Co-Creation of Values for Customized, High-End, Sustainable Furniture: A Market Exploration

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ABSTRACT,

In the creation of new products or services, it is an essential responsibility for marketers to generate value for customers. With the rapid and ever-changing customers' preferences in recent years and the rising demand for premium sustainable products, the market for customized, high-end, sustainable furniture is being explored. The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on customer experience and attempts to understand how and which intangible elements influenced the creation of customer value, through customer's involvement in the design and purchase of their own unique furniture. Our research case setting is designed based on existing frameworks such as Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing and result are referred to existing frameworks such as Smith & Colgate (2007). Drawing from the results, participants' professional background and interest in the arts and innovation is the biggest driver for designing and purchasing this furniture. Meanwhile, their personal aesthetics, hobbies, upbringing, and experiences contribute to the creation of values. The paper concludes which customers and certain values must be generated and prioritized when entering the market of customized furniture.

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Keywords

Customization, Customer Experience, Experiential Marketing, Value Creation

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been acclimatization for businesses towards the mass customization of products. With the breakdown of the stable mass market of yesterday, continuous systematic changes within companies are essential. Not only are customers becoming more difficult to generalize due to increasingly diverse markets, but also how the individual wants and needs of each customer are more prone to change (Hart, 1995). The adoption of mass customization as an organizational strategy has risen as a direct response to the turbulence that has shattered the mass market. (Urban *et al*., 2022).

According to Hart (1995), mass customization can be defined as the ability to provide your customers with anything they want profitably, at any given time and place. With the possibility of customizing purchases, it becomes crucial for businesses to highlight the importance of efficient contact with customers throughout all the activities related to product development (Urban *et al*., 2022). With the growing demand for high-quality service, the concept of customer experience has become increasingly essential. Through an experience-centric view, Schmitt (1999) suggests how Experience Marketing may deliver sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational value to customers. Considering aspects that refer to the emotional and irrational side of customer behavior becomes necessary as this side accounts for the whole experience coming from the set of interactions between a company and its customers compared to the customer's rational side (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Henceforth, an experiential perspective that considers the subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria during consumption must be recognized (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982).

1.1 Problem Statement

Though the growth of literature on customer experience and customer value has significantly increased over the last decade, there is still very little research on what creates the effectiveness of customer journey design from a consumer perspective and how it influences variables of consumer behavior. The existence of the classical economic theory of consumers being logical thinkers that commit purchases through rational problem-solving should not discourage the importance of exploration of intangible elements driven by emotional value as influenced by the developments of literature covering new streams of Experiential Marketing (e.g. Bolton *et al.* 2014; Gentile, Spiller, and Noci 2007).

To support the previous point, customers often encounter frustrating experiences with service providers which leads to lower customer satisfaction and lost revenue for respectful businesses (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Therefore, to improve customer satisfaction, service providers must gain insight on the dynamic and subjective experiences of individual touchpoints. (Meyer and Schwager, 2007). Such experiences contribute a crucial role in determining the customer's preferences, which in turn influences their purchasing decisions.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to explore the concept of customer experience and the roles of intangible elements when purchasing customized products. The case of sustainable luxury furniture is interesting to investigate as the market for it grows significantly over the last few years and is predicted to continue to grow exponentially up to the year 2028 (Verified Market Research, 2022). With the booming of the real estate industry as well as the increase in the standard of living, the demand for luxury and premium furniture is increasing. Additionally, the increase in government investment in infrastructural development encourages the growth of this market (Verified Market Research, 2022). Through quantitative and qualitative methods, this paper attempts to understand the consumption values of various groups of customers that may influence their choices, engagement, and journey when purchasing customized products of this kind. The specific roles of consumption value in the co-creation of high-end customer design-based furniture will be investigated and analyzed. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer the following question: **"How and which intangible elements affect customers' experience when purchasing customized furniture?"**

Furthermore, these experiential components may help and benefit organizations with the possibility of providing valuable differentiated services for various types of customers. This can be achieved through designing a competitive value proposition design for their business as customer value propositions should be defined from the customer perspective as it is an essential aspect of competitive advantage (Anderson *et al*., 2006). According to Rintamäki & Kuusela (2007), customers who are driven by experiential aspects of shopping appreciate retailers that create emotional value. In addition to that, using visual, olfactory, sensory, and gustatory aspects during shopping may be an effective way to create emotional customer value (Rintamäki & Kuusela 2007).

To further support this statement, the value obtained from the series of interactions between the customers and the company holds the potential to influence market share, sales, and profitability as well as a brand's equity and customer equity (Gentile, 2007).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, the existing theories that we will be referring to for our studies are explained. Most theories in this paper discuss experiential marketing and customers' value generated through holistic experiences.

