

Understanding and managing engagement journeys

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Abstract

Purpose – Existing research on customer journeys has tended to focus on the customer's purchase decision-making and firm-controlled touchpoints, overlooking indirect touchpoints where customer resources and behaviors influence the firm and other actors, beyond financial patronage. This article develops the concept of engagement journeys and discusses their implications on journey design and management.

Design/methodology/approach – This conceptual article synthesizes the customer journey and engagement literature to delineate the concept of engagement journeys. Insights from engagement research are reflected in the current journey management orthodoxy to provide novel implications for the management of engagement journeys.

Findings – The engagement journey is defined as the customer's process of diverse brand-related resource investments in interactions with the brand/firm and/or other customers, reflecting the customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioral disposition. The analysis outlines the manifestations and nature of different types of touchpoints along the engagement journey, and the novel requirements for journey management.

Research limitations/implications – The developed conceptualization opens up new avenues in both journey and engagement research.

Practical implications – Some commonly held assumptions regarding journey quality and management do not hold true for engagement journeys, so there is a need for new approaches.

Originality/value – Despite the proliferation of both journey and engagement research, only a handful of studies have considered the link between the concepts. The proposed novel conceptualization of an engagement journey breaks free from a predominant focus on purchase decisions. The analysis of engagement journeys and their management advances both customer journey and engagement research.

Keywords Customer journey, Engagement, Customer management, Journey management

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Customer journeys have become the state-of-the-art concept for understanding customer behaviors in a customer-centric way (Jaakkola and Terho, 2021; Becker *et al.*, 2020; Akaka and Schau, 2019). Customer journeys are commonly defined as a series of firm- or offering-related touchpoints that customers interact with during their purchase and usage processes (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Patrício *et al.*, 2011). Customer journey research explicates two key phenomena relevant to marketing: customers' purchase behaviors (Anderl *et al.*, 2016; Li and Kannan, 2014) and customer experiences that are formed along their purchase and usage processes (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

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Customer journeys can thus be a critical driver of firm performance, generating considerable interest among scholars and consultants in the study and management of journeys (e.g. Homburg and Tischer, 2023; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019; Edelman and Singer, 2015; Rawson *et al.*, 2013).

However, scholars are increasingly viewing the current journey literature as narrowly focused, calling for a broader perspective (e.g. Hamilton and Price, 2019; Akaka and Schau, 2019; Becker *et al.*, 2020; Pizzutti *et al.*, 2022; Trujillo-Torres *et al.*, 2024). We address two specific limitations of the existing research. First, existing journey research has typically focused on a customer's path to purchase, building on consumer decision-making models (Folstad and Kvale, 2018; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). This perspective neglects many aspects of journeys that have relevance for firms but that *are not anchored to a purchase decision*. In reference to services, touchpoints related to service delivery and usage are typically critical for customer satisfaction and firm performance, and these occur after a purchase decision has been made (Rawson *et al.*, 2013; Voorhees *et al.*, 2017; Jaakkola and Terho, 2021). Consider for example a stay in a hotel or the use of mobile telephone services; here, selecting the service provider is only the start of the process. Additionally, situations where customers influence the firm beyond purchase are overlooked. For example, engaged consumers can invest considerable resources in the development of the firm's offerings (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014) or act as influential advocates – or adversaries – for a brand without making any purchases (Azer *et al.*, 2023). This represents a serious gap in journey research, where the notion of customers' engagement value is increasingly being highlighted, rendering purchase volume an increasingly insufficient measure (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Venkatesan, 2017; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). Thus, there is a need for a conceptualization of the engagement journey that is not centered on purchases.

Second, while the increasingly social and emancipated nature of customer journeys has been widely acknowledged (Baxendale *et al.*, 2015; Halvorsrud *et al.*, 2016; Hamilton *et al.*, 2021), existing studies have remained preoccupied with firm-controlled touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Voorhees *et al.*, 2017). Thus, existing journey research has devoted scant attention to touchpoints across new technologies, platforms, and channels *beyond firm control* that may significantly affect customer journeys (Hamilton and Price, 2019; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019; Akaka and Schau, 2019; Wider *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, Review Trackers (2018) indicated that more than 60% of consumers explored online reviews before visiting a business, and 94% considered the reviews a deciding factor in convincing them to avoid a particular provider. Post-pandemic, interactions with reviews have increased by up to 50% from pre-pandemic levels (Review Trackers, 2022). Thus, touchpoints where customers interact with each other are often critical in determining the direction or continuation of a customer journey with a provider, and these effects can spread rapidly in customer networks, fueled by the actions of engaged individuals (cf. Azer and Alexander, 2018).

In sum, the full spectrum of relevant customer insights cannot be captured via traditional purchase journey analysis, and perhaps the most important customer journeys remain poorly understood. To address these gaps, *the purpose of this study is to develop the concept of engagement journeys and discuss their implications for journey design and management*. We draw on customer engagement research, which explicates customer behaviors that relate to the firm but occur outside its direct influence (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Vivek *et al.*, 2012). Engagement is inherently customer-driven, often exogenous to the firm and interactive in nature, accounting for behaviors at touchpoints beyond a firm's control and for how customer journeys affect each other (Azer *et al.*, 2023). Engagement is defined here as a “dynamic and iterative process that reflects actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system” (Brodie *et al.*, 2019, p. 2).

This study proposes a novel conceptualization of the engagement journey that breaks free from the purchase decision-making process. We conceptualize an engagement journey as the *customer's process of diverse brand-related resource investments in interactions with the brand/ firm and/or other customers, reflecting the customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral*

disposition. Despite the proliferation of both journey and engagement research, very few studies have considered the link between these concepts. For customer journey research, the present study offers a novel conceptualization of the journey that is applicable beyond the prevalent purchase decision-making focus and can account for thus far overlooked aspects, such as non-purchase journeys and the role of brand-related interactions in customer-owned and social or external touchpoints. We also outline how current views of journey management need to be renewed to account for engaged customers. For engagement research, this study offers insights into how the dynamic process of engagement can appear and how engagement journeys should be considered in firms' engagement marketing efforts.

The study proceeds as follows. The next section reviews state-of-the-art research on customer journeys. Then we review the engagement research to identify existing insights into customer engagement and its manifestations, which offers implications for journey research. The subsequent section synthesizes insights from the customer journey and engagement literature by analyzing how engagement manifests across different types of touchpoints, resulting in a conceptualization of the engagement journey. These insights are discussed in relation to the current journey management orthodoxy to pinpoint the implications engagement journeys have on our current assumptions of journey management. Finally, we discuss the contributions and implications of this analysis for research and managerial practice.

