The subsection focuses on five select methodological choices made and how they might have limited the contribution of the thesis. The second subsection outlines future research opportunities. The subsection briefly introduces four select areas of future research and provides a list of potentially interesting questions for future research on customer experiences and customer journeys in several areas of marketing research.

5.5.1 Limitations

This thesis provides one possible understanding of how sticky experiences evolve across multiple service cycles of the customer journey. As has been discussed in the Methodology Chapter, different understandings are possible in any qualitative research (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Belk *et al.*, 2013). The interpretation that this thesis provides is well grounded in empirical data and has offered several theoretical and practical implications to customer experience management research and practice, respectively. Nevertheless, it made methodological choices that have influenced its realm of possibilities and might have limited the thesis' potential to answer its research questions. Five such choices and potential limitations are discussed in this subsection, divided into the choice of contexts, sampling choices, and data collection choices.

Choice of contexts. The author chose three diverse and popular contexts within which to study the phenomenon of sticky experiences: The group fitness service CrossFit, the mobile augmented reality game Pokémon Go, and the mobile dating app Tinder. The rationale for the choice of these three contexts was outlined in the Chapter 3 (section 3.7). Had the author chosen a single context, he might have been able to develop a richer, more granular account of the evolution of sticky experiences in that specific context. Unlike studies that consider a broad spectrum of touchpoints and possible routes a customer might go through along the customer journey (see Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), this thesis,

with its choice of three contexts, had to let go off generating such rich granular understandings. However, the choice of three contexts allowed for the development of a more generalizable theory. A related advantage of the choice of more than one context is that the findings are applicable not only to offline or online service, but both. Future research could examine sticky experiences and their evolution across the customer journey in specific contexts, perhaps generating useful insights that this thesis did not generate, such as detailed touchpoint journey maps.

Sampling choices: The author interviewed 40 informants. Interviewing 40 informants allowed the author to cull more than ten stories from each of the three service contexts: 13 stories about sticky experiences with CrossFit, 19 stories about sticky experiences with Pokémon Go, and eleven stories about sticky experiences with Tinder. In addition, eleven stories included discernible termination trajectories. Data collection via informant interviews was stopped when the analysis of the data set did not alter emergent findings, at theoretical saturation. Related to the previous point, had the author chosen to focus on one context and collected a higher number of informant interviews, perhaps including multiple interviews with the same informants over time, he might have been able to trace the sticky experience journey in more detail. A more extensive and longitudinal data set from a single context might have offered possibilities for analysis and interpretation that the used data set did not offer, such as identifying more granular, touchpoint-specific insights on moments of truth within single service cycles. However, interviewing 40 informants from across the three services, as this thesis did, helped the author to develop a higher-order, mid-level theory of the evolution of sticky experiences. It is hoped that the emergent sticky experience model can inform research on these more granular accounts of customer experiences and journeys, just like these accounts have inspired the author along his research journey.

The second potential limitation of the sampling choices pertains to the cultural context within which the data was collected. All informant interviews were conducted in the United Kingdom and Continental Europe, with informants living in these Western countries and, with few exceptions, originating from these countries. All data, including primary and secondary data, was collected in the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, and the United States. Interviewing informants from Western countries and origins (with few exceptions) allowed the author to assume a relatively shared cultural background and understanding of informants. In addition, the author also has a Western cultural

background, which helped to reduce barriers to mutual understanding. Situating the research exclusively in the Western cultural context has certainly shaped the entire research. Consumers in other parts of the world, especially in non-Western cultural contexts, might experience the three selected service differently. As a case in point, the use of Tinder might be associated with more stigma, especially for women, in countries in which societal expectations around morality more severely restrict dating behaviours for leisure purposes. Sticky experiences for certain services might not emerge easily, or under different circumstances, or be closer associated with a sense of transgression, or even be more intensely experienced. Examining the phenomenon of sticky experiences in other cultural contexts might be an interesting avenue for future research.

Data collection choices. The author collected observational data from all three contexts. In the case of CrossFit, this included working out at three different CrossFit boxes, participated in social CrossFit events, and being a member of a social media group about CrossFit. In the case of Pokémon Go, this included playing the game to a moderate level of proficiency, taking part in group raids as part of spontaneous gatherings or organized via social media or email groups, and being a member of an email list-serv about the game. These online and offline activities provided ample opportunities for observing the behaviours of users of CrossFit and Pokémon Go, and to experience the stickiness of these services first-hand.

However, in the sensitive context of Tinder, opportunities for observation and first-hand experience were more limited, due to the ethical considerations outlined in Chapter 3. As an example, taking part in an intense CrossFit workout along other athletes or battling a legendary Pokémon along other players has truly enabled the author to experience what the core service is like. In the context of Tinder, the author could experience the stickiness of swiping through Tinder profiles, using his ethically appropriate user profile, but other parts of the Tinder experience (e.g., flirting with matches via Tinder's messaging service, real-world dates) were only accessible through the stories of informants. The author sought to make up for this limitation in observations regarding Tinder by familiarizing himself deeply with the service, for example by reading numerous press articles about Tinder and having informal conversations with friends and acquaintances about their Tinder usage. Future research on sticky experiences that seeks to heavily rely on observational data must be aware of the ethical

considerations regarding certain research contexts that might limit the ways in which such data can be collected.

The second potential limitation of the data collection choices pertains to the ease of access to internal firm data. Regarding CrossFit, the author could interview a few CrossFit box owners and coaches who provided not only their experience as CrossFit customers but also their insights on CrossFit's stickiness from the perspective of their role as providers. However, such access to primary data on Pokémon Go and Tinder could not be secured, primarily because there are no human service providers in these online technology-based services that directly interact with users. More generally, internal data from the brands or firms themselves was not collected. The author sought to access information about the brands and firms via publicly available materials in the form of website information, blog posts, press articles, and so on. This might have limited the insights the thesis could offer about the internal organizational perspective, for example, how customer experience management capabilities are created and fostered internally by members of an organization. This limitation of the current research offers rich opportunities for future research that can secure access to internal firm data, or even accompany firms as they develop and execute customer experience management capabilities over time. The next sections provides several additional avenues for future research.

5.5.2 Future Research

The development of the sticky experience model, as well as the limitations of this thesis, open up several opportunities for future research on customer experience management and especially on customer journeys. At a high level, chief among these opportunities is drawing more empirical research attention to new and different types of customer journeys. There is no single approach to designing and managing customer journeys that is optimal under all circumstances. Accordingly, it is hoped that this thesis inspires researchers interested in customer experience management to keep examining the variety of customer experience and journeys in today's marketplace.

Table 8 lists several potentially interesting questions related to the sticky and smooth experience models that might be worth pursuing in the marketing research areas of customer experience management, customer journey design, brands and branding, consumer culture theory, consumer

psychology, transformative consumer research and transformative service research. Four select opportunities are briefly introduced in the next four paragraphs.

One such opportunity is to drill down on the rather abstract smooth and sticky experience models to the concrete design elements that would complement each experience model at each service touchpoint. Some research has already begun examining how to configure verbal and visual elements to create effective web pages (Bleier *et al.*, 2018).

A second opportunity is to explore whether the customer segment archetypes of Jobbers and Adventurers correspond with particular ages and life stages. Perhaps young adults (Weinberger *et al.*, 2017) and retirees (Schau *et al.*, 2009) with more free time to enjoy themselves will be more amenable to sticky experience journeys, whereas busy parents and professionals may prefer the ease of loyalty loops to simplify their already complicated lifestyles.

In a related vein, future research could also explore whether customer archetypes vary situationally by time of day and day of the week. Perhaps morning and evening commuters (Christensen *et al.*, 2005) are more likely to be Jobbers who welcome loyalty loops to minimize delays whereas weeknight and weekend revellers (Goulding *et al.*, 2009) may be Adventurers seeking the unpredictable thrills of spiralling roller coasters.

A third opportunity is exploring new customer journey types beyond smooth and sticky journeys. In the emerging technological era of virtual reality, augmented reality, and the internet of things, customer journeys may be far more imaginative than customer experience management scholarship has considered thus far (Novak and Hoffman, 2019).

A fourth opportunity is tracing the evolution of customer experience journeys in burgeoning domains such as the peer-to-peer sharing economy, wherein firms have much less control over customer experiences than the traditional business-to-customer economy (Eckhardt *et al.*, 2019).

Table 8: Avenues for Future Research

Field of Marketing Research	Avenues for Future Research
Customer Experience Management and Customer Journey Design	<p>Beyond utilitarian and hedonic service categories, what other service categories might benefit from new and distinct customer journey models?</p> <p>What novel types of customer journeys are possible with artificial intelligence, artificial life, virtual reality, augmented reality, and the internet of things (Belk <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Javornik, 2016; Novak and Hoffman, 2019; Scholz and Smith, 2016)?</p> <p>How do customer experiences and journeys differ in the sharing economy, wherein firms have much less control over service touchpoints (Dellaert, 2019; Eckhardt <i>et al.</i>, 2019)?</p> <p>How can firms design customer experience journeys in hybrid service categories that have both utilitarian and hedonic characteristics (e.g., beauty salons, casual restaurants, yoga studios)?</p> <p>How can journey patterns in the smooth and sticky experience models be measured? For example, how can the spiralling roller coaster be measured (Kraemer <i>et al.</i>, 2020)?</p> <p>How can firms use the insights from the sticky experience model to accelerate the initial service cycle of the smooth experience model (Edelman and Singer, 2015)?</p> <p>How should sequences of triggers, activities, and rewards (Eyal, 2014) be arranged across multiple service cycles to best facilitate sticky experience journeys?</p>

	<p>What design elements complement smooth and sticky journeys at physical (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010) and virtual (Bleier <i>et al.</i>, 2019) touchpoints?</p> <p>How are customer journeys (i.e., with a firm) related to consumer journeys (i.e., person-centric journeys that typically involve interactions with multiple firms; Hamilton and Price, 2019)?</p>
Brands and Branding	<p>Can brands be sticky? If so, how might brand stickiness be conceptualized?</p> <p>How can customer experience management and customer journey design help to overcome the challenges of integrating brand experiences in a hyperconnected but fragmented mediascape (Swaminathan <i>et al.</i>, 2020)?</p> <p>How can different customer journey designs such as the smooth and sticky experience models contribute to building brand community (McAlexander <i>et al.</i>, 2002)?</p> <p>Do particular types of customer experiences (e.g., sticky experiences) correspond with particular types of brand relationships (e.g., love affairs; Fournier, 1998)?</p>
Consumer Culture Theory	<p>How are historical forces such as social acceleration (Husemann and Eckhardt, 2019), institutional pluralization (Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli, 2015), and consumer responsabilization (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014) restructuring the political economy of customer experiences?</p>

	<p>What are the ideological aspects of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998)? For example, what ideologies and myths shape firms' journey offerings and customers' journey preferences?</p> <p>How do social identity structures such as race, class, and gender (Gopaldas, 2013) shape customer journey patterns (Crockett and Wallendorf, 2004)?</p> <p>In what ways are the collective customer journeys of families, teams, and other social groups different from individual customer journeys (Epp and Price, 2008, 2011)?</p>
Consumer Psychology	<p>What are the moment-to-moment psychological dynamics of different kinds of customer experiences?</p> <p>How does the depletion and replenishment of consumers' psychological resources vary across different journey patterns (Vohs <i>et al.</i>, 2008)? For example, under what circumstances do spiralling roller coasters become exhausting rather than exciting?</p> <p>Are the consumer archetypes of jobbers and adventurers related to personality factors such as openness to experiences (Wild <i>et al.</i>, 1995) and variety-seeking (Kahn, 1995)?</p> <p>Do consumer preferences for particular customer experiences vary situationally (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020)? For example, do weekend revellers prefer sticky experiences, while weekday commuters prefer smooth experiences?</p>
Transformative Consumer Research	<p>How can the sticky experience model be used to motivate healthy behaviours (e.g., meditation, nutrition, running)? Similarly, how can the</p>

<p>and Transformative Service Research</p>	<p>sticky experience model be used to motivate pro-environmental behaviours (White <i>et al.</i>, 2019)?</p> <p>Where do sticky journeys end and behavioural addictions begin (Sussman <i>et al.</i>, 2011)?</p> <p>How are online behavioural addictions different from offline behavioural addictions (Cotte and Latour, 2009)?</p> <p>Why are some consumers better at self-reflexivity (Akaka and Schau, 2019) and self-regulation (Baumeister, 2002) than others?</p>
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Source: Author.

To sum up, this section has outlined five methodological limitations of the thesis that might have influenced the realm of possible outcomes and contributions of the research efforts to customer experience management. The section has also provided several questions that might inspire future research on customer experiences and customer journeys in different areas of marketing research. The next and final section will briefly summarize the chapter.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented succinct answers to the two research questions (section 5.2), described the theoretical contributions of this research (section 5.3) and the practical implications of this research (section 5.4), and provided the research's limitations as well as future research opportunities (section 5.5). Section 5.2 provided a summary of how the thesis has answered its research questions (First, do sticky experiences exist and if so, how can sticky experiences be conceptualized? Second, how do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey?) These answers describe the core theoretical contribution of the thesis. Section 5.3 has presented additional theoretical contributions to customer experience management and marketing research more broadly. Section 5.4 has described the thesis' practical implications. This section has mainly addressed three

substantive concerns for customer experience management practitioners: how to choose between these models, when to encourage purchases, and how to interlink the models. Section 5.5 has presented the final piece of the Discussion Chapter by acknowledging limitations of the thesis and providing suggestions for future research on customer experiences and customer journeys in various areas of marketing research.

By challenging the dominance of the smooth experience model, empirically developing the sticky experience model, and offering practical implications for managing sticky experiences across the customer journey, as well as for dealing with strategic concerns at the intersection of these two model, the thesis has sought to advance customer experience management research and practice. The insights developed in this thesis may be useful to better understand and manage the evolution of customer journeys, consisting of smooth or sticky experiences, across multiple service cycles over time. The author hopes that this thesis has made a contribution to customer experience management research, and that it can inspire future work in this exciting area of research and practice.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Interview Guide for Interviews with Consumers

1. INTRO: Tell me about yourself.

2. QUALE:
 - a. Tell me about [service].
 - b. What else in your life is linked to [service]?

3. JOURNEY – GENERAL:
 - a. How did you come to start [service]?
 - b. When did you realize you wanted to use/play/go to [service] again and again?
 - c. Were there times when you were less excited about [service]? What brought you back?
 - d. How has your experience with [service] changed over time?
 - e. (What made you stop [service]?)

4. ALTERNATIVES:
 - a. What other [exercise programs/games/dating apps] have you tried?
 - b. Tell me about the last time you did/played/used [alternative].
 - c. What about [alternative] didn't work for you?
 - d. Why do you like [service] more?

5. JOURNEY – DAILY/WEEKLY/MONTHLY: Walk me through how SE enters and exits your daily life from morning, or whenever you first think of it, to night.
 - a. *Triggers*: What makes you think or feel 'Oh I should get to/play/logon [service]'?
 - b. *Staying*: What makes you stay? (At the box. In the game. On the app.)
 - c. *Stoppers*: What usually makes you leave/stop/logoff [service]?
 - d. *Challenges*: How do you deal with challenges and dilemmas related to [service]?
 - e. *Absence*: How would your day be different without [service]?

6. EXPERIENCING [SERVICE] (EXTREMES):
 - a. Can you recall your most exciting or impressive moment of using [service]?
 - b. Can you recall your least enjoyable or most negative moment of using [service]?
 - c. What was the craziest thing you have done for/at [service]?
 - d. Do you think you are addicted to [service]?

7. CRITIQUE, TRANSGRESSION & CONFLICT: Can you tell me about a time when being in/on/playing [service] felt inappropriate or not appreciated in some way?

8. TERMINATION: Let's say [service] completely shut down tomorrow, how would that be for you? What would you miss? How would you feel?

9. CONTRASTING & REFLECTING: Other people have talked about their ongoing [desire/addiction/excitement/...] for [service], what is your take on this?

10. CHECK DEMOGRAPHIC & USAGE DETAILS: gender, age, education, occupation, family status, hobbies/interests; [service] usage length, frequency, start, (end)

11. OPTION FOR MORE: Can I keep you posted on how the research is going?

PROBES:

- How did you find yourself in that situation?
- What happened next? Where is this headed?
- You said you feel ['addicted to'/'obsessed with'] [service], how so?

7.2 Appendix B: Interview Guide for Interviews with Makers, Employees, and Providers

1. INTRO:

- a. Tell me about yourself.
- b. Tell me about what you do at [service].

2. QUALE:

- a. Tell me about [service] customers.
- b. What sort of experience is [service] trying to create for its customers?

3. JOURNEY – GENERAL:

- a. How do your customers come to start [service]?
- b. When do your customers realize they want to use/play/go to [service] again and again?
- c. Are there times when your customers are less excited about [service]? What brings them back?
- d. How do your customers' experiences change over time?
- e. What made customers stop [service]?

4. ALTERNATIVES:

- a. What other [exercise programs/games/dating apps] have your customers tried?
- b. What about [alternative] didn't work for your customers?
- c. Why do your customers like [service] more?
- d. What do you think makes [service] more attractive?

5. JOURNEY – DAILY/WEEKLY/MONTHLY: Walk me through how [service] enters and exits your customers' daily life from morning, or whenever they first think of it, to night.

- a. *Triggers*: What makes your customers think or feel 'Oh I should get to/play/logon [service]'?
- b. *Staying*: What makes your customers stay? (At the box. In the game. On the app.)
- c. *Stoppers*: What usually makes your customers leave/stop/logoff [service]?

- d. *Challenges*: How do your customers deal with challenges and dilemmas? (At the box. In the game. On the app.)
 - e. *Absence*: How would your customers' day/week be different without [service]?
6. CRITIQUE, TRANSGRESSION & CONFLICT: Can you tell me about a time when a customer said that being in/on/playing [service] felt inappropriate, not appreciated, or over the top? How do you respond to criticism?
 7. TERMINATION: Let's say [service] completely shut down tomorrow, how would that be for your customers? In your view, what would they miss and how would they feel?
 8. CONTRASTING & REFLECTING: Consumers have talked about their ongoing [desire/addiction/excitement/...] for [service], what is your take on this?
 9. DEMOGRAPHIC & WORK DETAILS: gender, age, education, occupation, family status, hobbies/interests; length in industry and current job, frequency of work, start of work, (end)
 10. OPTION FOR MORE: Can I keep you posted on how the research is going?

PROBES:

- How did you find yourself in that situation?
- What happened next? Where is this headed?
- You said your customers feel ['addicted to'/'obsessed with'] [service], how so?

7.3 Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent form for persons participating in a research project

Interactive Customer Experiences

Name of participant:

Name of principal investigator(s): Anton Siebert

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with an information leaflet to keep (entitled: Interactive Customer Experiences: Information Leaflet for Potential Participants).
2. I understand that my participation will involve an interview and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the information leaflet.
3. I acknowledge that:
 - a. The possible effects of participating in this research have been explained to my satisfaction;
 - b. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered from me until it is anonymised at the point of transcription on 30 November 2018. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
 - c. The project is for the purpose of research;
 - d. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be

safeguarded subject to any legal requirements. I am aware that a trusted transcription firm may be commissioned to transcribe the original interviews; and that only anonymised data will be used for the data analysis;

- e. I have been informed that with my consent the raw data generated will be stored on a password protected computer and will be destroyed after five years;
- f. I am aware that the data may be backed up in the US using the service Dropbox;
- g. If necessary any data from me will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;
- h. I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to this interview being audiotaped **yes** **no**
(please tick)

Participant signature:

Date:

Anton Siebert
Newcastle University London
102 Middlesex Street
E1 7EZ, London, GB

██
██

7.4 Appendix D: Information Leaflet for Potential Participants (Consumers)

Interactive Customer Experiences: Information Leaflet for Potential Participants

What is the aim of this research?

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of active and former users of services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. The study will focus particularly on the kinds of experiences, aspects of these experiences (e.g., emotions, thoughts, behaviour), and the journeys that participants live through when they are in contact with these services.

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?

Anton Siebert, Andrew Lindridge, Claudia Simoes, and Ahir Gopaldas are carrying out this research on behalf of Newcastle University London for the purpose of research. The project started during Anton Siebert's first year of his PhD at The Open University in 2016. The research team is experienced in conducting interviews and observations. We design, carry out, and analyse research in the fields of consumer behaviour and marketing. Further information about us can be found on the websites of Newcastle University London, Fordham University, and the University of Minho. The research is self-funded.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified as an active or former **consumer** of services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, or Tinder. For this reason, we would like to invite you to participate in our research.

If I take part in this research, what will be involved?

We will be conducting interviews from summer 2017 to winter 2018/2019. The interviews will take approximately one hour and would be conducted at a location of your choice, including your workplace and setting of service usage, at a date and time that is convenient to you. Interviews via Skype or a similar service would also be possible. To ensure your safety, all our researchers carry photographic identification. No incentive will be offered for your participation.

What will the interviews be like?

You will be asked to respond to a semi-structured interview guide and engage in free-range conversations. You can terminate your participation at any time during the interview. You are also free to skip any question and move on to the next one at any time.

What will we be talking about?

You will be asked to share your experiences with services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. After basic demographic and lifestyle aspects (e.g., occupation, education, and hobbies), we will be talking about your usage patterns of the service (e.g., how long you have been using the service, and how often you use the service), as well as your experiences with the service. Sample questions may include: How did you first get involved with the service? Could you tell me about your experiences with the service? Why do you think the service has been so attractive to so many people? How would your life be without the service? Do you see any negatives or downsides to the service – either for the individuals involved or for society?

Is it confidential?

Your participation will be treated in **strict confidence** in accordance with data protection laws. A transcription firm ensuring anonymity (e.g., Way with Words) may be commissioned to transcribe the original interviews (i.e., put them into written form). The transcribed data will be made and kept anonymous. Only these anonymised data will be used for the subsequent research steps. No personal information will therefore be shared with anyone outside the research team. We will write a report of the findings from this study, but no individual will be identifiable in published results of the research. A summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to you, should you request this. Please be aware that data may be stored in the US using the service Dropbox. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Newcastle University has reviewed this research and given ethical approval (confirmation of ethical approval is available upon request).

Can I withdraw from this research?

You are free to withdraw from the project – before, during, and after the interview – without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered until it is anonymised at the point of transcription on 30 November 2018. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data.

What happens now?

Either directly now, or over the next few weeks, someone from the research team may contact you to ask if you would like to take part and, if so, ask you a few questions about yourself. We need to make sure that a cross-section of people with different experiences are included in the study and for this reason we cannot guarantee that we will see everyone who volunteers to take part, although we would hope to include most. If you would prefer not to be contacted about this research, please tell us now or use the phone number below to let us know and we will not contact you again. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

What if I have other questions?

If you have any other questions about the study we would be very happy to answer them. Please contact Anton Siebert by phone [REDACTED]

Alternatively, you can contact Dr. Andrew Lindridge by email to [REDACTED]

Anton Siebert, Newcastle University London, 102 Middlesex Street, E1 7EZ, London, GB

7.5 Appendix E: Information Leaflet for Potential Participants (Makers, Employees, Providers, and Experts)

Interactive Customer Experiences: Information Leaflet for Potential Participants

What is the aim of this research?

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of active and former users of services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder – and learn more about how to facilitate such experiences. The study will focus particularly on the kinds of experiences, aspects of these experiences (e.g., emotions, thoughts, behaviour), and the journeys that participants live through when they are in contact with these services.

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?

Anton Siebert, Andrew Lindridge, Claudia Simoes, and Ahir Gopaldas are carrying out this research on behalf of Newcastle University London for the purpose of research. The project started during Anton Siebert's first year of his PhD at The Open University in 2016. The research team is experienced in conducting interviews and observations. We design, carry out, and analyse research in the fields of consumer behaviour and marketing. Further information about us can be found on the websites of Newcastle University London, Fordham University, and the University of Minho. The research is self-funded.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified as a (active or former) **maker, employee, provider, or expert** of services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. For this reason, we would like to invite you to participate in our research.

If I take part in this research, what will be involved?

We will be conducting interviews from summer 2017 to winter 2018/2019. The interviews will take approximately one hour and would be conducted at a location of your choice, including your workplace and setting of service usage, at a date and time that is convenient to you. Interviews via Skype or a similar service would also be possible. To ensure your safety, all our researchers carry photographic identification. No incentive will be offered for your participation.

What will the interviews be like?

You will be asked to respond to a semi-structured interview guide and engage in free-range conversations. You can terminate your participation at any time during the interview. You are also free to skip any question and move on to the next one at any time.

What will we be talking about?