2.1 Customer Value and Experience

With the increase of literature on Customer Experience, the significance of the experience factor in the success of organizations is becoming more evident (Gentile *et al*, 2007). The customer experience aims to create a unique, pleasant, and memorable experience (Jain *et al*, 2017). The concept of customer experience is still relatively new, and various attempts have been made to define and conceptualize it in order to explore its connections with different factors. However, there is currently no agreement or consensus on its exact nature and definitions (Jain *et al*, 2016). According to Shaw and Ivens (2005), The Customer Experience derives from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or a part of its organization, which incites a reaction. As the experience is strictly personal, it is becoming necessary to consider aspects that refer to the emotional, rational, sensorial, physical, and spiritual side of customer behavior, as it accounts for the whole experience as well as in determining the customer's preferences, that results in their purchasing decisions (Schmitt,1999; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Gentile *et al,* 2007).

This paper will be referring to Gentile *et al.* (2007) general framework to understand the interactions and experiences exchanged by consumers and the company. Smith and Colgate (2007) identify values such as functional/instrumental value, experiential/hedonic value, symbolic/ expressive value, and cost/sacrifice value) and sources of value (i.e. information, products, interaction, environment, ownership/possession transfer). Furthermore, Smith and Colgate (2007) framework discusses further self-oriented values such as excellence (quality); utilitarian value and aesthetics (beauty); sensory value as well as other-oriented values such as status (impression management); desired value, and esteem (possessions) which concerns possession value*)*.
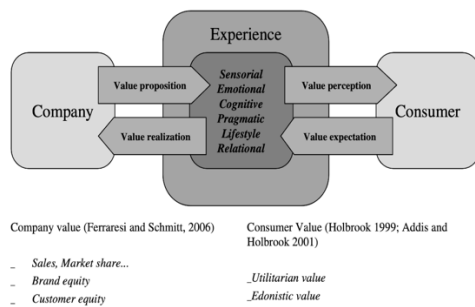

Figure 1. Company and Consumer Interaction (Smith & Colgate 2007)

2.2 Experiential Marketing (Schmitt 1999/Holbrook 2001)

In this paper, we will mostly refer to the strategic framework for Experiential Marketing of Bernd Schmitt (1999). It has 4 main key characteristics; a focus on customer experiences, an emphasis on consumption as a holistic experience, customers are rational and emotional beings, and methods are eclectic instead of analytical (Schmitt,1999). Experiential marketers believe that consumers are concerned with achieving pleasurable experiences as they are rational and emotional human beings. Schmitt (1999), suggests that there are five different types of strategic experiential modules (SEMs) that can be created by marketers:

Sensory experiences (SENSE) objective refers to customers obtaining information and perceiving it through sound, sight, scent, touch, and taste; effective experiences (FEEL) means allowing customers to obtain emotional perception and information regarding a company and brand through experience.; Creative cognitive experiences (THINK) refers to the engagement of creative thinking that encourages a reevaluation of the company and its products; Physical behaviors, Behaviors, and Lifestyles (ACT) means creating experiences associated with the customers' physical body, longer-term patterns of behavior, and lifestyle; and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE). The aim of using this framework is to create holistic experiences that take individual experiences into account.

2.3 Consumption Values (Consumer Choice Behavior)

2.3.1 Functional/Instrumental Value
Functional/instrumental value refers to the degree to which a product (goods or service) possesses desirable qualities, serves a useful purpose, or performs a desired function (Smith and Colgate, 2007). According to Woodruff (1997), functional or instrumental value can be further divided into three components. Firstly, it has the presence of correct, accurate, or suitable features, functions, attributes, or characteristics, including aesthetics, quality, customization, or creativity. Secondly, it holds the competence of appropriate performances, such as reliability, performance quality, or favorable service and support outcomes. Lastly, it includes the achievement of suitable outcomes or consequences, such as strategic value, effectiveness, operational benefits, and environmental advantages.

2.3.2 2.3.2 Experiential/hedonic Value
The concept of Experiential/Hedonic value refers to the degree to which a product generates suitable experiences, feelings, and emotions for the customer (Smith and Colgate, 2007). Organizations may prioritize different types of experiences to generate different sensory values, emotional values, or social-relational values. For example, organizations such as restaurants and high-end retailers may focus on creating the right ambiance, aromas, feel, and aesthetics. While organization in the travel and entertainment industries prioritizes generating pleasure/enjoyment, fun, humor, and adventure for emotional value. Meanwhile, an organization that focuses on creating social-relational value strives on obtaining bonding/connectedness, personal interaction, and developing trust and commitment from their customers. Lastly, some organizations aim to gain epistemic value (curiosity, knowledge, or fantasy) from their customers such as Disney and some travel and hotel companies (Smith and Colgate, 2007).

2.3.3 Symbolic/Expressive Value
Symbolic or expressive value focuses on the extent to which customers assign psychological significance to a product. Certain products, particularly luxury goods, possess the ability to align with consumers' self-perception and self-worth. They play a role in a positive self-image whether through ownership, such as purchasing a new outfit, or through the act of gift-giving, for example, presenting diamonds to a spouse as proposed by DeBeers (Smith & Colgate 2007). Other products such as music, perfume, comfort food, and vacations may have personal meanings and associations with specific events and people that only have meaning to customers. (Smith & Colgate, 2007)

3. METHODOLOGY

In this section, we explain the methods of collecting data for our study.

