Master Thesis

Signposting Customer Experiences:
Exploring the Influence of Nudging in B2B Engagements

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Abstract

This study explores the role of nudging in shaping intended customer experiences in business settings, using a grounded theory approach within a case study of knowledge-intensive sectors. Interviews were conducted with 12 DustXpert customers, which were analysed through Gioia methodology resulting in an integrative framework detailing the impact of nudging on customer experience. Three themes have emerged that directly influence the customer experience and one theme influences the customer experience indirectly, enhanced by customer trust. Additionally, nudging was found to play a crucial role in service recovery and customer loyalty. This research makes three key contributions to the field of customer experience management. First, it provides novel insights into how B2B customer experiences can be shaped through nudging strategies, focusing on influenceable aspects of the customer journey. Second, it highlights the importance of nudging in managing customer experience, demonstrating that strategic nudging can enhance customer satisfaction and engagement. Third, it shows that nudging can be an effective tool in service recovery, helping to restore customer trust and satisfaction after service failures. The integrative framework developed in this study serves as a practical tool for managers, aiding in the design and implementation of nudge strategies to predictably enhance customer experiences. This study is the first to introduce a framework of nudging's role in shaping customer experience within the B2B customer experience management literature, addressing a gap where previous studies have not offered a perspective on the use of nudging in business settings. This framework can guide future research and practical applications, contributing to a deeper understanding of customer experience dynamics and the strategic use of nudging in B2B contexts.

Keywords – Customer Experience, Nudging, Customer Experience Management

1. Introduction

Customer experience is an important topic for firms (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Sahhar et al., 2021; Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022; Verhoef et al., 2009; Witell et al., 2020). The concept gained increasing traction in theory and practice because of the belief that improving the customer experience at various interaction points throughout the customer journey will contribute to positive outcomes for firms (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Customer experience is a key source of competitive advantage (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). It is considered as the capability to drive profits and growth and a strategic response to commoditization (Witell et al., 2020). For these reasons is a strong customer experience now a leading management goal (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), recognised as crucial for a strategic, experience-oriented advantage (Verhoef et al., 2009; Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022).

Customer experience is a construct focusing on the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses of a customer to a firm's offerings and actions (Witell et al., 2020). This involves customers' unintentional, spontaneous responses and reactions to stimuli associated with offerings throughout the customer journey. Stimuli reside in dynamic ways within and outside firm-controlled touchpoints. Firms cannot create the customer experience, but they can manage stimuli that affect such experiences that occur during customer journeys (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Overall, customer experience is a holistic response to stimuli across various touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), with a significant impact on firms' competitiveness (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and strategic positioning (Witell et al., 2020).

Simultaneously, the construct has become increasingly complex for several reasons. The increase of potential customer touchpoints, amplified by the increasingly digital landscape (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), and the reduced control of the experience makes it complex for firms to create, manage, and attempt to control the experience and journey of customers (Edelman & Singer, 2015; Rawson et al., 2013). Even more so, it is generally accepted that customer experience is a complex phenomenon that is not always under the control of firms (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), because the social nature of these experiences is social in nature, with peer customers influencing experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The research in customer experience has expanded significantly over the last decade beyond business-to-consumer (B2C) to public and business-to-business (B2B) sectors (Witell et al., 2020). In B2B the customer-supplier interaction (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2011) and orientation of relationships (Tuli et al., 2007) are important (Witell et al., 2020). B2B customer journeys are intricate due to multiple actors, more complex service offerings, and diverse interaction modes (Sahhar et al., 2021). Researching customer experiences in B2B is just as relevant as in B2C because professionals experience like consumers (Witell et al., 2020).

While literature points towards the not always controllable nature of customer experience (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), firms continuously try to introduce stimuli to *nudge* the customer experience. Nudging is popularized by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) and is rooted in the idea of libertarian paternalism. Nudging presents an approach to influencing individuals' behaviour without imposing restrictions on freedom of choice (Hansen & Jespersen, 2013). This phenomenon has garnered attention across various domains, ranging from public policy to business strategies (Bammert & Roeglinger, 2020; Hansen & Jespersen, 2013).

More specifically, a nudge is a function of any attempt to influence people's judgment, choice, or behaviour predictably (Hansen, 2016). A nudge works independently of forbidding or adding any rationally relevant choice options, changing incentives, or the provision of information and rational argumentation (Hansen, 2016). The idea of nudging offers the potential for firms to set wishful parameters on the organizations' end to create solid customer experiences. Especially within touchpoints throughout the customer journey where interactions in the individual customer journey of a customer with a firm can have a significant positive or negative impact on that customer's experience (Maas et al., 2018). In this context, nudging entails strategically influencing customer behaviour at various touchpoints throughout their interaction with a firm. Understanding and mapping customer experience in journeys is a helpful starting point for coming up with intelligent nudges (Y. Gao & Liu, 2023).