Current understanding of customer journeys

We first review the current understandings of customer journeys and why they are relevant, then identify the current understanding of the determinants of high-quality journeys and firms' approaches to managing them.

Definition and relevance of customer journeys

Customer journeys comprise a series of firm- or offering-related touchpoints that customers interact with during their purchase and usage processes, either directly or indirectly (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Patrício *et al.*, 2011). While some of these touchpoints are hosted by the provider, others occur beyond the provider's sphere of influence. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) identified four types of journey touchpoints: (1) brand-owned, (2) partner-owned, (3) customer-owned, and (4) social/external. While brand- and partner-owned touchpoints are designed, managed, and controlled by an organization, customer-owned and social/external touchpoints relate to actions taken by customers and their networks. Critically, firms have less influence and control over these latter categories, which constitute important parts of both the customer journey and experience.

Customer journeys have become a key interest of both research and practice, as they help us understand two relevant phenomena. First, journeys represent the setting where *customer experience* emerges (Rahman *et al.*, 2022; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Kranzbühler *et al.*, 2018; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). While acknowledging the importance of analyzing and designing the journey as a whole to improve the customer experience, this strand of research continues to focus mainly on touchpoints controlled by service providers and says little about those exogenous to the firm. For example, the service management literature has traditionally described touchpoints as moments of contact, moments of truth, or service encounters – that is, as instances of communication between a customer and a service provider (Halvorsrud *et al.*, 2016). Some studies have also considered partner-owned touchpoints, such as service delivery networks comprising multiple providers (e.g. Patrício *et al.*, 2011; Tax *et al.*, 2013). However, any considerations of social touchpoints involving the influence of other customers and customer-to-customer interaction have remained anecdotal (Tax *et al.*, 2013; Voorhees *et al.*, 2017). As a notable exception, Hamilton *et al.* (2021) discussed ways that other customers may influence an individual customer's decision-making journey, noting the

relevance of non-purchase interactions, customer attitudes and emotions, and the role of social media in customer journeys. In addition, [Lemon and Verhoef \(2016\)](#) called for renewed attention to the customer's role. Nevertheless, existing customer journey literature has offered only anecdotal references to engagement (see [Lemon and Verhoef, 2016](#); [Venkatesan et al., 2018](#)) and has positioned engagement as a post-purchase phenomenon with little reference to its effects.

Second, the concept of the customer journey is considered relevant, as it explains customer behaviors. The concept is mainly used to trace the customer's path to purchase, mapping stages of the *consumer decision-making process* that include awareness, consideration, purchase, and loyalty (e.g. [Srinivasan et al., 2016](#)). The general aim of this line of research is to support customer conversion across touchpoints and to optimize the mix of marketing channels along the way ([Barwitz and Maas, 2018](#); [Edelman and Singer, 2015](#); [Li and Kannan, 2014](#)). Engagement here is seen to relate to customers' affective responses to marketers' actions, such as in the positive and negative sentiments that function as "earned touchpoints" on social media, impacting other consumers' purchase decisions (e.g. [Hollebeek and Macky, 2019](#); [Srinivasan et al., 2016](#); [Baxendale et al., 2015](#)).

Focusing on the value that engaged customers' direct and indirect contributions bring to a firm, this line of research has maintained an essentially firm-centric perspective on engagement and the customer journey ([Venkatesan et al., 2018](#)). However, as customer journeys become increasingly multichannel in nature, affording customers significant discretion in selecting pathways to their goals, the current firm-centric view lacks a comprehensive account of customer journeys ([Becker and Jaakkola, 2020](#); [Gasparin et al., 2022](#)). For example, customers can deviate from planned journeys ([Halvorsrud et al., 2016](#); [Trujillo-Torres et al., 2024](#)), are strongly influenced by social touchpoints ([Baxendale et al., 2015](#)), and are increasingly empowered in directing their own purchase journeys ([Edelman and Singer, 2015](#)). These effects are more pronounced among engaged customers, further highlighting the need to explore the connection between engagement and customer journeys.

Management of customer journeys

Firms and academics alike have invested in developing approaches to understanding, designing, and managing customer journeys, with their goal being to facilitate positive customer experiences and keep customers "hooked" on their purchase path (e.g. [Rawson et al., 2013](#); [Kuehnl et al., 2019](#); [Jaakkola and Terho, 2021](#); [Homburg and Tischer, 2023](#)). As most studies have anchored the journey to the purchase decision-making process, journeys have typically been depicted as comprising the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages ([Lemon and Verhoef, 2016](#); [De Keyser et al., 2020](#)). However, some recent studies acknowledged that journeys should be considered as recurring cycles with loyalty loops rather than linear processes, indicating a need to understand and manage journeys as iterative processes that place a more balanced emphasis on the purchase and usage phases ([Kranzbühler et al., 2018](#); [Siebert et al., 2020](#); [Purmonen et al., 2023](#)). Journey management has typically focused on brand-owned touchpoints that firms can directly influence or even control ([Homburg and Tischer, 2023](#)).

The performance of customer journeys is typically evaluated in terms of customer satisfaction, loyalty, customer experience, and customer lifetime value (e.g. [Jaakkola and Terho, 2021](#); [Homburg et al., 2017](#); [Lemon and Verhoef, 2016](#)). To support journey performance, studies have identified characteristics that drive journey effectiveness. For example, [Kuehnl et al. \(2019\)](#) defined effective customer journey design as "the extent to which consumers perceive multiple brand-owned touchpoints [to be] designed in a thematically cohesive, consistent, and context-sensitive way." Similarly, [Jaakkola and Terho \(2021, p. 8\)](#) defined service journey quality as the "degree to which customers perceive the combination of provider-owned service process touchpoints functioning as a seamless,

coherent and personalized whole” and demonstrated that such journey characteristics are critical drivers of customer performance in contemporary service businesses.

While most studies have highlighted that journeys should be frictionless (e.g. Rawson *et al.*, 2013; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019; Jaakkola and Terho, 2021), Siebert *et al.* (2020) showed that in some cases, a “sticky,” unpredictable journey that makes customers’ lives exciting increases customer involvement over time. In turn, Gasparin *et al.* (2022) showed that unexpected inconsistencies in retail elements across touchpoints may result in positive customer experiences. Furthermore, Trujillo-Torres *et al.* (2024) highlighted that access-based platforms especially struggle to manage customer journeys because in such contexts, customers play extended roles in the value chain, their experiences interconnect with that of multiple other customers, and there is instrumental sociality among customers. Thus, it seems that the different types of journeys call for different styles of management, but this has seen little consideration from current journey research.