3.1 Data Collection

For this research, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data regarding customers' backgrounds, preferences, values, and other intangible elements to understand consumer choice behavior.

3.1.1 Survey

To obtain quantitative data, a survey was created in Qualtrics. The survey contained 2 main parts. The first part consists of questions regarding participants' demographics, such as their age, gender, profession, nationality, city of residence, and marital status as well as psychographic questions (see Appendix 1.). Participants can answer the psychographic questions with the sliders provided according to the 5-PT Likert scale (see Figure 2.). 1 being "Strongly Disagree", 2 as "Somewhat Disagree", 3 as "Neutral", 4 with "Somewhat Agree" and 5 as "Strongly Agree".

Before respondents can move on to the next pair, a case is introduced in the survey. In this case, respondents will be invited to design and purchase their own high-end customized lounge chair (see Figure 3.). Respondents will be able to choose various materials for the chair frame (wood, metal, or glass) and upholstery (hemp, organic cotton, leather, wool, linen). Each material has a short description and explanation of what they are made of and what kind of "feel" it gave off as color and material provide various feelings towards the product (Park *et al.,* 2015). In the second part of the survey, participants are asked to answer more scalable questions about the process (see Appendix 2.) and their decisions. Lastly, the questionnaire also consists of several open-ended questions. (see appendix 3.) The open-ended questions aim to understand better which aspects of the customer's background, preferences, lifestyles, or profession affected their designing and purchasing decision as well as to what extent they are satisfied with the journey or process of purchasing a customized product.

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
Agreement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree

Source: (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Mobley, 2011; Friborg, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006)

Source: (Bearden et al., 2011; Friborg, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006)

Figure 2. 5-Pt Likert scale

Figure 3. Chair example

3.1.2 Qualitative Interview

To further support and understand the findings and results of the quantitative data obtained from the survey, a qualitative interview was also conducted with several individuals. Through qualitative data do not aim to create representativeness, it offers insight into how people think about certain subjects and why they think that (Ruyter and Scholl, 1998), thus the underlying motivations and decision-making process of individuals. Furthermore, the means-end chain in qualitative research technique links product attributes to consequences of product use and individual personal values — attributes are the specific characteristic or features of a product or service, and consequences are the outcomes that individuals associate with the product's attributes such as saving money or feeling a sense of accomplishment or power and lastly, values represent the fundamental beliefs, aspirations or ideals that individuals hold in which often reflects their motivations or self-identity (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2006).

Qualitative research may also provide answers to areas such as strategic marketing — how can target groups be described based on their needs, wants, and behaviors, aiding in the development of effective marketing strategies? (Ruyter and Scholl, 1998). The interview was semi-structured, and individuals were asked about their hobbies, professions, lifestyles, background, and opinions as well as experiences with customized products/processes. We analyze the qualitative interviews through the coding method. Coding in qualitative interviews involves the systematic process of categorizing and analyzing the data obtained from the interviews.

4. RESULTS

At the end, 35 respondents under 18 up to 34 years old participated in our survey and 5 individuals between the ages of 50-69 took part in our interview. This section aims to present the findings of the study.

4.1 Motivation to Buy (Consumer Value)

Based on the 5 PT Likert scale, on average respondents scored 3.63 to the extent of wanting to take part in designing their own unique furniture. On average our respondents score a 3.77 to being generally interested in art and innovation. Based on these numbers, we used the ranked correlation method to show the effect of both variables. With a P-value of 0.0111 and an effect size of 0.424, the variable "I am generally interested in art and innovation" is positively correlated to the variable "I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture" (see Figure 4.). When interviewed, 5 out of the 5 interviewees showed high interest in art and new innovations and 4 out of 5 interviewees showed positive reaction and enthusiasm towards the opportunity of designing their own furniture.

Q1_1: I am generally interested in art and new innovations. | No Name is positively correlated with **Q2_1: I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture. | No Name**

Hide statistical test results ▾

Ranked Correlation ⊙ (Recommended)

P-Value ⊙	0.0111
Effect Size (Spearman's rho) ⊙	0.424
Confidence Interval of Effect Size ⊙	0.106 to 0.664
Sample Size ⊙	35