While the idea of creating stimuli in the customer journey for optimal customer experiences has been coined, little is known about the role that nudging plays in shaping customer experiences. This is problematic for several reasons. First, an understanding of the gap can enable a firm to apply

nudging to develop strategies that can optimize the customer experience at various interaction points throughout the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Second, understanding nudging that shapes the customer experience, enables companies to develop targeted strategies for competitive and experience-oriented advantage (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022; Verhoef et al., 2009; Witell et al., 2020).

In this light, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of nudging in shaping intended experiences in business settings. The paper is guided by the following research question: *"What role does nudging play in shaping customer experience in B2B?"*. In addressing this question, this study deploys a qualitative approach to investigate the influence of nudging on customer experience in B2B engagements.

The study adopts a case study of a B2B firm in the extraction industry (DustXpert). DustXpert is based in the Netherlands and provides knowledge-intensive business services, KIBS (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2011). These are organizations whose primary value-creating activities are gathering, creating, or disseminating knowledge to provide customer-specific services or solutions (Bettencourt et al., 2002). Customer experience is considered as a strategic response to commoditization (Witell et al., 2020), which is the case with DustXpert's installations given their not-very-complex nature.

The findings provided an analysis of the dimensions that can influence the customer experience. Four dimensions were defined: Customer-Focused Considerations, Supplier Aspects, Supplier-Customer Relationship, and Presentability. These dimensions emerged from a total of 15 second-order themes and 57 first-order codes. The integrative framework developed in this study shows how these aspects and nudging strategies influence the customer experience during the different stages of the B2B customer journey.

The study contributes to the field of customer experience by making multiple contributions. First, it expands the understanding of customer experience in B2B (Sahhar et al., 2021; Witell et al., 2020; Zolkiewski et al., 2017), by offering insights into signposting customers. Second, it sheds light on the role of nudging in shaping B2B customer experiences, providing insights into effective strategies for firms in this context. Finally, the study offers a qualitative exploration of a B2B firm in the dust extraction industry, contributing empirical evidence to the theoretical framework of customer experience and nudging in B2B engagements.

The paper is structured as follows: it starts with an overview of how customer experience and nudging have been conceptualised and researched in the literature so far. It then provides the methodology, followed by the findings, presenting the firm's practices. The paper finishes with a discussion that includes a discussion, theoretical contributions, implications for management and possibilities for future research.

2. Literature review

The literature review provides an in-depth exploration of the two concepts central to this study, namely customer experience and nudging. Customer experience has been explored by addressing its definition, how it evolves over time, its uncontrollable nature and in business contexts. Nudging has been explored by addressing the definition of nudging and how it is deployed in customer environments. Finally, the role of nudging in customer experience management is discussed.

2.1 Customer Experience

Customer experience is explored, by providing an in-depth understanding of the definition of customer experience and how it evolves over time. This study also focuses on the uncontrollable nature of customer experience and how it manifests itself in business settings. Bringing these topics together provides a holistic understanding of the complexity of customer experience within different contexts.

2.1.1 Definition of customer experience

Multiple definitions of customer experience exist in the literature. Pine and Gilmore (1998) define experiences as a unique economic offering distinct from goods and services, emphasizing that consumers invest in memorable events crafted by a firm. Other researchers argue for a broader view of customer experience and propose that any exchange of services leads to a customer experience, regardless of its nature and form (Brakus et al., 2009). This perspective considers customer experience

as holistic focusing on the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses of a customer to all interactions with a firm (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Verhoef et al., 2009; Witell et al., 2020). Interactions with external actors, including other customers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), intermediaries (Payne & Frow, 2004) and wider network actors (Story et al., 2016) can also influence the customer experience (Zolkiewski et al., 2017).

Hence, studies argue that customer experience reflects the offerings of firms (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), while others argue customer experience as customers' reactions to firm-related interactions (Homburg et al., 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Becker & Jaakkola (2020) suggest that customer experience should be defined as non-intentional, spontaneous reactions and responses to certain stimuli. Tronvoll & Edvardsson (2022) noted that recent research has moved towards a subjective and experiential view and broadened the scope by including contextual factors to understand how value is created during the provision of service (Helkkula & Kelleher, 2010) or in the context of the customer's own life (Chandler & Lusch, 2015; Heinonen et al., 2010). Customer experience must be seen as the result of a complex set of interactions between multiple actors, shaped by the related structures and modalities that emerge during the customer journey (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022).