You will be asked about customer experiences with services such as CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. Items may include your understanding of customers' experiences with such services; ways in which companies, employees, and providers attempt to facilitate particular desired experiences of customers; what customer experience management or design strategies and tools are used; your perceptions of the managing of customer experiences done by competitors; your understanding of customer experiences over time; and ways you deal with failed or undesirable experiences on the part of your customers.

Is it confidential?

Your participation will be treated in **strict confidence** in accordance with data protection laws. A transcription firm ensuring anonymity (e.g., Way with Words) may be commissioned to transcribe the original interviews (i.e., put them into written form). The transcribed data will be made and kept anonymous. Only these anonymised data will be used for the subsequent research steps. No personal information will therefore be shared with anyone outside the research team. We will write a report of the findings from this study, but no individual will be identifiable in published results of the research. A summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to you, should you request this. Please be aware that data may be stored in the US using the service Dropbox. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Newcastle University has reviewed this research and given ethical approval (confirmation of ethical approval is available upon request).

Can I withdraw from this research?

You are free to withdraw from the project – before, during, and after the interview – without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered until it is anonymised at the point of transcription on 30 November 2018. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data.

What happens now?

Either directly now, or over the next few weeks, someone from the research team may contact you to ask if you would like to take part and, if so, ask you a few questions about yourself. We need to make sure that a cross-section of people with different experiences are included in the study and for this reason we cannot guarantee that we will see everyone who volunteers to take part, although we would hope to include most. If you would prefer not to be contacted about this research, please tell us now or use the phone number below to let us know and we will not contact you again. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

What if I have other questions?

If you have any other questions about the study we would be very happy to answer them. Please contact Anton Siebert by phone [REDACTED]

Alternatively, you can contact Dr. Andrew Lindridge by email to [REDACTED]

Anton Siebert, Newcastle University London, 102 Middlesex Street, E1 7EZ, London, GB

7.6 Appendix F: Preliminary Findings Based on the Initial Round of Data Interpretation

This appendix provides the preliminary findings of the initial round of data interpretation. The findings capture a preliminary understanding of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey. This understanding was a crucial step in the author's research journey toward developing a convincing theory of sticky experiences across the customer journey.

The preliminary understanding presented here is for reference purposes only. It is meant to offer the reader insight into one stage of the research process. At this stage, an initial understanding was formulated, but that understanding was subsequently revised to arrive at a more convincing theory, which was presented in this thesis' main text.

7.6.1 Overview of the Preliminary Sticky Experience Model

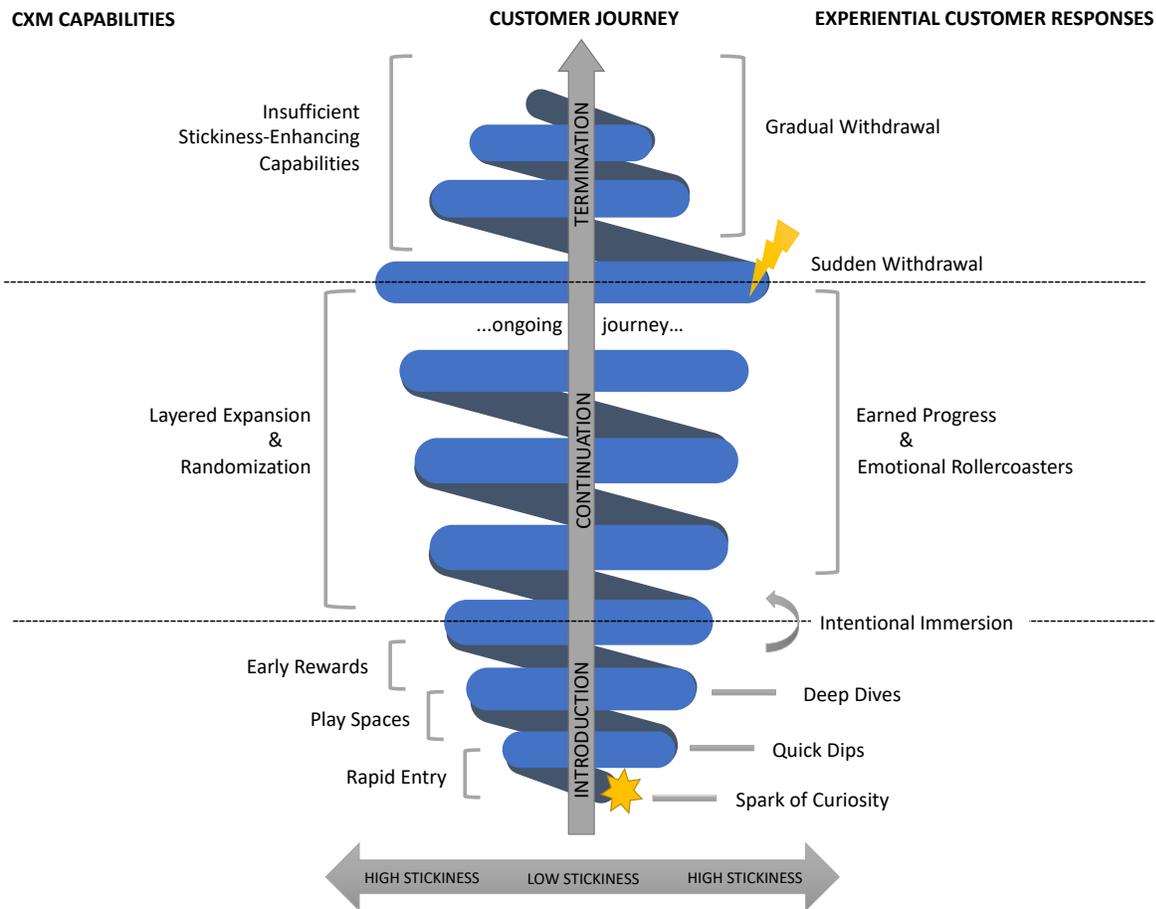
This section summarizes the preliminary answer to this thesis' second research question: How do sticky experiences emerge, evolve, and eventually conclude across the customer journey? Answering this question is the main contribution of the thesis to customer experience management research. The thesis sought to answer this question by developing a model of sticky experiences across the customer journey that includes both firm-side and customer-side insights, and that identifies relationships between customers' key experiential responses and firms' customer experience management efforts to facilitate such experiences over time.

As a reminder, the overarching goal of this thesis was to begin to address the 'significant gap in research on how firms can best manage the customers' journeys' (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 88-89). The thesis focused on developing theory on the management of unpredictable experiences that customers enthusiastically repeat over time during the customer journey, an experiential phenomenon named *sticky experience* in this research. To achieve the thesis's goal, an ethnographic approach was used to investigate three contexts in which this experiential phenomenon was widely and vividly present (CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder).

The author employed customer journey analysis in the initial round of data interpretation to analyse the firm capabilities for customer experience management and the experiential customer responses across customer-firm touchpoints. This process revealed key firm capabilities and customer responses (i.e., ‘moments of truth’ or ‘moments that matter’) that shape the entire journey and evolving sticky experience. The current research took the observation seriously that ‘marketing practice has a strong head start’ in customer experience management (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 89; Homburg *et al.*, 2017) by providing a detailed account of the increasingly established smooth experience model with its core notion of the loyalty loop (Court *et al.*, 2009) and differentiating the emergent model of sticky experience from this model throughout the findings and discussion chapters.

A visualization of the preliminary understanding of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey is provided in figure 5. A summary of the key theoretical claims of the smooth and preliminary sticky experience models are offered in tabular form (see table 9). The journey structure used in the figure and the table follow the structure used to introduce the smooth experience model. The evolution of the customer journey is traced throughout the introduction, continuation, and termination phases of customers’ interactions with a service. This appendix uses the labels *introduction* for the customers’ initial prepurchase and purchase phase, *continuation* for the postpurchase phase and ongoing customer journey, and *termination* for markedly reduced usage or termination of the service.

Figure 5: The Spiralling Journey of the Preliminary Sticky Experience Model



Source: Author.

Note.

As the customer’s journey unfolds over time, an increase (decrease) in the width of the spiral denotes increasing (decreasing) *stickiness*—understood as a combination of emotionality and meaningfulness of a customer’s experience as well as the time and space that the service occupies in the customer’s life. Stickiness is what motivates customers to frequently and enthusiastically repeat their experiences across their journey with a firm. Rather than moving from right to left or vice versa, customers move round and round along the idealized graphical spiral toward increased, sustained, or decreased stickiness. During the introduction and continuation phases of the customer journey, specific firm capabilities (shown on the left side of the spiral) enable specific customer responses (shown on the right side of the spiral). For example, the capability of rapid entry enables customers to move from a spark of curiosity to quick dips into the service. In the termination phase, insufficient stickiness-

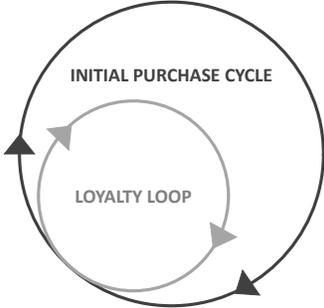
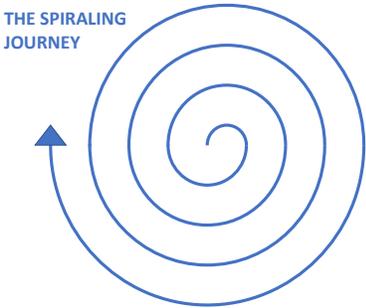
enhancing capabilities can lead customers to experience disappointment and gradually withdraw from the service, while overly effective stickiness-enhancing capabilities can lead customers to experience conflict and suddenly withdraw from the service.

The customer journey analysis revealed that sticky experiences manifest as specific, cumulative experiential responses along the customer’s journey, each facilitated through a specific customer experience management capability. Firms ignite the sticky experience journey (Figure 5) by providing a *rapid entry* into *play spaces*. These firm capabilities provide customers with value by enabling them to move swiftly from a *spark of curiosity* to *quick dips* and then into delightful *deep dives* into the services. Firms subsequently enhance the sticky experience journey by providing *early rewards* and repeatedly executing a *randomization* and *layered expansion* of selected touchpoints. These firm capabilities are a great source of value for customers, enabling them to move from *deep dives* to an *intentional immersion* into the service and then to repeatedly experience *emotional rollercoasters* and *earned progress*. Sticky experience journeys can come to an end in two ways. *Insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities* can engender disappointment and *gradual withdrawal*. *Overly effective stickiness-enhancing capabilities* can engender conflict and *sudden withdrawal*.

Table 9 lists key findings of the extant smooth experience literature according to the initial reading of the literature, and emergent findings from the initial round of data interpretation in this research. The is intended to help the reader more easily and fully see the differences between the extant smooth experience model and the emergent sticky experience model. This comparison shows that the management of sticky experiences across the customer journey requires a specific set of firm capabilities for customer experience management that are largely unaddressed by the smooth experience literature. Before unpacking the sticky experience model in detail, summaries of the two models are provided next.

Table 9: Key Preliminary Findings Compared to the Smooth Experience Model

	The Smooth Experience Model	The Preliminary Sticky Experience Model
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	(based on the smooth experience and related customer experience management literature, as indicated below)	(based on this study)
Schematic of the Customer Journey	 <p>The diagram shows two concentric circular paths. The outer path is labeled 'INITIAL PURCHASE CYCLE' and the inner path is labeled 'LOYALTY LOOP'. Both paths have arrows indicating a clockwise direction.</p>	 <p>The diagram shows a blue spiral starting from a central point and moving outwards in a clockwise direction. It is labeled 'THE SPIRALING JOURNEY'.</p>
Introduction Phase	<p>The firm capability of relevant information and support enables potential customers to move from initial consideration to active evaluation and a simplified purchase-decision. (<i>Court et al., 2009; Spenner and Freeman, 2012</i>)</p> <p>Purchase usually occurs in the introduction phase. (<i>Court et al., 2009; see Lemon and Verhoef, 2016</i>)</p>	<p>The firm capability of rapid entry enables potential customers to move from a spark of curiosity to quick dips into a service.</p> <p>The firm capability of play spaces enables customers to move from intended quick dips to deep dives into a service.</p> <p>Purchase(s) can occur at any time in the introduction or continuation phases.</p>
Continuation Phase	<p>The firm capability of innovative brand news helps customers to move from purchase to an enjoyable experience and a build-up of loyalty. (<i>Court et al., 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015</i>)</p> <p>The firm capabilities of personalization and contextualization enable customers to move from an enjoyable experience to</p>	<p>The firm capability of early rewards enables customers to move from deep dives to an intentional immersion into a service.</p> <p>The firm capability of randomization enables customers to move from an intentional immersion to frequently</p>

	<p>seamless, customized re-experiences. (Edelman and Singer, 2015)</p> <p>The firm capability of automation enables customers to move from an enjoyable experience to quick, easy results. (Edelman and Singer, 2015)</p>	<p>experienced emotional rollercoasters.</p> <p>The firm capability of layered expansion enables customers to move from an intentional immersion to repeatedly experienced earned progress.</p>
Termination Phase	<p>Customers can become ‘vulnerable repurchasers’ who consider alternatives but who end up staying passively loyal to the incumbent brand. (Court et al., 2017, p. 66)</p> <p>Customers can become ‘switchers’ who re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and choose an alternative brand. (Court et al., 2017, p. 66)</p>	<p>Insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities can engender disappointment and gradual withdrawal.</p> <p>Overly effective stickiness-enhancing capabilities can engender conflict and sudden withdrawal.</p>

Source: Author.

Based on the empirical investigation, the emerging sticky experience model can be described as follows. The sticky experience model is describing the management of repeated customer experiences along touchpoint journeys that (a) contain relatively unpredictable customer experiences, that (b) attract customers through rapid entry and play space, and that (c) keep customers through early rewards, randomization, and layered expansion. Sticky experiences (d) create value for customers by enabling experiences of quick dips, deep dives, an intentional immersion, and repeated experiences of emotional rollercoasters and earned progress. Sticky experiences make life more exciting by turning the customer journey into an engaging, escalating adventure. Consequently, (e) the metaphor best capturing the essence of the sticky experience model is a *spiral* that customers enthusiastically go further and further up.

Based on a review of the smooth experience literature and related customer experience management research, the smooth experience model has been summarized as follows in the theoretical background of this thesis: The smooth experience model is describing the management of repeated customer experiences along touchpoint journeys that (a) contain relatively predictable customer experiences, that (b) attract customers through relevant information and support, and that (c) keep customers through ongoing exposure to brand news, personalization and contextualization, and automation. Smooth experiences (d) create value for customers by enabling experiences of a simplified purchase-decision, an enjoyable experience and loyalty build-up, and repeated moments of seamless, customized re-experiences and quick, easy results. Smooth experiences streamline the customer journey to make customers' problem-solving or job-completing processes easier over time. Consequently, (e) the metaphor best capturing the essence of the smooth experience model is a *loop* that customers quickly and easily go around and round.

The extant smooth experience model and the emergent sticky experience model differ not only regarding specific customer experience management capabilities and customer responses across the customer's journey, but also with regard to the metaphor best capturing the specific journey trajectories (see Table 9). As the name loyalty loop in the smooth experience model indicates, the base metaphor here is a *loop*. Loyalty loop scholars typically draw a wide circle of the consumer decision journey that entails initial consideration, active evaluation, purchase, and postpurchase experience (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015). The trajectory starts from a broader outer circle and moves into a smaller inner loop, representing the path from deliberate initial consideration to less-deliberate repurchases and active loyalty. By contrast, the metaphor in the sticky experience model is a *spiral*. The sticky experience spiral is drawn with a narrow beginning that broadens as customers live through the increasingly engaging experiences. The trajectory follows along an upward spiral toward a broader spiralling course that represents the journey from a spark of curiosity to increasing engagement and stickiness.

The following three sections unpack the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey in the three selected service contexts (CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder) across three phases (introduction, continuation, termination), with each section covering one phase. Dividing the ongoing customer journey into the phases of introduction, continuation, and termination makes the dynamic and

iterative nature of customer experience and the changing emphasis on specific capabilities over time better understandable and hence more manageable. In each of the three phases, key firm capabilities are linked to specific customer responses.

7.6.2 Cultivating Stickiness - the Introduction Phase

This section begins to trace the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey. The introduction phase outlined in this section captures the initial prepurchase and purchase phase of the overall customer journey. The section links key firm capabilities to specific experiential customer responses over time, based on the initial round of data interpretation. The first part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that the firm capability of rapid entry enables potential customers to move from a spark of curiosity to quick dips. The second part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that the firm capability of play spaces enables customers to move from quick dips to deep dives. The final part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that purchase(s) can occur at any time in the introduction or continuation phases.

First preliminary finding: The firm capability of rapid entry enables potential customers to move from a spark of curiosity to quick dips. In contrast to the smooth experience model, firms in the proposed emergent sticky experience model do not appear to prioritize their efforts in the introductory stage of the customer journey on providing relevant information and support to assist consumers in their decision-making process, whether lengthy or compressed (Edelman and Singer, 2015). Instead, firms' customer experience management capability to optimize the customer journey in this phase is closer to a common practice found in the video gaming industry. Here, providing quick and often free access to a game by removing barriers to entry (Alter, 2017) and delaying asking users to pay money has been a profitable business strategy (e.g., Eyal, 2014). Across this research's empirical contexts, facilitating a rapid, barrier-reduced, and payment-free entry will be shown to be a strategic tools paving the way for important preliminary usage of each of the sample services by allowing potential customers to find out what the service is about through first-hand experience.

For example, the CrossFit boxes that are included in the fieldwork and other boxes that the author is familiar with all try to provide potential customers with rapid access to their services. An example is

one box offering free taster (introductory) work-out sessions, four times a day on weekdays, that can be booked online by clicking a ‘Try for free’ button on their website, by email, or by visiting the physical space. Consumers may do a free trial session the same day or week they first contact a CrossFit box, and do not need any preparation other than showing up in sports gear. Compare this to the typically more lengthy and thoughtful process of starting to work with a personal trainer at a gym, which often includes arranging the first meeting, fitness and health assessments, sharing of prior experience, discussion of goals, and scheduling future sessions. In addition, CrossFit box owner Martin notes that ‘people already know that they want to do CrossFit’ when he first interacts with them. Potential customers are less interested in studying available membership options. Accordingly, Martin focuses on providing newcomers with rapid access to sessions that leave them ‘convinced to continue.’

Pokémon Go and Tinder are mobile apps that are free to download from app stores through one click. Setting up Pokémon Go (e.g. choosing an avatar, reading the mission presented by ‘Professor Willow,’ the game’s guardian, and learning how to catch Pokémon) and Tinder (e.g., creating a profile, learning how to swipe and communicate) usually takes less than 20 minutes and can be done on the go. By design, Tinder lets consumers explore what they like – instead of asking users to answer more than 100 questions about themselves and their preferences to optimize results, which is more in line with a deliberate decision-making design in which providing the right information and support is key to satisfy consumers. In short, Pokémon Go enables new users to play the game within minutes on their mobile phones, and Tinder offers almost instant access to the actual service, rather than requiring customers to answer dozens of personal questions (e.g., eHarmony), which is reflective of the smooth experience model.

The customer experience management capability of providing rapid entry is aligned with an experiential view (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) that underpins much of consumers’ touchpoint journey in the sticky experience model. This differs starkly from the information processing view that undergirds the standard consumer purchase model (e.g., Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) and in turn heavily influences the smooth experience model. Prior research finds that consumers switch between goal-directed and non-directed, experiential behaviours during direct touchpoints, for example when they land on the Amazon.com website with a clear goal in mind and drift away to exploratory activities not directed to any specific goal (Hoffman and Novak, 2009).

This thesis's data set overwhelmingly contains stories and observations of consumers who directly and without much deliberation, information search, or active evaluation of options, satisfy their sparked curiosity through initial service usage. This suggests a hybrid form of activity in which consumers' goal is to explore one service experience – rather than to get a particular job done through the right choice or being carried away into a mere exploration of options and information. In numerous instances, the informants rapidly translate their sparks of curiosity into almost immediate service trials, without researching other market options. To illustrate this pattern, consider the following vignette by one of the CrossFit informants, Jenny, reflecting on how she came to start CrossFit:

It's only because people are like, oh my God you'd love it [and] I was like okay cool, I'll look into it. And you know with other gyms, it's not normally people do it all on recommendation, but this is really like, you can buy into it really quickly. So, then I just found one that was near work and just dropped by and was like, can I come and check out the gym? And because they were just all so friendly I was like, ah, this is quite nice, and everyone is really welcoming, and you don't get that normally with other gyms [...] [that was] what drew me in. (Jenny)

Similarly, many Pokémon Go players recall that their initial interest in the game and their initial service trials proceeded in quick succession. As Gordon reports:

It was just suddenly in the popular culture in my hometown. The street was full of people, pairs of people, walking around staring at their phones. My girlfriend's a teacher, and she wanted to know what [Pokémon Go] was like because all her kids were into it, and basically just wanted to know what it was. So, we both installed it, went out playing, and carried on playing. But yeah, she wanted to... relate to teenage kids. I didn't expect this to happen [laughs] because I'm not a game player normally. (Gordon)

Despite this unexpected, non-deliberate beginning, Gordon was among the top ten players in the UK about two years after the game came out (TL40 Data Team, 2018). Other curious informants created Apple or Google accounts in the United States to be able to play the game as soon as possible, before its official release in the United Kingdom. Apple or Google accounts in the United States allowed these informants to play the game two weeks before most other people in their country, which provided them with an additional source of excitement.

Lastly, consider the example of the Tinder informants, many of whom tried the dating app ‘immediately’ (Roberto) when they were single. One male informant, referring to other people who had used Tinder successfully before him, expressed being ‘fascinated by that facility that these people had to find dates’ (Roberto). Another informant found the idea of Tinder ‘amazing,’ ‘hilarious,’ and summed up his motivation to try Tinder by saying, ‘let’s see what the hype’s about.’ (Charles). Another informant, Sebastian, mentioned in an informal conversation that he installed, set up, and started swiping on Tinder one early morning after coming back from a night out with his friends, before eventually going to sleep. Like other informants’ beginning of their journeys with either of the three services, he did not start his journey with an information search followed by active evaluation of options. Instead, he had one option in mind that he was eager to try after a fun, but date-less, night with his friends.

The spark of curiosity that initiates informants’ sticky experience journeys has various sources, especially ‘social/external/independent’ touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 76). Among these touchpoints is word-of-mouth, which the informants initially receive (e.g., ‘people are like, oh my God you’d love it [and] I was like okay cool, I’ll look into it,’ CrossFit athlete Jenny) and subsequently pass on to others (e.g., ‘I actually did try and recruit my wife... And I’ve tried to get a couple of my friends to join as well,’ CrossFit athlete David). Touchpoints that evoke curiosity also include news items that ‘come up on the internet’ (Pokémon Go player Ruth) and exciting interpersonal observations such as Dora’s observation of a ‘really happy [friend] who met her husband through Tinder’ that prompts Dora to try the app herself and later recognize that she ‘didn’t do proper research about Tinder.’

These kinds of touchpoints tended to spark curiosity when they resonated with an informant’s current circumstances (e.g., getting bored at the gym, as Jenny does; wanting to join one’s partner in a leisure activity, as Gordon desires; and being single in a small city, as Dora is) or the informant’s broader life goals (e.g., becoming physically fit; enjoying more leisure activities; finding an eligible partner). In other words, many of the informants were already open to trying something new. Curiosity-sparking touchpoints propel them to take the first step of their sticky experience journeys. In general, this thesis concentrates its analysis on processes and touchpoints that firms can exert some control over and spends little time on those that are entirely out of firms’ control (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

What is perhaps most striking about the consumer voices in this research is what they are not talking about: considering and actively evaluating marketplace offerings based on relevant information provided by firms aimed to help them make simpler and better choices. Instead, what these stories show is that the service entry is so rapid and barrier-free that it is hardly noticed as a key bundle of well-designed touchpoints along their journeys. This may be due to the nature of curiosity and its specific focus in the empirical contexts. According to the gap theory of curiosity (Loewenstein, 1994), for instance, curiosity propels people to act in order to close gaps in their knowledge. Consumers in this research were propelled not to close knowledge gaps about which option or decision would be best, which would lead them to value guided, simplified decision-making (e.g., Spenner and Freeman, 2012). Rather, consumers in this study were propelled to close knowledge gaps about what a specific service that has come to their attention is like, which leads them to value quick experiential dips into that service.

To sum up, the data interpretation suggested that consumers in the emergent sticky experience model tend to sidestep a deliberate decision-making process in favour of curiosity-driven, quick dips into a service that are facilitated by firms through the design of a rapid entry experience.

