



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *Customer experience in the B2B area: The impact of age-related impressions*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/162135/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Lecoivre, L, Turner, R orcid.org/0000-0002-4139-7548 and Kuppelwieser, VG (2021) Customer experience in the B2B area: The impact of age-related impressions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58. 102216. ISSN 0969-6989

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102216>

© 2020 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved. This manuscript version is made available under the CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE B2B AREA: THE IMPACT OF AGE-RELATED IMPRESSIONS

Abstract

Services are dyadic experiences and many these experiences require personal relationships for service provision. The co-acting parties' early impressions form their unique expectations regarding, for example, appearance, behavior, and age. In a business-to-business (B2B) context, for example, younger employees might create a favorable impression in design-related tasks, while older employees might create a favorable impression in engineering tasks. The business partner subsequently contemplates the impression made by the individual's age (hereafter referred to as age impression) and ascribes certain competences to the individual.

This paper emphasizes the role of the others' age impressions in a working context. More specifically, a qualitative study's results highlight the impact of age impressions on service expectations and perceptions. The results identify several dimensions of age impressions that allow for adapting service personnel to a B2B context. This paper fills a void in the age-related marketing literature because it focuses on the others' age impression rather than the individual's perception. The paper also contributes to recent customer experience (CX) literature, as it emphasizes the context factors' role in the service encounter. Furthermore, this paper is one of the rare CX studies in a B2B context and enriches research in the CX's adaptability in such contexts.

Key words: customer experience; CX; customer journey; age; business-to-business; B2B; purchase

INTRODUCTION

Recent psychology and marketing literature discusses age self-perception (e.g., Jeste et al., 2010; Barak 1987), focusing on the link between the perceptions of a customer's age (i.e., the perceptions by the customer and toward others) and the client's cognitive and emotional responses (Ul Haq et al., 2015; Straker & Wrigley, 2016). Emotions are a key factor to succeed in business relationships (Estes et al., 2018; O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003) and they shape the customers' expectations (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014). As an integral part of the customer experience (CX) process (Wijaya et al., 2019), perceptions also configure the expectations (de Lange et al., 2016).

Moreover, the co-creating other's perceptions is one of the factors facilitating the quality of relationships (e.g., Elfenbein et al., 2018; Escuro et al., 2018; Winczewski et al., 2016). Emphasizing this interactive perspective for negotiation and cooperation, scholars recommend developing research "with regard to the economic outcomes of the negotiation" (Elfenbein et al. 2018, p. 88).

In marketing, findings on the perceptions of others are rare. Despite a number of studies on physical attractiveness (e.g., Kuppelwieser & Touzani 2016), specific characteristics of the others remain underresearched. More specifically, perceptions of age in a dyadic service experience have not been examined and research on its impression on others is scarce. Moreover, if researchers focus increasingly more on CX in a business-to-consumer (B2C) area, marketing literature appears to be less interested in studying this process in the business-to-business (B2B) relationships (Calo et al., 2014). Yet, the question of negative age stereotypes that might lead to discriminatory practices and difficult relationships is an accurate and important question for managers searching for skills and experience (Calo et al., 2014).

A customer's experience goes through a three-stage journey (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) that includes several touch points and interactions with the company and its employees (McColl-Kennedy et al, 2019). In the first pre-purchase phase, though, customers receive impressions and build their expectations on these impressions. Simply put, customers collect impressions and use them to create expectations. As a set of mental processes that relate to knowledge and knowledge integration (Yu, 2017), cognition and emotion build determinants in the customer's satisfaction (McColl-Kennedy et al, 2019). Emotional response is, thus, the reaction to a situation brought about by an outer influence, such as other individuals, groups, things or entities (Stout et al., 2013).

This paper sheds light on the pre-phase of CX and emphasizes the role of age impressions when forming expectations. Applying a qualitative research perspective, we identify the role of age in expectation forming in a B2B context. The B2B context allows connecting age impressions with underlying service or product expectations because trust and a relationship grow in later phases, leading to a real collaboration (Turner et al 2019, Hainglaise & Lecoeuvre, 2019). Our sets of interviews include different hierarchical levels and allow for a broad generalizability and increased credibility (Schreier, 2018).

This research contributes to the knowledge of CX in B2B settings. First, it focuses on how age influences the individual's impression throughout the customer's journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). As such, this paper contributes to the literature on others' perceptions and introduces age impression as an additional dimension in forming expectations. Second, this research highlights the importance of considering age as an experiencebuilding factor in business relationships. In doing so, the paper also contributes to recent CX literature, as it emphasizes the secondary factors' role in the service encounter. Third, this paper also fills a void in age-related

literature because it focuses on the other's age impression rather than the individual's perception. To conclude, this paper is one of the rare studies in a B2B context and enriches research in the adaptability of CX in such contexts.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. To start with, the manuscript provides a literature review on age impressions in service encounters. The second chapter describes the methodological approach. The next chapter focuses on results and the discussion of the results. The paper concludes with managerial and theoretical contributions and perspectives of future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dyadic interaction, perception, and impression

Psychologists emphasize subjective impressions as a clue for individual perceptions in dyadic interactions (e.g., Escuro et al., 2018). They emphasize the importance of perceptions during social interactions and call for analyzing individual behaviors and characteristics that have a major effect on the dyadic exchange's result (Elfenbein et al. 2018).