The literature also shows that customer experience is perceived to be increasingly complex (L. Gao et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Trischler et al., 2018; Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). Customers engage with companies through myriad touchpoints in multiple channels and media, resulting in more complex customer journeys (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Customer experience is social in nature with other actors beyond the business firm, like peer customers, influencing the experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Trischler et al., 2018). Customer experiences, shaped by interactions among diverse actors and structures, are inherently context-specific and phenomenological, reflecting the complexities of the customer journey (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). The complexity of customer experience is influenced by a multitude of factors, including social influence (L. Gao et al., 2020), service encounters (Hsieh, 2011), technological innovations (Ylilehto et al., 2021), and customer service quality (R. Singh & Söderlund, 2020). Considering the multifaceted nature of customer experience, it is essential to explore its evolution over time, considering the dynamic interactions of various actors, structures, and modalities throughout the customer journey.

2.1.2 Customer experience over time

It is thus known that customer experience is the non-intentional, spontaneous response to stimuli to all interactions with the firm during the customer journey (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). As the customer journey literature shows, firms must understand the customer journey over time (Grönroos, 2017) as the experience evolves through different touchpoints and channels (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The concept of customer journey is defined as the ongoing customer experience across phases of a service cycle (Følstad & Kvale, 2018). Zolkiewski et al (2017) noted that generally, the focus is on one part of the experience, neglecting to explore the customer experience at different touchpoints. However, understanding customer journeys is a prerequisite for developing superior customer experiences (Følstad & Kvale, 2018; Kuehnl et al., 2019).

The customer experience process flows from prepurchase to purchase to post-purchase and incorporates past experiences and external factors (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Customer experience during the first service cycle differs from customer experience during repeated service cycles (Court et al., 2009). Customer experience during each subsequent service cycle is built on the experiences of previous service cycles (Keyser et al., 2015). In other words, the customer journey over multiple service cycles is not repetitive but iterative (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). A dominant smooth journey model creates predictable experiences, building customer loyalty over time, known as a loyalty loop (Siebert et al., 2020). Nowadays, customer journeys are multitouch and multichannel in nature, suggesting that companies need to understand a wide range of contact moments inside and outside the firm's control (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Witell et al., 2020). The perspective of customer experience over time consists of touchpoints that are under the control of the firm but also ones that are completely independent of them. This uncontrollability of customer experience gets amplified even more in these kinds of touchpoints. Nevertheless, it is important to understand what happens in these moments as customer experience emerges, alters, and gets shaped in some kind of way.

2.1.3 Uncontrollable nature of customer experience

The customer experience may begin independently of firms through the mental processes of the customer (Grönroos, 2017). In general, customer experience is considered internal to the customer (Heinonen et al., 2010), subjective, and not fully controlled by the supplier (Verhoef et al., 2009; Witell et al., 2020). Because firms cannot control customer reactions, they cannot create the customer experience per se, however, firms can try to influence the stimuli to which customers respond (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Studies provide guidelines for designing and integrating stimuli in firm-controlled touchpoints to ensure a positive customer experience (e.g., Brakus et al., 2009; Grace & O'cass, 2004; Pine & Gilmore, 1998) (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Other studies offer guidelines for addressing the uncontrollable touchpoints (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). For example, it is suggested to monitor and react collective practices of customers with other consumers (Carù & Cova, 2015); to identify other firms in the consumer journey to collaborate with and improve the overall customer experience (Tax et al., 2013); to identify all stakeholders who influence the customer journey (e.g., Patrício et al., 2011; Teixeira et al., 2012). In this way, companies can use their knowledge of external incentives and contextual factors to their advantage even though they have no control over such factors (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). The complex dynamics of uncontrollable customer experiences, emphasise the challenges firms face in shaping customer experience.

2.1.4 Customer experience in business settings

Less research is done on customer experience in business-to-business (B2B) compared to business-to-consumer (B2C) (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Customer experience in B2B can be defined as customers' internal and subjective response to any direct or indirect contact with a firm (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). In B2B, customer experiences are more complex, because experiences arise from direct and indirect interactions involving multiple actors (Sahhar et al., 2021). B2B customer interactions arise between suppliers, customers, end-users, and other involved actors that are involved (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Additionally, B2B contexts are often considered more complex and difficult to standardise in nature in contrast to B2C contexts (Forkmann et al., 2017). Furthermore, B2B requires frequent and different modes of interaction between service providers and customers (Medlin, 2004; Mikolon et al., 2015), depending on the stage in the customer journey (Witell et al., 2020).

In B2B, the customer is an organizational entity, several actors within the customer play different roles and interact in diverse ways at various stages of the customer journey (Witell et al., 2020). It is argued that interactions among employees in business settings mirror customer experiences in B2C contexts (Witell et al., 2020). Employee interactions in B2B settings resemble B2C experiences, involving cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensory, and social aspects, and occur between individuals at various hierarchical levels or within collectives like functional units (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Witell et al., 2020). Within B2B contexts this is further complicated because touchpoints are more likely to occur across a wider range of front- and back-office functions and across firms too (Meyer & Schwager, 2007) and are not of equal value (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010), suggesting that employees would be a source of holistic customer experience knowledge (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Additional time-based complexity arises, as different actors (both individual and functional units) engage at different touchpoints at different stages of the customer journey (Witell et al., 2020). Thus, the ability to manage business relationships with both partners and with customers is the success in customer experience management (Witell et al., 2020).