Figure 4. Correlation

To further investigate the aspects behind what motivates our respondents to be interested in purchasing customized furniture, the answers to the open questions in the survey were analyzed. The answers were categorized into 3 main topics/categories which were symbolic/expressive value, functional/instrumental value, and experiential/hedonic values (see appendix 4.) Answers containing or suggesting specific keywords such as "personality" "unique" or "features" were grouped together under these 3 main values. Based on the results we found out that most 16 respondents' answers can be classified under emotional/symbolic value, 13 under functional/instrumental value, and 9 under experiential/hedonic value. The most common reason based on keywords was "uniqueness" and "correct/appropriate features" (see figure 5.)
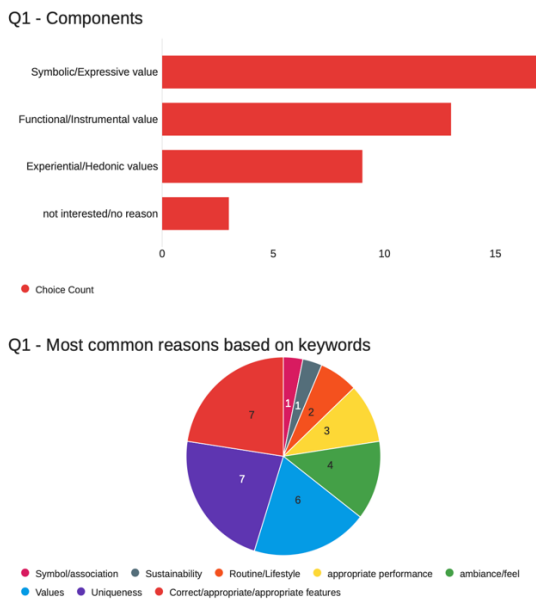

Figure 5. components/motivation to buy

4.1.1 Influential Components & Reasons to Buy

Based on our survey, with a sample size of 34, our population scores 3.97 on average to the questions *"My background and lifestyle influence my decision making and designing and purchasing this chair."* (see appendix 5.) a 3.11 average on the question "My profession influenced my decision-making in designing and purchasing this chair" (see appendix 6.) and a 3.49 average on the question "My hobby(ies) influenced my decision-making and designing this chair" (see appendix 7.). On the other hand, 5 out 5 of our interviewees strongly agree that their profession influence their decision-making in designing and purchasing this chair as well as the variable hobbies, and scored lower on the variable lifestyle and background influencing their decision-making in purchasing and designing this chair.

The question "Which background/preferences influences your decision-making in purchasing this chair and if so, why did it influence you?" was asked in our open-ended part of the questionnaire, and again answers were classified based on keywords. The answers associated with "personality" was answered the most with a total of 9. The answers associated with "preference" comes up second with a total of 6 answers. The next in line is "financial" with a total of 5. Other words such as "other

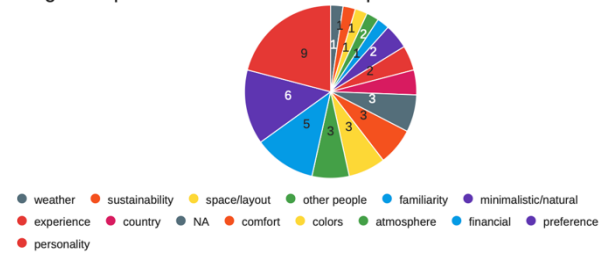people", "my country" and "sustainability" also came up. (see Figure 6.)

Figure 6. Aspects of background/preferences that is influential

4.1.2 Emotional Components

To further understand which emotions were felt during the process of designing and purchasing a customized furniture, participants of our questionnaire was asked the questions *"How do you feel about being involve in the design process of this lounge chair?"*. Answers was then classified into several components such as 'Social status' -- meaning it gives them a sense of a high social status, 'curiosity' – meaning it sparked feelings curiosity and creativity, 'social/relational value – allows them to relate and belong to a certain community, 'self-expression' – allowing them to express their individuality and 'enjoyment/pleasure' – all in all feeling positive emotions throughout the process.

'enjoyment/pleasure' component was felt the most, as it is connected to 20 answers. Second component that was associated the most to the respondents' answers was 'self-expression' with a total of 10 answers. 7 answers were connected to social-relational value and the rest were only associated to one answer. (see figure 7.)
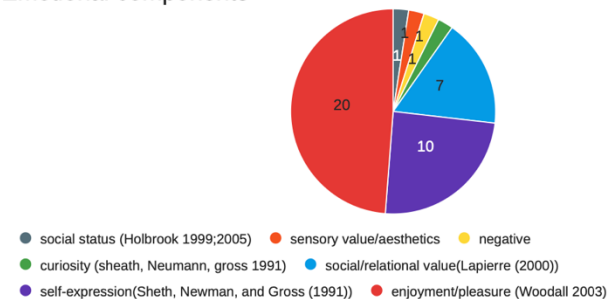

Figure 7. Emotional Component

4.2 Correlation

Through quantitative methods, the paper also aims to find how many correlations are there between variables influencing the design and purchasing process. We measure the results through Anova and Ranked Anova for data that are not normally distributed. Through the Anova method, we could find a correlation through the P-value and effect size. The smaller the P-value the bigger correlation there is and the bigger the effect size the bigger the relationship is between variables.

4.2.1 Profession to Designing & Purchasing

Based on our results through the questionnaire, despite respondents' answers averaging 3.11 on the question *"My profession influenced my decision making in the designing and purchasing this chair."*, our ranked Anova result suggests that there is a strong statically significant relationship between the variable "what is your profession?" and "my profession influence my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair." With and P-value of 0.0177 and an effect size of 1.01. (see figure 8.)

