EDITORIAL

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Consumer journeys: developing consumer-based strategy

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Consumers undertake many journeys in pursuit of large and small life goals and in response to various opportunities, obstacles, and challenges. Consumer journeys may anticipate consumption experiences, such as when consumers take steps to choose products, brands, or technologies, engage in online or offline retail experiences, and use products and services. However, consumers take other journeys that don't have consumption as their goal but nonetheless implicate brands, technologies, products, and services. For example, a cancer patient and family members undertake a traumatic emotional journey that involves a complex network of heath care brands, technologies, and services as patients and their families move from diagnosis, through treatment, to recovery, remission, or end-of-life care (Berry et al. 2015). An Uber driver may use his Toyota not only to take his own journeys but also to earn money by taking other people where they need to go. During some parts of these journeys, the consumer role may not be as prominent as other roles such as patient or producer or person.

The broad topic for this special issue, consumer journeys, is contoured by a focus on consumers rather than customers or firm touchpoints, and on journeys rather than goals, tasks, or jobs. Both of these aspects frame the topic in particular and significant ways.

Focus on consumers

The focus on consumers rather than customers is deliberate and important (Hamilton 2016). An essential impetus for this issue

is to highlight the value of consumer-based strategy for generating customer insights. "Consumer-based strategy is organizational strategy that is developed based on insights about consumers" (Hamilton 2016, p. 281). More holistic than a traditional strategic focus on customers, consumer-based strategy recognizes the need to understand consumers as they select, create, integrate, use, adapt, and discard products and services in order to meet needs and accomplish goals. "Consumers" is a more general term than "customers" that emphasizes that people draw on and integrate a wide variety of market and non-market resources to pursue their life paths (Epp and Price 2011). As Fournier famously wrote, consumers don't choose brands, they choose lives (Fournier 1998).

Consumers act as resource integrators in their role as customers of multiple entities, trying to accomplish, for example, the goal of moving to a new home or going on a family vacation. These common examples highlight the importance of understanding the context of the consumer's overall journey (Rawson et al. 2013). Understanding what consumers are trying to accomplish both before and after interacting with a provider can help providers increase the value they provide to their consumers (Seybold 2001). Such a perspective recognizes that "markets, customers, resources and contexts are constantly changing," (Bettencourt et al. 2014, p. 60). Without this broader perspective, firms can become so consumed with improving a specific touchpoint or maximizing choice of an option that they lose sight of the consumer's overall goal. When consumers move to a new home, they may need to navigate a complex array of separate and layered service encounters, including the home transaction(s), inspections, insurance, the physical move, and furnishing the new home. Even planning a family vacation is a complex problem, involving integrating various collective and individual goals (Epp and Price 2011). Firms may mismatch solutions to consumers because they don't appreciate the array of networked goals, goal management approaches, and constraints that families face. By looking at consumer networks more holistically, firms can improve solution design, identify new network partners, and create new offerings (Epp and Price 2011).

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188

J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci. (2019) 47:187–191

Focus on journeys

As importantly, the framing of consumption processes as journeys is consequential. "Journey" is one of the primary deep metaphors that consumers use to describe and understand their lives, and especially to make meaning of the past, present, and future (Zaltman and Zaltman 2008). Deep metaphors "provide a window into people's underlying conceptions of the social world," and help them interpret and evaluate information related to abstract constructs (Landau et al. 2010, p. 1046; Lakoff and Johnson 2008). The journey metaphor is evoked in numerous naturally occurring consumer settings and associated with a variety of experiences. Journeys can be arduous, as in a hero's journey, be of short or long duration, have unexpected events and turns, go toward or away from something, be repeated multiple times, and include obstacles, detours, and alternative routes. The journey includes the events or "touchpoints" along the way, but it is also a narrative of a progression in which overcoming fear and failure may be important parts (Arnould and Price 1993). The journey metaphor has been usefully applied to love, relationships, disease, adventure, addiction, education, growth, creativity, grief, death, and numerous other concrete and abstract human experiences.