Indeed, interpersonal responsiveness, feelings, and emotions play a “key role in shaping the quality of one's social interactions and relationships” (Winczewski et al., 2016, p. 91). In marketing and in service marketing, researchers and practitioners have emphasized for many years that emotions are a key factor to succeed (Ribeiro & Prayag, 2018), for example, in product evaluation and in product advertisement (Estes et al., 2018). As part of CX and mental processes for emotions (e.g., De Mooij, 2019), expectations shape perceptions (Wijaya et al., 2019; de Lange et al., 2016) and perceptions are the link between expectations and CX in a dyadic experience (Wijaya et al., 2019).

Impression influences perception (Benthaus, 2016). As Dixon (2017, p. 34) explains, an individual's perception relates to the information extracted when he/she interacts with another person and it relates to “how (he/she) interprets the interaction, and how (the) interpretation influences (his) behavior.” People can manage impressions. According to Dixon, impression is “the conscious and unconscious process of individuals controlling how others perceive them”. Dixon’s (2017) study proves the impression *of others'* importance when forming a perception during an interaction.

Customer experiences in B2B contexts

Improving the CX can lead to increased profitability, not only in a B2C (e.g., Klaus, 2015, Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) but also in a B2B context, (e.g., Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2019; McColl-Kennedy et al, 2019; Biedenbach & Marell, 2010). Nevertheless, the concept is still underdeveloped and needs more theoretical expansion and empirical research in B2B settings (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 71) define CX as:

“a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial and social responses to a firm’s offerings during the customer’s entire purchase journey.”

Customers go through three stages—pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase—when they purchase an item and their experience follows that journey (e.g., Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the journey, the customer has several touch points with the supplier where the customer experiences his/her relationship with the supplier and its products (e.g., McColl-Kennedy et al, 2019). Kuppelwieser and Klaus (2020) confirmed CX’s multidimensional nature in the B2B context. Turner et al. (2019) also identified three dimensions in the relationship between a contractor and its customer and showed that trust can influence the result of interactions. As trust

is also a result of perception linked with emotions, positive emotions (Voorhees, 2017) and expectations (De Salles Canfield, 2017) must be developed very soon in the customer journey.

Age-related stereotypes

While the motivation for recognition declines with age, the motivation linked with challenges and pleasures at work do not evolve much (Calo et al., 2014, p. 96). This kind of “negative age stereotypes” can lead to “discriminatory practices and dysfunctional relationships,” as a manager could be reluctant to hire older workers and, in this manner, will lose their skills and experience (Calo et al., 2014, p. 106). The negative age stereotypes and their impact are more prevalent for older workers than for younger workers. Customers' age perception of suppliers and commercial people can be different; for instance, customers may perceive younger representatives as better at design and older ones as better at engineering; moreover, customers may perceive younger ones as better in the creative service industries and older ones as better in consulting.

Sticking with McColl-Kennedy et al.'s (2019) five dimensions, the age impression and the subsequently ascribed stereotype fuel the fear that the supplier will underperform. Discovering that the supplier is competent may be surprising and bring joy (Mc Coll-Kennedy et al., 2019). For example, Kuppelwieser and Touzani (2016) demonstrate that the employees' social attraction, including their physical attractiveness, influences the customers' perception during dyadic interactions. Marketer and service employees thus need to manage their attractiveness toward customers (Tanskanen and Aminoff, 2015).

Owing to their expectations and behavior resulting from their job attitude, young representatives can be perceived as less competent and older ones as less motivated (Yang et al., 2018). It is thus necessary to develop a “proper management of age-diverse employees” (Kumar

& Srivastava, 2018, p. 302). Such an approach requires managers and co-workers to ensure that the negative suppositions evolve and to work more deeply on management skills, notably by analyzing job expectations and evaluating individuals' skills and capabilities. This management style relates to a new culture based on these efforts (Kumar & Srivastava, 2018; Rozman et al., 2017).

METHODOLOGY

We chose an ontological framework rooted in constructivism, which suggests that each observer creates the inherent and intrinsic meaning of social phenomena (Given, 2008; Östlund et al., 2011). We followed an inductive approach to produce meanings from the data collected in order to identify patterns and relationships (Saunders et al., 2012). We applied a qualitative methodology mainly based on interviews.

We proceeded with a total of ten non-directive and semi-directive interviews (see Table 1). The sample is relevant and appropriate because we aim for a broad approach to age perception rather than narrowing the methodology to a specific context. The sample size was determined by theoretical/practical saturation (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Locke, 2001). Since our objective was theory building and not theory testing, we used purposeful sampling instead of random sampling (Charmaz, 2006; Locke, 2001). Purposeful sampling enabled us to find participants with relevant experiences for theory building about age perceptions. We therefore collected data from different respondents with diverging characteristics (e.g., age, gender) who work in a broad range of sectors and company sizes. We selected the companies by relying on a list of businesses belonging to an association of enterprises mostly based in France. We approached the companies with a request to interview managers and decisionmakers in purchasing. The responses differed, but all the participants had a significant role in the

purchasing process; a number of them also occupied the chief executive officer (CEO) role.