There is a strong statistically significant relationship between **Q5: What is your profession?** and **Q10_1: My profession influenced my decision mak...designing and purchasing this chair. | No Name**

Hide statistical test results ▾

ANOVA ⓘ (Recommended)

P-Value ⓘ	0.0157
Effect Size (Cohen's f) ⓘ	0.976

Hide *ranked* ANOVA results ▾

Ranked ANOVA ⓘ

P-Value ⓘ	0.0177
Effect Size (Cohen's f) ⓘ	1.01

Figure 8. Correlation of Profession to buying chair

4.2.2 Interest in Art and Innovations & Designing and Purchasing

Our results also show that the variable "I am generally interested in art and new innovation" is positively correlated with the variable "I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture". We obtained a small p-value of 0.0111 and an effect size of 0.424. (see Figure 9.)

Q1_1: I am generally interested in art and new innovations. | No Name is positively correlated with **Q2_1: I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture. | No Name**

Hide statistical test results ▾

Ranked Correlation ⓘ (Recommended)

P-Value ⓘ	0.0111
Effect Size (Spearman's rho) ⓘ	0.424
Confidence Interval of Effect Size ⓘ	0.106 to 0.664
Sample Size ⓘ	35

Figure 9. Correlation of Interest in Art to Participating in Designing

4.2.3 Importance of Customization and Personalization and Interest in Participation and Purchase

Other variables that are positively correlated to one another are "customization and personalization are important for me when it comes to purchasing luxury/quality products" and "I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture". Based on the correlation method we found that the p-value is 0.0135, and the effect size is 0.414. (see Figure 10.)

Q3_1: Customization and personalization are imp...o purchasing luxury/quality products. | No Name is positively correlated with **Q2_1: I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture. | No Name**

Hide statistical test results ▾

Correlation ⓘ (Recommended)

P-Value ⓘ	0.0135
Effect Size (Pearson's r) ⓘ	0.414
Confidence Interval of Effect Size ⓘ	0.0934 to 0.657
Sample Size ⓘ	35

Figure 10. Correlation of Importance of Customization and Participating in the design of Unique Furniture

4.2.4 Sustainability and Interest in Participation and Purchase

The variable "Sustainability or eco-friendliness is very important to me in my purchasing decisions" and "I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture" has no statistically significant relationship. With a p-value of 0.370 and an effect size of 0.156, we can say that the importance of sustainability of a customer does not affect their interest in participating and purchasing a customized chair. (see Figure 11.)

There is no statistically significant relationship between **Q2_1: I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture. | No Name** and **Q4_1: Sustainability or eco-friendliness is ver...ant to me in my purchasing decisions. | No Name**

Hide statistical test results ▾

Correlation ⓘ (Recommended)

P-Value ⓘ	0.370
Effect Size (Pearson's r) ⓘ	0.156
Confidence Interval of Effect Size ⓘ	-0.187 to 0.465
Sample Size ⓘ	35

Figure 11. Participation in Unique Furniture and the Importance of Sustainability

4.2.5 Materials and Colors Chosen

Out of all the materials, organic materials such as wood, leather, cotton, and wool are chosen the most by our respondents and one participant suggested the material velvet with striking colors. Neutral colors such as black, beige/cream, brown and white seem to be preferred by respondents. Associations to these materials are also mentioned by interviewees, such as the Dutch word 'stoer' which translates to "tough" for leather.

5. DISCUSSION

This section aims to discuss and provide a comprehensive interpretation and analysis of the result of our study. This section also aims to provide in-depth context and comparisons as well as to explore limitations and potential biases. The main findings will be summarized.

5.1 Findings Interpretation

This section will provide further interpretation of our results as we try to further summarize them while giving an even deeper context as well as the reason for the respondent's answer along with examples.

5.1.1 Demographics

Based on the data gathered regarding the demographics of our participants, there is not much correlation or effect to purchasing and designing their own unique furniture. We see no significant effect on respondents' age, gender, nationality, city of residence, or marital status except for their profession.

5.1.2 Profession

Through our findings, we believe that respondents' hobbies and professions have the biggest influence on designing and purchasing decisions. 77% of our survey respondents are students or students with jobs and the median score to the variable "I am generally interested in art and new innovations" is a 4 (somewhat agree) and our interviewees all work in the arts and creative industry (painter, sculptures, and editor in chief of a fine arts magazine) and scores an average of 5 for the variable "I am generally interested in art and new innovations. This leads us to deduce that individuals having a greater interest in the arts and new innovations that intellectually and emotionally stimulates them are more open to the idea of designing and purchasing their own unique/customized furniture as this process generates creativity and sparks curiosity.