Recent research has underscored the importance of examining the customer journey in order to understand customer experience. The customer journey is defined as the process the customer goes through, across all stages and touchpoints with an organization, comprising the customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Mapping customer journeys from a firm perspective has long been a valuable tool for improving customer experiences (Bitner et al. 2008; Dhebar 2013; Edelman and Singer 2015; Rawson et al. 2013), and is likely to remain so. Yet, as Lemon and Verhoef (2016) explain, only some of these touchpoints are controlled by the firm, and firms need to deepen their understanding of both the ones they control and the ones they don't. Increasingly, theory and research call for advances in customer journey mapping, moving toward more adaptive and customized mapping, done less from a strictly firm perspective, and incorporating more of the pre- and post-components of the customer journey with the firm (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Voorhees et al. 2017; Rosenbaum et al. 2017). New technologies and platforms have altered customer journeys in myriad ways (Kannan and Li 2017; Court et al. 2009; Edelman and Singer 2015). New technology has introduced many different channels through which consumers can interact with product and service providers (Barwitz and Maas 2018; Chheda et al. 2019; Leeflang et al. 2014), giving consumers considerable control in how they interact with providers (Harmeling et al. 2017; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). It is important to examine touchpoints across multiple channels because analyzing channels individually can lead researchers to incorrect conclusions (Li and Kannan 2014).

Consumer journeys

A consumer journey often subsumes customer journeys, in that a consumer journey is broader and may involve multiple activities (e.g., engaging with a social media platform and then visiting a retailer, or deciding to see a doctor and then visiting a pharmacy) and multiple service providers (e.g., comparison shopping). Beyond understanding provider–consumer touchpoints, we contend it is vital to understand the complex emotional and experiential journeys that consumers engage in with the help of brands, technologies, products, and services. We can think of customer journeys as being motivated by more concrete goals, such as getting medications, while consumer journeys may be motivated by more abstract goals, such as getting healthy and feeling good again. For example, a customer journey with a pharmacy might flow from naming it as the preferred pharmacy during a visit to the doctor, stopping at its retail location on the way home to pick up the medication, and taking the medication each day until the prescription is gone. In contrast, a consumer journey might begin with the consumer feeling a bit off, modifying exercise and diet to no avail, searching online for a diagnosis of the symptoms being experienced, deciding to see a doctor and making an appointment, and then following a customer journey with the pharmacy. Following this broader conceptualization, we consider how a person's role as a consumer relates to this person's other roles, whether these roles are as a patient, a parent, or a producer.

Increasingly, service providers are taking these other roles into consideration. For example, the CEO of CVS Health, Larry Merlo, recently noted that their customers are also patients, and understanding them more holistically—in both roles—is important. Supporting this idea, CVS Health has developed a "Health Engagement Engine" that integrates their own pharmacy data with data from other sources such as health plans, providers, and health systems. Similarly, platforms such as AirBnB will be more successful if they understand that the same people sometimes play the role of guests (consumers) and other times the role of hosts (producers). In addition, by understanding AirBnB's role in the consumer journey, there is an opportunity to enlarge the platform to build on and complement other aspects of that journey. For example, AirBnB has expanded their service to include letting users book experiences on their app and make restaurant reservations in select U.S. cities (Forbes 2017). In their advertising, Deloitte Digital declares, "the customer experience is dead. It's time to see the customer journey as what it really is, a human journey" (Advertising Age Cover Advertisement, December 17, 2018). This overstates the case, but highlights increasing recognition of the need to understand holistically how people move into and out of consumer roles and customer journeys.

Overview of the articles in this issue

This special issue brings together a set of 13 conceptual and empirical articles around the broad topic of consumer journeys. Due to the high level of interest (over 60 submissions) and space constraints, nine papers appear in this issue (vol. 47, issue 2) and four papers will appear in a special sub-section of the next issue (vol. 47, issue 3). We are grateful to the many authors, reviewers, and conference participants who helped bring this issue to fruition, along with the vision, energy and resolve of editors Robert Palmatier and John Hulland. By design, the articles in this issue represent broad and diverse perspectives on consumers' journeys.