Table 1 provides an overview of the participants and their profiles.

We applied an interview method that enabled customers to tell their stories about their age perceptions (Morse, 2001, p. 4). The interviews lasted between 40 and 70 minutes and followed the principles of cognitive interviewing, owing to its relative superiority in retrieving historical data (Fisher & Geiselman, 2010; Memon & Bull, 1991). Interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview guide (Appendix 2) was created based on the literature review's results; for the main open-ended questions, we adopted the elements developed by McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019), i.e. value creation essentials (resources, activities, context, interactions, and customer role), reasoning responses, and emotions. The guide also included open-ended questions to describe the company/institution and its purchase process. The interviews started with general questions and became more specific after a while. We particularly identified situations in which age stereotypes appeared to occur in the past and encouraged the respondent to describe his/her expectations and experiences in one or two of these situations. The interview concluded with a value description of the focal situation.

For the data analysis, we clustered the elements collected using codes (Appendix 1) to generate categories (Miles et al., 2013) ensuring transparency, objectivity, and legitimacy of results (Myers, 2019, Bluhm et al., 2011). Indeed, using the content analysis method, we identified trends by applying nine factors or categories—age, empathy, motivation, process, technical and managerial experience, knowledge, competences, innovation, and decision—that resulted from the combination of 98 elements or codes (see the list of codes in Appendix 1). We

finally triangulated our findings with secondary data from each company, such as purchase order lists, supplier lists, quality reports, requests for modifications, and professional journal articles.

===== Table 1 about here =====

FINDINGS

Process and personal emotions

At the start of the interview, many of the participants were almost ashamed to admit the impact of age on their decisions. Depending on the sector of activity, this impact differs. Technical-driven companies apply very strict processes in which audits and evaluations prevail and the process avoids cronyism. The participants admit their emotions, their affect, a need for sympathy, and a real relationship with the supplier—from the negotiation until the completion of the contract. Moreover, the participants point out that the relationship must continue after completion and delivery. Here we find that the results of our analysis of CX in the B2B area can be reconciled with the theory developed by authors writing about project marketing: Experience with the supplier and long-term relationships build trust (Turner et al., 2019). For instance, a purchase manager explains:

“Confidence based on experience, long-term relationships and technical support appropriate to our needs, our expectations, and our profession—that's what makes the difference!”

These results underline McColl-Kennedey et al.'s (2019) conclusions on discrete emotions at touchpoints, such as resources, activities, context, interactions, and customer role. Indeed, the interviewees spoke a lot about capital of sympathy, and empathy; three quarters stated they could not work with an unfriendly and pretentious person.

If many companies follow a structured process or organization for their purchases, these processes and standards cannot replace personal feelings. Of course, internal trainings contribute to forgetting the emotions in the negotiations as pointed out by a respondent; however, she also recognizes that personal opinions and feelings remain.

“These training courses avoid cronyism but do not erase your own personality, your own feelings.”

In conclusion, for almost half of the respondents, the decision to purchase is collegial; for them, the collegial decision to purchase can be a means to minimize the effect of personal emotion and perception on the decision during their customer journey.

Trust and customer journey

Respondents are not precise regarding age groups; instead, we mostly find an estimate of the age group that is likely to reduce their confidence. In fact, the respondents—the purchase director, the CEO of a company selling hearing solutions, the marketing director, and the person responsible for maintenance—think that a salesperson under 30 is *“too young,” “young,” “not mature enough,”* and that a salesperson beyond 50 years is *“too old.”*

If young people do not inspire trust due to a lack of experience and of technical and/or trade knowledge, the people who are considered too old also inspire apprehension owing to a potential lack of motivation or knowledge of new technologies. In both cases, demonstrating a professional ear, a real motivation, and a real commitment to the proposed solutions—and proposing innovative solutions—is the answer to build confidence. (Turner & Müller 2004; Turner et al 2019).

Ning et al. (2019) investigate how ambivalence can cause the customer to trust the contractor in certain areas and simultaneously distrust him/her in other areas. However, the question here is to understand in which elements the customer do not trust owing to the age of

the suppliers' representative. Coincidentally, the interviewees express the lack of trust in the final results—in success. With more details, they reveal an absence of confidence in: technical support, innovative ideas adapted to their needs, a potential lack of understanding their trade, and an inadequate follow-up. Consequently, the interviewees are afraid of a bad experience; they fear a bad journey with their supplier, i.e. with the sales representative. According to researchers working on trust (e.g., Pappas, 2016), trust is directly linked to the perceived risk that influences buying behavior. Furthermore, trust is one of brand reputation's determinants that, together with “the relationship to customers' social identity” and “the alignment of the firms' goals with customers' goals” (Bolton, 2019, p. 27), proves to be relevant for a successful customer experience. To conclude, firms must innovate to build or re-build trust (Bolton, 2019).