2.2 Nudging

Nudging is explored, by providing an in-depth understanding of the definition of nudging and how it manifests itself in settings of customers.

2.2.1 Definition of nudging

Nudging is an approach to influencing individuals' behaviour without limiting choice (Hansen & Jespersen, 2013). Thaler and Sunstein (2008) define nudge as any aspect of choice architecture that predictably alters people's behaviour without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. The intervention of a nudge should be easy and cheap to avoid (Hansen, 2016). A broadened definition would be that nudges are ways of influencing a choice without limiting choices

or making alternatives noticeably more expensive in terms of effort, time, social sanctity, etc. (Hausman & Welch, 2010).

The fundamental theory of nudging is called dual processing, a concept that examines how humans process information and make decisions (Evans, 2008). The concept of nudging can effectively change decisions and behaviour (Dolan et al., 2012). Subtle changes in the decision-making context can systematically influence human decision-making and behaviour (Hansen & Jespersen, 2013). To apply nudging, the choice architecture must be changed. Choice architectures, i.e. the environment in which decisions are made, are designed by choice architects. As they influence people's decisions, there is no neutral way to design or present choices (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Nudging provides a gateway to exploring its application within customers' environments, where the interplay of choice architecture and decision-making unfolds.

2.2.2 Nudging into the settings of customers
So, nudging offers tools that lead individuals to better decisions through changes in their environment (Weinmann et al., 2016). The concept is increasingly used to promote healthy food choices in different environments such as supermarkets and restaurants (Stuber et al., 2022). Studies indicate that nudging can effectively encourage customers to healthy food without imposing restrictions on their choices (Kaljonen et al., 2020). Strategies like modifying defaults, strategically positioning items, offering caloric information, and timely reminders, can significantly impact customers' decision-making processes (Yi et al., 2022). Nudging has also been applied to sustainable choices. For instance, less single-use cutlery was used in food delivery (He et al., 2023), the use of plastic bags in supermarkets was reduced (Lim, 2020), and strategies were developed that made consumers opt for the more sustainable delivery choice (Nijssen et al., 2023). These studies show that nudging can influence consumer behaviour. Because the effect of nudging in decision-making is already known, and given the relevance of understanding customer experience, an assumption can be made that nudging can contribute to customer experience management.

2.3 Customer experience management through nudging
Customer experience is thus not always under a firm's control and has a complex nature (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Grönroos, 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The complexity of customer experience amplifies in B2B contexts because experiences arise from direct and indirect interactions involving multiple actors (Sahhar et al., 2021; Zolkiewski et al., 2017) and requires frequent and different modes of interaction between firms and customers (Witell et al., 2020). Nudging, as a behavioural influence tool (Hansen, 2016; Hansen & Jespersen, 2013; Hausman & Welch, 2010; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), can be explored as an application to shape customer decisions and responses in these dynamic environments.

Even though companies do not always control customer experience, interruptions help characterize the customer value experience. They influence how consumers perceive and create value in their interactions with a product or service. Interruptions act as mechanisms that change the value experience and serve as mediating mechanisms between unreflective and reflective value experience, and value creation and destruction (Sahhar & Loohuis, 2022). This provides insight into how interruptions and disruptions to the customer value experience affect consumer behaviour and perceptions. By understanding how consumers respond to interruptions and how these interruptions affect value creation and destruction, companies can design targeted nudges to improve the customer experience.

Firms are advised to invest in "streamlining" techniques (Edelman & Singer, 2015), such as simplification, personalization, and contextualization, to enrol customers into an ongoing cycle of retrigger, repurchase, and reconsumption experiences (Court et al., 2009), known as a loyalty loop (Siebert et al., 2020). Considering the emphasis on consistency, effortlessness and predictability, this approach to customer journey design is called the smooth journey model (Siebert et al., 2020). Underlying the model of a smooth journey is the idea that companies should aim to make customers' lives easier by creating consistent and predictable experiences (Court et al., 2009; Edelman & Singer, 2015; Siebert et al., 2020). High customer experience predictability facilitates smooth customer experience journeys (Siebert et al., 2020).

Nudging is a viable mechanism that can be used to influence customers' interaction channel choices (Maas et al., 2018). Some nudges can be implemented with minimal effort and may provide extraordinary returns on that investment (Maas et al., 2018). The idea of nudging offers the potential for firms to set wishful parameters to create solid customer experiences (Maas et al., 2018). Keeping this in mind, the assumption can be made that nudging could play a role in optimizing customer experience. The potential integration of nudging within customer experience in B2B contexts has not been explored yet, making it highly relevant to explore the contribution nudging can make to customer experience in B2B contexts.