Second preliminary finding: The firm capability of play spaces enables customers to move from quick dips to deep dives. Customers appear to move from intended quick dips to typically unanticipated deep dives into the service, which will be shown to be facilitated by firms' creation of play spaces. Play space is a 'provisional space' (Foster, 2002, p. 17) that 'brings with it a sense of exploration, imagination, and engagement with the unexpected' (Lunenfeld, 2011, 75). Play spaces can be seen as ever-unfolding over time and evocative of opportunity, a notion that is familiar to gamers whose ludic experience rests in part on this key characteristic of games (e.g., Lunenfeld, 2011). Applied to the purposes of this research, play space refers in a concrete sense to the physical or digital touchpoints customers can safely start exploring at the beginning of their journeys. These include touchpoints where newcomers conduct their orientation sessions in CrossFit, access Pokémon Go for the first few times, or view the first profiles of potential matches in Tinder's mobile app. In doing so, firms are able to help transform consumers' intended quick dips into deeper plunges into the evolving service experience.

The existence of play spaces that draw people in as they explore what is largely unknown and only gradually revealed to them (Zwick and Dholakia, 2006) is intuitive for the mobile game Pokémon Go and for Tinder, given the dating app's gamified experience design. For example, Tinder creates play spaces through an inherently playful swiping function that asks customers to swipe each profile either right (interest) or left (no interest) or up (much interest) before a new profile is presented, whereby only mutually interested users can message each other. Learning to navigate this simple process and finding out what each newly revealed profile provides (e.g., photos, personal information) can be done in a focused and uninterrupted manner without receiving messages or requiring other immersion-disrupting tasks such as rating other users or adding details to one's preferences. This also means that newcomers can start exploring the service 'passively,' in a safe space of exploration, without being in active communication with others.

CrossFit creates play spaces primarily through introductory sessions (entailing a variety of exercises that prepare newcomers for the intense activities to come) and online videos and stories that introduce the fitness regimen and feature aspirational journeys of CrossFit athletes. Note that CrossFit offers an almost open-ended world of fitness, including regular workout sessions, special workouts, and local and global competitions. Despite the complexity and intensity of its workouts, CrossFit manages to provide play spaces in which newcomers can learn about the basic physical movements, while more complex and potentially dangerous exercises such as push-up handstands are commonly postponed to later points in time when members are more advanced in their fitness training. Trainers in local franchises typically spare newcomers long introductions to the fitness regimen and rather focus on teaching the basics in a safe environment and at a speed and level appropriate to potential new members. Online videos and stories about CrossFit athletes complement this play space by providing further resources for customers' exploration and imagination.

The customer experience management capability of providing play spaces invites customers to embark on an adventurous journey of exploration and discovery. The customer journey analysis shows that in key moments in this journey phase, the experienced distance between customers and the consumption situation decreases; in other words, customers experience moments of immersion that Carù and Cova (2006) describe as a proximity between a customer and their consumption situation. There is a tendency among the informants to experience these moments as deep dives into certain resonating

aspects of the overall offering. As the following quotes illustrate, these dives are made possible through the play spaces that the three services concretely and symbolically provide. For example, take CrossFit athlete Alan's dramatic vignette about the transformational effect CrossFit had for him as he started exploring the service:

Just it all changed. It's all I can... I just, I just changed so fast. In the moment realizing it and then doing my first workout then realizing this is what I want, this is who I've got to become. Seeing all the videos of the biggest athlete like [Unclear] smashing it out and opened in the Games and realizing that's what I want to be. That's what I want to do. Like going to the CrossFit Games is like going to the Olympics is sort of our moment. You know something I'd love to go to, not to watch but to compete. I mean let's say you compete in the Games, you're like a legend. I know what I want. Can you imagine winning the CrossFit Games? That's the history and the Games' history and then [inaudible]. You're a legend. (*unedited quote, Alan*)

The following informant, Pokémon Go player Aron, emphasizes how much he enjoyed the discovery of hitherto unknown things in the physical world through the use of Pokémon Go, which increased his familiarity with his environment:

But I love that, that is super cool, that is super cool. Like, that was my favourite part of Pokémon GO, going back to your previous question, I walked around London for the whole afternoon and I was, like, I've never seen that statue before, I live five minutes away from it, did the little spinning thing, tell me about the avenue, and that was, that's super cool, thank you Pokémon GO for that, interaction with my environment and all that. Yeah, definitely. Tell me more. (*unedited quote, Aron*)

Lastly, a Tinder informant, Obasi, drives home nicely the point of unexpected deep dives enabled through play spaces in a story about his response when he opened Tinder for the first time:

Wow, you're seeing people so closely, the whole idea of it was wicked, the fact that you could see the people so closely... Show[ing] up people's bios and say, that's what they want, saying what they're looking for. You can also link it to your Facebook and Instagram, so you can go on and see their Instagram, people put their Snapchat even there as well so you can add them on Snapchat. (*Obasi*)

Like many other informants, Obasi was impressed by the high degree of proximity ('seeing people so closely') evoked between him and other people who openly share their preferences, history, and social media profiles. The author experienced a very similar, unanticipated deep plunge into this aspect of the

Tinder experience when he used the app for the first time. After setting up the profile on the go in a hotel lobby, he started swiping on a bus ride between two cities in the United Kingdom. Seeing people's pictures and reading their descriptions gave the student a sense of intimate knowledge about the lives of people nearby, including their past experiences and hopes for the future. For instance, the author recalls being drawn in by a story of a single parent, an easy-going adventure-seeker, a user with a physical disability, and someone who described herself as a hopeless romantic despite previous disappointments.

The emotional tone of these vignettes suggests that informants' deep dives in this stage of the sticky experience journey are deeply delightful (Oliver *et al.*, 1997). They are not only pleasurable but also provide customers with surprising experiential proximity. As informants engage with unexpected yet manageable aspects of the services (e.g., doing beginner movements in CrossFit; easily capturing basic Pokémon; swiping profiles without yet communicating with matches in Tinder), their initial intent to casually dip into a service (see previous finding on quick dips) moves to the background and the pleasures of exploration and discovery come to the fore of their experience. Viewed through the gap theory of curiosity (Loewenstein, 1994), consuming CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder in this phase opens many more knowledge gaps than it helps to close. For instance, imagining what it would be like to compete in the CrossFit Games (Alan), exploring what Pokémon Go can 'tell' us about our physical environment (Aron), and exploring what other people are searching for on Tinder (Obasi) all rouse further curiosity.

In addition, these activities shift customers' curiosity from a more general, casual focus (e.g., on Tinder to 'see what the hype's about' [Charles]) to focusing on service features and more specific evoked meaning-making. This manifests through informants' experiential foci, for instance, imagining going to the CrossFit Games 'not to watch but to compete' and becoming an athletic 'legend' (Alan), discovering new things about one's neighbourhood as the 'favourite part of Pokémon Go' (Aron), or exploring Tinder profiles to 'figure out what was out there' (Charles).

To sum up, the data interpretation suggested that the moment of truth that follows the intended quick dips along the customer journey in the emergent sticky experience model are typically unanticipated

deep dives into a service. Firms facilitate customers' immersive moments through the design of play spaces that invite exploration, imagination, and discovery.

Third preliminary finding: Purchase(s) can occur at any time in the introduction or continuation phases. According to the smooth experience literature, firms commonly ask for payment in the introduction phase (Court *et al.*, 2009). However, purchases in the emergent sticky experience model appear to occur at different times: in the classic purchase phase when customers can first sign up for a membership or subscription; much later in the customer's journey in response to service-owned, customer-owned, or other influences; or not at all during a customer's journey. With the extension of the free-of-charge business strategy beyond the video gaming industry (Eyal, 2014), firms increasingly allow customers to freely use their (digital) services. This can be limited to a basic version of the service (e.g., Tinder). Or companies give users full access to a service (e.g., Pokémon Go). In either case, firms typically offer various in-app purchases that promise to enhance the experience and, in some cases, are required to continue using a service after a certain point (Alter, 2017).

CrossFit boxes typically offer various options after free trials and reduced-price introductory sessions, including single drop-in sessions and personal trainings, session packs (e.g., 10 sessions), time-based contracts (e.g., 10 weeks), and monthly subscriptions allowing different usage frequencies. With regard to the on-ramp introductory program, CrossFit franchises may ask for a one-time payment, offer it as part of a one-month membership, or offer special deals to encourage consumers to conduct the program. At the latest, consumers are required to pay when they sign-up to become regular members or train as a visitor in a box more than a couple of times.

Pokémon Go and Tinder build on the free-to-use business model that includes in-app stores in which purchases for virtual items, memberships, and upgrades can be made at any time. In Pokémon Go and Tinder, in-app purchases are generally voluntary and paying money can be postponed indefinitely. Purchase options are easily accessible through the apps (field notes, 2017-11). Pokémon Go charges for virtual items, such as raid passes. All virtual items are bought with the in-game currency of 'coins.' Players can collect coins through the in-game action of defending gyms with their Pokémon or decide to buy coins. The latter has helped Pokémon Go earn more than \$1.8 billion between its inception in July 2016 and the end of 2017 (Henry, 2018; Nelson, 2017). Tinder also charges for virtual items, such

as Super Likes, and Tinder Plus and Gold subscriptions. These additional features and services cannot be earned through in-app actions but have to be paid for. Using this strategy, Tinder ‘accounts for 40% of [parent company] Match Group’s revenues and is the main driver of organic topline growth,’ among more than 40 online dating brands owned by Match Group (Agarwal, 2018, p. 1).

In response to these diverse purchase models and options, customer purchase behaviour seems to not converge on a single pattern. When and how often customers choose to buy something, order it, and pay for it appears to depend on many factors. Along the customer journey, key factors include firm-owned touchpoints such as the general business models outlined above and new or changed features, customer-owned touchpoints such as the intensity or style of usage, and social, external, or independent influences.

For example, new CrossFit customers often sign up for a membership option that gives them limited access to classes, simply based on the fact that new members are hardly able to do more than two intense classes per week. The CrossFit informants report that the volume of classes they were able to do increased over time from about two up to six or more classes for the fittest and most committed. These changes over time are mirrored in adjustments of the chosen membership option to allow for increased access to classes. Besides core membership fees, customers make occasional purchases of drinks, snacks, food, equipment, and other merchandise such as branded t-shirts. Some CrossFit members the author talked to formally and informally shared a routine to collect t-shirts from all boxes they train at, including the ones they visit during vacations (e.g., Tara). With regard to Pokémon Go and Tinder, there is considerable variety in purchase behaviour among the informants. To illustrate this variety, consider the following three vignettes from Pokémon Go players.

I don’t go in for all the merchandising or anything like that. I don’t spend any money on it at all, out of principle. I won’t buy coins or anything like that. And I’ve never cheated so I’ve never used any hacks or anything like that. (Jill)

Until last week I’ve never put any of my own money into the game, so I’ve never spent a single pound... of my own money into the game. That changed last week when I needed to buy, I wanted to do a load of raid passes you know I was seeing all these Legendries raids were going on. And it’s not like I’ve been saving coins because you use them to buy incubators and stuff. And then suddenly you know I needed raid passes. So, I did put £10 of my own money to buy some premium raid passes but that £10 is the

only £10 I've ever spent. [Interviewer: How did you feel about it?] Uh... not good no, no not bad I suppose, it's slightly annoying that I... I was quite pleased that I had gone the entire way without spending anything. (*unedited quote*, Tobias)

Perhaps one of the biggest aspects of how it's affected normal life is that I pay for coins through PayPal, and, whenever I sell something on eBay, the money I get from eBay tends to sit in PayPal and will pretty much exclusively service Pokémon Go. I keep that there as a buffer so that it doesn't have to come out of our main account. [...] On average, we spend about £20 a month on Pokémon Go, so £10 between each of the accounts, which we use almost purely to buy incubators because we do so much walking. Although having said that, now that the gyms have been overhauled and you get 50 coins for six hours in a gym, we haven't actually had to spend anything for a while because we seem to be getting coins a bit more with the new gym system. (*unedited quote*, Ryan)

Besides this variety in purchase behaviour regarding the game itself, what many of the informants and other players encountered during participant observations have in common is the purchase of Pokémon Go Plus, a \$40 Bluetooth accessory produced by Nintendo. The portable device supports players with the basic activities of collecting Pokémon and spinning the Photo Discs on PokéStops and Gyms to receive items. In addition, almost every informant bought at least one portable power pack for their phones. Some informants report changing their mobile data plan because of Pokémon Go (e.g., Sahib, Esther) or replacing their mobile phone batteries (e.g., Gordon), and the author bought a new mobile phone.

These customer stories exemplify the three categories that the Pokémon Go informants tend to fall into. One category of players firmly upholds their principle to not spend money on the game (e.g., Daniel, Jill, Esther). These customers resist the temptation by, for instance, practicing patience (e.g., 'if I haven't got it I haven't got it and it's not the end of the world' [Jill]) or emphasizing earning over spending ('I look at it as doing work by doing and earning my coins and things each day' [Esther]). The second category of users basically has the same principle but spends money on rare occasions, even if only once and only of £5-20 (e.g., Timothy, Tobias, Joanne, Gordon). Such occasions may come about, among other reasons, due to rare opportunities presented by the firm (e.g., legendary Pokémon to catch for a limited time, see quote by Tobias above) or social and technical issues (e.g., when a third attempt and raid pass is required to try and beat a legendary Pokémon, Gordon). Like customers in the first category, these informants tend to be glad and 'proud of not putting any money into it' (Tobias). They justify their exceptions by alluding to the 'better value' (Joanne) they receive from spending a few

pounds on Pokémon Go compared to spending on other games (Joanne) or visits to the pub (Tobias). In the third category fall individuals who regularly spend money on in-app purchases to enhance their experience (e.g., Ryan). Interestingly, the amount of money Ryan spends on the game decreased after developer Niantic changed the gym system. The research informants mention several other people who fall into this categories, for example, one player and friend of Dave who allegedly spent £50 during one of the first months after the game came out.

Importantly, the services share a purchase flexibility characteristic that spares customers the decision-making efforts that upfront payments tend to require. This flexibility enhances the services' stickiness in at least two ways. First, purchase flexibility renders the purchase experience into a truly dynamic, interactive, and customer-demand-based experience. Take the example of Pokémon Go player Tobias, who 'did put £10 of my own money to buy some premium raid passes' when Legendary Pokémon raids were going on and he suddenly required additional raid passes to engage in those Legendary raids. Second, purchase flexibility also enables customers to craft appealing, personal narratives around the issue of payment. For example, Tobias' emotionally charged narrative excludes any mention of payments for portable power packs, gasoline to drive to other cities in search of Pokémon, and the \$40 accessory, Pokémon Go Plus, that supports players with the game's basic activities. Rather, Tobias reports feeling 'proud' and 'quite pleased that I had gone the entire way without spending anything.' In essence, purchase flexibility allows purchases to blend into the phenomenological background of customer journeys.

To sum up, purchases in the sticky experience model can occur at any time in the early or subsequent phase of customers' direct experiences with a service: Purchases can occur in the classic purchase phase when customers decide to sign up for a membership option or subscription straightaway or buy virtual items; they can and often do manifest much later in the customer journey as a response to service-owned, customer-owned, or other influences; or they can be entirely absent from a customer's journey with a service.

7.6.3 Sustaining Stickiness - the Continuation Phase

This section continues to trace the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey, linking key firm capabilities to specific experiential customer responses over time, based on the initial round of data interpretation. The continuation phase captures what is traditionally referred to as the postpurchase phase and the ongoing customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The first part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that the firm capability of early rewards enables customers to move from deep dives to an intentional immersion. This part of the section captures the transition from the introduction phase to the continuation phase in this version of sticky experience model. The second part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that the firm capability of randomization enables customers to move from intentional immersion to emotional rollercoasters. The last part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that the firm capability of layered expansion enables customers to move from intentional immersion to earned progress. The preliminary findings are numbered consecutively.

Fourth preliminary finding: The firm capability of early rewards enables customers to move from deep dives to an intentional immersion. In the transition to the continuation phase, the firm capability of providing or enhancing the potential for early rewards appears to enable informants to move from deep dives to an intentional immersion into a service. The transition from the introduction to the continuation phase in the emergent sticky experience model seems to be more blurred than in the smooth experience model. As a reminder, the continuation phase in the smooth experience model begins neatly after purchase when customers enter the postpurchase phase. In the current study, the timing of points of transition differ across the three cases and for individual research informants.

However, the customer journey analysis used in this thesis research illuminates a tendency among the informants to experience moments in which they form, and act on, an intention to immerse themselves further into a service. Informants seem to associate the transition from one or more deep dives into a service to a more intentional immersion predominantly with the early rewards they receive from using a service. This transition is interpreted as the marker of the beginning of the continuation phase. Across the cases, firms make a precise effort to facilitate rewarding experiences during the early usage period, attainable not only by already experienced users in a service category but also attainable by new customers with only rudimentary skills.

CrossFit, for example, uses the mechanism of ‘scaling’ to drastically increase the likelihood that customers can achieve the goal of each workout from the very beginning. In a regular CrossFit class, there is a high intensity ‘workout of the day’ that clients try to successfully complete either in a given amount of time or as fast as possible. Workouts of the day are the core element of the CrossFit regimen to ‘forge elite fitness’ and ultimately to help athletes become the ‘Fittest on Earth,’ as those who win the CrossFit Games are called. At the same time, the workouts are designed for ‘universal scalability,’ and the company aims to create inclusive fitness built around a communal spirit (CrossFit, 2019).

Trainers in local gyms and the brand on its website make suggestions for scaling the load and intensity of every workout of the day. For example, in addition to concrete intermediate and beginners recommendations, the scaling option for workout of the day 180710 (July 10, 2018) on the company website is: ‘Just about all athletes can perform deadlifts and some version of a burpee. Reduce the loading so you can complete each set of deadlifts unbroken. If needed, reduce the number of burpees to a point that allows you to keep moving quickly and avoid excessive rest.’ (CrossFit, 2018b) Local trainers carefully monitor their clients’ performance and scale workouts to ensure everyone completes the workout of the day while creating a supportive, rewarding environment, as captured in the field notes (2017-08) and expressed by trainer Olivia:

You cheer loudest for the person who finishes last in CrossFit. We teach people that it’s nothing to do with the competition in the room, it’s all to do with how you dealt by yourself... So, congratulate them and make them feel as good as you feel right now.
(CrossFit trainer Olivia)

Pokémon Go, in turn, builds on an explicitly escalating reward system often found in video games, where rewards are given quickly in the beginning but exponentially more slowly as users continue to play (e.g., Alter, 2017). In this way, Pokémon Go provides its players with the chance to reap rewards for relatively little time and energy at the beginning. For instance, levelling up is a matter of not even hours of time played at the beginning, while it becomes a matter of days, weeks, and months later in the game. To get from level one to level five, which allows players to join one of three teams and take part in a key feature of the game (i.e., Pokémon battles), requires players to collect 10,000 units of so-called ‘Experience Points’ or ‘XP’. In contrast, moving up from level 20 to 21 requires 25,000 XP, from level 30 to 31 requires 500,000 XP, and from level 39 to the highest level 40 requires 5 million XP.

Similarly, collecting new Pokémon and filling one’s index of Pokémon is relatively fast and easy at the

beginning. However, it becomes exponentially more difficult over time because the Pokémon that players are missing are typically those that appear rarely in the game, only for a limited time, or even only in specific areas of the world such as Australia or Asia.

Finally, consider how Tinder creates the option for early rewards. After the mobile app provides a rapid entry and an interface that encourages customers to explore what is ‘out there’ (Charles), Tinder makes rewards instantly noticeable and provides the means for customers to immediately start a potentially rewarding conversation with a match. Although users’ success with Tinder for the most part is out of the firm’s hands, Tinder’s swiping mechanism is designed to enable rewarding matches and communication from the very beginning. Concretely, when two individuals have swiped right to signal that they like each other, a message saying ‘It’s a Match’ appears in the app’s interface when it is open, and a notification appears on a user’s phone when the app is closed. Tinder then enables matched users to start writing messages to each other through the in-app messaging service.

The customer experience management capability of facilitating early rewards enables customers to arrive at an altered, more deliberate, immersive experience with a service. The difference between deep dives and intentional immersion seems not to be primarily the degree of immersion or the frequency of mini-immersive episodes. For the research informants, the deep dives following the intended quick dips often occur unanticipatedly, and much of their value tends to be rooted in the pleasurable pursuits of exploration and discovery. When the informants reap personally meaningful, early rewards further along their journey, this initial delightful experience of deep dives moves to the background. What takes on centre stage is an energizing experiential state in which informants tend to be focused on the positive potential of a service and a more conscious, purposeful investment into it. For example, consider Jenny’s story about the realization she had at CrossFit during the first two weeks:

So, my first week or two I found it quite daunting and I didn't want, part of me didn't want to go. Because it felt I was the worst in the class, and I was really rubbish. And then after about two weeks when I realized, actually I can do this, then it sort of kicked in and I was like, right well if I want to do this well and I want to do it as good as everyone else in the class, then I need to keep going. So, there was that element then that I thought okay I want to get better. (Jenny)

The author recalls his first regular workout, which was scaled down to his fitness level and in which he received great verbal support from the trainer (Olivia) and other informants (including Jenny) to make it in time, which he did. The feeling of having achieved something increased his motivation to stick with the CrossFit box and led the author to schedule another workout shortly afterwards. The following quote from Pokémon Go player Gloria nicely captures the customer journey pattern outlined above:

I felt the early stages of Pokémon Go are very addictive in that they give you a lot. You know, you get a lot back for your involvement, so you really want to do more. What's the next level going to give me? What extra things am I going to get? [...] So that's all going on very happily. And then we developed some techniques for getting coins.
(Gloria)

Interestingly, one observation over time has been that several of the informants in this study started at least one more account on additional mobile phones (e.g., Gloria, Tobias, Gordon). Gloria said she had created the new account to explicitly re-experience the rewarding time at the beginning. It can be speculated that others also created additional accounts to increase their overall combat power during solo and group raids, which is a matter of concern frequently raised among players online and in person. Lastly, male Tinder user Roberto leaves no doubt about what made him want to use Tinder again and again after picking up the service: 'Basically because things start to work in the sense that I could date people' (Roberto).

These and other informant stories suggest that customers experience intentional immersion as an extended moment of truth that entails a sudden or cumulative realization in response to meaningful early rewards, a focus on the future, and an investment into shaping one's future with the service. In the informants words, in these moments they decided they 'need to keep going' to CrossFit (Jenny), or they 'really want to do more' and 'developed some techniques' to play Pokémon Go more successfully (Gloria). Early rewards can certainly evoke in customers a pleasurable sense of achievement or of receiving something valuable in return for their time. Yet more importantly, reaping meaningful rewards in this stage sets a broader experiential shift in motion that commonly entails concrete behaviours such as signing up for a service or spending more time to learn about it and improve one's performance. This shift is typically aligned with the value proposition of a service, propelling customers to become fitter and better (CrossFit, e.g. Jenny), to catch all Pokémon and become a

successful ‘Trainer,’ which is how the game generally calls its users (Pokémon Go, e.g., Gloria), or to date many singles through Tinder (Tinder, e.g. Roberto).

Interestingly, in the smooth experience model, deliberate decision-making and conscious investments of money and other resources take place much earlier in the customer journey (Court *et al.*, 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Spenner and Freeman, 2012). In fact, customers typically need to invest considerably before receiving any substantial rewards. This makes firms’ efforts to simplify and validate the purchase decision in the smooth experience model ever more logical and pressing. In contrast, firms in the emergent sticky experience model provide a rapid entry, play spaces, and early rewards to help customers arrive at a point of intentionality, moving them toward making a service a continuous and growing part of their life.

To sum up, the data interpretation suggested that the moment that matters to customers following their deep dives is an extended moment in which an intention toward immersion and investment into a service is formed and acted on. Firms facilitate the emergence of these stickiness-enhancing moments by providing or enhancing the potential for early and meaningful rewards that enable customers to experience the (potential) value of a service.

Fifth preliminary finding: The firm capability of randomization enables customers to move from intentional immersion to emotional rollercoasters. The customer journey analysis showed that the firm capability of randomizing selected touchpoints appears to enable customers to move from an intentional immersion to frequently experienced emotional rollercoasters. In the smooth experience and general customer experience management logics, firms employ resources to tailor customer experiences to customers’ personal contexts and journey positions, drawing them to the next desirable touchpoints (Edelman and Singer, 2015; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). By contrast, firms in the emergent sticky experience model seem to prioritize randomization over personalization and contextualization. The current research found that the three firms in the data set seem to focus their customer experience management efforts more on providing or enhancing the potential for customers to interact with constantly varied service elements that present themselves to customers in an unpredictable order or arrangement. Simply put, firms seeking to enhance the stickiness of their services appear to follow the proverb that ‘variety is the spice of life,’ in other words,

that new and exciting experiences make life more interesting (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2017). It will be shown in the following paragraphs that these firms seek to provide customers with unpredictably varying service elements.