Existing research has also highlighted the importance of researching and monitoring customer journeys to detect potential pain points and sources of customer dissatisfaction (e.g. Rawson *et al.*, 2013; Homburg *et al.*, 2017). For example, journey mapping can be used to identify and understand touchpoints and journeys that are critical to the formation of customer experiences (Følstad and Kvale, 2018; Rawson *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, firms are advised to adapt their touchpoints to address detected problems (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2019).

Customer engagement and journeys

In marketing and service research, customer engagement has become increasingly significant in both practical and theoretical terms (Wetzels *et al.*, 2023). However, the connection between engagement and journeys has seldom been explicitly discussed. Next, we briefly review the key premises of customer engagement research, gathering insights that can inform the understanding of how engagement might affect customer journeys (see Table 1). Here, engagement research reveals how individuals’ tendencies to engage are generated, articulates manifestations of engagement (engagement behaviors), reveals the interactivity and social dimension at the heart of engagement, and explores how engagement intensity and valence change its impact on both organizations and other actors.

Early research presented engagement as a psychological state with multidimensional properties: emotional (more intense feelings about a focal object), cognitive (increased focus and absorption), and behavioral (doing and acting more and contributing resources toward the firm and other actors) (cf. Brodie *et al.*, 2011). More recent research has promoted the idea of a *disposition* to engage (see Brodie *et al.*, 2019). Engagement dispositions comprise a customer’s internal tendencies and capacity to act, as well as tendencies triggered in relation to the brand/firm and generated through a sense of similarity, social connection, and trust in a provider (Sim *et al.*, 2022). Thus, engagement is associated with an increase in the intensity of participation, changes in value perceptions and affective commitment, and an increased likelihood that customers will intensify activities around a focal firm (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Vivek *et al.*, 2012). Engaged customers are increasingly viewed as important to firms because they are, typically, more loyal, invest more resource, and have an impact on both the firm and other customers (de Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2020).

Customer engagement behaviors (CEBs) are the visible manifestations of engagement, representing customer activities beyond financial patronage that have consequences for customers, firms, and other actors (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Through CEBs, customers contribute their resources either directly to the firm or its offerings, or they influence other customers’ attitudes and behaviors toward the firm (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Alexander *et al.*, 2018). In the former scenario, customers

Article	Focus	Insights for developing the understanding of engagement journeys
van Doorn <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Conceptualizes antecedents and consequences of engagement behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement behaviors occur beyond purchases and have consequences for customers, firms, and other actors Firms should seek to identify, evaluate, and react to engagement behaviors
Brodie <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Explores the theoretical foundations of engagement and revisits its definition and conceptual scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement relates to customers' psychological states, resulting from experiences with the firm/brand Engagement occurs both within and outside relationships with focal firms Engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to the firm/brand
Vivek <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Explores the nature and scope of engagement as a component of relationship marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement increases intensity of participation with a firm/brand, influencing an individual's value perceptions and affective commitment to a firm Engaged customers are more likely to communicate positive WOM and to engage in exogenous activities (e.g. brand communities)
Brodie <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Explores consumer engagement in an online brand community environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement differs in intensity over time, reflecting different states Engagement is precipitated by an individual's need for information, with a likely increase in interaction with various touchpoints Engagement is highly interactive and influences exchange value and value in use, indicating its role in both the purchase and use phases of the journey
Jaakkola and Alexander (2014)	Conceptualizes the role of customer engagement behavior (CEB) in value co-creation within a multi-stakeholder service system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement behaviors can augment or co-develop firm offerings, affecting other purchase journeys Engaged customers contribute resources that may influence and/or mobilize other customers by changing their attitudes and behaviors toward the focal firm Engagement affects value co-creation at the systemic level by attracting additional actors
Dessart <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Investigates engagement in online brand communities in terms of engagement with the brand and with other community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers engage with a brand and with other engaged individuals Engagement creates strong bonds between actors around learning, sharing, and endorsing activities Engaged customers invest extensive time in engagement activities Online engagement has a magnetic effect, attracting other actors and stimulating prolonged activity

Table 1.
Selected engagement studies and their contributions to the understanding of engagement journeys

(continued)

Article	Focus	Insights for developing the understanding of engagement journeys
Harmeling <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Introduces two forms of engagement marketing and links strategic elements to customer outcomes and firm performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged customers contribute resources beyond financial patronage Engagement marketing can strengthen customers' existing engagement bonds Engagement marketing increases engagement through psychological ownership and self-transformation
Alexander <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Examines engagement within a service ecosystem framework at multiple levels of aggregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actors balance multiple parallel engagement contexts, which may result in role conflict Actors can disengage from a focal object, thus ending the journey Interactions with others affects actor's engagement by subjecting them to social norms
Fehrer <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Operationalizes engagement dynamics within a customer–brand dyad and tests interrelationships in a network setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement behaviors can influence other customers' disposition toward a focal firm The presence of other engaged customers (social proof) may affect the likelihood to engage
Sim <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Provides a comprehensive framework of customers' disposition to engage with a service provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement dispositions comprise a customer's internal tendencies and capacity to act, as well as tendencies triggered in relation to a brand/firm Sense of similarity, sense of social connection, and trust in the service provider facilitate engagement dispositions
Wang <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Offers a comprehensive understanding of actor engagement intensity from an individual, dyadic, and network perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement intensity at the individual level refers to actors' affective and cognitive tone and varying magnitudes of resource investments (i.e. efforts, duration, and activeness) Engagement intensity at the dyad level represents relational strength Engagement intensity at the network level refers to the degree of connectedness within a network

Source(s): The above table was created by the authors

Table 1.

contribute resources to focal organizations through co-development activities or use their own resources to augment the offerings of the focal firm, thus sharing resource investments with other users. In the latter scenario, customers use resources to influence how other customers think, feel, and act (i.e. affect their disposition) toward a focal organization (Fehrer *et al.*, 2018; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). A growing body of research has identified types of CEBs that emerge within particular social/external touchpoints; these include online reviews (Azer and Alexander, 2018), social media (Azer *et al.*, 2023; Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Dolan *et al.*, 2019), and specific contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Azer and Alexander, 2022).