5.1.3 Symbolic/Expressive Value vs Functional/Instrumental Value

There seems to be a widely accepted idea among our respondents that personalized/customized objects are very personal and symbolic as they may be an outlet for expressing one's identity and emotions. Based on the results, not only a personalized chair can express your identity, aesthetics, and style but it also gives a sense of connection and attachment to your purchase. According to one of our interviewees who sculpted customized lights out of wood and glass, most of his works have a name. He created stories behind them, and this was sometimes the main reason why his customers buy them. The personification of an item may be what attracts customers the most in some cases. The idea of having a story behind an item seems to be what engross our interviewees in purchasing a customized object the most. Another interviewee mentioned how she would like to be able to pass down this furniture in the future to her grandchildren since she herself still owns garden chairs that were passed down from her own grandparents. It holds significant meaning and story to her, and this was an important aspect she would like to incorporate by purchasing a customized chair. To further support this idea, Gutheil et al (2004), suggest that evidence indicates that the history of objects is becoming significantly important over the course of development.

On the other hand, a handful of our respondents believe that functional/instrumental value is still crucial in their purchasing decision and that through personalization or customization, respondents can design and purchase items that function, looks, and feel exactly how they want them to be. Nowadays, different aesthetics and styles exist, it is relatively hard to find something that fits appropriately and perfectly to your preferences is relatively difficult and when you can customize your own chair it makes the process of finding something much easier. For example, one of our interviewees explained that earlier she would have to purchase furniture that was practical and easy to clean because she had small children then, but this furniture was not always according to her liking or style. By making customization available to more groups of individuals, more people can buy things that are based on their style while also having it highly functional as well as practical. According to our

results, an average score of 3.97 was obtained from the statement, "I believe that this chair is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also highly functional and comfortable". Since the meaning of comfortable is rather subjective, some respondents believe that wool materials seem cozier than the rest while some believe that organic cotton is nicer to the touch and will feel much comfortable than the rest of the materials. Hence, we made these various options available.

5.1.4 Materials Chosen and Associations

Based on the qualitative interview, a variety of materials are chosen by our participants. Wood and leather are mentioned and choose the most for the frame and upholstery of the chair. The participants associated certain materials and colors with a specific feel. Most of our participants believe that wood is the most organic material and that it has more 'life' compared to the rest of the materials (see Figure 12.) Our interviews also seem to conclude that participants that enjoy nature and the outdoors are more inclined to choose wood instead of glass, metal, or any other color. In combination with this, neutral colors, white or black are more favored. Lee (2019a) suggests that to achieve 'Natural style', the incorporation of natural colors and materials with natural textures such as wood and fabric is crucial. Wool and cotton are meanwhile very much associated with comfort and 'coziness'. Participants' aesthetic inspired by Scandinavian style, tend to choose wool, cotton, and wood. According to Lee (2019b), due to Scandinavia short days and long winters, creating a bright, comfortable, and warm atmosphere with fabrics and white or light colors for furnishing is the key. These materials are also considered 'minimalistic' compared to velvet as velvet seemed to be more striking and 'edgy'. Natural colored leather on the other hand gives off a more 'luxurious' feel. One participant believes that leather is the most timeless and sustainable material. The association with 'tough' is also mentioned by one of our participants, this was because of her motorcycle-riding hobby. Leather holds a big role in the motorcycle community and many people often see this community as 'tough'. Some materials are also chosen due to their practicality as this is an important aspect for certain types of customers, such as customers with kids or customers working in an art studio or environment that could easily dirty furniture.
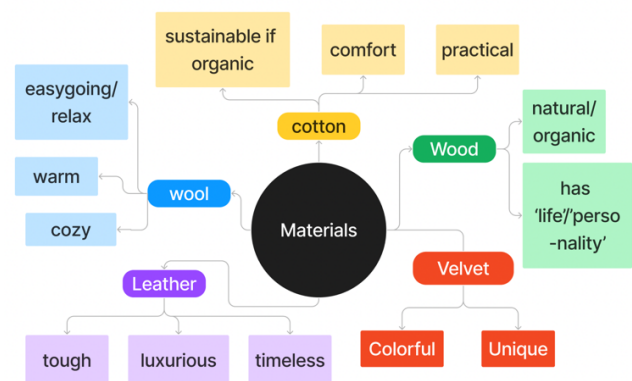

Figure 12. Material association

5.2 Practical Contributions

Our findings contribute to the value creation and customization literature by analyzing the value creation process and the roles of intangible elements in that process. By exploring the customization market for types of furniture, we agreed with the experiential marketing literature (Schmitt, 1999) suggesting humans are irrational and eclectic beings. This brings us to focus

on the intangible aspects influencing the different choices made during a customer's journey that led to various levels of satisfaction with customer experiences.

By allowing customers to be involved throughout the whole process of designing and purchasing the furniture, we can obtain information regarding the choices made by customers, such as the choice of colors, and materials, the reason behind these choices, and how they feel regarding the steps of the process and throughout the whole journey. By obtaining feedback on the process, we are also able to suggest to companies which part of the design process customers enjoy and disliked the most.