3. Method
In the method section, the research design, research setting, data collection, and data analysis are outlined, providing a comprehensive overview of the study's methodology and approach.

3.1 Research design
The objective of this study is to explore the role of nudging in shaping customer experience in B2B and to create guidelines for nudging strategies to optimize customer experience. This is built on a qualitative case study approach involving grounded theory. Grounded theory is an inductive data collection method in qualitative research, based on the systematic collection and analysis of data to construct a theory grounded in the data (Khan, 2014). Grounded theory is appropriate considering the ability to provide a creative approach without confining the researcher to an already existing realm of theory (Cho & Lee, 2014). There is literature on customer experiences and on nudging, however, there is a lack of literature on the role of nudging in customer experiences in B2B contexts. As this is the first study to explore the role of nudging in shaping customer experiences in the B2B context, grounded theory is useful to get the first insights into the influences between these concepts. Thus, the study is not guided by theory but enters the field with an open mind and is based on rich empirics and careful analysis to build theory.

3.2 Research setting
The research setting of this study is B2B. Exploring nudging and customer experience in B2B settings is necessary given the lack of research on customer experience in B2B (Zolkiewski et al., 2017), despite the importance of customer-supplier interaction (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2011) and relationship orientation (Tuli et al., 2007). Furthermore, B2B and B2C customer experience cannot be measured in the same way (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Researching customer experiences in B2B is just as relevant as in B2C because professionals experience like consumers (Witell et al., 2020). This study adopts a case study at a Dutch firm in B2B providing KIBS, knowledge-intensive business services (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2011). These are organizations whose primary value-creating activities are gathering, creating, or disseminating knowledge to provide customer-specific services or solutions (Bettencourt et al., 2002). For confidentiality reasons, the firm is further referred to in this study as DustXpert.

DustXpert was founded in 1907 and has 45 employees and serves more than 600 customers, mainly located in the Netherlands and operating in the B2B sector. The core business is installing and servicing industrial extraction installations. The core activities of DustXpert are (1) to identify a customer's extraction challenges and needs; (2) to create an understanding of a customer's extracting process; (3) to advise customers for an appropriate solution to the challenges and needs; and (4) to implement the solutions at the customer by DustXpert's field engineers. DustXpert identifies customer challenges and needs to gain an understanding of the extraction problems that may occur at the customer's operation. As a result, the services and solutions offered by DustXpert are knowledge-intensive and customer-specific. Furthermore, the installations have a long service life and are maintained periodically, both requiring highly intensive customer interaction over several years. Given that DustXpert interacts intensively with customers, it is important to optimize the customer experience, making DustXpert a suitable firm for this study.

3.3 Data collection
The data collection method used in this study is semi-structured interviews. Interviews are among the most common ways of collecting qualitative data and are best suited to gather information about

people's understanding, perceptions, and experiences (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Radford et al., 2022). The interviews were organized using an interview guide with open-ended questions. Throughout the interview, questions were asked, with new questions arising. The interviews were conducted in this way to explore the concepts of this study from the customers' experiences (Radford et al., 2022).

A total of 12 interviews were conducted with an average duration of about 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted at companies operating in different industries and with staff from different disciplines. An overview of the interviews is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Information

Nr	Job role	Core business	Duration	Amount of data (in pages)
1	Technical Manager	Supply of raw materials in the PVC industry, by blending compounds.	00:47:29	21
2	Maintenance Engineer & Production Planner	Producing biscuits for other businesses, such as a supermarket.	00:17:47	10
3	Production Planner	Producing waffle biscuits for other businesses, such as a supermarket.	00:28:09	10
4	Managing Director	Supplier to metal rolling mills by drawing wire.	00:37:32	16
5	Maintenance Manager	Manufacturing and repairing moulds.	00:24:44	24
6	Technical specialist maintenance and operation	Manufacturing agricultural machinery, especially developing and producing balers.	00:43:46	22
7	Corporations' director	Manufacturing bread improvers in solid, liquid and powder form.	00:46:37	20
8	Technical Manager	Manufacturing bread improvers and release agents.	00:43:59	25
9	Maintenance Engineer	Manufacturing aircraft parts.	00:44:32	20
10	Coordinator (guiding external contractors)	Treating seeds from the customer to give it the desired characteristics.	00:31:23	15
11	Technical Sales manager	Manufacturing dough processing machines.	01:03:21	25
12	Manager of two production sites	Produce beef, pig, chicken, and horse feed.	00:40:20	19
				Total amount of pages: 227

To ensure the richness and quality of the data collection, the interviews were conducted by the same researcher using an interview guide, which ensured that the same guideline of questions was adopted in each interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using an online tool, after which the same researcher read through the transcripts to check and improve them. The transcripts were sent to the interviewees to get confirmation that the researcher's interpretation and the transcript were correct. For confidentiality reasons and without loss of contextual data, data such as names or places have been replaced by general terms in square brackets (Wiles et al., 2007).