While existing engagement research has typically framed CEBs as a post-purchase phenomenon, where dedicated customers benefit a firm through their CEBs (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), there is a recognition that engagement

value is not always delimited to purchases and that engaged individuals may have ongoing relationships – and thus journeys – with a firm, even if no purchase occurs (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, recent research on CEBs has expanded to actors beyond customers (Verleye *et al.*, 2024; Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019; Alexander *et al.*, 2018; Storbacka *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, emergent research has identified CEBs to occur not only within the pre-purchase stage (Lehto *et al.*, 2022) but also in unexpected ways within the post-purchase stage (i.e. post-decision information search; see Pizzutti *et al.*, 2022). Overall, CEBs affect value creation at a system level, as individuals impact the way other actors experience, think, feel, and behave toward particular organizations (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Engagement is depicted as a social, and highly interactive, phenomenon often precipitated by an individual's need for information, resulting in a commensurate increase in interaction with organizations and other actors (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). As levels of interaction increase, so does the sharing of brand-related values and content and levels of social exchange between actors (Vivek *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, the presence of other engaged customers affects the likelihood that others will engage and maintain engagement levels, with engagement creating strong bonds between actors around, for example, learning, sharing, and endorsing activities (Alexander *et al.*, 2018; Azer *et al.*, 2023; Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Fehrer *et al.*, 2018). However, in balancing multiple parallel engagement contexts, actors may be exposed to a range of conflicting social norms and engagement contexts, which could result in role conflicts and affect individual customers' dispositions and future intentions to (dis)engage (Alexander *et al.*, 2018).

Intensity and valence are identified as core dimensions of engagement (see van Doorn *et al.*, 2010) that affect both nature and the impact of engagement on individual customers, other actors, and focal organizations (Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). The heightened mental and emotional intensity of engaged individuals is likely to lead to the increased investment of resources, such as time, effort, and knowledge (Kleinaltenkamp *et al.*, 2019). Azer and Alexander (2020) measured how the relative intensity of negative engagement can be moderated by the behaviors of other actors, highlighting the networked effect of engagement intensity. Wang *et al.* (2023) observed the effects of engagement intensity at the individual, dyadic, and wider network levels, connecting it with actors' resource investments, relational strength, and the degree of connectedness in the network. In relation to valence, research has explored the interplay between forms of valence (positive, negative, and disengagement) (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014; Naumann *et al.*, 2017) in offering typologies and discussing the impacts of negative engagement behaviors (Azer and Alexander, 2018, 2020).

The nature of engagement valence and intensity shapes, and is shaped by, institutional arrangements within a network. For example, Sim *et al.* (2022) noted that while certain aspects of an individual's engagement disposition (a customer's capacity and tendency to engage) are internally generated (e.g. confidence and extroversion), other aspects are determined via interactions (e.g. trust and social connection). Thus, the valence and intensity of engagement are likely to play an important role in shaping the engagement dispositions (and, ergo, future behaviors) of other customers. When CEBs directed at a focal object are increased, reduced, or even withdrawn, the quantity and extent of interactions are altered, and the introduction of new customers, partner organizations, and stakeholders to the wider service ecosystem is affected (Alexander *et al.*, 2018; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Understanding the range of engagement behaviors, alongside their valence and intensity, can aid organizations in their social listening, helping them to identify key individuals who occupy central positions within a network, to incentivize certain behaviors at certain key journey stages, and to encourage imitation (Azer *et al.*, 2023; Wang *et al.*, 2023).

The research outlined above indicates how engagement contributes to customers' experiences of organizational offerings, impacting the nature, intensity, and quantity of

customer interactions with a focal firm and other customers or stakeholders. As engagement behaviors have important implications for organizations (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Venkatesan, 2017), existing research has highlighted a need to identify, evaluate, and react to engagement and to leverage the resources brought by engaged customers (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). However, this requires an improved understanding of how engagement impacts a customer's journey – an issue that remains neglected by the literature.

Delineating engagement journeys

To delineate the nature of engagement journeys, we integrate previous research on customer journeys and engagement. We analyze how engagement manifests and how it can alter customer behaviors in relation to focal organizations with regard to three types of journey touchpoints: provider-owned, customer-owned, and social/external.

Provider-owned touchpoints

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) characterized brand- and partner-owned touchpoints as designed, managed, and controlled by organizations. *Brand-owned* touchpoints include all media and brand-controlled elements of the marketing mix, such as advertising, customer service, websites, store environment, product attributes, and sales force (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). *Partner-owned* touchpoints are jointly designed or controlled by organizations, such as multichannel service delivery partners or multivendor loyalty program partners (Patrício *et al.*, 2011; Tax *et al.*, 2013; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). From the customer's perspective, both brand- and partner-owned touchpoints represent points of interaction with a provider. For that reason, we use the term *provider touchpoint* to refer to any point of communication or service contact between the focal customer and focal firm (Lemke *et al.*, 2011).

To understand what provider-owned touchpoints look like to the engaged customer, consider a devoted Apple customer. She visits an Apple Store and feels excited by the captivating atmosphere. She spends more time touching and trying the new products on display and interacts extensively with employees and other customers. As she wants to keep up to date with the brand, she subscribes to email alerts and follows Apple on social media, liking, sharing, and commenting on posts. When new products are launched, she keenly follows the live updates on YouTube and regularly visits the Apple website. She purchases an Apple Watch to manage her fitness, subscribes to Apple TV+ and Apple music, which she listens to via a Home Pod, and stores files on iCloud. When something does not work as it should, she considers it important to provide feedback to Apple and often offers suggestions to other users on the support platform. As her commitment to Apple increases, her purchase phases become indistinguishable from her ongoing relationship with the company. She makes regular monthly payments for Apple Music, pays seasonal charges for iCloud, along with regular one-off payments for movie rentals, and periodically upgrades her devices to the most recent versions.

As the above example illustrates, engaged customers are likely to exhibit *intensified responses* to brand-related stimuli and *invest more time, effort, emotional devotion, and mental concentration* in their interactions with provider-owned touchpoints (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Vivek *et al.*, 2014). The existing literature on engagement has indicated that the consequences of past engagement (e.g. satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty) can become the antecedents to future engagement (Fehrer *et al.*, 2018). This reflects the intensification of individual experiences among customers who become more absorbed in their interactions with a firm, leading to increased enjoyment and heightened enthusiasm (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2023).

Engaged customers are likely to spend more time in store, communicate with the focal organization, and exhibit their interest. It seems plausible, then, that engaged customers pay more attention to brand-related stimuli and respond to these more intensely than non-engaged consumers.