Illustrating a wide view of the roles of consumers within journeys, work by Nakata and colleagues (Nakata et al. 2019, issue 2) suggests that focusing on a consumer's interactions with firms produces limited models of the journey that miss the nuance of consumers' usage experiences over extended periods in everyday settings. Their paper reports a qualitative study of the situated experiences of disadvantaged consumers who are struggling to treat chronic hypertension, which incorporates consumers' interactions with firms but spends more time with them as they follow their daily routines. Complementing this work, a paper by Trujillo Torres and DeBerry-Spence (2019, issue 3) examines consumers' responses to traumatic, extraordinary experiences such as receiving a cancer diagnosis. A qualitative analysis identifies strategies consumers use to construct an enduring life story, claim authority and preserve meanings as they live through traumatic experiences.

Work by Novak and Hoffman (2019, issue 2) also considers consumers' usage experiences over an extended time period, in this case, focusing on technology products. They propose a framework for considering consumers' complex relationships with smart objects. Sometimes, consumer have relationships with smart objects that are similar to "master–servant" relationships, but sometimes the consumer and the smart object behave more like partners. For example, Amazon's Alexa might remind a consumer of an upcoming appointment or communicate with other devices to turn off or turn on lights.

New technology platforms push firms to think about engaging consumers in multiple roles. Just as CVS Health is moving towards considering people in both their roles as both customers and patients, platforms like AirBnB and Uber are being pushed to consider their customers in other roles such as producers. Daellert's paper (2019, issue 2) suggests that consumer co-production activities require firms to rethink their role in the marketing value creation process. He encourages marketers in the sharing economy to not only think about how to support consumers in fulfilling their own consumption needs but also to help them create value for other consumers.

Consumers' use of products and brands to fulfill their goals is often shaped by experiences that far predate the typical span of a customer journey. Mende and colleagues (Mende et al. 2019, issue 2) show that the early life experiences of consumers with their caregivers shape their relationships with romantic partners and their consumer journeys with regard to romantic consumption even in adulthood. Similarly, the paper by Hamilton and colleagues (Hamilton et al. 2019, issue 3) examines consumer decision journeys that are constrained by a scarcity of products and/or a scarcity of resources. Research on customer journeys often implicitly assumes that consumers have access to products and services and that they have sufficient resources to buy them. However, many consumers experience either temporary restrictions on the availability of products or resources or chronic scarcity. In particular, there is growing evidence that scarcity of resources during childhood can have a lasting effect on how consumers navigate their decision journeys.

Another case in which consumer journeys are influenced by experiences that far predate the customer journey is in inspiring brand experiences during foreign exchange trips. Vredeveld and Coulter (2019, issue 2) study the consumer journeys of international students from nine countries temporarily living in the U.S. They find that the cultural experiential goals of these students influence their use of brands during their stay in the U.S. In some cases, their brand usage is motivated and interpreted based on expectations developed when they were exposed to the brands before they came to the U.S., such as in American movies.

Some of the papers in the special issue expand the scope of previous work on customer journeys by considering multiple service providers and spillovers across them. For example, Hildebrand and Schlager (2019, issue 2) examine how pre-shopping activity on social media affects consumers' subsequent shopping behavior. Their field study and experiments show that using Facebook before engaging in a product configuration task makes consumers more likely to choose conventional product features. Using Facebook seems to encourage consumers to focus more on how others will evaluate them, making them less willing to choose unconventional features.

The stage in the journey in which consumers encounter features can also influence their receptivity to the features. Schamp et al. (2019, issue 2) show that ethical attributes (such as environmentally friendly ingredients) have more influence at some stages of the consumer decision journey (choice; when consumers are considering small assortments) than at other stages (consideration; when consumers are considering large assortments). Thus, a consumer's interest in ethical attributes is not static, but depends on the stage of the journey.