The customers with whom DustXpert currently experiences the most intensive interaction were interviewed, given that with these customers the customer experience weighs more heavily than with other customers. The customers with whom the most intensive interaction is experienced are the customers to whom DustXpert provides the most service, which was determined by the value of invoices. Given that most of DustXpert's customers are based in the Netherlands, the interviews were conducted in Dutch so that language would not be a barrier in the interviews.

3.4 Data analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA) was considered a suitable method to gain an exploratory understanding of the experiences of the interviewed customers of DustXpert. Traditionally, TA is seen as a process carried out within analytical traditions such as grounded theory (Radford et al., 2022). TA offers systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). An inductive TA was designed for the research question. An inductive approach means the themes identified will be strongly linked to the data, without trying to fit into pre-existing coding frames (Patton, 2002).

For this study, the Gioia method is used for generating codes and themes from the transcripts. Gioia method consists of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). In the first-order analysis, little effort is made to distil categories, so the number of categories at the beginning of a study explodes to 50 to 100 categories from the first 10 interviews (Gioia et al., 2013). As the study progresses, we look for similarities and differences among the many categories, which reduces the relevant categories to a more manageable number of second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013). The emerging second-order themes are further distilled into aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013).

Analysis of the data was carried out simultaneously with data collection. The number of interviews needed was determined according to when data saturation was reached. The concept of data saturation originates from grounded theory and is achieved when new data no longer leads to new codes or themes (Radford et al., 2022).

4. Findings

This chapter explains the findings of the Gioia method analysis. The emerged aggregate dimensions will be connected to the research question of this study using an integrative framework.

4.1 Themes on nudging and customer experience

Throughout the interviews, several questions were asked about the customer experience and how the supplier can positively contribute to this. Using the Gioia analysis, four aggregate dimensions emerged from this. Figure 1 shows the data structure of these dimensions arising from the first-order concepts and second-order themes.

4.1.1 Customer-Focused Considerations

Customer-focused considerations are seen in this study as the considerations a customer makes when doing business with a supplier. These considerations contribute to a certain customer experience. The considerations are divided into four themes.

4.1.1.1 Importance of price-quality

Price and quality are aspects that influence the customer experience. First, price, several customers indicated that it is an important aspect on which the experience can depend. For instance, they indicated that the price should be in line with the market. To check whether customers are billed in line with the market, current suppliers' prices are periodically compared with the competitors, as told in the following quote:

> *"...An existing organization we work with, I throw under a microscope about once every two years. Then I deliberately request a quote from the competitor and then I put the prices against each other..."* (R6)

By doing so, customers can find out whether the price of the current supplier is an acceptable price for the services or products being offered. Mainly when there is no urgency, price is perceived as important. Likewise for stock products:

> *"...If it is a stock product, price does play a role..."* (R3)

First-order concepts

- Price matters in the absence of urgency, if end-customer requests or the same quality of the solution.
- Periodically compare prices of current suppliers with competitors.
- Price-quality ratio must be good.
- Quality is more important than price.

→ Importance of price-quality

- Selection of supplier based on best documents.
- Multiple departments are involved in decision-making.
- Customer requests multiple quotes on a new project.
- In case of a new supplier, ask for references and visit for experience and trust.

→ Customer decision-making

- The supplier nearby matters to the customer.
- The supplier is more important than price and installation.
- The supplier should be open and no nonsense.

→ Supplier preferences

- Fast delivery time or availability of a technician is important to the customer.
- In case of urgency, delivery time is more important than price.
- In case of urgency, action must be taken quickly, otherwise it can be planned.

→ Delivery time and presence

⇒ **Customer-focused considerations**

- Keeping to the agreements made.
- Better framing at the front end and not adjusting or adding to it afterwards.
- Clear agreements and goals between supplier and customer.

→ Customer and supplier agreements

- Communicating and providing information about an order and/or delivery towards the customer.
- Completely unburdening the customer.
- After delivering the installation keep interacting for relationship and servicing.
- The supplier should proactively inform.
- The supplier should visit the customer to understand the situation.

→ Interaction during a partnership

- Preference for current suppliers due to trust and familiarity.
- Building a long-term relationship with a supplier is important for the customer.
- Prefer choosing a supplier from own network.
- Preference for current suppliers due to complexity for doing business with a new supplier.

→ Relationship maintenance

- To gain trust in a new supplier, references and tests are looked at.
- If trust is continuously broken, the customer will look for a new supplier.
- Trust in supplier through familiarity within another branch.
- A regular contact person for trust in expertise.

→ Trustworthy

- Personal contact through directness, short lines and a single contact person who picks it up internally.
- Reachableness and a quick and good response is important when making contact.
- Important to communicate points of improvement for a good relationship.
- Quality in contact and information is more important than quantity.