There is also evidence that engaged customers are likely to seek out additional opportunities to connect with a firm. As customers become more engaged, they are *more likely to invest their resources and participate* in activities designed to build their affective commitment to a brand (Auh *et al.*, 2007). Harmeling *et al.* (2017) noted that engaged customers are more susceptible to engagement marketing initiatives and that their interactions with a firm extend beyond transactions – for instance, to competitions and social media. Engagement is also likely to increase the customer's involvement in co-development activities, such as by making suggestions for product improvements and participating in design contests or innovation platforms and projects (Nambisan and Baron, 2009).

To summarize, we posit that provider-owned touchpoints along an engagement journey feature (1) intensified customer responses to brand stimuli, (2) increased points of contact between the provider and customer across multiple channels, and (3) increased customer resource investments toward the provider.

Customer-owned touchpoints

Customer-owned touchpoints represent moments where customer interactions with a brand are less controlled or less directly influenced by a provider. These touchpoints are an important part of the customer experience, as consumption occurs largely within the customer's lifeworld, even in the case of products and brands (Becker *et al.*, 2020; Akaka and Schau, 2019; Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argued that customer-owned touchpoints are likely to be most critical and influential in the post-purchase phase of the customer journey, when customers use products or services independently.

To illustrate the effects of engagement on customer-owned touchpoints, imagine a consumer who is a fan of the *Harry Potter* series and the associated film franchise. Deeply devoted to the world of *Harry Potter*, she watches the films and reads the books repeatedly. She visits websites that tell her which Hogwarts House she belongs to, along with her likely wand and spells. She also incorporates her fan status into her lifestyle – for example, by using *Harry Potter* merchandise, such as mugs and t-shirts, in her everyday activities. She may write her own fan fiction stories, blog about the *Harry Potter* world, or knit a scarf representing her favorite Hogwarts House, and she may plan her vacations around visits to *Harry Potter* filming locations.

Here, again, engagement induces the increased assignment of meaning and resources to the brand, this time through customer-owned touchpoints. There is evidence that customer actions toward a focal brand are motivated in part by some form of self-enhancement (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Through increased engagement, customers create links between the focal brand and their own identity, and these self-brand connections signal the importance attached to this association (Harrigan *et al.*, 2018; Sprott *et al.*, 2009). In short, engagement affords opportunities to create a preferred contextual self as opposed to something more scripted (Hollebeek, 2011).

Engaged customers' interactions with the focal brand or product involve more frequent and prolonged usage touchpoints. Engagement is also likely to result in the more diversified use of the brand, as customers feel a stronger sense of ownership (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). This means that engaged customers may diverge from recommended or typical usage patterns; as focal objects become part of their broader sense of self, they seek additional opportunities to incorporate the brand into their everyday lives through customization and

augmentation (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). In this way, engagement may stimulate a kind of transformation, in which the customer incorporates specific aspects of the focal object (i.e. the brand) into the self (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). However, as the individual's level of engagement differs from brand to brand, the extent of these aspects' incorporation into their self-concept reflects a brand's relative importance to them (Alexander *et al.*, 2018; Maslowska *et al.*, 2016).

In sum, we contend that with regard to customer-owned touchpoints, engagement (1) increases the volume, intensity, and diversity of customer-owned touchpoints and (2) facilitates the absorption of brands into a customer's broader lifeworld.

Social/external touchpoints

The recent customer journey literature on social/external touchpoints has acknowledged "the role of others in the customer experience" (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 78). Whether via peer-to-peer or external reviews, customers depend increasingly on the views of others (Review Trackers, 2022), highlighting the importance of social/external touchpoints within the customer journey (Hamilton *et al.*, 2021). These brand-related interactions may be solicited or unsolicited and involve third parties exogenous to the firm, including peers, other customers, and independent entities that may inform or exert influence on the customer journey (Baxendale *et al.*, 2015). Interactions of this kind might include observing or communicating with other customers during the service process (Baxendale *et al.*, 2015), brand-related peer-to-peer problem solving within third-party Internet communities (Dholakia *et al.*, 2009), or word of mouth (WOM) in online or offline settings (Azer and Alexander, 2018).

As an example of social/external touchpoints, consider an engaged fan of Tesla cars. The customer follows Tesla on social media and searches for online reviews of and stories about Tesla models. When browsing social media, tweets and posts that mention Tesla capture her attention, and she may comment on or forward such posts, rejecting negative opinions and applauding positive sentiments. As an active participant in car-focused discussion forums, she learns more about Tesla models and expresses admiration to fellow customers who have purchased a new model. The opinions of other Tesla fans influence her perceptions of what is valuable and desirable about Tesla products and services, ultimately guiding her expectations regarding the brand. However, no purchase occurs, as the car is outside the customer's budget.

Here again, interactivity is central to engagement (Brodie *et al.*, 2019) and fosters a sense of connectedness among actors in a network or ecosystem (Fehrer *et al.*, 2018). Ubiquitous and accessible exogenous touchpoints afford ongoing access to brand-related information, stimulation, and support, increasing customer interactions (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Azer *et al.*, 2023). In this way, engagement prompts a marked increase in interactions, as customers are more inclined to seek and share information through co-experiences of the firm or brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Engagement thus has an almost magnetic effect, attracting other actors and stimulating prolonged activity (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; de Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2020), leading to the emergence of more shared social/external touchpoints throughout the customer journey.

The influence of social touchpoints on the customer journey is bidirectional; as consumers experience social influence, they simultaneously influence the customer journeys of their companions (Hamilton *et al.*, 2021). Engaged customers are more likely to influence and be influenced by other customers' feelings and thoughts about a firm (Fehrer *et al.*, 2018; van Doorn *et al.*, 2010), and they often shape the motivations that initiate new customer journeys (Hamilton *et al.*, 2021). For example, they may help others to select or use the offering, build friendship groups and brand communities (Dholakia *et al.*, 2009; Mathwick *et al.*, 2008), or share information about a brand (Azer and Alexander, 2018). In particular, the rise of

engagement platforms has facilitated such interactions (Breibach and Brodie, 2017), as engaged customers can directly mobilize other customers to change their behaviors toward particular firms – for example, by ending their relationship with one firm or initiating a relationship with another (Alexander *et al.*, 2018).