Our findings suggest that not many people especially younger groups have experienced the process of purchasing customized products. The concept of customizing something, in this case, furniture, is new to them. Customers seem to believe that the process of customizing a product is very expensive and is not worth the money as the process of co-creating value is not known or understood by customers. Though the idea of designing your own unique furniture sparks curiosity and enthusiasm among customers, value anticipation is crucial for the process to be successful and valuable. According to Holmqvist *et al. (2020),* customers already perceive value by looking forward to the service, though this value is positive it poses a risk when expectations are not met. Thus, customers' input and demands throughout the process need to be taken into consideration and implemented. We suggest companies entering this market create enthusiasm and understanding by communicating the process of customization. This allows customers to understand where the value of personalization comes from.

Furthermore, our research uncovers details of where customers' choices stem from and what are the main reasons behind the choices made. Most customers' styles, preferences, or 'aesthetics' are derived from their hobbies, professions, and background (culture, upbringing, etc.) However, the influence of their environment can also directly affect and create one's preferences and choices when choosing materials and colors such as the opinion of others or what style is currently trending. Customers must be given the freedom to choose from a wide variety of colors, materials, and textures to fully express themselves and what kind of image, feel, and meaning they'd like to project. Allowing customers to bring their own materials (such as their own wood or prints (see Figure 13.), have their initials engraved, and give names and backstories to pieces of furniture allows them to engrain deeper meaning and a sense of ownership as well as the expressiveness of their individuality.

Though our findings suggest that older groups of people and people with an interest in the arts are relatively more willing to design and purchase their own customized furniture, it is relatively unimportant and unnecessary to prioritize and advertise only to these groups of customers. If managers can communicate and provide valuable experience to all kinds of customers, the company will be able to broaden its market. It is still important however to not only focus on selling furniture limited to only several materials or colors as this limits customer's choices and expressions that may also lead to customer dissatisfaction. It may also be possible for companies to make ready-to-buy furniture every now and then instead of only made-to-order furniture, as this may be considered a 'special' edition with the furniture having its own story behind it.

5.3 Limitations

While our suggestions deduced based on the results can be implanted for companies selling customized furniture, we recognize that it is rather difficult to deduct an accurate, representative result from our questionnaire as our sample size is rather small with little variety of individuals' backgrounds and demographics. The population is not normally distributed which makes it hard for us as well to obtain accurate results. The suggestions may also not be applicable to organizations everywhere in the world as demands based on preferences and backgrounds differs across countries. Our findings on customers' decisions are also limited as it is nearly impossible to identify all aspects influencing decisions and make sense of how these aspects contribute to customers' decisions.

As we are dealing with mostly intangible elements that can hardly be measured by numbers, we rely on previous theories on experiential marketing and the subjective opinions and feelings of our participants. It does not give us high-reliability answers and explanations but it gives us information high in validity. As mentioned before all our 5 interviewees are also working in the same industry thus making our findings limited to representativeness.

6. CONCLUSION
This paper aims to answer the research question, question: "**How and which intangible elements affect customers' experience when purchasing customized furniture?**". Our findings provide insights into various aspects of customers' preferences, backgrounds, and values that may influence their purchasing decisions leading to different experiences.

Main Contributions	Key Findings	Examples
The Value process		wood found in the forest
		own fabric/pattern
	customers would also like to bring in their own materials	metal they always had
	customers appreciate personification of object	creating a story behing the chair and relating to it
		naming objects to make it more 'human-like'
	Giving Personalised touches	Having one's name or initials engraved
		Engraving the date when it was purchased/designed by customers
Background	Younger target groups are concerned more about the price than older target groups	people in the age group of 45-65+ are less hesitant on spending (full-time/better paid jobs, savings)
	Sustainability is not directly important/thought of/prioritized in the process and aesthetics comes first	
	target groups age 45+ decisions are more influenced by their upbringing and environment	family tradition, culture, 60s,70s/80s culture (interest in vintage)
Materials	Organic materials such as wood has 'more life' than materials such as glass	
	Materials chosen may depend on country/city of residence	In warmer climates, cotton or leather may be more preferred than wool
	Materials chosen can be influenced by one's 'motto' and upbringing	one will try to show how important 'love' is in one's life through prints and color
	Leather and one color schemes are preferred for a more 'luxurious' feel	
Functionality	Younger target groups expects the furniture to be functional when expected to pay an amount of money	
	Older target groups with profession in the arts and creative industry would still purchase furniture	

Figure 13. Main Findings from Qualitative Interview

We believe that it is best to sell and advertise to customers with an interest or background in the arts and creative industry. Providing customers with a variety of colors and materials during the process may be essential to create the best experience. Furthermore, we believe that customers must be allowed to bring in their own materials to be incorporated into the chair/furniture as it may be crucial in generating a deeper meaning and value for customers. To further enhance this, details for personalization, such as the possibility to name, give objects back story or engrave dates, or initials in the chair must be made possible as this is crucial for esteem value such as possession (Smith and Colgate, 2007)

Not only customer benefits and obtain value through personalization but through incorporating Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing techniques, companies choosing differentiation as their competitive advantage, can co-create value with their customers through a more holistic experience. This method allows them to further understand the wants and needs of their customer on a much deeper level. They will be able to provide a high service level that may leave them with a high customer satisfaction level. An average score of 3.66 was obtained when respondents answered the statement "When purchasing an item, being able to be part of the design process, positively influences my perception of the furniture's quality and craftsmanship".