One implication of the firm capability of randomization is that it allows customers to not only interact with a great variety but also to receive variable rewards in doing so. Variable rewards refer to rewards given on an intermittent schedule and/or differing in degree or content each time they are provided. Research has demonstrated that people engage more frequently and longer in behaviours leading to variable rewards and gain more and more prolonged pleasure from these experiences compared to non-variable rewards (e.g., Berns *et al.*, 2001). Across the cases in this thesis research, randomization appears to be critical for firms because it spurs engagement by eliciting an invigorating array and change of service-related emotions, often on a daily basis. Note that in the current conceptualization, randomization refers to unpredictable variety provided to customers; it does not refer to customer experience management activities done randomly, without method or conscious decision. Likewise, randomization is applied to selected service elements; it is neither applied indiscriminately nor extended to all elements of a service that a customer interacts with.

As a case in point, consider that there are both predictable, stable and unpredictable, varied aspects in CrossFit. For instance, CrossFit classes commonly include warm-up phases and workouts of the day, class schedules are reliable and published in advance, and social events often take place regularly on a certain day each month. Yet workouts and the single most important service element, the workout of the day, truly follow Chief Executive Officer and founder Greg Glassman's fitness philosophy to 'mix these elements [i.e., weightlifting, gymnastics, sports] in as many combinations and patterns as creativity will allow. Routine is the enemy. Keep workouts short and intense. Regularly learn and play new sports' (Glassman, 2002, p. 1). In practice, each workout of the day is unique and consists of an unpredictable combination of functional movements with varying goals (e.g., as many repetitions as possible in a certain amount of time, or a certain number of repetitions completed as fast as possible).

Local CrossFit boxes build on these brand resources in their marketing communications. For instance, one local box explained in an email newsletter that monotony was not welcome in their studio because routine is the enemy (email, 2018-05). Local CrossFit affiliates also often keep workouts a secret until

the start of classes when athletes gather around a board or screen to learn about the intense training awaiting them. Some CrossFit boxes post the content of their workouts in advance, but only the night before or in the morning of the same day. Randomizing their core offering and not revealing workouts until the beginning of classes, local CrossFit boxes operate in line with the brand's statement that, 'We sought to build a program that would best prepare trainees for any physical contingency—prepare them not only for the unknown but for the unknowable as well.' (Glassman, 2007, p. 1).

With regard to Pokémon Go, non-varied aspects include the Pokémon that are part of each so-called generation of Pokémon, the technique to catch Pokémon and spin Discs at gyms and PokéStops, and the fact that Pokémon can be collected in an index and transferred to the game's guardian, Professor Willow, among other non-varied aspects. Among the many randomized elements for players are the appearance of Pokémon, the chances to catch especially rare and strong Pokémon, the chances to find Pokémon with a high individual value, what Pokémon will hatch from an egg, and what Pokémon will appear as a raid boss. Another concrete example illustrating the capability of randomization is a weather feature released in December 2017 that links certain aspects of the game to a completely external and unpredictable influence, the weather in one's local area (e.g., water-type Pokémon spawn more frequently when the game assumes it rains; Pokémon Go, 2017).

Like Pokémon Go, Tinder leaves its basic mechanisms such as swiping and messaging unchanged and instead systematically provides customers with unpredictably varying content. Most notably, Tinder presents profiles of potential matches without any clues for customers to logically order or categorize these profiles, nor to figure out how many more potential matches are available in one's surrounding. In addition, the very nature of human preferences and communication ensures that rewards in the form of matches, enjoyable messaging, and real-world dates are highly unpredictable. The main preferences that customers can set in the app are the radius from within which profiles are drawn (e.g., 5km, 10km), as well as the targeted gender and age range.

The customer experience management capability of randomizing selected service elements enhances the stickiness of the evolving customer experience by eliciting responses around the seductive state of suspense. Suspense is defined as the 'state or feeling of excited or anxious uncertainty about what may happen' (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2017). Similar to how readers of suspense novels wonder

excitedly about what awaits them on the next page, customers in the data set frequently live through moments in which excited expectation and/or uncertainty prevails about what the next workout, hatched Pokémon, or potential match will be like. The customer journey analysis shows that the enthralling quality that randomization and variable rewards add to customer experience is crucial to informants before, during, and after direct touchpoints, serving as an important glue that keeps them engaged over time. For example, consider Alan's excitement about the constantly varied workouts at CrossFit, his attention pre- and post-workout, and the moments he wants to repeat. Asked about moments that make him want to go to CrossFit again, he replies:

I have those moments every day because it's the unknowing of what you're going to do that night because you're not really supposed to know. [...] And then you're like, well I'm going to book on because if I know what it's going to be tonight I won't turn up and that's why, that's the beauty of it because you don't know so you've got to go to find out. It's like a present. If you get a present, if they just tell you you're not going to be excited so if you don't know, if it's a surprise then when you open it, you're excited. You're amazed by what you've got. And that is literally the beauty of just going to a CrossFit class because every day you're like I'm going to go tonight because you are so excited to see what the workout is. It could be amazing. It could be bad, but you still get excited. You'd still be... You could be shocked because of how bad it is and you'd still want to do it. If you choose a workout and think oh I haven't done that one in ages but I'm so glad we're doing it tonight and then you're excited. It's like swings and roundabouts really because you can be shocked but excited or you'd just be excited.
(*unedited quote*, Alan)

Pokémon Go players similarly experience suspense across direct and indirect touchpoints with the game. Consider the following short vignette by Ruth on hatching eggs:

When I went out with my daughter, and we go, oh there's an egg about to hatch. And, we gather round and look at it and go, oh no, it's a [relatively common Pokémon] [laughs]. And then, we get excited about another one. [...] I have walked 1,502km.
(Ruth)

To further illustrate this pattern, consider Sophia's vignette about her use of Tinder:

I was going back home and instead of sleeping I was spending an hour [on Tinder] and I was saying okay it will be the next one that I might like, it will be the next one, but no, it wasn't. And at some point because we are in a small place there was no one else to like or dislike. So, then I was stopping and then in the morning if someone liked my profile, if I was finding it interesting I would say hello, good morning, stuff like that and then I

would try to initiate a discussion. [...] it was really addictive like in the morning I might lose like 10-15 minutes to, to see what's happening, who liked me. Perhaps I was waiting for it as well to see, ah would this person like me? And if it was, I would talk with them. (Sophia)

Informants used several expressions to describe the unpredictable, variable nature of Tinder in their interviews. For instance, Roberto mentions a 'degree of uncertainty' that accompanies the app; 'fascinating' or 'extremely boring and extremely pointless conversations;' and sudden changes between 'very bad' and 'much better' phases and his interpretation that 'there is no rationale behind it I guess, it's just [laughing] fate or [laughing] just random.' Charles notes that 'it's complete wild fly, you never know what you're going to get or if you met someone.'

All three services enable customers to receive variable rewards, from unexpected 'gifts' (Alan) of CrossFit workouts to surprising Pokémon catches to delightful conversations with Tinder matches. Yet, as Sophia's vignette also reminds us, even when rewards are absent for a certain time period, emotional rollercoasters keep customers engaged. After all, randomization elicits suspense and leaves room for hope so that 'it will be the next one' that Sophia likes on Tinder.

The current research conceptualizes how customers experience key moments in response to randomized service elements as 'emotional rollercoasters,' defined as moments of truth in which customers undergo high intensity, short duration, typically positive and negative affect in rapid, unpredictable succession. These intense moments are connected by phases of lingering service-related moods and thoughts. They are cumulatively experienced as an overall pleasurable and energizing state. A close reading of the smooth experience literature suggests that desirable experiences evoked by customer experience management capabilities in the smooth experience logic instead tend to be of lower intensity, longer duration, and low positive emotions, for example through repeatedly enjoying the convenience or flexibility of a service (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015; Homburg *et al.*, 2017).

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the evolving customer experience in the sticky experience model tends to have a strong ongoing or even permanent character due to the prevalence of suspense within single touchpoints and across multiple touchpoints. Some smooth experience scholars argue that well designed customer journeys in the smooth experience model are also continuous or permanent (e.g., Edelman and Singer, 2015). However, this refers primarily to the 'permanently open link between

company and customer' (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 8) enabled by smart, connected products that provide firms with continuous streams of data and allow them to optimize touchpoints instantaneously. In contrast, the firms in this thesis's data set keep customers continuously guessing and excited about the next interaction. These firms appear not to focus on making life easier and smoother for consumers but on making it more interesting and exciting through unpredictable variety.

The three firms in the data set employ randomization and provide variable rewards from the very beginning of regular service usage. If the customer journey analysis were conducted from the firm's perspective, it would likely have concluded that their positive impact was critical throughout the entire journey. However, following the imperative to understand what actually happens from the customer's perspective over time (e.g., Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), the analysis lead the author to a more nuanced conclusion: There is support that customers live through moments of emotional rollercoasters early on in their service consumption, yet the analysis reveals that other experiences (i.e., curiosity-driven quick dips, exploratory deep dives, and intentional immersion) are more centerstage in the early phases of their experiential journey. Besides informants' stories in interviews, the author's observations of people's visible and voiced emotional responses at different times along their journey supports this finding. In short, emotional rollercoasters reveal their true potential in the continuation phase of the customer journey when they serve as key motivators over time. Here, the prevalence of exciting uncertainty regarding the next workout (e.g., Alan), Pokémon catch, or potential dating match (e.g., Sophia) spreads across touchpoints and invests sticky experiences with ongoing emotionally intense characters that keep customers motivated to seek frequent usage.

To sum up, the initial round of data interpretation showed that informants move from an intentional immersion into a service to frequently, often daily experienced emotional rollercoasters. These pleasurable and stickiness-enhancing moments of truth are facilitated by firms through randomizing selected service elements.

Sixth preliminary finding: The firm capability of layered expansion enables customers to move from intentional immersion to earned progress. The firm capability of providing a layered expansion of service elements appears to enable informants to move from an intentional immersion to repeatedly experienced earned progress, as will be shown subsequently. Firms in the data set seem to

facilitate moments of earned progress by providing or enhancing the potential for customers to engage in time-limited opportunities and challenges that tend to be, though not necessarily need to be, escalating over time.

The three firms examined in this thesis expand their service elements by introducing new elements (e.g., new specialized CrossFit classes), encouraging the use of previously untapped elements (e.g., advanced forms of familiar CrossFit exercises), and enabling access to previously withheld elements (e.g., CrossFit competitions for advanced athletes), which may require payments or transfers of points. These processes can include aspects such as the amount, type, or intensity of such elements provided to customers. The analysis also found that firms expand service elements in a layered fashion rather than all at once or in a linear progression, for example every day.

The capability of layered expansion of service elements shapes the evolving nature of the services in the data set. Within the sticky experience model, it could be argued that the layered expansion capability delivers on the promise of play spaces to be expanding over time and to provide opportunity (Lunenfeld, 2011). Interacting with play spaces early on in their journeys invited consumers to dive deeply into the pleasures of exploration and initial discovery. Yet later in their journeys, other experiential responses seem to come to the fore of their overall experience with a service and are valued more by customers. These responses are intentional immersion and repeated moments of emotional rollercoasters and progress earned through labour and effort.

In CrossFit, expanded service elements are offered to customers at different levels. One such expansion concerns the class schedule. For instance, in an email newsletter, one CrossFit affiliate included in this study broadcasted the introduction of two new specialist classes, one on conditioning and another one named ‘Strongman WOD [workout of the day]’ – a specialist class containing movement and loads that ‘better mimic challenges found outside the gym’ and are intended to help ‘build super human strengths’ (Email newsletter, 2018-06). At the individual workout level, CrossFit trainers (and sometimes other members) make suggestions about the intensity (e.g., weight, number of repetitions) and variation (e.g., full range of motion, more advanced version) of a workout for individual trainees. Trainers may also increase the weight of an individual’s workout load without prior notice during a workout of the day, prompting a member to train at a higher intensity. Making clients aware of CrossFit competitions is

another important way in which trainers keep their advanced clients motivated and encourage them to become engaged in a broader spectrum of what the brand offers. An expansion of service elements can also occur at the level of social events and other offerings. For example, one box in our study started organizing birthday parties for children in the summer of 2017, and a member of that box who is a hair stylist regularly offers haircuts in the physical space of the box.

In the case of Pokémon Go, layered expansion is an intuitive and central part of the mobile game. Developer Niantic has introduced numerous new creatures and many features to the game, changed existing elements, and created countless in-game events and several physical events in Asia, Europe, and North America. These events are often linked to the release of new Pokémon and of so-called legendary Pokémon as raid bosses to certain areas of the world or worldwide for a limited time. Niantic also revised the gym structure and introduced a 5-level raid system in which players need to work together in order to defeat powerful raid bosses, often legendary Pokémon in the case of level 5 raids. Since the introduction of the first legendary Pokémon in July 2017, the company has almost continuously added new legendary Pokémon and brought back old ones. One of the latest important expansions of the game was a system that allows players to become friends and trade Pokémon, a feature long discussed in the player community.

Niantic provides customers with escalating challenges, for example, by encouraging players to complete increasingly difficult 'Field Research' and 'Special Research' tasks (e.g., win three raids) in return for variable and escalating rewards, a feature introduced in March 2018. The game also presents customers with time-limited opportunities, including the use of generally available elements from the in-app store, such as egg incubators and raid passes, as well as participation in in-game events, such as Halloween special events that spawn more 'ghost' and 'dark' type Pokémon (observations compiled from field notes).

Tinder utilizes the layered expansion capability to enhance the customer experience primarily through the introduction of new features, new designs, and new services for paying members. Between September 2016 and July 2018, for instance, the firm launched eleven new features, one design update, and the members-only service Tinder Gold, promising a 'first-class swipe experience' (Tinder, 2017d). An examples of a recently added features is 'Loops,' enabling users to create two-second looping

videos ‘to show more personality’ (Tinder, 2018b). Another manifestation of the customer experience management capability of layered expansion concerns the creation of a sense of unlimited possibility for users. Especially, the app tells users after varying times of swiping that no more matches are available in their area and disables the swiping function. When users check the app a few hours or a day later, however, new profiles appear, and they can continue swiping through an uncertain number of new profiles again.

Besides offering escalating challenges, the firm capability of layered expansion provides opportunities for customers to enhance their experience and make progress (e.g., become stronger, fill the Pokémon index, find better matches). At the same time, new, revised, or increased service elements also challenge customers to learn how to make the best use of them and adjust their ongoing consumption to the evolving offering. Providing time-limited opportunities and escalating challenges, the layered expansion capability differs from the capability highlighted in the smooth experience model to automate journey processes in order to enable customers to achieve results quicker and in fewer steps (Edelman and Singer, 2015). In light of that firm capability, the tendency toward more complexity and prompting customers to put effort into their service usage may seem counterintuitive at first glance. However, in the adventurous contexts of this thesis research, encouraging customers to employ their growing expertise and do some work to keep progressing by exposing them to opportunities and challenges is a crucial way to keeping them engaged. This finding is supported by the ‘handmade effect’ (Fuchs *et al.*, 2015), the ‘IKEA effect’ (Norton *et al.*, 2012), and other consumer research (e.g., Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), all showing that customers place higher value on creations that are partially of their own making and required labour to complete.

The following quotes illustrate earned progress as a key repeated moment of truth in customers’ spiralling journey toward enhanced stickiness. Emily shares an important moment at the CrossFit box that deepened her enthusiasm about and engagement with the service:

It was when I was I started seeing a progress in my weightlifting. I remember the first time that I managed to do a 30kg snatch, which was a big deal for me. I’d been trying to do it for ages. And it was that moment when everything clicked and then all of a sudden my weights and everything else started going up as well. When I started it was very much like, you know, I wanted to watch my figure. But, it changed. It became like, I wanna see how strong I can get. [...] it’s a really nice rush when you get that new

personal best. [...] It was quite late one evening, but a few guys were still around. One of the guys was Jamie, who I'd trained with quite a lot because he was helping with my programming. And he was there, and I was just like, I sort of dropped [the bar] down, looked around and was like, did anybody see that? Anyone? And then I shouted across the box. I was like, Jamie, Jamie. I've done it, I've done it and he was like, oh, thank God for that. You'll shut up now [laughs]. It's nice cause everyone gives you a little nod of well done. But, it's never patronising, and nobody ever lets it get to your head or anything. Everyone's like great, that's amazing. Right, next one. Let's go again kind of thing. (Emily)

In addition, consider the following vignette by Jenny about her experience with the influence of CrossFit trainers:

At CrossFit you've got the instructor who is teaching the class as a whole but also takes the time to sort of go around, look at each person, look at their technique. Really think about your ability and think, okay you are lifting that, actually I've seen you do it, you can lift more. And then goes to the person next to you and say, do you know what you need to be lifting less, you know? [...] [Interviewer: I think that happened to you last time. When we did the workout together. The instructor increased your weight?] Yes. So, I, in my mind like I was doing that workout and I was like do you know what I'm killing it. Like this is going really well and like I'm, you know, doing a good run and I'm doing better. And then I come in and she increases the weight and you think okay now this is really tough. And you know I could do it, like I could get through that workout. But it's only because someone pushed me in a way that I didn't even think of doing. And it's that, sort of, I think that's like a prime of example of what you'll have in every class. And maybe that's how you get better and progress and train. Whereas if you turn up to the same class week in week out in a gym and you do the same thing, your body, your muscles will get muscle memory and you'll just plateau. (Jenny)

Comparing Pokémon Go to other leisure activities such as Geo-Caching, Ruth talks about the 'hooks' in Pokémon Go:

'Pokémon Go's got that game structure of a lot of unique goals. You know, and different routes you can go through it. [...] So, I think Pokémon has more hooks to keep you there. Because, it is designed to have more hooks to keep you there. And, yeah, there's always just, you know, a little bit more you can do. There's another little quest you can go on [laughs]. [Interviewer: What are some of the hooks that work best on you?] On me? Um, well, they have events when there is, you get more points for doing things. Or, a particularly difficult sort of Pokémon is out there. Um, they have Pokémon that are only released in certain countries. I do travel a lot for work, so when I'm in America, I'm catching American Pokémon. It's quite exciting. Um, this new thing where you have to work together on Raids where you have to catch Pokémon that are desirable Pokémon. [...] But to get Moltres [a legendary Pokémon available only through raids and for a few

weeks], you can't just find it around, you've got to go to a Gym, you've got to find a Gym that's got one in, you've got to take part in a Raid. The Raids themselves are time limited. And, you can't win a Raid unless you've got, I think, about ten people there. Now, that's shifted the whole balance of Pokémon Go from something that you do individually, to something where you're subtly going, oh where are the other players? (Ruth)

Similarly, Daniel explains what keeps him interested in the game:

When I download a game App I tend to sort of play it a little bit obsessively until I get to a certain level, um like maybe the top level or reaching all of the achievements. And at that moment I become totally uninterested and delete it. Um so because there are still challenges in Pokémon Go, because new Pokémon appear, because there's rare ones or trying to get one to the maximum level, that kind of stuff, it kind of gets me interested. So, I think it was the sense of I'm not done with this, there are Pokémon to get, there are achievements to achieve, um medals to get. That I kept going, kind of thing. [Interviewer: And where there any times when you were less excited about Pokémon Go?] Um I think just before Generation 2 started my interest was kind of beginning to wane a little. And then Gen 2 started um so um that kind of got me interested again. I didn't give it up completely, but I was beginning to think um, you know, have I done as much as I, you know, it's all there is, kind of thing. (Daniel)

These and many other informant voices illustrate that moments of progress occur when customers achieve something that typically took them some time and energy over the course of interacting with a service repeatedly. Such desirable moments can occur in direct response to the expansion of service elements or can occur less related to any one manifestation of this customer experience management capability. Consider that informants note how progress is earned by repeatedly using the service. For instance, customers may experience earned progress simply as a result of customers' showing up frequently to CrossFit classes, working on their technique using YouTube videos on weekends, and stretching in the evenings to prepare for the next day (e.g., Jenny).

Informants also report earned progress as a result of doing the 'grind' (Julia) of catching dozens of common Pokémon (which one player's son calls 'Poké-clutter') each day, of mass-evolving Pokémon, and of sorting through hundreds of Pokémon to make space for new ones (e.g., Ruth). Players often mass-evolve Pokémon during special in-game events and while using a specific item (Lucky Eggs) that increase the amount of received 'Experience Points' (XP), which are used to determine a player's level. Similarly, for Tinder, Roberto reports making progress through a 'consistency' and 'organization' of

usage based on the insight that the ‘fruits from Tinder come out only with constant use and after a while.’ Firms can support customers to experience moments of earned success, especially over the long run and in periods of waning interest (e.g., Daniel), by expanding service elements in a layered fashion.

The results of the customer journey analysis further showed that moments of earned success often go along with an evolution of service-related goals. Having achieved something meaningful, many informants revise their goals or develop new goals that assist them in their deepened engagement with a service. Take, for example, Emily’s evolution from wanting to ‘watch her figure’ at the beginning to wanting to ‘see how strong I can get,’ a more open-ended goal in line with CrossFit’s value proposition that propelled her to increase her involvement with the service, take part in competitions, and even ‘working towards getting good enough to go to the bigger, higher end competitions.’ Or take Roberto’s temporary goal to date women older than him after successfully using Tinder in his age group. In some cases, firms can directly suggest goals to customers. Consider, for instance, the introduction Pokémon Go’s field research and special research tasks (The Pokémon Company, 2018).

In addition, when the research informants engage with opportunities and tackle difficulties ‘just-challenging-enough’ (Alter, 2017, p. 190), they tend to develop a growing sense of expertise. This sense of expertise and involvement in turn tends to bring research informants enjoyment and pride when it is noted by other people, as some of them recall in the interviews. Together, repeated moments of earned progress, goal-evolution, and growing mastery increasingly help customers integrate themselves into the service offering. Firms that provide truly sticky experiences may in fact be able to take over considerably large parts of an individual’s life; one potential and unintended consequences of this will be discussed in the subsequent section on sudden service termination.

To sum up, the initial round of data interpretation found that informants move from an intentional immersion not only to frequently experienced emotional rollercoaster but also to repeatedly experienced moments of earned progress. Firms facilitate these stickiness-enhancing moments of truth by providing a layered expansion of service elements encouraging customers to deal with time-limited opportunities and escalating challenges.

7.6.4 Stickiness Dissipation - the Termination Phase

This section presents the termination phase of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey, based on the initial round of data interpretation. The termination phase captures markedly reduced usage or termination of a service, and hence ends the customer journey. The first part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities can engender disappointment and gradual withdrawal. The second part of this section unpacks the preliminary finding that overly effective stickiness-enhancing capabilities can engender conflict and sudden withdrawal. The preliminary findings are numbered consecutively.

Seventh preliminary finding: Insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities can engender disappointment and gradual withdrawal. In the first termination trajectory, customers who experience repeated disappointment due to insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities appear to enter a downward spiral of gradual withdrawal to avoid further negative experiences. The customer journey analysis reveals a form of service termination in which customers use a service less and less until the point of near or actual abandonment. This gradual withdrawal from a service tends to occur when customers experience moments of disappointment, defined as customer moments when displeasure or sadness is experienced over the course of multiple touchpoints that leave the customers' hopes unfulfilled.

Customers' overall disappointment typically accumulates over the course of multiple touchpoints in which hopes, or expectations remain unfulfilled. From the perspective of Chandler and Lusch's (2015) service system framework, experiencing repeated moments of disappointment gradually disintegrates the alignment between external connections and customers' internal dispositions, disengaging customers from a service over time. If the loosening alignment between connections and dispositions cannot be repaired, a customer's service experience will continue to deteriorate and he or she will eventually leave a service.