Increased exposure to social/external touchpoints may subsequently change how individual customers interact with or experience touchpoints, altering their engagement disposition and intensity or valence of engagement. As social/external touchpoints are shared with other actors, they expose engaged customers to institutional settings and social norms, as well as to the behaviors of a particular reference group that affects the nature and practices of engagement in a given context (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Alexander *et al.*, 2018). Social/external touchpoints invite customers to assess other actors' behaviors, affecting their experiences (Baxendale *et al.*, 2015) and decision-making (Lapinski and Rimal, 2005) and triggering (or, potentially, terminating) engagement with a particular brand or firm (Alexander *et al.*, 2018). Communities of highly engaged individuals may develop shared rituals and traditions (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001), fostering near-religious zeal in relation to a focal object (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). The development of joint values, norms, and practices affects how customers generate value from a brand and to some extent determines what they expect from their relationship with a firm (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Research on Peer-to-Peer Problem Solving communities has indicated that customer-to-customer interactions often replace firm-owned touchpoints, ultimately changing how customers use an offering (Mathwick *et al.*, 2008). This suggests that experiences of social/external touchpoints also influence customers' perceptions and actions at other touchpoints.

Thus, we argue that engagement (1) increases the volume and diversity of social/external touchpoints along a customer's journey; (2) subjects customers to the influence of others, potentially changing their attitudes and behaviors toward particular focal offerings; and (3) exposes customers to the social norms, values, and practices of other customers, affecting their experiences and behaviors in relation to journey touchpoints.

Finally, Table 2 summarizes the role of engagement in different types of touchpoints and provides illustrations using three running examples. Building on this analysis, we next develop a definition of *engagement journey* and discuss its implications for the current understanding of customer journeys.

Discussion

Defining the engagement journey

The above analysis revealed the multiple ways in which engagement impacts touchpoints of different kinds along the customer journey. Higher levels of engagement disposition spur more intense experiences and participation across different types of touchpoints, as an engaged customer's relationship with a focal object results in deeper emotional devotion, higher mental concentration, and a greater propensity to act (Sim *et al.*, 2022; Brodie *et al.*, 2011, 2019; Vivek *et al.*, 2014). Customer engagement thus intensifies a customer's resource contributions to interactions within journey touchpoints (Wang *et al.*, 2023). As a result of this analysis, we define the engagement journey as the *customer's process of diverse brand-related resource investments in interactions with the brand/firm and/or other actors, reflecting the customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disposition*.

This analysis also allows us to characterize engagement journeys. First, it becomes clear that engagement increases the number and variety of touchpoints experienced by an engaged customer who pursues more ways to interact with and/or diversify their use of a brand (see Table 2). This is likely to increase the level of interaction between the customer and the provider, as well as with third parties, as engaged customers seek additional brand-related content or modes of communication (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Some customers may be

	Provider-owned touchpoints	Customer-owned touchpoints	Social/external touchpoints
Influence of customer engagement (CE) on types of touchpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CE intensifies customer responses to brand stimuli • CE increases a customer's points of contact with the provider across multiple channels • CE increases customer resource investments towards the provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CE increases the volume, intensity, and diversity of customer-owned touchpoints • CE facilitates the absorption of brands into a customer's broader lifeworld 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CE increases the volume and diversity of social/external touchpoints along the journey • CE subjects customers to the influence of others • CE exposes customers to the social norms, values, and practices of other customers, affecting the customer's experiences and behaviors
Illustration 1: Apple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer purchases additional Apple products (e.g. Apple Watch) • Customer provides feedback that contributes to Apple changing customer service hours • Customer views broadcast of launch event for new iPhone model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer spends more time using Apple products and trying out different functionalities • Customer seeks additional opportunities to experience the brand (e.g. signs up for Apple Genius Bar tutorials) • Customer uses Apple products in as many areas of life as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer recommends Apple products to her friends • Customer decides to stop using Apple products due to the withdrawal of endorsement by the reference group • Customer learns how to solve Apple product-related problems through a peer-to-peer platform
Illustration 2: <i>Harry Potter</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer experiences a strong emotional reaction when watching a <i>Harry Potter</i> film • Customer visits <i>Harry Potter</i> film set. • Customer purchases a variety of <i>Harry Potter</i> merchandise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer incorporates <i>Harry Potter</i> merchandise into their lifestyle • Customer adopts a particular persona from the <i>Harry Potter</i> world • Customer makes her own <i>Harry Potter</i> scarf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer recommends <i>Harry Potter</i> books to her friends on social media • Customer reads <i>Harry Potter</i> fan fiction stories written by other fans • Customer learns how to participate in fan-created <i>Harry Potter</i> activities (e.g. cosplay)
Illustration 3: Tesla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer spends time watching Tesla's ads on YouTube • Customer participates in the Tesla design contest • Customer visits Tesla website regularly and participates in Tesla events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer identifies as a "Tesla person." • Customer enjoys spending time on the care and maintenance of her Tesla • Driving her Tesla becomes an immersive experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer reads reviews of Tesla models on various websites • Customer pays more attention to Tesla-related social media posts • Customer stands up to Tesla critics

Source(s): The above table was created by the authors

Table 2. Illustrating the nature of engagement journey touchpoints

more inclined to accept invitations from a firm regarding extra-role activities and engagement opportunities (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). This increased interaction means more touchpoints of various kinds, making customer journeys longer and more complex.

Second, we propose that customer engagement elevates the relative importance of social touchpoints when determining the direction of the journey and associated customer experiences. Engaged customers seek opportunities to share their brand experiences and to influence and be influenced by others (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Niemi and Kantola, 2018; de Oliveira Santini *et al.*, 2020). By triggering this connectivity between customers, engagement increases exposure to others' resources and activities (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). It also seems likely that interactions at social touchpoints would affect customer expectations and experiences of brand-related stimuli at provider-owned touchpoints. Social touchpoints may also contribute to the value associated with a purchase, as owning a particular product affords access to a particular social setting (Schau *et al.*, 2009). Third-party views and recommendations may even prompt a customer to abandon their relationship with one provider to switch to another (Alexander *et al.*, 2018; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2016). This increased influence of social touchpoints on engaged customers makes their journeys more volatile and less predictable.

Comparing purchase and engagement journeys

To reveal the implications of our novel conceptualization, we compare the traditional view of customer journeys with our engagement journey concept across the set of key assumptions identified in the previous sections (see Table 3). Our aim is not to suggest that the traditional purchase-focused view of journeys is irrelevant but to highlight that in contemporary settings, it offers a narrow view of journeys that needs to be extended.