The company's age versus the company representative's age

For a third of those interviewed, the company's age and the shared history precede the age of the salesperson they face. For instance, the purchase director in a large enterprise declares: *“The company's reputation precedes that of the new commercial enterprise.”* Of course, the respondents mention quality (cited 14 times), deadline (8 times), and price (9 times) as factors that influence a decision, but above all they expressed the need for collaboration, support, professionalism, and experience in the long term. Moreover, reliability and credibility appear to be an indisputable prerequisite; the interviewees hereby confirm the studies of Turner et al. (2019) and of Turner and Müller (2004) who underline the importance of the communication and collaboration between the customer and its supplier, reinforcing the unavoidable reliability.

Lastly, we chose the following quote to illustrate the ambiguity expressed by the majority of respondents: They acknowledge the role of age in the purchase decision and in the CX via personal relationships, but as the CEO (design and modeling) concedes:

“I do not judge the quality of my supplier through its sales representative; I judge the company. I call upon a company, not an individual!”

A first impression to manage

We deem it important to emphasize that the apprehension regarding age is only a matter of seniority, a first impression, a feeling at first contact (in the respondents' own words), and this impression can fade very quickly if the opposite person understands this issue and acts accordingly. For example, a purchasing manager says:

“On a first contact, age can definitely influence me and alter my decision. I can worry about a young person, a lack of experience that would diminish the technical knowledge and the ability to understand our expectations and offer us the best solution. Even if we know the company and the quality of the services provided, I recognize that I have seniority.

The technico-commercial colleagues should then make sure that I forget his young age by listening actively, professionally and by allowing the young person to show me his technical knowledge.

Similarly, someone too old (close to retirement) can make me worry about a lack of motivation, responsiveness, and of innovative ideas. Here again my first impression can evolve if I see this person's dynamism, his understanding, and that he is interested in our company and our expectations.

I experienced a number of situations like this: After wasting time to gauge the situation, we can rectify it!”

As authors who specialize in emotion in the psychology area, Bar et al. (2006, p. 269) state that “first impressions of people's personalities are often formed by using the visual appearance of their faces.” Furthermore, the speed at which these impressions are shaped is very important. As the authors point out, it is therefore critical “for understanding social interactions”.

Besides, Holmes (2016, p. 285) confirm that first impressions are critical to “judgments of threat as well as trustworthiness.” Despite being called first, these impressions will last long into a relationship and can determine the future interactions between the customer and the supplier.

Age perception and trade

Moreover, the buyers' feelings and impressions depend on the sector of activity as a senior design official acknowledges:

“I feel more in confidence when I have someone older due to his or her reputation and experience. I think I trust older people better when it is a question of managing the projects, delivering the complete solution (a concept car, for instance), and being flexible during a request of changes by a young designer but still keeping within the budget and maintaining quality and time! Our models are required for show cars; there is no possibility to postpone. However, for the designer I think I will prefer a younger person owing to younger people's enthusiasm, their passion, their innovative ideas—they don't censure themselves”.

However, two people engaged in medical fields state that age does not influence them at all; they deal with historic suppliers who are regularly audited through a quality system.

Nevertheless, if newcomers present themselves, they must be very reliable and credible—with the support of their company—and the sales representatives in question must have a level of higher education, which stands out as soon as they express themselves. If age does not play a role in this instance, the respondents still have a personal opinion about the salesperson's profile.

According to the majority, the influence of personal feelings will depend on the type of purchasing; thus, the CX will depend on it.. For example, the CEO (design and modeling) states:

“For bolts, for example, a phone call is enough. But for training our staff, for instance, we need a personal meeting, affinity, empathy. [...] We must be reassured about the course of the training and the person's ability to understand and follow, to commit even after the end of the service”.

DISCUSSION

The majority of the interviewees declare that they have an a priori negative impression in front of commercial people who are either too young or too old; they say that they will not trust this person due to their age impression. However, this first impression can change very quickly if the commercial person is open, empathetic, demonstrates an ability to listen, and understand their

needs. This salesperson or seller must be professional and competent. If he or she is innovative and shows technical knowledge, the bad impression fades to increase confidence.

A number of authors and practitioners have developed models on the customer journey in B2C (e.g., Roscoe, 2001; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Here, the customer had a very positive experience with the supplier or the commercial people; consequently, the customer will support them and work with them again. These stages encompass the periods within a service experience defined by Voorhees et al. (2017): (1) pre-core service encounter, (2) core service encounter, and (3) post-core service encounter. The content analysis of the interviews enabled us to extend the models in order to theoretically model the customer journey in B2B situations, with a focus on reducing the influence of the age-related impressions.

As customers view experience holistically (Bolton, 2019), our results present factors in a holistic perspective, able to reduce the customers' potential negative impression due to the age of the commercial people. We can observe that trust is central and directly linked not only with the buying decision (Pappas, 2016) but also with future relationships, as the customer journey goes through “myriad touch points in multiple channels” (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) in the past, present, and future. Trust is definitely a strategic factor of CX (Bolton, 2019) and all the factors influencing the trust perception must be integrated by the company “to create a coherent experience” (Bolton, 2019).