When informants across our cases repeatedly lived through moments of disappointment, they tended to reduce their use of a service in order to avoid further negative experiences. The following vignette by Pokémon Go player Dave illustrates this tendency. After being enthusiastic about Pokémon Go and

setting up an email group at his workplace to exchange ideas and coordinate joint activities, his interest in and use of the game dwindles in response to disappointments:

It's good to have the [email] list used in that way, and it's good to have people sort of engaged and stuff. I mean, personally, like, I have... so, like, there's a bonus you can get if you catch a Pokémon every day for seven days or something. And I've never got that bonus. So, it only brought it in about six months ago. Something like that... which sort of shows how much I play at the moment, or how much I've been playing. Because, after the first few months, I really hardly played at all. Like, there's a couple of, of annoying things to me. One of them is, so, if you wanted to count your distance to hatch eggs... so, you know about the mechanic, yes? [Interviewer: yes] You have to, you have to keep, like, a screen on. If you put, turn the screen off and put it in your pocket, it doesn't count the GPS distance. So, otherwise, I would probably take it running with me every day. But I just won't take it running every time when I have to hold it in my hand. (*unedited quote, Dave*)

To further illustrate the pattern of gradual withdrawal in response to insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities, consider how Charles realizes after a series of disappointments that Tinder is not the right way for him to find what he is looking for:

I did match a few people and then unfortunately the people I did match weren't necessarily the sort of people I'd usually go out and try a date. So, and it's quickly finding it out within the like first few bits of conversation between them and just... It really started putting me off after a while, especially with some of the people that, started, kind of, talking to me and it was like, I can understand why it is good but it just, it became very unappealing after a while, it was like aaah, not really feeling this, not really getting out what I'm looking for. [...] I mean I still stand by it, the apps a very, very good idea and even though I found it wasn't for me, it's not like I'll completely stop using it altogether. There are times when it helps you to see what is going on, sort of, thing. And log on to Tinder, but I'm just not as frequent as say, probably other people on Tinder. [...] when I first started I was probably using it to figure out, just to type of, see what was out there, really, but... Now I'm kind of looking elsewhere. I've not necessarily set in my ways but I, kind of, know what I want now, and I don't feel like I need to depend on that. (*unedited quote, Charles*)

These quotes show how gradually disruptive an increasing misalignment of connections and dispositions can be for the customer experience and hence for the firm goal of growing an actively engaged user base. As a case in point, Dave is an enthusiastic player of Pokémon Go for a few months, investing considerably and making an effort to align his dispositions (e.g., service-related interests, desires, meaning making) with that of other players. Yet after a while the service experience loses its

stickiness for him because of a lack of re-invigorating and a couple of ‘annoying things.’ This trajectory is not uncommon among Pokémon Go players who expected developer Niantic to improve and extend the game over time. As Niantic Chief Executive Officer John Hanke revealed in an interview after the first year of the game, his team ‘lost probably six months on our schedule because of the success of the game,’ keeping resources focused on infrastructure instead of new or improved features (Webster, 2017). In response to such insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities, in particular a missing layered expansion capability in the first months after the release of the game, players like Dave began to reduce their engagement in a downward spiral toward gradual withdrawal.

For Charles, it is a less a lack of a particular customer experience management capability or tactic than an overall failure of Tinder to facilitate desirable experiences by matching him with people he would like to date. In other words, Tinder was not able to build on this users’ early curiosity and intentional immersion to move him to repeatedly experience the stickiness-enhancing combination of emotional rollercoasters and earned progress. Charles remains to see the app as a ‘very good idea’ and occasionally uses it as an information device, but he has realized that ‘looking elsewhere’ is more aligned with his current preferences and future vision of dates. In fact, to this informant it is meeting people through friendship groups or just in public ‘that makes it easier, rather than [Tinder-mediated situations in which] you’d never spoken to each other and then one person has to break the ice, we’re talking completely random and then you sit down in that leap of faith, almost hope that things go well.’

Gradual withdrawal is not always a straightforward process ending with full termination. Some informants report that their declining service usage is temporarily stabilized, or their usage even increases for short periods of time, such as during special service events. This shows that when customers re-strengthen the loosening alignment of their connections and dispositions (Chandler and Lusch, 2015), the deterioration of their experience and engagement may be stoppable or even reversible. To illustrate this, consider the continued vignette by Dave who keeps Pokémon Go somewhat integrated into his life. Dave arrives at this alternative point in the customer journey that can be labelled a stabilization into a habitual frame, a scenario in which customers usage of a service is driven more by habit than by a yearning for repetition. As his quote shows, key to this recovery from hardly playing the game at all were firm-owned touchpoints of new features (i.e., collaborative raids) and social touchpoints via his friends:

The only times I've really been playing in the last six months have been... I have a friend who comes around on a Thursday evening, and we go for a run. And we both play and catch at the same time. We do the gyms and stuff. And that is, that's really the primary reason that I continue to play. And then, the raids in the last few weeks have been out four or five of them or something, which, again, is much more than I've done in any sort of recent time. But yes, it's quite nice to go and see real people and stuff. I have a friend from... [name of friend], who I think in the list. So, we've been friends since school, actually. So, and, and he's quite active on the, on the mailing list. So, I, you know, I go out, because I can also say hi to [name of other friend] and stuff like that. (*unedited quote, Dave*)

Dave maintains a link with the game through social and new firm-owned touchpoints. His and other informants' journey suggests that gradual withdrawal partially overlaps with passive loyalty in the smooth experience model (Court *et al.*, 2009). Concretely, when consumers' expectations are not met through adequate performance, their satisfaction with a product or service decreases. Expectation gaps (Fleming, 2015) or negative disconfirmations can interrupt both loyalty loops and stickiness spirals. In the loyalty loop rationale, their cumulative influence can lead customers to become so-called vulnerable repurchasers who stay with a brand passively and contribute to the firm much less than active loyalists do (Court *et al.*, 2017). Informants such as Dave and Charles similarly respond to disappointed hopes by lowering their service consumption toward near or de-facto abandonment. Informants on such paths of near (and toward actual) service withdrawal often remain infrequent users, reduce engagement, and shift their focus elsewhere. For example, Dave realizes, 'if I can do recreational activities like reading that also actually make me feel good, then I should do those instead.'

To sum up, the initial round of data interpretation showed that one way in which customers (almost) terminate their service usage is through a downward spiral of gradual withdrawal in order to avoid further negative experiences that repeated moments of disappointment entail. This gradual service termination can be facilitated by firms through insufficient stickiness-enhancing capabilities for customer experience management.

Eighth preliminary finding: Overly effective stickiness-enhancing capabilities can engender conflict and sudden withdrawal. In the second termination trajectory, customers who experience moments of conflict that they are neither able to resolve nor bear appear to immediately and completely quit the service to seek relief. In contrast to scenarios of service termination described in the smooth

experience literature (Court et al., 2017), it seems that firms facilitating sticky experiences can excel at facilitating a superior customer experience yet can still lose customers after certain stickiness-disrupting experiential responses. In fact, the customer journey analysis showed that the stickiness of an experience can lead customers to instantly quit a service. It will be shown that sudden withdrawal tends to arise from a customer's unbearable conflict, understood as an overwhelming clash of opposing or incompatible forces (e.g., goals, desires, life circumstances). Firms tend to engender such conflict through stickiness-enhancing capabilities that evoke in customers an overpowering sense of (future) service stickiness.

Viewed through the service system framework by Chandler and Lusch (2015), experiencing such a moment abruptly disintegrates the alignment between temporal and relational connections surrounding customers and their individual dispositions, and hence disengages customers from a service. If connections and dispositions cannot be re-aligned, an individual's service experience remains disrupted and he or she may leave a service altogether (Chandler and Lusch, 2015). When informants across the data set experienced moments of conflict in the form of unbearable clashes among opposing or incompatible forces, they tended to suddenly withdraw from a service in order to seek immediate relief. To illustrate this pattern, consider Aron's reasons for abruptly terminating Pokémon Go. Aron is an avid consumer and former professional player of video games and currently works in the e-gaming industry:

Downloaded it, walked around, saw the historical sites that are within it, the PokéStops, but also, it tells you little things about what might be on the street. Loved it, did it for four or five hours and deleted it, because...I will do this way, way too much. Now, it's cool because it's [an] active [game] but I don't really need to be more active, and I definitely need to consume fewer video games. So yeah, that was my Pokémon Go journey. (Aron)

As another example, take Sophia's vignette about an undesirable encounter with her past that prompted her to delete Tinder:

I went on a trip to [a city in the United Kingdom]. And on Tinder I found my ex-boyfriend and I was like; no, I don't want to see that, and I deleted it. But it was random that I deleted it because I was seeing people I know and I didn't want [that] anymore, and there I saw my boyfriend['s profile] so... I just said, okay it's time to delete it now because I don't want to meet up with my ex-boyfriend. Perhaps I felt embarrassed when

I saw him. That's why I deleted it, yes thinking about it now [laughing]. I've never reflected on that before to be honest. (Sophia)

These quotes exemplify the disruptive impact that moments of conflict can have for a customer and, consequently, for firms seeking to keep customers engaged. A former professional player of video games and an expert in the industry, Aron plays enthusiastically yet makes a quick assessment that continuing to play Pokémon Go is not aligned with his present goals (e.g., to consume less video games). This assessment is based on his experience with other games he played obsessively. He is clear in his interview that adopting a new activity that he enthusiastically and frequently repeats does not support him in his career ambitions nor provides him with benefits of being active, which he already is through hobbies such as playing football. While he 'loved' aspects of the game, no alignment and hence no prolonged engagement could be sustained as a result.

Multiple informants voiced awareness of the lurking danger of sticky experiences to dominate their lives, consuming more resources than would be appropriate. For some, this remains an awareness but does not yet engender an unbearable or unresolvable conflict because the positive and thrilling aspects of sticky experiences trump the negative effects. To illustrate this tendency, the reaction of Tobias to the release of Pokémon Go's research tasks in a group email was 'Awesome!! So much for getting my life back anytime soon though!' (email, 2018-03-26).

Meanwhile, other informants can no longer bear the increasing encroachment of sticky experiences into their lives. Consider Tinder user Sophia, who experienced an intense moment of conflict and deleted the service. Sophia's decision to suddenly withdraw herself from Tinder is a direct response to encountering someone who used to be a truly good match on the app and accidentally swiping right on him, namely her ex-boyfriend. The negative emotions she feels when this aspect of her past and her present Tinder-using, date-seeking identity collide sends her previous alignment and sticky experience in disarray. She is neither able to bear nor to resolve the conflict that this encounter evokes when continuing to use the service. As someone who perceives using Tinder to be an 'addictive game' and an activity that needs some justification at the same time, she feels the urge to delete Tinder and instead, after some time, tries a desktop dating service.

It is worth mentioning that not all life-service conflicts end with sudden withdrawal. When informants experienced conflict that was bearable or resolvable over time, they did not necessarily withdraw from the service entirely and finally. In other words, when individuals are able to adjust and adapt over time and re-align their connections and dispositions (Chandler and Lusch, 2015) in response to a conflicting situation, the disruption of a service experience may only be temporary and/or to a certain degree, leaving a certain level of stickiness. To illustrate this, consider the following quote by Emily, who manages to find a new working alignment within a more habitual frame:

I definitely don't do CrossFit to the same level I was doing it... Anymore. My new job role is... I've found it difficult to like sort of reincorporate... Fitness into my new job role. So, I'm sort of doing it at a much lesser level now. So, it is now mainly... Whereas before it was like, right, I need to get my next personal best. I need to up my weight. Now, I'm just happy to go and do the workouts and just keep a certain level of fitness... and strength going. Cause it's important for my job as well that I have a level of fitness. [...] I'm a trainee paramedic. Lots of lifting heavy people off of the floor [laughs]. [...] The biggest thing for me was when I started this new job, I moved away from home. So, I started at a different box. And that, that was really difficult for me. I really struggled with that for a while, because I was so familiar with my old box at home... to then go into a different box where I knew absolutely no one... And they were absolutely lovely, and they are lovely... but it took me quite a while to find my feet again. That was quite a big stumbling block for me. And then it was at that point as well that I realised that I needed to do CrossFit for different reasons. Like when I was at my original box with [my brother], going to the gym five days a week... We were doing competitions and... It was very much working towards getting good enough to go to the bigger, higher end competitions. Whereas now at the new box, [...] you can go into the competitions cause you're really good and I said, actually, no that's... I don't think that's what I'm about anymore. I just need to maintain my fitness... and my strength. And so, it's definitely sort of gone down now from what it was. [...] I suppose I'm not as emotionally involved with this box [sound slip].... Yeah, this box now I don't quite feel as emotionally involved with it as I did with the original one. But I think that is also partially because I want different things from it now, from what I did. (*unedited quote*, Emily)

In contrast to Dave in the previous section, Emily reaches the alternative stage of stabilization into a habitual frame from a starting point of being intensely involved with her former CrossFit box. After undergoing significant changes in her life that conflict with her former intense CrossFit usage and make a continuation of her training at the old CrossFit box impossible, she struggles for a while until being able to reincorporate fitness into her new life situation. While CrossFit lost stickiness for her throughout the changes, she did not completely let go of the service and choose an alternative solution potentially more in line with her new situation (e.g., lifting exercises with a bar and weights at home;

going to a gym with colleagues from work). Instead, she realizes that she needs to shift her goals toward fitness maintenance and adopt a more practical perspective on her training at the new box where she is less ‘emotionally involved’ despite everyone being ‘lovely.’

Sudden withdrawal in the sticky experience model somewhat overlaps with full termination in the smooth experience model where customers end their loyalty to choose another brand. This overlap predominantly refers to the behavioural aspect of entirely terminating the use of a service. In the smooth experience logic, customers who become ‘switchers’ re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and choose an alternative (Court *et al.*, 2017) to find a better solution to complete a job. In the sticky experience model, following the immediate termination of a service, customers either continue consuming extant services (e.g., other video games, like Aron does) or begin using a different service of the same type (e.g., another dating service, like Sophia does).

To sum up, the initial data interpretation showed that a second way in which customers terminate their service usage is to suddenly withdraw from the service in order to seek instant relief from a conflict that customers are neither able to resolve nor bear. This sudden termination of a service can accidentally be facilitated by firms through overly effective stickiness-enhancing capabilities that disrupt customers’ sticky experiences.

This appendix has traced the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey based on the initial round of data interpretation. It was organized along three phases using three generic terms: introduction, continuation, and termination. Throughout the appendix, especially at the beginning and end of each subsection, the emergent findings of the sticky experience model were contrasted with the extant smooth experience model (see also Table 9).

The main text of this thesis has presented the revised findings from the final round of data interpretation. This interpretation generated a more comprehensive understanding that relies on less and higher-order concepts. Overall, the revised sticky experience model presented in the thesis’ main text provides an improved understanding of the evolution of sticky experiences across the customer journey that is well grounded in all three research contexts (see Chapter 4).

7.7 Appendix G: Published Academic Article Based on the Thesis (Siebert et al., *Journal of Marketing*, forthcoming)

**Customer Experience Journeys:
Loyalty Loops versus Involvement Spirals**

Anton Siebert, Ahir Gopaldas, Andrew Lindridge, and Cláudia Simões

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Abstract

Customer experience management (CXM) research is increasingly concerned with the long-term evolution of customer experience journeys across multiple service cycles. A dominant *smooth journey* model makes customers' lives easier, with a cyclical pattern of predictable experiences that builds customer loyalty over time, also known as a *loyalty loop*. An alternate *sticky journey* model makes customers' lives exciting, with a cyclical pattern of unpredictable experiences that increases customer involvement over time, conceptualized here as an *involvement spiral*. Whereas the smooth journey model is ideal for instrumental services that facilitate *jobs to be done*, the sticky journey model is ideal for recreational services that facilitate *never-ending adventures*. To match the flow of each journey type, firms are advised to encourage purchases during the initial service cycles of smooth journeys, or subsequent service cycles of sticky journeys. In multi-service systems, firms can sustain customer journeys by interlinking loyalty loops and involvement spirals. The article concludes with new journey-centered questions for CXM research, as well as branding research, consumer culture theory, consumer psychology, and transformative service research.

Keywords

customer experience management, customer journey design, service design, customer loyalty, customer involvement, experiential involvement, sticky experiences, attention economy, experience economy, CrossFit, Pokémon Go, Tinder

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Customer experience management (CXM) research is increasingly concerned with the long-term evolution of customer experience journeys across multiple service cycles (Bolton et al., 2014; Homburg et al., 2017; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Much of this research suggests that firms make customer journeys as ‘consistent and predictable’ as possible (Hyken 2009, p. 55; Frow and Payne 2007; Kuehnl et al., 2019). Firms are advised to invest in ‘streamlining’ techniques (Edelman and Singer, 2015, p. 90), such as simplification, personalization, and contextualization. These streamlining techniques seek to enroll customers into an ‘ongoing cycle’ of retrigger, repurchase, and reconsumption experiences (Court et al., 2009, p. 101), known as a ‘loyalty loop’ (p. 102). In time, this loop can feel seamless, like ‘sliding down a greased chute’ (Fleming 2016, p. 227). Given the emphasis on consistency, effortlessness, and predictability, we call this approach to customer journey design the smooth journey model. This approach is mostly derived from research on instrumental services, such as banking (e.g., Citibank), pharmacies (e.g., MedPlus), and transportation (e.g., Amtrak).

However, many firms today offer a dramatically different kind of customer journey, one that intentionally features inconsistency, effortfulness, and unpredictability to keep customers excited (Alter, 2017; Eyal 2014; Lopatto 2018). For example, CrossFit, a group fitness service, offers customers ‘constantly varied’ workouts (Glassman 2002, p. 2) in which ‘the excitement never seems to wear off’ (Peacock 2013, p. 4). Pokémon Go, an augmented reality game, keeps players wandering real-world locations to catch randomly spawning virtual creatures (Barrett 2018). Tinder, a geosocial dating app, facilitates a dating journey ‘filled with adventure, unknowns, and endless possibilities’ called the #swipelife (Tinder 2018, p. 3). The press refers to such customer journeys as ‘sticky’ to emphasize that customers cannot seem to pull away, and even when they do pull away, they are eager to return for more (Lynley 2016, p. 7; Miller 2011; Reich 2014). Simply put, sticky journeys are *exciting journeys that customers yearn to continue*. Despite the rising popularity of sticky journeys, CXM researchers have yet to question the assumptions of the smooth journey model or to develop an alternate conceptual model. Redressing these oversights is important because CXM research is too quickly converging on the smooth journey model, without recognizing legitimate alternatives.

In this article, we make three contributions to CXM research on customer journey design. Our first contribution is to challenge the dominance of the smooth journey model. This model advises firms to enroll customers into a loyalty loop of predictable experiences, such as Citibank transactions, MedPlus refills, and Amtrak trips, regardless of the service category. Such predictable experiences

offer customers convenience, ease, and satisfaction, but also risk losing customer attention in competitive markets.

Our second contribution is to empirically develop an alternate sticky journey model, premised on the excitement of unpredictable experiences. Beyond CrossFit workouts, Pokémon Go walkabouts, and Tinder dating adventures, other examples of such experiences include those of Blue Apron meal kits, dramatic HBO serials, Instagram image feeds, Spotify music streams, and trendy Zara fashions. At the heart of the emergent sticky journey model is the notion of an involvement spiral—a roller coaster ride of thrilling and challenging experiences that motivates increasing experiential involvement over time.

Our third contribution is to address practical CXM concerns at the nexus of the two journey models, including which model to select, when to encourage purchases, and how to sustain journeys. We advise firms to employ the smooth journey model in instrumental service categories, wherein customers have jobs to be done, and the sticky journey model in recreational service categories, wherein customers seek never-ending adventures. We also advise firms to encourage purchases at different times within each journey type: during the initial service cycles of smooth journeys, when customers are motivated to make complex decisions; and during the subsequent service cycles of sticky journeys, when customers are already caught up in involvement spirals. Lastly, we trace six possible ways of interlinking loyalty loops and involvement spirals to sustain customer journeys in multi-service systems. For example, firms could spark involvement spirals from existing loyalty loops.

Overall, this article challenges the dominance of the smooth journey model, offers an alternate sticky journey model, and encourages new ways of thinking about customer experience journeys.

The Customer Experience Journey

The concept of *customer experience* is generally defined as a customer's multidimensional—cognitive, emotional, sensorial, behavioural, and relational—responses to a firm's service (Schmitt 1999). Building on the notion of customer experience, the concept of *customer experience journey* (or *customer journey*) is typically defined as the ongoing customer experience across the phases of a service cycle (Følstad and Kvale 2018). These phases are variously demarcated in the CXM literature as 'pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase situations' (Homburg et al., 2017, p. 384); 'pre-core, core, and post-core service encounters' (Voorhees et al., 2017, p. 270); and 'search, purchase,

experience, and reflect [phases]' (Dellaert 2019, p. 243). However, exclusively focusing on phases within a service cycle is too myopic for CXM practitioners if they hope to have customers returning for several service cycles (Bolton et al., 2014; Nakata et al., 2019; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010).

To overcome this myopia, recent CXM literature expands the scope of the customer journey concept—from the relatively short-term customer experience of a single service cycle to the relatively long-term customer experience across multiple service cycles (Kranzbühler et al., 2018). This literature emphasizes that the customer experience during the first service cycle is different from the customer experience during repeat service cycles (Court et al., 2009), necessitating distinct conceptualizations of journey patterns during initial and subsequent service cycles. Moreover, the customer experience during each subsequent service cycle tends to build on the experiences of prior service cycles (De Keyser et al., 2015). In other words, the customer journey across multiple service cycles is not repetitive but iterative (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Finally, when journeys near the end, the journey pattern across the final few service cycles may also be different from those in prior service cycles (Court et al., 2017), necessitating distinct conceptualizations of termination trajectories.

To sum up, recent CXM literature advises customer journey researchers to look beyond the short-term customer experience of a single service cycle to the long-term journey patterns across initial, subsequent, and terminating service cycles. In this way, recent CXM literature is renewing the originally intended scope of the customer journey concept (Følstad and Kvale 2018). Thus far, this literature has developed around an interconnected set of conceptual axioms that we frame as the smooth journey model.

The Smooth Journey Model

The Initial Service Cycle in the Smooth Journey Model

The initial service cycle of customer experience journeys is widely understood as a highly deliberate, multi-phase, customer decision-making process, motivated by internal and external triggers (Court et al., 2009; Leboff 2014; Spenner and Freeman 2012). Firms compete for customer attention during every phase of this process: (1) the *initial consideration* of multiple brands, (2) the *active evaluation* of those brands, (3) the *moment of purchase*, and (4) the *consumption experience*. To win market share during these four key phases, firms are advised to provide customers with *decision*

support, including: (1) brand advertising and content marketing during the initial consideration phase; (2) interactive website tools for the active evaluation phase; (3) in-store advertising and special offers at the moment of purchase; and (4) informative packaging and service updates to enhance the consumption experience. Winning customers over during these four phases increases the likelihood that customers will return to the firm for future purchases when retriggered.

Subsequent Service Cycles in the Smooth Journey Model

Following the initial service cycle, firms are advised to *streamline* the customer journey (Edelman and Singer, 2015) by (1) eliminating unnecessary steps (or simplification), (2) anticipating customer preferences (or personalization), and (3) providing just-in-time support (or contextualization). Such streamlining techniques facilitate predictable as well as convenient, easy, and satisfying customer experiences (Fleming 2016; Hyken, 2018; Kuehnl et al., 2019). Even more importantly, these techniques enroll customers into a routinized or automated cycle of retrigger, repurchase, and reconsumption experiences known as a loyalty loop. The loyalty loop is named as such to emphasize that customer loyalty builds every time the service meets customer expectations (Court et al., 2009). In the best-case scenario, the brand becomes a trusted provider, and the customer in turn becomes a brand advocate (Leboff 2014).

Termination Trajectories in the Smooth Journey Model

Loyalty loops are generally visualized as infinite cycles (Court et al., 2009). However, loyalty loops can come to an end following loyalty-weakening incidents, such as when the brand delivers poor service, or when a competing brand offers a better service (Fleming 2016). Following such incidents, customers tend to follow one of two patterns. Whereas ‘switchers’ re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and choose an alternate brand, ‘vulnerable repurchasers’ tentatively consider competing brands but end up repurchasing the incumbent brand for the time being (Court et al., 2017, p. 66).

Toward an Alternate Sticky Journey Model

Underlying the smooth journey model is a taken-for-granted assumption that firms should seek to make customers' lives easier by creating consistent and predictable experiences (Court et al., 2009; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Hyken, 2018). This assumption has a long history in marketing thought. For example, service research has long argued that predictability across service encounters is 'integral to consumer satisfaction' because it 'increases cognitive control, minimizes risk, and reduces cognitive effort' (Surprenant and Solomon 1987, p. 88–89). More recently, CXM research argues that touchpoint cohesion, consistency, and context-sensitivity 'reduce the amount of time and effort customers must invest in living through a customer journey' (Kuehnl et al., 2019, p. 556). Given this history, one can better appreciate why the smooth journey model assumes that customers always value predictable experiences.

However, customers sometimes value unpredictable experiences. For example, entertainment research shows that dramatic serials with unpredictable plotlines (e.g., *Game of Thrones*) motivate binge-watching, whereas dramatic procedurals with predictable structures (e.g., *Law and Order*) are less captivating (Mittell 2006). Likewise, gambling research shows that unpredictable reward schedules are much more exciting than predictable ones (Schüll 2014). The 'intermittent wins' of unpredictable reward schedules can produce 'states of arousal' like a 'drug-induced high' (Blaszczynski and Nower 2002, p. 491), motivating gamblers to keep on gambling, and some gamblers to become addicted (Schüll 2014). Similarly, gaming research shows that unpredictable gameplay outcomes can be simultaneously 'enjoyable,' 'frustrating,' and thought-provoking (Iacovides et al., 2015, p. 224), within and beyond playtime, 'keep[ing] players returning to the game' (Calleja, 2011, p. 40). Today's video games (e.g., *World of Warcraft*) are even stickier than prior generations because of their greater unpredictability (Alter, 2017). The combination of expansive virtual worlds, massively multiplayer capacities, and evolving game objectives escalates the unpredictability as well as the excitement. Finally, consumer research on desire (Belk et al., 2003), extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993), and repetitive decisions (Shen, Hsee, and Talloen 2019) also show that customers are much more likely to persist on a journey when they are not entirely sure what comes next. One reason is that the suspense is itself exhilarating (Eyal 2014). Another reason is that the need for resolution is strong (Shen, Hsee, and Talloen 2019).