It is true that based on our results, respondents that are more immersed in the creative industry or individuals with hobbies related to the arts are more likely to purchase customized furniture, however, it's an experience that must be available and inclusive to more variety of people with different backgrounds and interests. Though the customized furniture industry is still rather a niche and expensive with luxury associations to it, through the right ways of marketing and concept, it could become a bigger, more sustainable, and positively associated industry for all groups of people.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

8. APPENDIX:

Participant Demographics:
1. How old are you?
2. How do you describe yourself?
3. What is your nationality?
4. What is your current city of residence?
5. What is your profession?
6. What is your current marital status

Scalable Questions: Participant's Background
1. I am generally interested in art and new innovations.
2. I would like to participate in the design of my own unique furniture.
3. Customization and personalization are important for me when it comes to purchasing luxury/quality products.
4. sustainability or eco-friendliness is very important to me in my purchasing decisions.
5. It is important for me that my personal items (e.g. furnitures, clothes, etc.) reflect my unique personality and individuality.
6. I am willing to pay a great amount of money for high-quality/sustainable/personalized furniture.
7. I am more likely to invest in furniture that intellectually stimulates me, such as pieces with interesting design concepts or functional innovations.
8. It is important that others are able to enjoy my personal items/furnitures as well when they make use of it.
9. I think that the visual aesthetics of an object I am purchasing must be as good as it's functionality.
10. When purchasing an item, being able to be part of the design process, positively influence my perception of the furniture's quality and craftsmanship.
11. I am more likely to buy a brand that creates a sense of community and fosters a relational value with its customers.
12. the opinion and recommendation of others influence your purchasing decisions.

Appendix 1. Participant's Demographics and Background

Scalable Questions regarding the process:
1. I am satisfied with the level of customization of this product.
2. Being able to choose the materials, textures, colors, and upholstery of the chair increases my interest, satisfaction, and engagement in the purchase of this furniture.
3. The overall design of this furniture generates positive emotions (joy, relaxed, tranquility, excitement, surprise).
4. The level of customization allows me to successfully express my personality/values through this chair.
5. The design concept is innovative and being involved in the process stimulates me intellectually.
6. I am willing to purchase this chair within the price range given for this furniture.
7. By being able to design this chair based on my preferences, I feel understood and belonged to a community.
8. I believe that this chair is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also highly functional and comfortable.
9. My background and lifestyle influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.
10. My profession influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.
11. My hobby(ies) influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.
12. It is very likely for me to recommend this furniture to my friends and family.

Appendix 2. Questions Regarding the Process

Open-ended Questions:
1. What is your profession and how did you get into this profession?
2. What are your hobbies/ what do you like to do in your free time?
3. How would you describe your aesthetics/art?
4. Why are you interested in designing and purchasing a customized chair/furniture?
5. How do you feel about being involve in the design process of this furniture?
6. Which part of the design process do you like and value the most and why so?
7. Which part of the design process you did not like or did not enjoy?
8. Which materials would you choose; how do these materials make you feel?
9. Do your upbringing influence your decision making in designing and purchasing this chair?
10. Which of your background/preferences influences your decision making in purchasing this chair and if so, why did it influence you?
11. Do you think a customize/furniture can symbolizes a certain meaning for some people?

Appendix 3. Open-ended Questions

Q1 - Why are you interested in designing and purchasing a customized chair?

Why are you interested in designing and purchasing a customized chair?	Q1 - Topic Hierarchy Level 2
To fit my personality	N/A
To matching my personalities	Values
Could fit to the specific requirements that I need	Correct/appropriate/appropriate features
The uniqueness and functionality of the chair	Uniqueness, appropriate performance
Ergonomics is important to me	Correct/appropriate/appropriate features
To find a unique piece of furniture	Uniqueness
It will fit with the aesthetic of my home	ambiance/feel
It feels more personal and exciting	Uniqueness
To achieve my ideal "picture"	Correct/appropriate/appropriate features
It's a way of creativity and design which attracts me	Correct/appropriate/appropriate features
Generates more connection with my purchases	N/A
Because it can add more life to my house	ambiance/feel

Appendix 4. Some answers Given by Participants for Motivation to Purchase

Q9_1 - My background and lifestyle influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses	Sum
My background and lifestyle influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.	2.00	5.00	3.97	0.88	0.77	35	139.00

Appendix 5. Influence of Lifestyle and Background

My profession influe_1 - My profession influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses	Sum
My profession influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.17	1.36	35	109.00

Appendix 6. Influence of Profession

Q11_1 - My hobby(ies) influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.

Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Responses	Sum
My hobby(ies) influenced my decision making in designing and purchasing this chair.	2.00	5.00	3.49	0.77	0.59	35	122.00

Appendix 7. Influence of Hobby(ies)

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