→ Contact preferences

⇒ **Supplier-Customer relationship**

- Mechanics from the supplier who do what is asked and follow the customer's rules.
- A single mechanic who visits the customer's site, for independence of the mechanic.
- Mechanics from the supplier who leave it tidy at the customer's site after the work is done.
- A mechanic is the company's selling point.

→ Characteristics of mechanics

- The supplier must take responsibility to fix the mistakes made.
- Good cooperation by showing commitment by the supplier to reach a solution for the customer.
- The supplier must be able to offer a trustworthy, honest and good advice.
- The supplier must get the required information from the customer.

→ Solution-oriented

- Having skilled staff at the supplier who know what it is all about.
- Properly answering questions.
- Not simply offering what the customer asks for from a specialist perspective, creates trust and appreciation.
- Skilled mechanics at the supplier who understand what they are doing.

→ Specialism

⇒ **Supplier aspects**

- When a product is bought, a supplier tries to sell the customer more.
- Influencing is positive if the customer had not thought of the option and fits the need.
- Influencing is positive if the effect is favourable to the customer need.

→ Ways of influencing

- The customer does not see advising as a form of influencing.
- The customer is not influenceable because the customer is there and makes his or her own choices.
- Influencing should not be noticed as a customer.
- The customer should not be corruptible.

→ Perception of influencing

- The manner of presentation is not more important than the result.
- Presentation of a product is important to show the company behind it, where the appearance matters.
- Displaying the solution based on good reasoning based on figures and examples.
- Presentation of a product beforehand, was not as expected afterwards.

→ Presentation and appearance
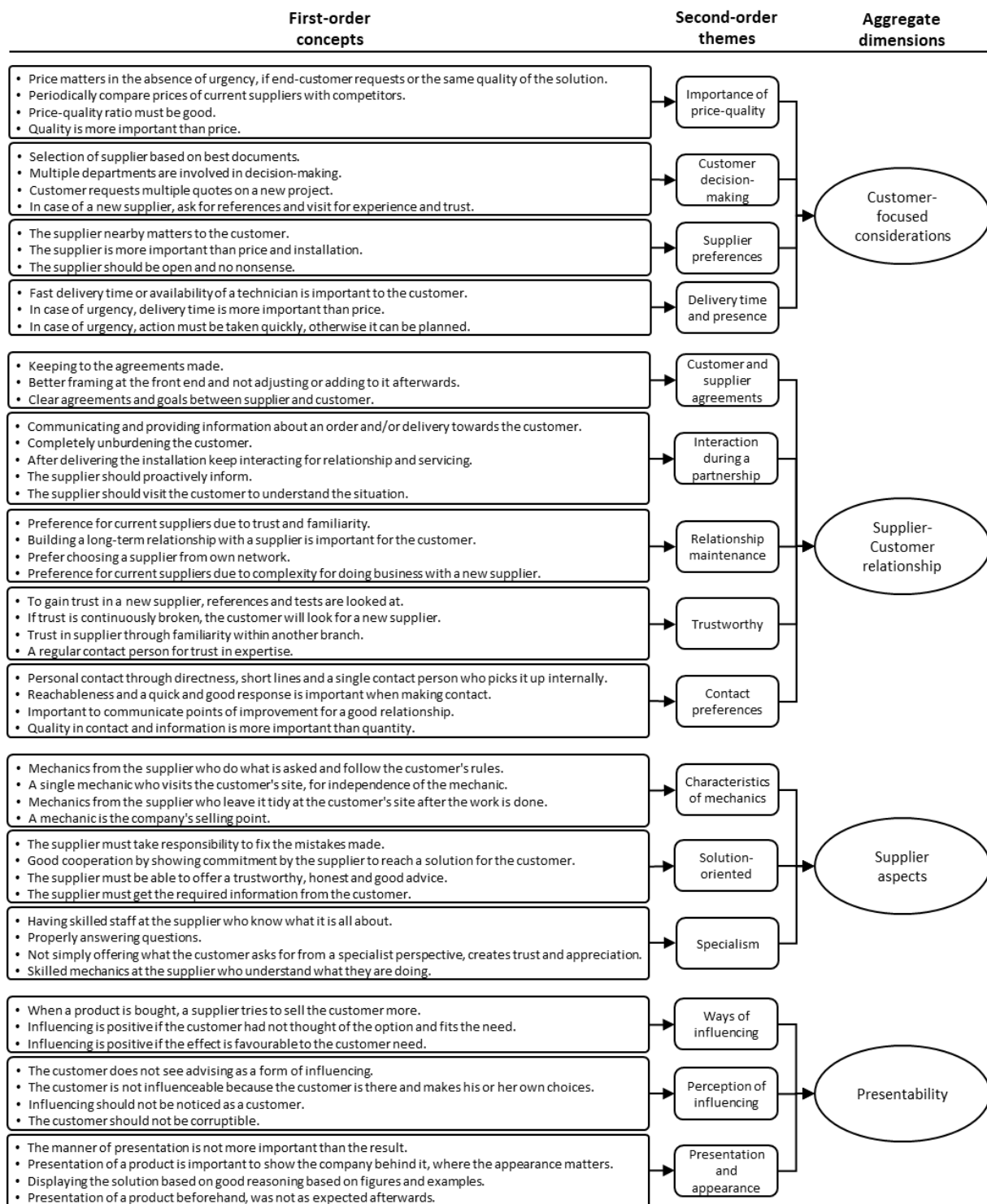
⇒ **Presentability**