First, our analysis highlights the need to revise assumptions related to the *theoretical anchoring and boundaries of the journey concept*. Traditional journey research has mainly anchored itself in the customer's purchase decision-making process and primarily considered customer interactions with a firm. Although feedback and loyalty loops have been acknowledged (e.g. Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Siebert *et al.*, 2020), this view has inevitably remained focused on transactions and considered only customers' financial resource investments. In turn, engagement journeys focus on the customer's firm/brand-related relationship that may involve various purchase and usage situations or none at all. Nevertheless, this focus takes into account a wide array of resource investments, exogenous touchpoints, and touchpoints owned by providers.

This novel view on journeys calls for new considerations regarding the design and management of journeys. In terms of what constitutes a *high-quality journey*, our engagement journey perspective offers an interesting juxtaposition from traditional perspectives that focus on providing tightly managed, consistent, and cohesive journeys with the firm in control to ensure the delivery of a planned brand promise (e.g. Homburg and Tischer, 2023; Homburg *et al.*, 2017). Rather, engagement journeys demand greater adaptability, transparency, and reciprocity from the focal organization (cf. Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). A high-quality journey can be characterized as one that facilitates customers' positively valenced dispositions and behaviors, for example through fostering dialogue with customers and providing them with access to ownership of the brand (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

In relation to *journey management goals*, the concept of engagement journeys extends current thinking focused on generating positive experiences and promoting purchase path advancement (e.g. Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). The management of engagement journeys should also consider triggering specific CEBs and ameliorating possibly disruptive behaviors that could affect an organization. Journey touchpoints should

Key assumptions	Traditional journey research	Engagement journeys
Anchoring and boundaries of the journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the customer’s decision-making process and path to purchase, comprising the phases of pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase • Focus mainly on brand- and partner-owned touchpoints • Focus on customers’ financial resource investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the customer’s process of versatile brand-related resource investments in interactions with the brand/firm and/or other customers, reflecting the customer’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disposition • Focus on all types of touchpoints • May not involve a purchase
Criteria for high-quality journeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality journeys are seamless, thematically cohesive, consistent, and context-sensitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality journeys are adaptable and transparent, facilitate dialogue with engaged actors, and facilitate a sense of ownership
The goal of journey management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and manage touchpoints and cues for positive customer experiences • Nurture customer’s advancement on their purchase path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design, manage, and monitor touchpoints to trigger wanted and mitigate unwanted resource investments • Encourage interactions between positively engaged customers but steering negatively valenced customers away
Information needs regarding journeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map customer’s path to purchase • Measure customer satisfaction at touchpoints to identify pain points • Focus mainly on brand- and partner-owned touchpoints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand who customers influence and become influenced by • Understand the valence and intensity of engagement • Understand the nature/types of engagement behavior • Focus on all types of touchpoints
Key outcomes of the journey to be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm outcomes relate to customer purchase behavior, satisfaction, and loyalty • Customer outcomes relate to experiences along the journey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm outcomes relate to customer lifetime value, as well as value gained from customer referrals, influence, and knowledge • Customer outcomes relate to increased enjoyment, attachment, and empowerment

Source(s): The above table was created by the authors

Table 3. Comparing the traditional view of journeys and engagement journeys

offer opportunities for positive interactions between engaged customers, the brand, and other actors (e.g. through various platforms), but firms should also consider how they can steer negatively valenced customers away from these touchpoints.

Organizations are also likely to face extended *information needs* related to engagement journeys. Service blueprints provide well-understood points of interaction, including potential fail points, between organizations and customers, but they mainly focus on brand-owned touchpoints (Bitner *et al.*, 2008). Engaged journeys are more complex and, as a result, require a greater diversity of information needs, including the identification of influential engaged customers. Furthermore, CEBs across a range of touchpoints need to be monitored to capture different resource investments, valences, and intensities. This is likely to require more nuanced social listening to exogenous touchpoints (Azer *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, when considering the *journey outcomes* to be measured, engagement journeys offer more than typical chain–profit outcomes, such as satisfaction; they offer broader value benefits for organizations via referrals, influence, and knowledge from customers (Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). In terms of customer outcomes, relevant measures may

include increased enjoyment, brand attachment, and empowerment (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Conclusions and implications

Theoretical contributions

This article developed the concept of engagement journeys and discussed its implications on journey management. The customer journey has become a key concept in marketing and service research, as it can be used to understand and influence customers' purchase behaviors (Anderl *et al.*, 2016; Li and Kannan, 2014) and customer experiences (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). However, many studies have highlighted that the current purchase process-anchored journey literature is too narrow in its focus (e.g. Hamilton and Price, 2019; Akaka and Schau, 2019; Becker *et al.*, 2020), rendering only a partial view of the journeys of engaged customers. This article provides a richer account by analyzing the relationship between engagement and the customer journey, addressing the limited consideration of engagement in the existing journey literature. As a result, we provide a nuanced conceptualization of engagement journeys and highlight their key differences compared to the traditional view of customer journeys. We postulate that important differences relate to the anchoring and boundaries of journeys; the criteria for what is considered a high-quality journey; firm goals and information needs related to journey management; and the key outcomes for the measuring of engaged journeys.

This paper offers two main contributions to the literature streams on customer journeys and customer engagement. First, this study is among the first to systematically integrate the concepts of customer engagement and journeys and develop a definition for engagement journeys. This contributes to customer journey research by offering a novel journey concept that is applicable beyond the purchase decision-making focus prevalent in this line of research and that can account for thus far overlooked situations, such as service usage and prospective customers who might not buy but contribute other relevant resources to an organization. This study also highlighted the role of customer-owned and social/external touchpoints, which have attracted limited attention to date (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020), revealing how engagement influences the nature and intensity of journey touchpoints that are beyond a firm's direct control.

For engagement research, the developed conceptualization offers insights into what the dynamic process, or relationship, between the consumer and their object of engagement looks like. While antecedents and consequences of engagement have been studied, few engagement studies have analyzed engagement as a dynamic, longitudinal process. This study can offer an important building block toward developing a processual view of engagement.

As its second contribution, this study provides insights into how current understandings and foci related to journeys and journey management need to be renewed when accounting for engaged customers. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that while engaged customers are of crucial importance to firms, as they contribute to value creation beyond financial patronage (e.g. Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Pansari and Kumar, 2017), current views of customer journeys are insufficient in elucidating and managing the complex, prolonged, and unpredictable journeys of engaged customers. This paper identified key assumptions that need revising, related to the boundaries of the journey concept, as well as the goals and foci of journey management (e.g. Homburg and Tischer, 2023; Jaakkola and Terho, 2021; Kuehnl *et al.*, 2019). These observations contribute to the customer journey literature by highlighting the need to renew journey management and related processes, such as customer experience management, and by providing tools for considering "non-purchase journeys" that have remained alien to journey research but are arguably relevant as promotional and creative resources offered by engaged customers may be highly valuable to a firm despite these customers' lack of actual purchase.