As we discussed before, the following factors are likely to reduce the bad age impression (too young or too old) during the CX; this bad impression, considered by authors as a stereotype or a bias in working relationships (Kumar & Srivastava, 2018; Calo et al., 2014), can provoke discrimination and dysfunctionalities during the customer journey and, consequently, also during

the decision-making process. We noted that the respondents did not speak about the signs of old age, such as a walking stick or a hearing aid, that could reinforce their impression of the age.

Furthermore, the ageing of the workforce is acknowledged as one of this century's prevailing trends in developed countries and “middle-aged and older employees can face important adaptive challenges in the workplace” (Kumar & Srivastava, 2018, p. 302). Therefore, management must make efforts to communicate and let employees understand this risk such that the employees can improve themselves; furthermore, management must make efforts to develop a new culture (Rozman et al., 2017). First of all, empathy and openness are important factors to reduce this bad impression. Employees' empathic behavior is critical to service quality (Iglesias et al., 2019; Varca, 2009). The individual's and the company's managerial and technical experience is also helpful. In a B2B context, organizations definitely improve the understanding of CX and “consequently enhance the experiences of their employees, their customers and other connected actors” (Zolkiewski et al., 2017) for success. At that point, the commercial people need to be really motivated and the customer needs to be engaged during the entire journey. Certainly, the effort in the engagement, in the understanding, in the supplier's openness undoubtedly impacts on CX (see, for instance, Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017, who add to this effort of the supplier as well as the customer's determination to achieve overall satisfaction). Furthermore, this is a long-term endeavor during all the stages of the customer journey (Wittel et al., 2019).

Equally important to reduce the biases, the knowledge and competences relating to the trade are definitively significant; the suppliers' competencies and knowledge undeniably generate memorable CXs; however, memorable CXs do not only relate to the trade but also encompass skills, attitudes, and behavioral competencies (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2017).

Importantly, the people involved should be innovative: The suppliers should be able to present creative ideas and solutions to their customers. Furthermore, respondents are ready to collaborate and co-create innovation with their suppliers (e.g., Fernandes & Remelhe, 2015) for a better and richer experience.

Moreover, the processes within the two parts and notably a decision-making process involving collegial decisions within the customer's company should be applied. The supplier should be aware of this process and should be involved in it. Actually, "customer experience is the aggregate of feelings, perceptions and attitudes formed during the entire process of decision making and consumption chain involving an integrated series of interaction with people, objects, processes and environment" (Jain et al., 2017, p. 649).

As Jain et al. (2017, p. 642) underline it: "Customer experience is regarded as a holistic interactive process, facilitated through cognitive and emotional clues, moderated by customer and contextual characteristics, resulting into unique and pleasurable/un-pleasurable memories." The provided conceptual model enriched the theory of CX; it responds to the need to develop research in CX in the B2B area (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2018), providing a holistic view and a characterization of the determinant factors to reduce the first impression related to the age of the suppliers' representative. Moreover, this paper fills a void in age-related literature because it focuses on the other's age impression instead of the individual's perception.

The customer journey must be managed and this management of the CX becomes a priority for organizations (Wittel et al., 2019). This exploratory study shows that top managers in supply organizations should train not only young representatives but also older people to adopt attitudes and behaviors in accordance with the model provided here in order to influence the customer at different touchpoints. Besides, the customers and the buyer should be able to control

their personal feelings notwithstanding the suppliers' age to assure the best decision possible and an efficient decision-making process in the long term. Furthermore, the customers and the buyer should massively adopt collegial decisions to reduce the risk of error or cronyism.

The study is built on a qualitative methodology; even if the analysis is rich and provide credible conclusions with regard to different profiles and trades, we interviewed ten people interested in the topic. We probably induce a bit of bias in interviewing people about age impressions. People can unconsciously introduce social desirability bias as well (e.g. Ganster et al. 1983) or reluctance to express their beliefs clearly and frankly. While quantitative research tries to identify the impact of social desirable bias (e.g., Farrell and Oczkowski 2009), qualitative research has not yet discussed this challenge in depth. As our work might suffer from this bias, we encourage future research to replicate our findings. Additional quantitative studies might help carve out the main effects and the included biases.

We invite researchers to continue working on this topic. Further research could test the model in organizations based on complementary qualitative approaches, such as tests, observation, new interviews, design thinking, etc. We will also continue interviewing people in line with this new model. Moreover, a quantitative study is needed to check the robustness of our model and the presented conclusions.

We only interviewed people in France, even if a few of them work for international companies and two interviewees are not French native but live in France. In the future, we should therefore first of all conduct research in the rest of Europe, then in North America and South America, and finally in Asia. This will give us an interesting comparison; particularly, the question of age should be different in the various countries, notably owing to cultural differences. Furthermore, cultural differences impact on management and decision-making

processes (Tung & Verbeke, 2010, based on Hofstede cross cultural research, 1980). In addition, further research will enable scholars to examine the model's real support.

Only one male respondent evoked gender (female, male) when discussing the impression in front of a commercial representative. We encourage academics to deepen their research on the gender question too; the questions of age and gender could be addressed together.

Finally, this paper is a conceptual paper at an exploratory stage. We intend to deepen this research and we hope that researchers and practitioners will also undertake to deepen their work on this very interesting and important topic.