To summarize, multiple fields of research indicate that predictable experiences satisfy customer expectations, but also risk losing their attention. Meanwhile, unpredictable experiences keep customers

excited and yearning for more, but also risk fostering addictions. To put these insights in CXM terms: *high (low) customer experience predictability facilitates smooth (sticky) customer experience journeys.*

Methods

Research Contexts

The aim of this study is to develop a conceptual model of sticky journeys, including *service design principles* on the firm-side and *customer journey patterns* on the customer-side. To achieve our aim, we examine three brand contexts: CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder. Each of these brands features customer experience unpredictability as a core service attribute. Furthermore, each of these brands is well-known for being especially sticky in its respective service category (Lynley 2016; Miller 2011; Reich 2014). Together, the brands offer a mix of journey formats that help to develop a generalizable model of sticky journeys. CrossFit journeys are largely offline; Tinder journeys are largely online; and Pokémon Go journeys are both.

CrossFit is a group fitness regimen founded by Greg Glassman in 2000. The signature ‘constantly varied’ workouts include gymnastics, weightlifting, and bodyweight exercises in well-equipped, indoor-outdoor servicescapes called ‘boxes.’ Athletes are encouraged to strive toward increasingly higher levels of fitness, measured in terms such as reps, weight, and time (CrossFit 2019). CrossFit is a multi-billion-dollar brand (Ozanian 2015), growing from 13 affiliates in 2005 to more than 15,000 affiliates worldwide in 2019 (CrossFit 2019).

Pokémon Go is an augmented reality mobile video game released by Niantic in 2016. Drawing on Google Maps data and the global positioning system (GPS), the app reveals a dynamic virtual reality world in players’ own local surroundings. Players hunt for virtual fictional creatures (Pokémon) that appear unpredictably and marshal those creatures in subsequent gameplay activities such as battles and raids (Niantic 2019). Pokémon Go was the fastest mobile app to reach \$1 billion in revenue (Nelson 2017), and ‘more cumulative time is spent playing Pokémon Go than any other [mobile] game’ (Barrett 2018, p. 3).

Tinder is an online dating app launched by Hatch Labs in 2012. Based on user locations and preferences, Tinder presents users with a seemingly infinite supply of other users’ profiles. Tinder users can swipe right on profiles to express interest, swipe left to express disinterest, swipe up to express high interest, and chat with ‘matches’ (i.e., users who have expressed mutual interest; Tinder 2019).

Tinder is among the highest grossing non-gaming apps worldwide (Sydow 2019) and ‘the most-used dating app in the UK and the US’ (Hern 2019, p. 1).

Data Collection

The first author collected the data using an ethnographic combination of *experiencing* via participant observation, *enquiring* via in-depth interviews, and *examining* via archival research (Wolcott 2008). The majority of this data collection occurred in the United Kingdom between 2016 and 2019. Some data were also collected in North America and Europe.

Experiencing. To experience the stickiness of the services directly, the first author exercised at three different CrossFit boxes, played Pokémon Go to a moderate level of proficiency, and swiped through dozens of Tinder profiles. On his Tinder profile, the first author displayed his real name, university affiliation, and research intent. Communications were focused on the research project. Tinder users who expressed other interests were unmatched to avoid confusion (Kozinets 2015). Field notes about these immersive activities amounted to 185 single-spaced pages. All descriptions of the three services in this article are based on these observations, except where otherwise noted.

Enquiring. Using social networking and snowball sampling, the first author recruited 40 informants who have customer experience with one or more of the three services. Five informants also have provider-side experience at CrossFit as owners or coaches, and four informants also have gaming or technology expertise. These nine informants are more likely than other informants to use industry jargon in their stories, but their journeys in a customer role are similar to those of other informants. Of a total of 43 distinct customer journeys culled from the interviews, 13 journeys pertain to CrossFit, 19 to Pokémon Go, and 11 to Tinder. At the time of the interview, some informants had just begun using the services a few weeks prior, while others had been customers for several years. Eleven of the 43 journeys included discernible termination trajectories. The informants are mostly white and middle-class but vary in terms of age (16–59) and gender (18 female, 22 male). Interviews were conducted in person or by telephone, ranging from 30 to 172 minutes (83 minutes on average). Interviews were loosely structured around five areas of inquiry: (1) the informant’s everyday experiences with the focal service (e.g., how the service enters and exits their day); (2) their long-term journey with the service

(e.g., how they got started; what keeps them interested; when they lose interest); (3) their experiences with competing services, if any; (4) their recollections of significant moments or time periods; and (5) the life contexts surrounding these service experiences. The audio-recorded interviews yielded 1,464 single-spaced pages of transcribed text. Informants that are quoted in this article are renamed for confidentiality and their quotes are edited for clarity. Quotes from foreign language speakers are translated into English.

Examining. Using keyword searches and a custom Google feed, the first author collected publicly available materials about the three services, including websites, press releases, industry reports, and news articles, from mainstream media (e.g., *The Guardian*) as well as niche media (e.g., *Wired*). These data include announcements of service updates and upcoming events, newsworthy customer experiences, and industry leader perspectives. In total, the archival data set amounts to over 200 documents, about 20 of which are cited in this article.

Data Interpretation

Our interpretive process consisted of three iterative activities: making constant comparisons across our informants' lived experiences to discern common patterns; creating memos of our preliminary insights to debate within the research team; and tacking back and forth between the existing literature and our emerging understanding to crystallize our theoretical insights (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). We drew on different types of data to discern firm-side and customer-side insights. Specifically, we drew on firm-side fieldnotes and archival materials to discern the service design principles, and customer-side fieldnotes and interview transcripts to discern the corresponding customer journey patterns. To trace the evolution of sticky journeys, we compared journey patterns in the initial, subsequent, and terminating service cycles of customer journeys across the three research contexts (see Appendix). As is often the case in interpretive research, no single informant provides a complete view of the phenomenon. Rather, that complete view emerges from a critical mass of empirical snapshots. We terminated our interpretive process at theoretical saturation, when new rounds of data interpretation did not meaningfully alter the emergent model. For an overview of the extant and emergent journey models, please see Table 1 and Figure 1.

The Sticky Journey Model

The Initial Service Cycle in the Sticky Journey Model

Rapid entry: the service design principle in the initial service cycle. Firms nurture smooth and sticky journeys differently. At the beginning of smooth journeys, firms support the customer's deliberate decision-making process with considerable decision support. By contrast, at the beginning of sticky journeys, firms attempt to eliminate customer decision-making altogether, by giving customers immediate access to the service. As our informants will reveal, their CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder journeys tend to begin on a whim, motivated by the promise of fun. Accordingly, the most appropriate firm action at this juncture is to give potential customers a taste of the excitement to come, as soon as their curiosity is sparked.

Many CrossFit boxes, for example, offer newcomers a free beginner class, followed by an affordable beginner plan (e.g., a low-cost one-month membership). Unlike traditional gyms, CrossFit gyms do not greet newcomers with gym tours, salesperson interactions, or a complex menu of service plans, which necessitate deliberate decision-making. Pokémon Go's virtual moderator, Professor Willow, orients new players via a rapid sequence of fun and easy steps. Players learn the game's mission via short-text snaps, customize their avatar via a few clicks, and catch a trial Pokémon via a couple of swipes. Unlike dating services that begin with extensive questionnaires (e.g., eHarmony), Tinder only asks new users for their gender, distance, and age preferences (Tinder 2019). Users can import photos into their Tinder profiles from Facebook and begin swiping through potential matches immediately. As commentators have noted, 'Tinder's most revolutionary aspects were to nix the web[sites] and questionnaires' (Reich 2014, p. 2).

We conceptualize these speedy onboarding techniques as the service design principle of *rapid entry*. This conceptualization highlights the expediency with which firms facilitate the beginnings of sticky journeys. As soon as potential customers visit a service entrypoint, firms rapidly offer exciting service experiences. Conspicuously absent are the tedious entry practices of most service industries (e.g., complex menus of purchase options, extensive questionnaires, servicescape tours). If customers cannot experience the excitement of a service quickly, easily, and for free, they may turn their attention to something else that is more immediately accessible. (For additional examples of the rapid entry principle, see the Appendix.)

Quick spin: the customer journey pattern in the initial service cycle. The initial customer experiences in smooth and sticky journeys are remarkably different. Smooth journeys begin with a highly deliberate, multi-phase decision-making process. Prior to our research, we expected that sticky journeys would also begin with some sort of decision-making. However, contrary to our expectations, we find almost no deliberate decision-making process among our informants. As Dora, a Tinder user puts it, ‘I didn’t do proper research.’ Instead, most of our informants begin their journeys on a whim, after receiving enthusiastic reviews, or observing customers enjoying themselves.

Karen, CrossFit athlete: [My Bootcamp instructor] said to me: ‘CrossFit, that’s something you’ll like’... And then a neighbor told me she had started at [a local box] and invited me to come by and give it a try... I went with her and did a couple of regular workouts. Then I attended a beginner’s introduction... which was great, answered a couple of questions, and then we were thrown into it!’

Aron, Pokémon Go player: My brother tells me, ‘You walk around the city. And you pick up Pokémon.’ I’m like, ‘That is amazing. I definitely want to do that’... I walked around London for the whole afternoon and I was, like, ‘I’ve never seen that statue before! I live five minutes away!... Thank you Pokémon Go for that interaction with my environment.’

Charles, Tinder user: When Tinder first came out, I was still in a relationship, so I never really played it, but I saw my mates play it, and I thought the idea of it was amazing in the sense that you literally just swipe, ‘Yeah, I think she’s hot!’ or ‘No, not for me!’ And then if you did get a match out of it, I think that’s hilarious, but I wasn’t able to [try Tinder at that time]... When I became single... I was like, ‘All right, let’s see what the hype’s about... This is definitely a game changer!’

As these vignettes indicate, CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder journeys begin with sparks of curiosity about the focal service, rather than an active evaluation of multiple brands. These sparks of curiosity are often ignited by highly enthusiastic word-of-mouth from family (Aron), friends (Charles), and acquaintances (Karen). Such word-of-mouth excites our informants only if the service complements their already existing life projects. For example, Karen is already a fitness enthusiast when she hears about CrossFit, and Aron is already a passionate gamer when he hears about Pokémon Go. Charles hears about Tinder when he is in a relationship, so he does not download the app immediately, but soon after he becomes single again. Some informants are also exposed to these services through advertising, news, and social media, but regardless of their sources, informants answer these calls to adventure because the promise of fun is compelling and the hurdles to entry are minimal. Of course, services must

deliver on the promise of fun for customers to want to continue the adventure. Karen relishes her first CrossFit class, Aron rediscovers his neighbourhood through Pokémon Go, and Charles finds Tinder to be ‘a game changer!’

We conceptualize the initial service cycle of sticky journeys as a *quick spin* to emphasize not only the lack of deliberate decision-making but also the rapid transitions from observed excitement to anticipated excitement to realized excitement. Although customers intend to try the service briefly, once they experience the exciting service firsthand, they have so much fun that they are often swept up into subsequent service cycles, again without much deliberation. In other words, what starts out as a ‘test drive’ turns into a ‘joy ride’ that turns into a ‘road trip.’ (For additional examples of quick spins, see the Appendix.)

Subsequent Service Cycles in the Sticky Journey Model

Endless variation: the service design principle during subsequent service cycles. Service design principles diverge even further in the subsequent service cycles of smooth and sticky journeys. The smooth journey model advises firms to streamline the customer journey such that subsequent service cycles are as consistent, easy, and predictable as possible. In stark contrast, CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder focus on providing customers with infinitely variable configurations of a core service experience. Delivering such *endless variation* along the customer journey depends on at least three concrete service design features: (1) the expansiveness of the service system, (2) the open-endedness of the service system, and (3) the uniqueness of each service encounter.

One essential design feature is a highly expansive set of service system elements. For example, CrossFit workouts combine innumerable exercises from global athletic traditions (e.g., handstands, muscle-ups, power squats) in a blended indoor-outdoor gym equipped with considerable workout gear (e.g., jump ropes, kettlebells, pull-up bars). Similarly, the Pokémon Go game includes: hundreds of Pokémon; elaborate reward structures, including coins, medals, and points; and countless real-world locations, where players can collect game-relevant items (‘PokeStops’) and battle rival teams (‘Gyms’). Thanks to Tinder’s rapid growth to millions of active daily users (Lapowsky 2014), the app presents users with a virtually infinite supply of potential matches, and once matched, users can exchange unlimited private messages.

A second essential design feature is openness to the addition, subtraction, and transformation of firm-owned, customer-owned, and external service elements. For example, CrossFit boxes design novel workouts daily, coaches add their own flair, and athletes exercise with various partners at different skill levels. Meanwhile, Pokémon Go keeps adding new creatures, features, and events, some of which are time-limited (e.g., Halloween Pokémon events), environment-based (e.g., the dynamic weather gameplay system), and community-dependent (e.g., group raids). Tinder too regularly introduces exciting new features (e.g., Top Picks, Swipe Night, Tinder Gold). Moreover, Tinder's pool of active daily users is constantly changing as new users join the app and existing users take a break.

A third essential design feature is the service system's capacity to perpetuate unpredictable service experiences, even for seasoned customers, by foregrounding a unique configuration of service elements for the customer at every service encounter. For example, every CrossFit workout is a unique mix of aerobic/anaerobic, individual/partner, and indoor/outdoor exercises in varied temporal configurations. Every Pokémon Go walkabout is a unique mix of gameplay activities such as catching varied Pokémon, battling opposing teams, and conducting group raids. Every Tinder session is a unique mix of swiping through new profiles, advancing conversations with matches, and planning off-platform dates. In this manner, no two CrossFit workouts, Pokémon Go walkabouts, or Tinder sessions are ever the same (Bosker 2017; Fry 2013; Lynley 2016). (For additional examples of the endless variation principle, see the Appendix.)

Involvement spiral: the customer journey pattern during subsequent service cycles. In the smooth journey model, the customer journey pattern during subsequent service cycles is a cyclical pattern of predictable experiences that increases customer loyalty over time, hence the name loyalty loop. By contrast, the customer journey pattern during subsequent service cycles of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder is a cyclical pattern of unpredictable experiences that increases customer involvement over time. We conceptualize this pattern as an *involvement spiral* (see Figure 1). From a conceptual standpoint, the involvement spiral has two noteworthy patterns, one in the moment-to-moment timescale of the customer journey, the other in the long-term timescale of multiple service cycles.

In the moment-to-moment timescale of the customer journey, the involvement spiral entails a variegated pattern of thrilling and challenging experiences that we describe as an *experiential roller coaster*. Such an unpredictable pattern of positive and negative experiences, including emotions of anticipation, dread, amazement, disappointment, and enjoyment, keeps customers in a state of high

psychological arousal; and in their highly aroused state, customers become highly attuned to the multidimensional intricacies of service experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993; Blaszczynski and Nower 2002; Calleja, 2011).

In the long-term timescale of multiple service cycles, the involvement spiral entails an upward trend in customer involvement that we describe as *increasing experiential involvement*. Here, our composite notion of *experiential involvement* refers to customer involvement (i.e., interest, excitement, and investment) in the customer experience (i.e., the cognitive, emotional, sensorial, behavioural, and relational responses to a service) (Schmitt 1999; Wild et al., 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Increasing experiential involvement does not imply that customers spend more time on the service each day. Rather, it implies that customers become more deeply invested in the multidimensional intricacies of their service experiences. With each successive cycle of the customer journey, customers also acquire new service-relevant competencies, including new insights, mindsets, and skills (Alter, 2017; Celsi et al., 1993; Eyal 2014). Given the centrality of the involvement spiral to the sticky journey model, we now empirically illustrate this journey pattern in each of our three service contexts.

The involvement spiral at CrossFit. CrossFit's core service is a one-hour group-training class. The prototypical class includes a warm-up, a weightlifting segment, and a workout-of-the-day (WOD). The warm-up is customized daily for the segments that follow. Warm-ups include static stretches (e.g., the hip-flexor stretch), dynamic stretches (e.g., the side shuffle), and other creative activities (e.g., push-ups to the beat of a pop song). Next, the weight-lifting segment might combine multiple exercises or focus on one compound exercise (e.g., the clean-and-jerk). The target number of rounds and repetitions are posted on a large screen, but athletes scale the weights to their current abilities. Coaches often encourage athletes to beat their own personal record. Finally, the WOD is the most fast-paced segment of the class. A WOD can include not only weight-lifting movements but also gymnastics and bodyweight exercises (e.g., pull-ups, rope climbs, lunges) and metabolic conditioning (e.g., running, biking, rowing). Overall, CrossFit classes can feel easier or harder depending on a host of factors such as the athlete's current abilities, the competitiveness among attendees, or even the weather conditions. Some CrossFit boxes post the workouts online the night before, and some athletes take a peek at those workouts in advance to jump-start their excitement. Other athletes, like Alan, take pleasure in the suspense of not knowing what comes next.

Interviewer: What makes you want to go to CrossFit again?

Alan, CrossFit athlete: It's the un-knowing of what you're going to do that night, because you're not really supposed to know... You go to the gym the night before, you do a horrible workout, but you love it... It makes no sense, because why would you love something that's horrible?... But you've worked up a sweat because it's horrible. And then you're like, 'Well, I'm going to book [a class], because if I know what it's going to be tonight, I won't turn up,' and that's why, that's the beauty of it, because you don't know, so you've got to go to find out. It's like a present [i.e., gift]. If you get a present, if they just tell you, you're not going to be excited... [but] if it's a surprise, then when you open it, you're excited. You're amazed by what you've got. And that is literally the beauty of just going to a CrossFit class, because every day, you're like, 'I'm going to go tonight' because you are so excited to see what the workout is. It could be amazing, it could be bad, but you still get excited... It's like swings and roundabouts really.

Alan's words nicely illustrate why the endless variety of CrossFit classes can feel like an experiential roller coaster. There are moments of anticipation ('it's the un-knowing'), surprise ('it's like a present'), and reflection ('but you love it'). Classes can be 'amazing' or 'horrible,' but regardless, they always get one 'excited.' Simply stated, the journey is a mix of positive and negative moments ('it's like swings and roundabouts'). We use the conceptual metaphor of the experiential roller coaster to describe the moment-to-moment experience of the sticky journey because it encompasses the full spectrum of experiential dynamics: the *peaks* of pleasurable experiences, the *valleys* of painful experiences, the *climbs* toward peaks, the *dives* into valleys, and the ever-present suspense about what's around the next turn.

At the same time, a sticky journey is no mindless roller coaster; rather, it is one that continually shifts customer attention to the many possible connections between the service experience and one's own life goals. In this manner, a sticky journey invites greater experiential involvement over time. For example, many CrossFit informants speak of developing greater physical and psychological mastery through CrossFit's workouts.

Jenny, CrossFit athlete: If you are not good at something, it takes a lot for you to dedicate your time to want to be better at it. And I think CrossFit is the only [fitness regime] that has made me do that. I hate squatting, I hate doing anything like that. And I am forced to do it at CrossFit... [and] that's really good for my hips and my back, and as I get older, that movement is really important... When you are like, 'I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what this activity is?', watching [other CrossFit athletes] do it sort of helped me remember the technique, so I was like, 'Okay, so when I need to squat, for example, I should be getting that low'... The more you watch... the better you'll be.'

In this vignette, Jenny describes one meaningful trajectory of her CrossFit journey as overcoming her psychological barriers to the compound exercise of squatting. Jenny is an intermediate athlete who still has much to learn, but unlike a beginner, she has become aware of the general importance of good form ('I should be getting that low'), the specific functions of different exercises ('good for my hips and my back'), and the potential linkages between her CrossFit activities and long-term goals (e.g., staying fit as she ages). We interpret this tendency of customers to become more deeply invested in the intricacies of service experiences as increasing experiential involvement.

The involvement spiral at Pokémon Go. Pokémon Go has an elaborate game structure, including: 40 game levels; rewards such as bronze, silver, and gold medals; and different numbers of points for different in-game actions. Pokémon tend to appear unpredictably and for brief time spans, thus motivating the gamer to catch them immediately. The game's tagline, 'Gotta catch 'em all,' refers to the goal of catching every type of Pokémon by throwing PokéBalls at them. Commentators have noted that 'each capture session... each walk a player goes on... is unique' (Lynley 2016, p. 4). Although players can perform select game actions without walking around (e.g., reviving fainted Pokémon), most game actions require walking or other modes of travel. Collectively, these various triggers, actions, and rewards during each Pokémon Go service cycle (or 'walkabout') generates considerable excitement for players.

Ruth, Pokémon Go player: When I went out with my daughter, and we go, 'Oh, there's an egg about to hatch.' And we gather round and look at it and go, 'Oh no, it's a [common Pokémon]!' [laughs]. And then, we get excited about another one! It's the medals. I have walked 1,502 kilometers... [There's] a lot of unique goals and different routes you can go through. [Niantic] keeps releasing new features... They have Pokémon only released in certain countries, so when I'm in America, I'm catching American Pokémon. It's quite exciting... Some are incredibly difficult to find, and you get very excited when you find one. And some are legendary. The legendary ones you couldn't find anywhere... It's really exciting cause it's time-limited, so if you want to complete your Pokédex... you've got to get [the released Legendary Pokémon]... You've got to find a Gym that's got one... You've got to take part in a raid. The raids themselves are time-limited. And you can't win a raid unless you've got about ten people there.

Ruth derives pleasure from Pokémon Go's varied gaming activities (catching Pokémon; hatching eggs; group raids) in varied social constellations (alone; with her daughter; in groups) at varied real-world locations (in the UK and the US). Like other informants, she experiences an unpredictable sequence of

thrills ('Oh, there's an egg') as well as challenges (hunting for 'incredibly difficult to find' Pokémon), making the moment-to-moment Pokémon Go journey feel like a roller coaster ride.

Further analysis of the Pokémon Go dataset reveals that informants' journeys also evince increasing experiential involvement across multiple walkabouts.

Daniel, Pokémon Go player: I walked past a PokeStop... [and] I was like 'Oh, let me try and catch [a Pokémon], see what happens,' and before I knew it I was catching them and then trying to figure out which ones were better to catch and which numbers were good... and learning that stuff. I went back to work after the summer and there were lots of PokeStops and [other players] wanted to get walking so that they could hatch the eggs. I thought, 'I walk a lot while I'm at work, I go from one building to the other and back again.' So when I'm out... I can have it on... Every night when I get home, [my son] would check how much I'd walked and which Pokémon I'd got. I found myself using it more and more... Because there are still challenges in Pokémon Go, because new Pokémon appear, because there's rare ones, or trying to get one to the maximum level, that stuff, it gets me interested... I'm not done with this, there are Pokémon to get, there are achievements to achieve, medals to get...

Daniel's vignette illustrates how informants can get swept up into the involvement spiral of sticky journeys without any explicit intentions to do so. He initially downloads the game as a family pastime, then continues playing the game on his own. Like many other players, Ruth included, Daniel soon incorporates playtime into his daily walking routines, connects with fellow players, and finds himself playing Pokémon Go 'more and more.' Although his time spent on the app does not increase indefinitely, his experiential involvement during his playtime keeps increasing. He hunts for different, new, and rare Pokémon; powers them up to their maximum levels; and continually learns new ways to earn rewards. His end game is a 'moving target' (Lynley 2016, p. 5). Over weeks, months, and sometimes even years of playing the game, informants such as Ruth and Daniel become increasingly well-versed in the game's numerous intricacies, which in turn increase their enjoyment of the game.

The involvement spiral at Tinder. Departing from traditional matchmaking services that connect customers based on compatibility questionnaires (Finkel et al., 2012), Tinder thrusts users into an 'open' stream of fellow users' profiles (Tinder 2019). Anna, a Tinder user, describes the resulting experience: 'Tall men, small men, fat men, thin men, poor [men], rich [men], doctors, gardeners, and everything! You really see a big cross-section of society. And that was super exciting!' Tinder also includes a messaging stream for matched users to get to know one another, schedule off-platform dates,

and keep in touch for as long as there is mutual interest. These two main streams of user interaction generate Tinder's experiential roller coaster.