Considerations related to the management of engagement journeys also contribute new knowledge for engagement marketing and management research that is concerned with guiding customer engagement in ways that benefit firm performance (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010; Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). Thus far, this area of research has focused on the analysis of drivers and outcomes of effective engagement initiatives but has not considered how customer journey management could be applied to manage and leverage customer engagement.

Implications for future research

These new insights into engagement journeys open up several areas of future research (see Table 4). First, we highlight the value of further exploration into the relationship between engagement and customer experience – for example, by considering engagement as a contingency factor in customer responses to specific touchpoints and the extent to which these responses are amplified in more impactful outcomes, especially in the case of negative experiences or touchpoints that, as seems increasingly likely, are automated. It also seems useful to explore the overall impact of engaged customers’ more intense reactions and whether these are good for firms.

Second, in relation to customer-owned elements of the journey, we challenge researchers to capture additional insights beyond purchase journey data or service blueprints, which offer only a dyadic, linear account and fail to capture the broader picture in relation to exogenous touchpoints. Additionally, future research should seek to identify and develop ways to capture data from exogenous touchpoints. The ethnographic approaches already popularized in brand community studies seem appropriate (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), along with netnography, and “ethnobot” technology (Tallyn *et al.*, 2018). We also predict a key role for artificial intelligence in creating approaches to analyzing and understanding exogenous touchpoints.

Future research implications	Managerial implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can firms assess the extent and quality of customer engagement journeys? • What is the role of engagement in the emergence of customer experiences? • What is the impact of engagement journeys on overall journey performance? • What research approaches would be most appropriate for capturing data from exogenous touchpoints? • How can firms optimize customer conversion along the planned journey where external touchpoints dominate the customer journey? • How does the lexicon of customer journey research change when capturing alternative conceptualizations, such as engagement or non-purchase journeys? • What factors affect the degree of influence of external touchpoints on customer journeys? • What factors determine the influence of exogenous norms and practices on customers’ experiences of touchpoints? • How can firms mitigate against or leverage the influence of external touchpoints? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firms should harness engaged customers’ resource contributions and support their activities through touchpoint design • Existing journey analysis tools (e.g. service blueprints) offer only a limited understanding of more complex engagement journeys, and firms should adopt new methods • Degree of engagement should inform segmentation when developing a portfolio of journey designs and customer personas • Managers should be able to identify, monitor, and analyze the most salient exogenous touchpoints • Firms should track non-purchase and purchase journeys to reveal exogenous activity • Firms should identify key external touchpoints that influence customer perceptions of their offerings • Firms should seek to understand how exogenous activities change customers’ experiences of touchpoints and should proactively adapt touchpoints

Source(s): The above table was created by the authors

Table 4. Research and practical implications

Finally, increased connectivity within customer journeys and the influence of exogenous norms and practices also suggest important avenues for future research. There is a need to further explore the relative influence of firm-controlled and exogenous touchpoints on customer decision-making – for example, in non-purchase and purchase journeys. The influence of exogenous norms and practices on individual customer experiences of touchpoints should also be explored.

In summary, the present study raised issues that call for novel research into customer journeys and, perhaps, important existential questions about how we as service researchers understand and conceptualize these journeys. Our findings suggest a need to develop a more meaningful understanding of journey phases beyond traditional purchase journey approaches. As existing frameworks cannot capture engagement journeys, we must develop alternative models and a new lexicon. This endeavor will take journey research beyond its dogmatic focus on purchase journeys and pre- and post-purchase phases. To that end, future research might explore journey phases, such as *experiencing*, *sharing*, *augmenting*, and *influencing*, as more representative of the life cycle of the customer's relationship with a focal offering, perhaps enhancing the scope to allow the rethinking of our core understanding of relationships in marketing. Researchers can also seek a more nuanced understanding of the different types of journeys to identify subcategories of engagement journeys that call for different management approaches.

Managerial implications

Table 4 highlights several implications particularly relevant to service and customer experience designers and managers. Engaged customers exhibit heightened reactions and increased resource contributions at journey touchpoints controlled by organizations, underscoring the importance of managing engagement (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017; Venkatesan, 2017). Firms should seek to foster engaged customers' sense of belonging and ownership, to leverage their willingness to invest resources through triggers and participatory platforms throughout their journeys. While engaged customers might represent a notable premium in terms of share of wallet, profitability, revenue, and relationship growth compared to the average customer (Pansari and Kumar, 2017), they contribute to value creation not just through their purchases but also through the promotional and creative resources they can offer. Thus, firms need a better understanding of the nature of engagement journeys to harness such resources and offer touchpoints which support their investment.

However, the management of engagement journeys, as identified in our paper, is likely to pose a challenge for designers due to their complexity and prolonged nature, especially beyond firm-controlled touchpoints. Traditional service blueprint models may prove limited here, necessitating the adoption of methods such as ethnography and web analytics to monitor and track customer journeys outside firm-controlled touchpoints.

Engagement's significance in shaping customer journeys should inform segmentation strategies. By understanding a wider range of engagement dispositions and levels, there is potential for organizations to "segment customers accordingly and build distinct customer profiles" (Sim *et al.*, 2022, p. 1947). Firms are advised to create a diverse portfolio of journey designs that accommodate varying engagement levels and consider exogenous touchpoints. Incorporating customer-owned, social, and external touchpoints in persona development can enhance insights, contributing to organic visibility and guiding customer conversion along the journey (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of customer journeys, firms must look beyond touchpoints under their control. Balancing support for engaged customers with a non-intrusive approach to exogenous activity is crucial to avoid appearing inauthentic (Fournier

and Avery, 2011b; Gretry *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, managing engaged customers is challenging due to the risk of falling into the “best customer trap,” where increasing demands may lead to higher costs that potentially become a profit drain (Fournier and Avery, 2011a).

Finally, the interconnected nature of engaged customers’ journeys calls for attention to the influence of norms and practices of other customer journeys and external touchpoints. Social and external touchpoints significantly shape how customers interpret and evaluate interactions with a firm or brand (Alexander *et al.*, 2018). Firms must invest in understanding individual customers’ lifeworlds, monitoring both non-purchase and purchase journeys to reveal exogenous activities that influence norms and practices. These insights will enable the design of provider-owned touchpoints aligned with emerging norms and practices from exogenous touchpoints, such as brand communities (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020).

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