References

- Bar, M., Neta, M., & Linz, H. (2006). Very first impressions. *Emotion*, 6(2), pp. 269–278.
- Barak, B. (1987). Cognitive Age: A New Multidimensional Approach to Measuring Age Identity. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 25(2): 109-128.
- Bekk M., Spörrle M., Landes M., Moser K. (2016) Traits grow important with increasing age: customer age, brand personality and loyalty *Journal of Business Economics* Volume 87, Issue 4, pp 511–531
- Benthaus J., Risius M., Beck R. (2016) Social media management strategies for organizational impression management and their effect on public perception *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems* Volume 25, Issue 2, July 2016, Pages 127-139.
- Bharwani S., Jauhari V. (2017). An Exploratory Study of Competencies Required to Cocreate Memorable Customer Experiences in the Hospitality Industry. *Hospitality Marketing and Consumer Behavior - Creating Memorable Experiences*. Edited By Vinnie Jauhari. Apple Academic Press, Inc., Taylor Francis Group, USA.
- Biedenbach G.; Marell A. (2010) The impact of customer experience on brand equity in a business-to-business services setting, *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 17, 6, 446–458
- Bigot, O. (2011) Passations papier/crayon et informatisées : quelle influence sur les stratégies d'autoprésentation ? Thèse validée CRPCC EA 1285 - Centre de Recherches en Psychologie Cognition et Communication.
- Bolton (2019). *Innovating the Customer Experience*. *Handbook of Advances in Marketing in the Area of Disruption, Essays in Honor of Jagdish N. Sheth*, Edited by Parvatiyar A. & Sisodia R., Sage Publications Inc., California

Bluhm D.J.; Harman W. ; Lee T.W. ; Mitchell T.R. (2011), “Qualitative Research in Management: A Decade of Progress”, *Journal of Management Studies* Volume 48, Issue 8, p. 1866-1891

Calo T.J.; Patterson M.M.; Decker W.H. (2014), Age-Related Work Motivation Declines: Myth or Reality?, *Journal of Organizational Psychology* vol. 14(1), pp. 96-110.

Colquitt J.A., LePine J.A., Zapata C.P. Wild R.E. (2012) Trust in Typical and High-Reliability Contexts: Building and Reacting to Trust among Firefighter Academy of Management Journal Vol. 54, No. 5 <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2006.0241>

De Salle Canfield D., Basso K. (2017). Integrating satisfaction and cultural background in the customer journey: A method development and test *Journal of International Consumer Marketing* Vol 29, Issue 2, pp. 104-117

De Lange F., Heilbron M., Kok P. (2018). How Do Expectations Shape Perception? *Journal for Trends in Cognitive Sciences* Volume 22, Issue 9, September 2018, Pages 764-779

De Keyser, A, Lemon, KN, Klaus P & Keiningham, TL. (2015). A Framework for understanding and managing the customer experience. Marketing Science Institute Working Paper Series. Report No 15-121. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.

Dixon M. (2017) Personality, person perception, and impression management: does impression efficacy and motivation predict change in personality presentation? Thesis - RUcore: Rutgers University Community Repository <https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T3445Q60>

Elfenbein, H. A., Eisenkraft, N., Curhan, J. R., & DiLalla, L. F. (2018). On the relative importance of individual-level characteristics and dyadic interaction effects in negotiations: Variance partitioning evidence from a twins study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(1), 88–96

Escudero, V., Lee, M., & Friedlander, M. L. (2018). Dyadic interaction analysis. In E. Brauner, M. Boos, & M. Kolbe (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of group interaction analysis* (p. 45–67). Cambridge University Press.

Estes Z., Brotto L., Bussaca B. (2018). The value of art in marketing: An emotion-based model of how artworks in ads improve product evaluations *Journal of Business Research* Volume 85, April 2018, Pages 396-405

Farrell, M. A., & Oczkowski, E. (2009). Service worker customer orientation, organisation/job fit and perceived organisational support. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 17 (2), 149–167

Fernandes T. & Remelhe P. (2015). How to engage customers in co-creation: customers' motivations for collaborative innovation. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*. Volume 24, 2016 - Issue 3-4, pp. 311-326 |

Given L.M., 2008. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Volume 1, Sage Publications, inc., USA

Ganster, D. C., Hennessey, H. W., & Luthans, F. (1983). Social desirability response effects: Three alternative models. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26 (2), 321-331

Hainglaise, J.C. and Lecoivre, L. (2019) *Les Projets Collaboratifs - Etudes de cas, Modèle dynamique et Facteurs clefs de succès*, Editions Universitaires Européennes, Paris

Halpern A., Zioga I., Shankleman M., Lindsen J., Pearce M. T., Bhattachary J. (2017). That note sounds wrong! Age-related effects in processing of musical expectation *Brain and Cognition* Volume 113, Pages 1-9

Hofstede, G. 1980. *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Holmes M. (2016). You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a First Impression? First Encounters and Face-Based Threat Perception *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Vol 1, Iss 4, pp. 285–302.