Sophia, Tinder user: I was going back home, and instead of sleeping, I was spending an hour, and I was saying 'Okay, it will be the next one that I might like, it will be the next one,' but no, it wasn't... In the morning, if someone liked my profile, if I was finding it interesting, I would say 'Hello, good morning,' stuff like that, and then I would try to initiate a discussion... It was really addictive. In the morning, I might lose, like, 10-15 minutes to see what's happening, who liked me... Sometimes the application shows you profiles first, and then, if the other person likes you, it will appear in your profile as a match. But there were times that I would like someone, and he had liked me first, so I will talk with them straight away. That was when I would text someone more often.

For Anna, Sophia, and other Tinder informants, swiping through profiles is a psychologically arousing process with moments of suspense, delight, and frustration. Users only see one profile at a time in the default swiping channel ('Discover'). They must swipe right to 'Like', swipe left to 'Nope', or swipe up to 'Super Like,' before the next profile is revealed. In Sophia's journey pattern of 'obsessively swiping through Tinder' (Dickson 2015, p. 1), she follows each 'Nope' with a wish that 'it will be the next one' that she might 'Like,' followed by a near immediate revelation of whether her wish has come true or not. Matching with a few users and chatting with them injects new variety into her experiential roller coaster, rendering the overall experience 'really addictive.' Tinder informs a user about a match as soon as two users have liked one another. Sophia's urge to check the app as soon as she awakes indicates that the suspense she experiences while swiping also endures through the matching and messaging process. Intense feelings of desire and disappointment can occur for informants even before they have scheduled any off-platform dates (BBC Newsbeat 2015).

As informants keep swiping through profiles, communicating with matches, and going on dates, their experiential involvement increases, albeit without any explicit reward structure. Unlike Pokémon Go, Tinder does not award points for successful plays, and unlike CrossFit, Tinder does not chart performance metrics on scoreboards. After all, 'success' in online dating can mean many things to many people' (Reich 2014, p. 3). Even so, the Tinder journey does have an implicit reward structure: the quantity and quality of one's matches, chats, and dates, which users interpret subjectively. Many informants also express personally meaningful developments, such as a growing self-awareness about their own relational desires and an increasing ability to understand and respond to matches.

Roberto, Tinder user: [The] fruits from Tinder come out only with constant use... At the beginning, I would invest more time chatting with some specific people, while now, I'm much more direct. Also, because it's a matter of numbers, in the sense that after a while, you get more matches. You basically spend less time on average with every person... My philosophy is chat a little bit, and if you see that there is some kind of common ground and chemistry that you can feel at the very beginning, just by texting someone, then my next proposal is 'Okay, let's meet!'... How people reply, how people write you, you can really get an idea, more or less, of the kind of person it is. There are people who are very funny and start making jokes, or tell you something different, or something more clever, while other conversations [are] more standard, boring ones.

Over the course of his Tinder journey, Roberto refines his approach in several ways. For example, he learns to start swiping during the week to arrange a date for the weekend. He abbreviates unnecessary conversations with a 'more direct' style. He becomes quicker at recognizing the 'kind of person' he is chatting with based on their texting style. From week to week, Roberto also gets more matches, juggles more conversations, and enjoys more dates. Such increasing experiential involvement in the intricacies of the Tinder journey allows him to become more efficient, effective, and even philosophical about dating. (For additional examples of involvement spirals, see the Appendix.)

Termination Trajectories in the Sticky Journey Model

Smooth journeys are generally visualized as infinite loyalty loops. However, in reality, smooth journeys can and do come to an end. Loyalty-weakening incidents, such as poor service experiences and attractive competitor offerings, can trigger customers to re-enter the deliberate decision-making process and switch to a new brand. Sticky journeys, by contrast, tend to terminate with service usage fluctuations fueled by well-being concerns. Sometimes, sticky journeys also terminate for brand-specific reasons.

Service Usage Fluctuations Fueled by Well-being Concerns. We observe that some of our informants begin to question whether to continue their sticky journeys when those journeys start to feel addictive in the pathological sense of the term (i.e., the service discernibly conflicts with the customer's own sense of well-being; Sussman et al., 2011). In these instances, informants tend to withdraw from the service, either gradually or suddenly. Oftentimes they re-patronize the service, then withdraw again. Christine's dissonance about continuing her CrossFit journey stems from its overly enthusiastic culture.

Christine, former CrossFit athlete : I did it quite intensively until Christmas... And then I did it a bit less. Somehow, I could not motivate myself to go as often... But for four months, really intense, and then three months... not quite so intense. Then, when I went home, I actually stopped it... What rather scared me is the fanaticism that many have... I thought, 'Okay, that's not my world, as far as I'm concerned...' It's very important to me to become fit and stay fit, but only to a certain level.

As a former competitive athlete, Christine is well aware of how fitness and health concerns can become all-consuming over time. For her, the CrossFit journey is fun 'to a certain level,' but she reaches that upper limit after several months of enthusiastic participation. By contrast, that upper limit comes very early in Aron's journey with Pokémon Go.

Aron, former Pokémon Go player: Downloaded it, walked around, saw the historical sites that are within it, the PokéStops, it tells you little things about what might be on the street. Loved it, did it for four or five hours and deleted it, because... I will do this way, way too much... I definitely need to consume fewer video games.

Aron's concerns about the addictive potential of Pokémon Go arise within a few hours of playing the game. To put this episode in perspective, Aron is an avid gamer who has pre-existing concerns about keeping his playtime in check. Accordingly, he deletes the app the very same day he starts playing. However, following this episode, Aron downloads the app again and plays the game for a few more weeks, before giving it up for a second time. Whether users take mere hours or several years to reach their upper limit of the involvement spiral, they nonetheless express the same general concern about the addictive potential of sticky journeys.

Sophia, former Tinder user: It's very addictive... I would spend a lot of time... It was like... an addictive game, so in order to stop using it, at some point, I just deleted it, and it worked fine... if I don't want to do something, I'm trying to not have sirens around me.

Sophia tries to use the Tinder app less at first but eventually decides that deleting the app is the only way to cope with its addictive potential. In telling her story, Sophia draws on the myth of the Sirens—beautiful-voiced but dangerous creatures who lure gullible sailors to shipwreck themselves on the Sirens' island. In some versions of the myth, sailors plug their ears so as not to hear the Sirens' call. In a similar vein, Sophia blocks out the call of Tinder by deleting the app. Of course, not all informants terminate their journey when well-being concerns arise.

John, current CrossFit athlete: I'd always want to keep training and training, but I think with experience, I've learned to say... 'Just take a week, let your body recover a little bit.' And our coach is quite good at saying, 'If you're tired... then take the week off. It's not going to do any harm and, if anything, you'll benefit from it.'

Unlike Christine, Aron, and Sophia, John simply takes time off when his well-being concerns arise, suggesting that some informants are better at self-regulation than others. (For additional examples of service usage fluctuations fueled by well-being concerns, see the Appendix.)

Brand-Specific Termination Trajectories. Sticky journeys also fluctuate or terminate for brand-specific reasons (e.g., physical injuries at CrossFit; boredom with Pokémon Go; relationship status changes in Tinder). In the context of CrossFit, athletes can get injured while participating in high-intensity workouts. For example, Olivia recalls being 'surrounded by individuals who were a hell of a lot fitter than me... looking at them as my role models and icons, going, 'I can do that if I want to'' Her journey came to a sudden stop: 'I did too much too soon... And then, as a result, I got injured... I fell off the rig and broke my elbow.' Two years after this 'breaking point,' she resumed CrossFit. In the media, controversy over the 'cultish' nature of CrossFit focuses on such 'overuse injuries [that] are not uncommon among CrossFitters' (Fry 2013, p. 2). Many in the industry are 'wary' of the fitness regime because of its 'risk of injury and drop out' (Denoris, in Fry 2013, p. 2).

In the context of Pokémon Go, boredom is a common theme. For example, Aron says: 'I've put enough hours into this, every egg that hatches is the same, every Pokémon I find is the same, I'm bored.' Timothy too stops playing for several months, because the journey eventually loses its appeal: 'I walked 100 kilometers to get a [specific Pokémon]. And it was not even a good Pokémon... that was a chore, and that did feel boring... I was like, 'No, I don't have to do this,' and so I stopped.' Informants' waning interest in the first year of the game's launch corresponds with Niantic's delay in effectively deploying endless variation across the customer journey, ironically due to the overwhelming success of the game. As CEO John Hanke noted, 'We had to redirect a substantial portion of the engineering team to [work on] infrastructure versus features... I'd say we're about six months behind where we thought we would be' (Webster 2017, p. 2). When Niantic launched Generation 2, some of our informants enthusiastically returned to the game. As Jill says, '[Niantic] introduced Generation 2 at just the right moment for me, because it piqued my interest again!'

In the context of Tinder, journeys terminate when users wish to settle down with one partner, and then do not find one despite significant effort, or do find one. Former Tinder user Enrico withdrew

from Tinder for each of these two reasons. After many ‘dead [end] conversations’ with matches, ‘[I] felt disengaged with the application, as I was not achieving anything in particular,’ and ‘at some point I decided to uninstall the application.’ However, Enrico re-joins Tinder about 18 months later, when his friends encourage him to ‘go on Tinder and try to have fun.’ This time, being ‘more mature in the use of the application,’ and having ‘fate’ on his side, he matches with someone that he falls in love with, prompting another uninstallation of the app: ‘since things were almost done, I also decided to uninstall Tinder.’

Theoretical Implications

Challenging the Dominance of the Smooth Journey Model

CXM research on customer journey design is too quickly converging around the smooth journey model, without adequately interrogating its underlying assumptions. The smooth journey model is certainly useful but only in terms of maximizing hyperrational factors such as consistency, effortlessness, and predictability. As our findings highlight, customers also sometimes yearn for the excitement of unpredictable journeys, if only to temporarily escape their otherwise hyperrational lives. Accordingly, in this article, we have developed an alternate journey model that is premised on the excitement of unpredictability. This model explains how firms can design sticky journeys that customers yearn to continue. Each of the two models advocates for a unique set of service design principles and customer journey patterns (see Table 1). In essence, the smooth journey model helps customers to make an informed decision, then fall into a comforting, trust-building routine (a.k.a., a loyalty loop). By contrast, the sticky journey model yanks customers onto an experiential roller coaster ride that increases customers’ experiential involvement over time (a.k.a., an involvement spiral).

A caveat for CXM researchers is that both journey models are ideal types (i.e., tidy abstractions of messy realities; Weber 1904). Real-world customer journeys are never wholly predictable, nor wholly unpredictable. Most services facilitate a mix of predictable and unpredictable experiences. What distinguishes the two journey models is the relative emphasis on high versus low customer experience predictability. Furthermore, all journeys are interrupted and interwoven in customers’ everyday lives. No journey unfolds in isolation from all others. These caveats aside, journey models are valuable as ‘cultural mindsets’ for coordinating CXM activities across organizational stakeholders (Homburg et al.,

2017, p. 385). Figure 1 can help customer experience officers (CXOs) to coordinate all customer-facing departments in a firm toward a shared vision of the customer journey. If that vision is a sticky journey, then the notion of an involvement spiral can help CXOs to emphasize the importance of keeping customer experiences unpredictable in the moment-to-moment timescale, and increasing customer opportunities for experiential involvement across successive service cycles.

Connecting Sticky Journeys to Related Marketing Concepts

The emergent concept of sticky journeys is related to several existing marketing concepts (see Table 2). Among these concepts, *customer involvement* (Zaichkowsky, 1985) is the most central to understanding sticky journeys. As sticky journeys evolve, customers become increasingly involved in the service experience. Given that involvement is a decades-old construct with several variants (e.g., product, brand, and purchase involvement; Beatty, Kahle, and Homer 1988), we emphasize that experiential involvement is the most appropriate concept for our model, as well as CXM research at large. As journeys evolve, customers may also become more engaged in the sense that they begin to contribute direct and indirect value to the firm. However, such *customer engagement* (Pansari and Kumar 2017) is not necessary for journeys to be sticky. Journey stickiness can be distinguished from *customer loyalty* in both behavioural and affective terms. When customers regularly consume one brand in a service category, out of a sense of commitment, that repatronage is best conceptualized as loyalty (Oliver 1999). However, when customers frequently return to a service, out of a sense of excitement, that repatronage may be better conceptualized as stickiness, which does not imply brand exclusivity.

Consumer desire is a type of consumer motivation that is much more energetic, passionate, and urgent than need or want (Belk et al., 2003). Our study indicates that customers do not need or want their sticky journeys to continue but urgently desire such continuity. However, when sticky journeys become compulsive or pathological, they may be better conceptualized as *consumer addiction* (Sussman et al., 2011). Finally, *extraordinary experiences* are highly positive and infrequent experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993). Sticky journeys, by contrast, entail a variegated pattern of positive and negative experiences in quick succession. All of these interrelated marketing concepts point to customer interests in something more than efficient service experiences, but that ‘something more’ varies across these seven concepts. Only the concept of sticky journeys denotes a cyclical pattern

of unpredictable customer experiences, with increasing experiential involvement, that customers yearn to continue.

Practical Implications

The CXM literature generally advises firms to design smooth journeys. With the rising popularity of sticky journeys, three new practical questions arise: (1) How should CXM practitioners choose between the smooth and sticky journey models? (2) Within each journey type, when should firms encourage purchases—during the initial or subsequent service cycles? (3) How can firms interlink loyalty loops and involvement spirals to sustain customer journeys in multi-service systems?

How to Choose Between the Smooth and Sticky Journey Models

The strategic choice between the two journey models boils down to whether the service is more instrumental or recreational in nature. In instrumental service categories, customers are like *jobbers*, trying to get their tasks done as efficiently as possible; hence the smooth journey model is a perfect fit. In recreational service categories, customers are more like *adventurers*, looking for thrills, challenges, and fun times; hence the sticky journey model is a better fit.

Smooth journeys are ideal for instrumental service categories. Examples of instrumental service categories include business hotels (e.g., Courtyard by Marriott), insurance (e.g., Progressive), and transportation (e.g., Amtrak). Customer journeys in these service categories are like ‘jobs to be done’ (Christensen et al., 2016, p. 54). There are tiresome evaluation tasks (e.g., are buses, subways, or trains the best transportation option for my commute?), difficult purchase decisions (e.g., should I buy a cheaper non-refundable ticket or a pricier refundable one?), and potentially significant consequences (e.g., delays, exhaustion, fees). Jobbers are generally willing to deliberate through the initial service cycle, but they expect subsequent service cycles to be easier. To win these jobbers, firms must provide superior decision support during the initial service cycle, then streamline subsequent service cycles into easy loyalty loops.

Sticky journeys are ideal for recreational service categories. Examples of recreational service categories include driving clubs (e.g., Jeep Jamboree USA), lifestyle media (e.g., Thrillist), and content-sharing networks (e.g., Instagram). Customer journeys in these service categories are more like adventures than jobs. A vaguely defined hunger for excitement leads to a series of unexpected twists and turns, and a sense of purpose keeps the customer moving forward, overcoming challenges in the process (Scott et al., 2017). Our research suggests that customers often consider such adventures on a whim, so firms must invest in rapid entry mechanisms, especially when the entry hurdles are significant. For example, instead of limiting Jamborees to Jeep owners, Jeep Jamboree USA could rent out Jeeps to potential Jeep owners who wish to join the driving adventures. Our research also suggests that customers will only continue their adventure if it remains exciting, so firms must also invest in endless variation mechanisms. For example, Jeep Jamboree USA keeps changing its adventure sites, from the Catskill Mountains of New York to the Death Valley of California. Thrillist has a global team of freelancers to cover the ever-changing nightlife of super cities (e.g., London, New York City, Paris). Instagram intentionally exposes users to new, personally relevant influencers (e.g., Jivamukti yoginis, Latinx actors, Turkish wrestlers), to keep customers scrolling.

When to Encourage Purchases in Smooth and Sticky Journeys

Firms today offer customers a variety of free, affordable, and expensive service access options, as well as one-off purchase opportunities. Free service at the outset of customer journeys can take the form of free sample sessions (CrossFit), free basic services (Tinder), or even free full services (Pokémon Go). Thereafter, some firms offer customers relatively affordable time-limited options, such as one-time passes (e.g., CrossFit's drop-in passes), package deals (10-class passes), and short-term service plans (e.g., 3-month plans). Most firms also offer monthly subscription plans, some of which are tiered (e.g., Tinder's Plus and Gold plans). Finally, some firms also offer customers one-off purchase opportunities (e.g., Pokémon Go raid passes). Firms that provide unlimited full-service access for free (e.g., Niantic) rely on these one-off sales to generate revenue. All of these options can work with smooth or sticky journeys. However, to match the distinctive flow of each journey type, firms are advised to encourage purchases at different times within each journey type (see Figure 1).

Encourage purchases during the initial cycle of smooth journeys. Firms seeking to facilitate smooth journeys tend to showcase their complex menu of purchase options during the initial service cycle. For example, Verizon, a telecom service provider, promotes several possible phone plans on their website. One reason is that customers approach instrumental service categories with the mindset of a job-to-be-done (Christensen et al., 2016), highly motivated to conduct a deliberate decision-making process. Another reason is that once customers complete that process, they do not want to be bothered by difficult choices again (Fleming 2016). From a customer's point of view, the value of a loyalty loop is to minimize the cognitively demanding labour of deliberate decision-making. Accordingly, firms should avoid the common practice of promoting upgrades during a loyalty loop (e.g., advertising a new phone plan to existing Verizon customers). When firms do so, they run the risk of triggering customers to reconsider their prior decisions and switch providers altogether (Court et al., 2017).

Encourage purchases during the subsequent cycles of sticky journeys. Firms seeking to facilitate sticky journeys should avoid presenting customers with complex menus of purchase options at the outset. One reason is that such menus are antithetical to the promise of fun, and they immediately dampen customers' excitement to try the service. Another reason to wait until well after the quick spin is that customers are most likely to make substantial purchases when they are already caught up in the involvement spiral. That said, firms must be patient. Each sticky journey is a unique adventure, so each customer will advance at their own pace. Firms such as CrossFit and Tinder recognize that customers feel ready to commit to premium plans at different times. Accordingly, these firms tend to enroll all newcomers into a free or affordable beginner plan, with little pressure to upgrade that plan until customers themselves seek premium plans. These firms also recognize the indirect value of non-paying, low-paying, and short-term customers. Unlike instrumental services, recreational services thrive on having a sizable number of active customers within the servicescape at all times. For example, CrossFit thrives on a fleeting sense of hypercommunity, which requires a mix of core and peripheral community members to show up for workouts. Likewise, playing Pokémon Go is much more exciting alongside and against other players (Barrett 2018). Tinder, too, can only offer their users hundreds of potential matches if there are indeed hundreds of other users. As these examples indicate, recreational services often need a critical mass and steady turnover of users, whether or not those users are paying customers. For these reasons, recreational service firms (e.g., Grindr, Spotify, TikTok) often

need angel investors, crowdfunding, and venture capital to survive the early years, when their revenue streams are limited.

How to Sustain Customer Journeys in Multi-Service Systems

Many large firms operate multi-service systems that include instrumental and recreational services. These firms must not only design the first loyalty loop or involvement spiral, but also sustain the customer journey beyond that existing loyalty loop or involvement spiral (see Figure 2). Firms that have customers simultaneously enrolled in multiple loyalty loops and involvement spirals are at less risk of losing their customers.

Sustaining the customer journey beyond an existing loyalty loop. When a firm already has customers enrolled in one loyalty loop, CXM practitioners can expand upon that loyalty loop using three possible journey expansion pathways. To illustrate these pathways, we discuss a prototypical customer at quick service chains (e.g., Dunkin', Pret, Starbucks). This customer purchases the same type of coffee every morning using the firm's app, thus getting her *energize-me* job done efficiently. In CXM terms, the customer is locked into a loyalty loop.

One way to expand upon the existing loyalty loop is to trigger an adjacent loyalty loop (see Figure 2a). For example, on a special occasion such as the customer's birthday, the chain could reward the customer a free breakfast sandwich of her own choosing for the next three service encounters. In this manner, the customer is invited to enter a new deliberate decision-making process about which sandwich might best suit her breakfast needs. When the free offer ends, this tactic could result in the customer regularly purchasing a breakfast sandwich with her coffee, to get the *energize-me* job done even better.

Another way to expand upon an existing loyalty loop is to spark an involvement spiral (see Figure 2b). For example, instead of rewarding the customer a self-selected breakfast sandwich on her birthday, the chain could surprise her with a varied food offering at each of the next three service encounters (e.g., a cranberry scone, a cheese sampler, a fruit salad). When this birthday treat ends, the customer's involvement with the chain's food offerings may be sufficiently elevated to motivate her own exploratory purchases. Alternatively, the chain could reward the customer a free short-term subscription to a partner's recreational service (e.g., Hulu, Netflix, Spotify). Such inter-firm alliances

can create value for both firms (Homburg et al., 2017). For the quick service chain, providing such rewards can strengthen the customer's loyalty. For the streaming service, these short-term subscriptions, framed as rewards, can spark involvement spirals, unlike direct mail offers, which are often ignored.

Yet another way to expand upon an existing loyalty loop is to escalate that loop with spiralling logic for a brief period of time (see Figure 2c). For example, the chain could reward their loyal customer any beverage on the house for the next three service encounters. In this scenario, the customer may upgrade her orders to more premium beverages each morning (e.g., a caramel macchiato, a nitro cold brew, a pumpkin spice latte). Alternatively, the chain could provide the customer with surprise beverages, with the order label placed on the underside of the cup, to foster the excitement of 'blind tasting' (Ghoshal et al., 2014). Exposure to the chain's premium beverages could motivate the customer to permanently upgrade her loyalty loop, to get the *energize-me* job done with a dash of self-indulgence.

Sustaining the customer journey beyond an existing involvement spiral. When a firm already has customers caught up in one involvement spiral, CXM practitioners can expand upon that involvement spiral using three journey expansion pathways. To illustrate these pathways, we discuss a common marketing problem at group fitness services (e.g., CrossFit, Orange Theory, SoulCycle): once enthusiastic athletes are coming in less often.

The first way to expand upon an involvement spiral that is losing momentum is to spark a new one (see Figure 2d). At CrossFit, for example, the most enthusiastic athletes eventually reach a level of fitness at which the regular classes are no longer much of a challenge. At this juncture, CrossFit coaches invite those members to special classes for advanced athletes, such as Barbell Club and Strongman. As these new classes have significantly different structures, memberships, and challenges, athletes can be understood as entering a new involvement spiral. Eventually, some of these athletes may go on to compete at the CrossFit Games and related competitions, sparking new involvement spirals once again.

The second way to expand upon an involvement spiral is to trigger an adjacent loyalty loop (see Figure 2e). For example, some CrossFit boxes include smoothie bars. While the athletes primarily come to CrossFit for the involvement spiral of varied workouts, some members may also become locked into loyalty loops of smoothie purchases on their way out. In this manner, customers accomplish

the job of *workout-recovery* efficiently. If these add-on services offer unique value (e.g., organic fruits, paleo sweeteners, vegan proteins), some members might also swing by the CrossFit box just for the smoothie. In CXM terms, a parallel involvement spiral and loyalty loop in the same multi-service system can keep customers returning for one or the other journey pattern.

The third way to sustain a customer journey when a customer's interest is waning is to stabilize the involvement spiral into a loyalty loop (see Figure 2f). This pathway is especially relevant when the customer is switching from an adventurer mindset to a jobber mindset. For example, some CrossFit athletes eventually tire of the ethos of relentlessly challenging themselves. However, rather than quitting, these athletes convert their upwardly spiralling journey into a stable cyclical one, 'just [to] keep a certain level of fitness' (Emily, a CrossFit athlete). A CXM lesson to be derived from these mindset-switching athletes is that involvement spirals can sometimes be stabilized into loyalty loops, if that is what the customer wants.

Conclusion

This article has made three contributions to CXM research. First, it has challenged the dominance of the smooth journey model. Second, it has offered an alternate sticky journey model. Third, it has addressed practical concerns at the nexus of the two journey models. In closing, this article also opens up several new avenues for future research on customer journeys (see Table 3). Chief among these avenues is examining new and different types of customer journeys. No one customer journey design is optimal under all circumstances. Accordingly, we hope that this article inspires CXM researchers to keep exploring the fascinating variety of customer journeys in the contemporary marketplace.