Work by Kranzbuehler and colleagues (Kranzbühler et al. 2019, issue 2) considers how to structure a consumer's interactions with multiple service providers across a consumer

190

J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci. (2019) 47:187–191

journey. Specifically, they consider cases in which firms may want to dissociate themselves from a consumer touchpoint, such as when that touchpoint is inherently dissatisfying for customers. Using both a field study and experiments, these authors identify conditions under which firms may want to use branded outsourcing as a strategic tool to reduce their own brand's associations with a negative touchpoint. Notably, the extent to which consumers perceive multiple brand-owned touchpoints as being designed in a thematically cohesive and consistent manner, which Kuehnl and colleagues (Kuehnl et al. 2019, issue 3) call "effective customer journey design," tends to affect consumers' evaluation of utilitarian brand attributes more than their evaluation of hedonic brand attributes. In contrast, evaluation of hedonic brand attributes is influenced more by the brand experience.

Knowing how to engage consumers effectively may depend on the length of the consumer's journey with the brand. Akaka and Schau (2019, issue 3) show that as consumers' identities evolve, their consumption practices also evolve. Focusing on the practice of surfing, they show that identity alignment (and misalignment) over time encourages consumers to change the way they interact with products and brands. Turning to firms' efforts to engage consumers, Hanson et al. (2019, issue 2) examine the effects of different kinds of incentives for engagement, such as points and badges, for consumers to engage in an online brand community. They show that for novices, who are new to the community, signals that communicate a specific social role drive more engagement (such as creating discussions, posting comments, and future engagement intentions) than signals that do not provide role clarity. However, for consumers with longer tenure, the degree to which incentives communicate a social role is less influential. Notably, consumers develop and change along their journeys, and firms need to take this evolution into consideration.

Conclusion and research directions

To summarize, we propose that important strategic insights can be uncovered by moving from a focus on a customer's journey with a single firm to a broader scope, in which the consumer may shift between roles as a patient and consumer or between roles as a producer and consumer. These consumer journeys may include interactions with other consumers, as in the case of brand communities or when buying for others, and interactions with smart objects. Consumer journeys may encompass interactions with multiple firms, either by the design of the focal firm, as in the case of outsourcing, or in spite of its efforts, as in the case of comparison shopping. These journeys are often extended in time and initiated in distant places, with lagged effects on consumers' decision making with respect to specific products and brands. We hope that as you finish reading this issue you will allow this broadened

perspective on consumers' journeys to spark your own ideas and future research.

A treasure trove of future research directions is embedded in each of the papers that encompass this issue. Here we underscore a few possible future directions. First, future theory and research should investigate the temporality and duration of consumer journeys. This issue has uncovered challenges in neatly defining a pre-core-post customer journey process, suggesting the value of more adaptive and customized time frames depending on the consumer journey context. Moreover, the pre- and post- components of a consumer's journey may themselves be quite prolonged, as consumers develop histories with brands, navigate networked relationships with smart objects in their homes, or replicate relational journeys from their past.

Second, future theory and research should interrogate when and how consumption processes are experienced as journeys and how that metaphor shapes consumers' experiences. For example, thinking of a consumption process as a journey versus, for example a job to be done, may change how consumers think about control, unanticipated events, obstacles, failures, emotions, progress, and outcomes. Journeys may not always be motivated by explicit goals, and goals may change over time. This may, in turn, have additional implications for when and how we think about customer journeys and customer experience. Importantly, when is it useful and when does it create value to frame a process as a consumer journey, and when not?

Third, future research should deepen our understanding of people's movements between their roles as customers and other roles, and the role of companions in consumers' journeys. As a whole, the articles in this issue suggest that a contextualized view of these movements between roles, sometimes with companions, can shed important insight on customer touchpoints even when these touchpoints comprise only a small portion of the overall consumer journey. This broadened perspective emphasizes the way in which consumer journeys collide, interplay, and change directions.

Finally, not new to our issue, there are widening opportunities to investigate how new platforms and technologies are interfacing with elements of both consumer and customer journeys as enablers, rewards, obstacles, and companions. Again, we contend it is useful to consider these platforms and technologies as part of a consumer journey, and not just as funnels through which consumers come to engage with the firm.

We are confident that readers will identify many additional exciting contexts and opportunities for investigating consumer's journeys, and we look forward to watching how the journey continues.

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