Iglesias O., Markovic S., Rialp J. (2019) How does sensory brand experience influence brand equity? Considering the roles of customer satisfaction, customer affective commitment, and employee empathy. *Journal of Business Research*. Vol 96, pp. 343-354.

Jain, R., Aagja, J. and Bagdare, S. (2017), Customer experience – a review and research agenda, *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 642-662.

Jeste D.V.; Depp C.A., Vahia I.V. (2010). Successful cognitive and emotional aging. *World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 9(2), 78–84.

Keynes, JM. (2017/1936). *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions.

Krishna A.; Schwarz N. (2014). Sensory marketing, embodiment, and grounded cognition: A review and introduction *Journal of Consumer Psychology* Volume 24, Issue 2, April 2014, Pages 159-168.

Kumar R.; Srivastava U.R. (2018). Ageing Workforce: Negative Age Stereotypes and their Impact on Older Workers, *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* Vol. 8 Issue 5(1), pp. 302-312.

Kuppelwieser V.G., Klaus P. (in press). Measuring customer experience quality: The EXQ scale revisited *Journal of Business Research*

Kuppelwieser V.G., Touzani M. (2016). Attraction during the service encounter: examining the other side of the coin *Journal of Services Marketing* Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 504-518.

Kwon, I. and Suh, T. (2005), Trust, commitment and relationships in supply chain management: a path analysis, *Supply Chain Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 26-33.

Lecoeuvre, L & Deshayes, P. (2006). From marketing to project management. *Project Management Journal*, 37(5): 103-112.

Lemon, KN & Verhoef, PC (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80 (November) pp. 69-96.

Lochman J.E., Dodge K.A. (1998) Distorted perceptions in dyadic interactions of aggressive and nonaggressive boys: Effects of prior expectations, context, and boys' age *Development and Psychopathology* Volume 10, Issue 3, pp. 495-512

McColl-Kennedy J., Mohamed Zaki M., Lemon K.N., Urmetzer F., Neely A. (2018). Gaining Customer Experience Insights That Matter, *Journal of Service Research*, 1-19

Miller C., Cardinal L.B., and Glick W.H., (1997). Retrospective Reports In Organizational Research: A Reexamination Of Recent Evidence. *Academy of Management Journal* Vol. 40, N° 1
<https://doi.org/10.5465/257026>

Miles, M.B.; Huberman A.M.; Saldaña J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook and the Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Sage Publishing Ltd.

Myers M.D. (2019), *Qualitative Research in Business and Management - Third Edition*, Sage Publishing Ltd, London.

Ning, Y, Feng, M, Feng, J & Liu, X. (2019). Understanding clients' experience of trust and distrust in dwelling fit-out projects: An ambivalence approach. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, 26(3): 444-461

O'Shaughnessy J., O'Shaughnessy N. J. (2003) *The Marketing Power of Emotion* Oxford University Press, NY.

Östlund, U., Kidd, L., Wengström, Y., & Rowa-Dewar, N. (2011). Combining qualitative and quantitative research within mixed method research designs: a methodological review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 48, 3, 369-383.

Pappas N. (2016). Marketing strategies, perceived risks, and consumer trust in online buying behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. Vol 29, pp. 92-103.

Ribeiro M.A., Girish Prayag (2018). Perceived quality and service experience: mediating effects of positive and negative emotions *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management* Volume 28, 2019 - Issue 3 Pages 285-305

Roscoe D. (2001). The customer knowledge journey *Journal of Financial Services Marketing* Volume 5, Issue 4, pp 314–318.

Rožman M.; Sonja Treven S.; Čančer V. (2017). “Motivation and Satisfaction of Employees in the Workplace”, *Business Systems Research*, Vol. 8 No. 2 pp. 14-25.

Straker, K. and Wrigley, C. (2016), "Emotionally engaging customers in the digital age: the case study of “Burberry love”", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 276-299.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., Thornhill, A., (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students* 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited.

Schreier, (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, Sage Publications Ltd, London

Smith, A. (2012/1776). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions.

Söderlund M. & Sagfossen S. (2017). The consumer experience: The impact of supplier effort and consumer effort on customer satisfaction *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. Volume 39, pp. 219-229

Stout P.A., Leckenby J.D. (2013) The Nature of Emotional Response to Advertising: A Further Examination. *Journal of Advertising*, Vol 17, 1988 - Iss 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1988.10673130>

Tanskanen, K. and Aminoff, A. (2015), "Buyer and supplier attractiveness in a strategic relationship – a dyadic multiple-case study", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 50 (October), pp. 128-141.

Turner, JR, Lecoeuvre, L, Sankaran, S, & Er, M. (2019). Marketing for the Project: Project Marketing by the Contractor. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 12(1): 211-227.

Turner, JR & Müller, R. (2004). Communication and cooperation on projects between the project owner as principal and the project manager as agent. *The European Management Journal*, 22(3), 327-336.

Tung, R., Verbeke, A. (2010) "Beyond Hofstede and GLOBE: Improving the quality of cross-cultural research". *Journal of International Business Studies*, 41, 1259–1274.

Ul Haq, N, Raja, A, Nosheen, S; & Muhammad, F. (2018). Determinants of client satisfaction in web development projects from freelance marketplaces. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 11(3): 583-607.