Table 1. A Comparison of the Smooth and Sticky Journey Models

Dimensions	The Extant Smooth Journey Model	The Emergent Sticky Journey Model
Brief overview	Firms enroll customers in <i>loyalty loops</i> by offering them <i>decision support</i> during the initial service cycle and <i>streamlining</i> across subsequent service cycles; the resulting customer journey is predictable, easy, and <i>smooth</i>	Firms enroll customers in <i>involvement spirals</i> by offering them <i>rapid entry</i> into the initial service cycle and <i>endless variation</i> across subsequent service cycles; the resulting customer journey is unpredictable, exciting, and <i>sticky</i>
The initial service cycle	Service design principle: providing customers with <i>decision support</i> at each phase of the deliberate decision-making process via brand advertising, content marketing, interactive tools, etc. Customer journey pattern: internal/external triggers motivate customers to undertake a <i>deliberate decision-making process</i> consisting of four phases: (1) initial consideration of multiple brands; (2) active evaluation; (3) moment of purchase; and (4) consumption experience (visualized as a large purple curve at the base of Figure 1)	Service design principle: providing customers with <i>rapid entry</i> via easy account set-ups, free basic access, and beginner orientations; avoiding traditional onboarding practices such as questionnaires, sales pitches, and servicescape tours Customer journey pattern: enthusiastic reviews from existing customers and third parties spark potential customers' curiosity to take the service for a <i>quick spin</i> , usually on a whim, without much deliberation (visualized as a small orange curve at the base of Figure 1)
Subsequent service cycles	Service design principle: <i>streamlining</i> the customer journey by (1) eliminating unnecessary service elements, (2) anticipating customer	Service design principle: <i>endless variation</i> along the customer journey via (1) an expansive set of service system elements, (2) frequent additions,

	<p>preferences, and (3) providing just-in-time information at each service encounter</p> <p>Customer journey pattern: a <i>loyalty loop</i>, defined as a cyclical pattern of predictable experiences that reduces the need for customer deliberation and builds customer loyalty over time (visualized as a small blue helix in Figure 1)</p>	<p>subtractions, and changes, and (3) unique configurations of those elements at each service encounter</p> <p>Customer journey pattern: an <i>involvement spiral</i>, defined as a cyclical pattern of unpredictable experiences that motivates greater customer involvement over time (visualized as a widening upward yellow spiral in Figure 1)</p>
Termination trajectories	Brand switching triggered by loyalty-weakening incidents	Service usage fluctuations fueled by well-being concerns
Purchase patterns	Deliberate purchase decisions at first, routinized or automated purchases later (during the loyalty loop)	Free or low-cost plans at first, premium service plans and one-off purchases later (during the involvement spiral)
Application contexts	<p>Instrumental service categories, wherein customers are <i>jobbers</i> and tend to be loyal to one brand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Banking (e.g., Citibank) ● Business hotels (e.g., Marriott) ● Insurance (e.g., MetLife) ● Mail/Parcel (e.g., FedEx) ● Pharmacies (e.g., MedPlus) ● Repairs (e.g., Mr. Appliance) ● Telecom (e.g., Verizon) ● Transportation (e.g., Amtrak) ● Utilities (e.g., British Gas) ● Work apparel (e.g., Van Heusen) 	<p>Recreational service categories, wherein customers are <i>adventurers</i> and often use multiple brands at once</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dating apps (e.g., Bumble) ● Dramatic serials (e.g., HBO) ● Driving clubs (e.g., Jeep Jamboree) ● Content networks (e.g., Instagram) ● Fast fashion (e.g., Zara) ● Gaming (e.g., Fortnite) ● Group fitness (e.g., Orange Theory) ● Lifestyle media (e.g., Thrillist) ● Meal kits (e.g., Blue Apron)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music discovery (e.g., Spotify)
Key sources	This model synthesizes insights from several CXM texts: Court et al., 2009; Court et al., 2017; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Fleming 2016; Hyken, 2018; Leboff 2014; Kuehnl et al., 2019; and Spenner and Freeman 2012	This model synthesizes insights from relevant texts on addictive services (e.g., Alter, 2017; Eyal 2014; Schüll 2014) and empirical research on sticky journeys in the contexts of CrossFit, Pokémon Go, and Tinder (c. 2016-2019)

Table 2. Sticky Journeys and Related Marketing Concepts

Concept	Description	Relationship to sticky journeys
Sticky journeys	<p><i>Sticky journeys</i> are exciting journeys that customers yearn to continue. This article reports that sticky journeys begin with <i>quick spins</i>, develop into <i>involvement spirals</i>, and terminate with <i>service usage fluctuations</i>.</p> <p><i>Quick spins</i> are extemporaneous service trials, just for fun, without any long-term consumption intentions.</p> <p><i>Involvement spirals</i> are cyclical patterns of unpredictable customer experiences that increase customers' experiential involvement over time.</p> <p><i>Service usage fluctuations</i> are termination trajectories wherein customers withdraw from a service, then return, sometimes more than once.</p>	
Consumer addiction	<p><i>Consumer addiction</i> is the compulsive repetition of pleasurable consumption behaviours (e.g., drinking, gambling, shopping) despite negative consequences (Sussman et al., 2011). The term addiction is also popularly used to refer to compelling but non-pathological behaviours (e.g., 'that show is so addictive!').</p>	Sticky journeys are 'addictive' only in the popular sense of the term, but they can turn into pathological addictions.
Consumer desire	<p><i>Consumer desire</i> is 'a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomfoting and pleasurable' (Belk et al., 2003, p. 326). Unlike a need or want, a desire is 'for something fantastic... to drag us out of our ordinary habits... into the chaos and unpredictability... of our own deeper nature' (Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman 2017, p. 674).</p>	Sticky journeys can feed consumer desires for adventure in otherwise hyperrational lives.
Customer engagement	<p><i>Customer engagement</i> is 'the mechanics of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and</p>	Sticky journeys can include customer

	indirect contribution' (Pansari and Kumar 2017, p. 295). Customer engagement typically includes purchase, referral, influence, and knowledge-sharing behaviours (Kumar and Pansari 2016, p. 500).	engagement in this sense of the term, but it is not a definitive component.
Customer involvement	<i>Customer involvement</i> is 'a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests' (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). Experiential involvement denotes a person's interest in the cognitive, emotional, sensorial, behavioural, and relational dimensions of a service experience.	Sticky journeys entail increasing experiential involvement across multiple service cycles.
Customer loyalty	<i>Customer loyalty</i> is 'a deeply held commitment' (Oliver 1999, p. 34) toward a brand that results in repatronage of the brand over time, despite opportunities to switch brands. The attitudinal and behavioural components of customer loyalty are not always in sync.	Sticky journeys also feature repatronage, but customers are motivated by excitement not commitment.
Extraordinary experiences	<i>Extraordinary experiences</i> are 'intense, positive, [and] intrinsically enjoyable experiences' (Arnould and Price, 1993, p. 25). In contrast to ordinary experiences, they are 'uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond the realm of everyday life' (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014, p. 2).	Sticky journeys tend to include varied positive and negative experiences in rapid succession.

Table 3. Sample Avenues for Future Research

Field	Avenues for Future Research
Customer Experience Management (CXM) and Customer Journey Design (CJD)	<p>Beyond instrumental and recreational service categories, what other service categories might benefit from distinct customer journey models?</p> <p>What novel types of customer journeys are possible with artificial intelligence (AI), artificial life (AL), virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and the internet of things (IoT) (Belk, Humayun, and Gopaldas 2020; Javornik 2016; Novak and Hoffman 2019; Scholz and Smith 2016)?</p> <p>How do customer journeys unfold in the sharing economy, wherein firms have much less control over service touchpoints (Eckhardt et al., 2019)?</p> <p>How can firms use insights from the sticky journey model to accelerate the initial service cycle of the smooth journey model (Edelman and Singer, 2015) in today’s hypercompetitive attention economy?</p> <p>How can marketing analytics discern smooth versus sticky journeys from service usage data? Can spiralling journey patterns be dissected, measured, and tracked (Kraemer et al., 2020)?</p> <p>How should sequences of triggers, activities, and rewards (Eyal 2014) be arranged across multiple service cycles to best facilitate sticky journeys?</p> <p>What design elements complement smooth and sticky journeys at physical (Zomerdiijk and Voss, 2010) and virtual (Bleier, Harmeling, and Palmatier 2019) touchpoints?</p> <p>How are customer journeys with a firm related to consumer journeys (i.e., person-centric journeys that typically involve interactions with multiple firms; Hamilton and Price 2019)?</p>
Brands and Branding	<p>Can brands be sticky? If so, how might brand stickiness be conceptualized?</p> <p>How can CXM and CJD help to overcome the challenges of integrating brand experiences in a hyperconnected but fragmented mediascape (Swaminathan et al., 2020)?</p>

	<p>How can CJD contribute to building brand community (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002)?</p> <p>Do particular types of customer journeys (e.g., sticky journeys) correspond with particular types of brand relationships (e.g., love affairs; Fournier 1998)?</p>
<p>Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)</p>	<p>How are historical forces such as social acceleration (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019), institutional pluralization (Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli 2015), and consumer responsabilization (Giesler and Veresiu 2014) restructuring the political economy of customer experiences?</p> <p>What are the cultural aspects of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998)? For example, what ideologies and myths shape firms' journey offerings and customers' journey preferences?</p> <p>How do social identity structures (e.g., race, class, gender; Gopaldas 2013) shape customer journey patterns (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004)?</p> <p>In what ways are the collective customer journeys of families, teams, and other social groups different from individual customer journeys (Epp and Price 2008, 2011)?</p>
<p>Consumer Psychology</p>	<p>What are the moment-to-moment psychological dynamics across different kinds of customer journeys?</p> <p>How do consumers' psychological resources vary across different journey patterns? For example, under what circumstances do loyalty loops feel boring rather than trustworthy? Under what circumstances do involvement spirals become exhausting rather than exciting?</p> <p>Do consumer preferences for journey types vary situationally (Becker and Jaakkola 2020)? For example, do weekday commuters prefer smooth journeys, while weekend revelers prefer sticky journeys?</p> <p>Are consumer preferences for sticky versus smooth journeys related to personality factors such as openness to experiences (Wild et al., 1995) and variety-seeking (Kahn 1995)?</p>

<p>Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) and Transformative Service Research (TSR)</p>	<p>How can the sticky journey model be used to motivate healthy behaviours (e.g., meditation, nutrition, walking)? Similarly, how can the sticky journey model be used to motivate pro-environmental behaviours (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019)?</p> <p>Where do sticky journeys end and behavioural addictions begin (Sussman et al., 2011)?</p> <p>How are online behavioural addictions different from offline behavioural addictions (Schüll 2014)?</p> <p>Why are some consumers better at self-reflexivity (Akaka and Schau 2019) and self-regulation (Baumeister 2002) than others? How do reflexive customers reclaim ownership of their attention in the attention economy?</p>
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Figure 1. A Visualization of the Smooth and Sticky Journey Models

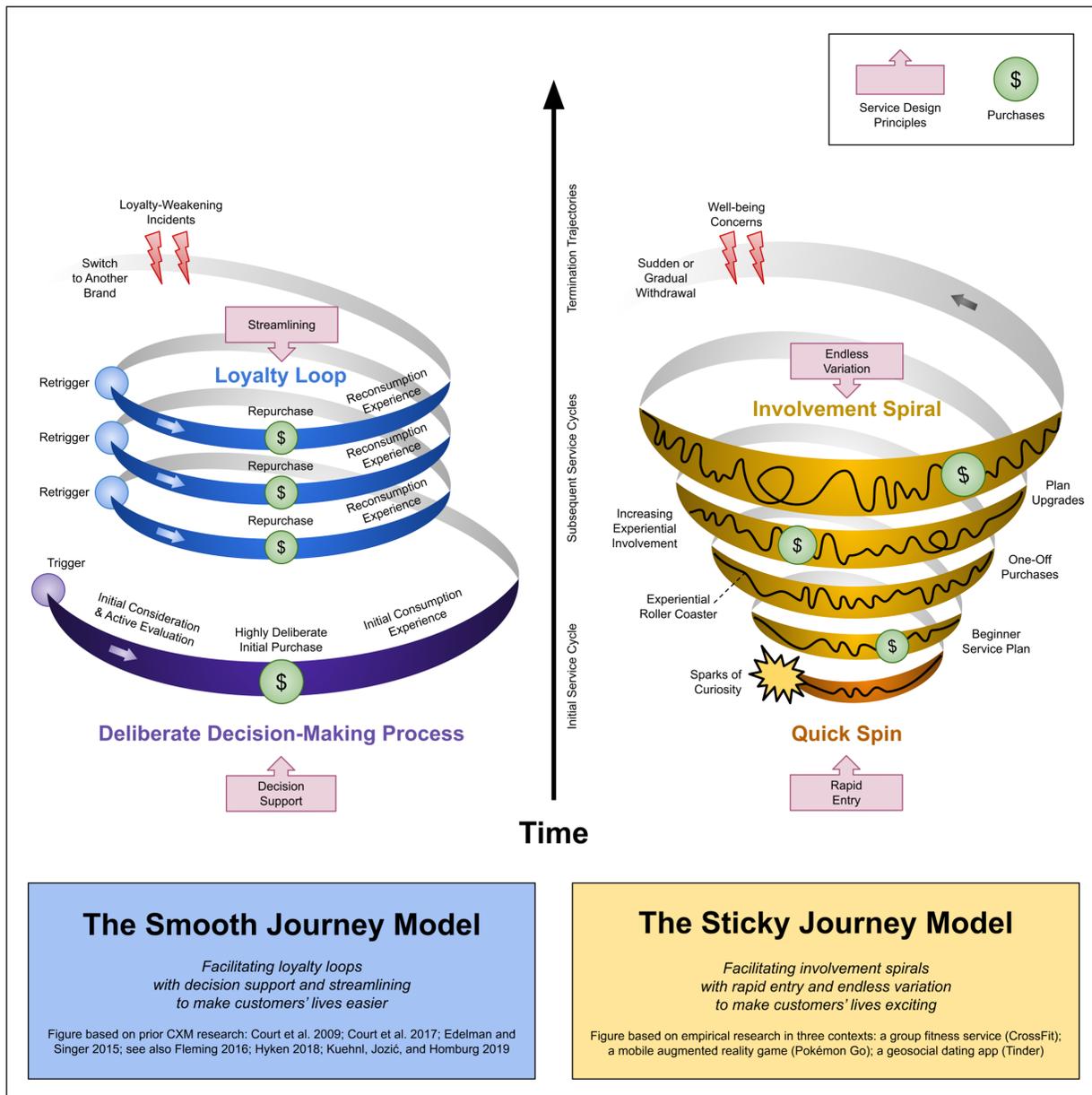


Figure 2. Sustaining Customer Journeys in Multi-Service Systems



Appendix. Additional Evidence for the Sticky Journey Model

Concept	Evidence from CrossFit	Evidence from Pokémon Go	Evidence from Tinder
<p><i>Rapid entry:</i> the service design principle during the initial service cycle</p>	<p>CrossFit offers newcomers free taster sessions, low-cost beginner programs, and minimal paperwork; some customers get started with one-time class passes through third parties. The core service begins when the newcomer does a CrossFit workout with other existing athletes. Trainers tend to introduce newcomers to other athletes by name to begin their socialization process.</p>	<p>Pokémon Go on-boarding entails a free mobile app, quick in-app set-up, and brief tutorial by the character Professor Willow, who ends his introduction with ‘It’s time to GO!’ The core service begins when the new player sees their own avatar equipped with a few PokéBalls to throw at one of three Pokémon nearby to catch that Pokémon, making the first play very simple.</p>	<p>Tinder ‘doesn’t ask for much from you as a user, aside from your current location and gender, it’s just your age, distance and gender preferences to start’ (Tinder 2019, p. 1–2). Photos can be imported from Facebook accounts. All other user input is optional. The core service begins when the new user sees a profile of another local user. A swipe right/left indicates interest/disinterest.</p>
<p><i>Quick spin:</i> the customer journey pattern during the initial service cycle</p>	<p><i>Jenny:</i> People are like, ‘Oh my God, you’d love it!’ [and] I was like, ‘Okay, cool, I’ll look into it.’ And you know with other gyms, it’s not normally that people do it all on recommendation, but this is really like, you can</p>	<p><i>Gordon:</i> My girlfriend’s a teacher, and she wanted to know what [Pokémon Go] was like because all her kids were into it... So, we both installed it, went out playing, and carried on playing... she wanted to relate to teenage kids. I didn’t</p>	<p><i>Sebastian:</i> I saw that there was such an interest among girls and boys. Sounds exciting... You simply log in via Facebook and then you upload photos, write something in your profile and you’re done!... I was not on any other [dating</p>

	<p>buy into it really quickly. So then I just found one that was near work and just dropped by and was like, ‘Can I come and check out the gym?’... When I saw the workouts, I was like, ‘Wow, that looks really tough!’ So I wanted to do it... it’s like a step up from fitness... you could go to the gym... running... cycling... CrossFit combines all of those things.</p>	<p>expect this to happen! [laughs] Because I’m not a game player normally... I [had] read that [if] you walk away three times from the starters, then Pikachu [the game’s mascot] will appear. So my first ever Pokémon was a Pikachu... then you do more walking and start evolving...</p>	<p>site]... I don’t know if it was romanticized, but I first heard from [a friend] that he has quite a few friends that ended up in a relationship via Tinder. And then there were these stories of one-night stands. And both are interesting... It was exciting, because you see a lot of different people, very pretty people... and then also totally not pretty people too... It’s very diverse.</p>
<p><i>Endless variation:</i> the service design principle during subsequent service cycles</p>	<p>CrossFit’s ‘constantly varied’ (Glassman 2002, p. 2) workouts typically include a dynamic warm-up, a weightlifting module, and a high-intensity workout-of-the-day (WOD). Each of these modules can include countless different exercises (e.g., box jumps, cleans, lunges). Workout modules are further varied by their temporal</p>	<p>The Pokémon Go game draws its titular creatures from the existing Pokémon universe of more than 800 Pokémon across 7 generations. To keep the game interesting, Niantic keeps releasing new Pokémon into the game as well as new features (e.g., ‘Dynamic Weather Gameplay’ that adapts the game to the local weather [Pokémon Go</p>	<p>Tinder’s service system includes millions of active users, each of whom creates a user profile with attractive images of themselves. Each user sees the profiles of other users in feeds called Discovery, Top Picks, and Likes (for premium subscribers only). The Discovery feed shows the user one profile at a time. To proceed, the user must</p>

	<p>ordering (e.g., 10 clean-and-jerks every minute on the minute [EMOM] or a trio of exercises for as many reps as possible [AMRAP]). As CrossFit CEO Greg Glassman (2002, p. 1) says, ‘Five or six days per week, mix these elements in as many combinations and patterns as creativity will allow. Routine is the enemy.’ Given that CrossFit workouts often span the outdoors, the weather is yet another significant source of unpredictability. Running can feel like an extraordinary challenge on a snowy day.</p>	<p>2017, p. 1]). Niantic also releases special Pokémon for a limited time (Legendary Pokémon) and organizes global events (e.g., Safari Zone). The game’s interface reveals countless PokeStops at which players can collect items and battle other teams for control over Gyms. Pokémon Go varies the timing, location, and number of Pokémon that players can try to catch. Each Pokémon has distinct characteristics (e.g., combat power) and an Individual Value (max. 100%). Some Pokémon come in male, female, and rare ‘shiny’ versions.</p>	<p>swipe right, left, or up to Like, Nope, or Super Like. Although these profiles are sequenced by a multifactor algorithm, they cannot be predicted by the average user. Other sources of unpredictability are the messages between the user and their matches, and the user’s freedom to unmatched their matches, which instantly eliminates the entire message history from the apps of both users. Swipe Night is an interactive video feature wherein the user chooses from two options of what happens next to be matched with other users who choose similarly (Hern 2019).</p>
<p><i>Involvement spiral</i>: the customer journey pattern during subsequent</p>	<p>[1] <i>Karen</i>: The [CrossFit] mix includes everything that I like, a little bit of weightlifting, a bit of gymnastics and endurance, and the mix. You never know what’s</p>	<p>[1] <i>Martha</i>: I was new to the Pokémon world... So it was quite a vicarious thrill in seeing all these new Pokémon popping up... and going out to different places... I</p>	<p>[1] <i>Donna</i>: You see these images of men who are often really attractive... and it’s like ‘Yep, I want that!’ And then it’s like, ‘Oh, another!’... Whatever your perfect</p>

<p>service cycles</p> <p>[1] Additional evidence of the <i>experiential roller coaster</i> in the moment-to-moment timescale of the customer journey</p>	<p>going to happen the next day, and you're active and work really hard... That's what I like the most, that there are so many different things, that it is so variable what you do there... I'm bored really fast, and [CrossFit] doesn't bore me. I don't feel like, 'Oh it's the same again!' which I did feel about football... [In CrossFit,] it's always thrilling.</p>	<p>caught [a powerful Pokémon], and it was one with all the question marks, and so I didn't know how big it was because it was its first appearance... I suddenly realized, 'Oh how exciting!' and that by branching out and going to different places, I could make the world very exciting... I was out for a walk, and we caught [a very common Pokémon]... And it turned into [a very rare Pokémon]. I was so excited, I nearly jumped up and down on the spot. 'Oh my God that's so brilliant!'</p>	<p>partner is, you start projecting on complete strangers... Then you might get a conversation... More often than not, there's a level of disappointment... and it's so sad... it feels like you're actually losing something, which is ridiculous really because it's just a fantasy... but that keeps me doing this. Even though on 99.9% of dates... there has not been chemistry... there have been a few times where the magic has happened... and I think those few times [are] enough for me to keep doing it.</p>
<p>[2] Additional evidence of <i>increasing experiential involvement</i> across the long-term timescale of the customer journey</p>	<p>[2] <i>John</i>: The first month, I thought, I'm really addicted now, I just want to go and do it almost every day and try something new and try and improve on this and that. [Later on] it became a case that I was seeing real improvements. I was lifting heavier weights, I was doing [movements that I couldn't do before], so that just feeds into it even more, it gets</p>	<p>[2] <i>Esther</i>: [In the beginning,] I needed [my son's] knowledge in order to access the raid system... He was my guru; he was showing me what to do... and he would then talk about</p>	<p>[2] <i>Enrico</i>: As soon as you have the first match you say... 'Hi, how are you?' and the conversation goes on. But then you feel greedy... and you're non-stop until you reach</p>

	<p>even more and more addictive because you're like, I'm seeing real changes, I'm getting slimmer, I'm getting stronger... Over time, you realize that even if you're able to grow stronger that there's still room for improvement there. There's always steps, there's always something to work on. It never feels like you ever get to the point where you've nailed it and you're perfect. So there's always either a different movement or a more advanced movement or a bigger weight or there's always something new to try... I [just] got more and more into it.</p>	<p>tactics of only powering up the best [Pokémon], and I'd just power up anything! [laughter] ... So we discussed tactics... [In time,] I was pulling the game apart and trying to understand it... It was interesting to see the different strategies, and even now that [my son's] at university and I'm on my own doing this with my raid group, I do find it interesting that we all have different tactics... I started seeing the same people. And they said, now you've got to join in... with random strangers and within the space of ten minutes you are working together to achieve a goal.</p>	<p>the second match, or third, or fourth. And then you start having five conversations at the same time, and don't understand whom you are talking to about what! Your phone becomes a mess, because it's a disorganized set of conversations... And then you try to... select a few... that you really think... are the good catches. You throw back in the sea all the fish that you don't want... The difference between [my first] time and this time was that... I was more mature in the use of the app... I really knew what I wanted.</p>
<p><i>Service usage fluctuations fueled by well-being concerns</i></p>	<p><i>Martin (Coach):</i> I talked to one of my athletes who did two classes per week after the trial month, then three classes per week, and who then</p>	<p><i>Marco:</i> It's like drugs... You're just like, 'Oh yeah, I checked only two hours ago, let me check again if there's something new,' you</p>	<p><i>Anna:</i> You have such bizarre conversations with people you do not know. And of course that's funny and exciting... Swiping these</p>

	<p>chose an unlimited class package. [He] tends to overdo things, and eventually he says to me, 'It is more important to me to make [more money] as a salesman, and that's why I want to invest my time there, and therefore no longer come to CrossFit.'... His girlfriend now wants to go into family planning, he has to manage his time better, and he has chosen to reduce CrossFit and not the work.</p>	<p>know?... It kind of gets obsessive... I also lost interest because I cannot keep up with these things. You play, and then you realize that if you want to become better, you need to spend lots of time on it... [Super Mario Run] was perfect for casual gaming; you have five minutes, you play. [With] Pokémon Go, at some point, I realized that five minutes are not enough. Like, it requires more commitment, [and] I cannot be bothered, and it stops there...'</p>	<p>photos was certainly two-sided. For one thing, it seemed to be taken-for-granted to shop for men like in the supermarket. And on the other hand... it's super interesting to see who is there... And what I found frightening, there were many people whom I actually just eliminated immediately because I just did not find them attractive. Then I thought 'That's harsh!'... That shocked me about myself... And then I quit. I thought, 'It's enough.'</p>
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