Varca, P. (2009); "Emotional empathy and front line employees: does it make sense to care about the customer?" *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 51-56

Voorhees C.M., Fombelle P.W., Gregoire Y., Bone S., Gustafsson S.A., Sousa R., Walkowiak T. (2017) Service encounters, experiences and the customer journey: Defining the field and a call to expand our lens *Journal of Business Research*, Vol 79, pp. 269-280

Wijaya I., Rai A., Hariguna T. (2019). The impact of customer experience on customer behavior intention use in social media commerce, an extended expectation confirmation model: An empirical study *Management Science Letters* Volume 9 Issue 12 pp. 2009-2020

Winczewski L. A., Bowen J. D., Collins N.L. (2016). Is Empathic Accuracy Enough to Facilitate Responsive Behavior in Dyadic Interaction? Distinguishing Ability From Motivation *Psychological Science*; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615624491>

Witell L., Kowalkowski C., Perks H., Raddats C., Schwabe M., Benedettini O., Burton J. (In press; 2019). Characterizing customer experience management in business markets *Journal of Business Research*; <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.08.050>

Yang W., Johnson S., Niven K. (2018) “That's not what I signed up for!” A longitudinal investigation of the impact of unmet expectation and age in the relation between career plateau and job attitude *Journal of Vocational Behavior* Volume 107, Pages 71-85

Yu, MC. (2017). Customer Participation and Project Performance: A Moderated-Mediation Examination. *Project Management Journal*, 48(4): 8-21

Zolkiewski, J., Story, V., Burton, J., Chan, P., Gomes, A., Hunter-Jones, P., O'Malley, L., Peters, L., Raddats, C. and Robinson, W. (2017), Strategic B2B customer experience management: the importance of outcomes-based measures, *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 172-18

TABLE 1. PROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWEES AND OF THEIR COMPANIES

Position in the company	Sector / trade / activities	Company size	Type of purchase
CEO	Wood trade	SME	Exotic wood
Co-director	Office real estate	Micro-enterprise	Technical maintenance / IT / air conditioning / electricity / decoration / furniture
Pediatrician	Doctor partners' office	Micro-enterprise	Medical supplies / services maintenance / cleaning
Purchase director	Group specialist for electricity and gas	Large e-commerce	Works (pipeline, trenches, repairs, etc.) / electrical and gas equipment
Purchase manager	Industrial sector (transformation of steel parts for construction, mechanics, and automotive)	SME	Steel parts / sub-assemblies / subcontracts / maintenance
CEO	Hearing solutions	SME	Consulting, hearing products, medical supplies
President of the R&D and design department	International car manufacturer	SME belonging to a large enterprise (large international group)	Design / conception / 3D modeling / models / prototypes / parts / colors / clay models
CEO and project manager for large projects such as concept cars	Design and modeling, prototyping for different sectors, mainly car manufacturers or submarine manufacturers.	SME	Raw materials (resins, modeling bars, wood, clay, paints, metal bars, plastics, composites) Machines Subcontracting (rapid prototyping) Services (digitalization, 3D modeling)
Marketing Director	Petroleum sector; distribution of petroleum products	Large enterprise	Rewards / advertising gifts / events / Internet sites
Responsible for maintenance	Chemicals sector	Large enterprise Worldwide	Material and equipment (bolts, seals, pumps, etc.) for maintenance and servicing

APPENDIX 1: CODES

Codes	Codes (cont.)
Transaction amounts	Experience of the supplier / historical supplier / lived experience with the supplier
Activity area	Passion
Prices – Budget	Complexity
price requests - requests for offers	Performance
process	Professionalism - technical knowledge
Specifications	Understanding of markets / of client business / of needs
Market research - sourcing	Skills - technicality - competence of the customer profession
Negotiation - compromise	Capacity / resources
Decision - validation - choice	Results / success
Collegial decision	Confidence / lack of confidence
Cronyism	Apprehension / bad a priori / bad impression
Assessment / selection / audits	1st impression / a priori / 1st approach
Value creation	Want to work with
Intelligence in the solutions offered	Relationship / long term relationship / relationship capital
Profitability	Affect
Feasibility	Education level / language
Competition	Age / young / old / too old / too young
Commercial	Age of the company
Supplier - service provider	Flexibility / responsiveness / flexibility
Partner - friends	Geographic proximity
Team - expert	Accessibility
Knowledge - we know each other well - we have known each other for a long time	Face2face
Management	Joint work / Collaboration
Honesty	Support
Sympathy / empathy	Long term
Listening / openness / humility	Reliability / credibility / reputation
Deadline - quality	

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW TOPICS

Chapter	Topic
General questions	Industry sector and size Company organization Participant's role in the organization
Purchasing	Purchasing organization Purchasing process Decisionmakers
Respondent's role	Respondent's relationship with suppliers Participant's description of a customer/supplier journey General decision factors Individual decision factors
Age	The role of first age impressions The role of stereotypes Age impressions in different customer contacts The influence of age in the decision process
Value creation	Resources Activities Context Interactions Customer and supplier roles