Figure 1. Data structure

Also, when the end customer asks for the lowest price or when another supplier provides the same quality, price plays a more crucial role. This is evident from the following statement:

> *"...Unless you have been put through the wringer by our client, forcing us to take our trousers off to get the project sold. Then you do include how you purchase the solution from your supplier and then price can be decisive..."* (R11)

However, in addition to price, quality is also important, so the price-to-quality ratio should be good. It is generally said that quality is more important than the price attached. Customers prefer to pay more

for a service or product when they know the quality will be good in any case. There has been a customer who bought products from a competitor of DustXpert at a lower price, but also experienced that the quality went down as well. For this reason, this customer chose to purchase products from DustXpert again, even though the prices were higher. This can be garnered from the observation of the respondents:

> *"…You have a system, it's more expensive but the functionalities also work better…"*
> (R11)

> *"…We bought stuff from someone else, but it was disappointing. So, then you quickly come back to something more expensive, but then it's good…"* (R12)

4.1.1.2 Customer decision-making
The customer decision-making process can influence the customer experience. In several B2B companies, multiple departments are involved in the decision-making process. These departments make choices based on different points of view, which can change the overall experience with a supplier. For example, one respondent indicated the following:

> *"…I can be positive, but if three others are negative, I am not the only one who decides…"* (R1)

Therefore, customers in the B2B industry will often define a scope before a project. Within this scope, suppliers can make proposals. The data collection shows that customers make a choice based on the supplier with the best documents that fall within the scope of the project:

> *"…If there are several suppliers, we go back to the scope, whether they can offer what we ask for. Does it comply with European directives? Regarding food safety, we go into further detail to see who has the best cards, which determines the choice…"* (R7)

Furthermore, some customers are obliged, and others wish to request multiple quotes from other suppliers for projects above a certain amount. This is demonstrated by the quote below from respondent 10. Comparing these quotes can help change the customer's experience with a supplier.

> *"…Contractually, we have to request multiple quotes from a certain amount…"* (R10)

When dealing with a new supplier, customers want to gain confidence in the quality of the supplier and the solution. For this reason, customers will request references and schedule visits, which can influence the experience. As cited by one of the respondents:

> *"…It's not that I go to a fair, often I call someone that I know what they are doing and ask for the experience and if I can come by to have a look…"* (R7)

4.1.1.3 Supplier preferences
Customers have several preferences among suppliers that influence their experience with the supplier. Several respondents commented on the location of the supplier. A few indicated that it is always important, as companies located in the same region want to support each other by doing business with each other:

> *"…We prefer to buy locally here because everyone helps each other here…"* (R4)

Others indicate that a nearby supplier is especially important for an urgent product, where the supplier's mechanics need to be there quickly if there is a breakdown. One respondent told the following story about this:

"…The other location has its court suppliers, and they are around the corner there. I have a similar supplier around the corner here. They have often approached me to do the services here as well, but I hold off because it only works at the other location because they are around the corner there. It works the same way with our supplier because they are around the corner here…" (R9)

They also indicate that a supplier should be open and no-nonsense, where everyone can call each other by name. Suppliers are seen as a total package behind the products and services they provide. The supplier is more important than ultimately the service or product. The same was perceived from the replies of some of the participants:

"…We are a no-nonsense organization. With us, everyone addresses each other by name and is open, which is also what we prefer to see in a supplier…" (R6)

"…You don't just buy the machine, but the whole process. It is important for the supplier to match that…" (R1)

"…We don't look at the price but at the total package…" (R10)

4.1.1.4 Delivery time and presence
Delivery time and presence of the supplier are also aspects that can influence the experience with the supplier. The following quote indicates that the delivery time of parts and the quick presence of the supplier can result in a positive experience.

"…The moment I call and the time someone comes here, it doesn't take very long. You sometimes see that differently, so that is positive…" (R2)

Delivery time and quick presence appear to be mainly important in situations where there is urgency. In these situations, customers are willing to pay a higher price if at least quick delivery can be made. In situations where there is no urgency, it is indicated that fast delivery time is not a requirement. In these cases, they wish to schedule the service or delivery. As revealed by some of the respondents:

"…What do we need it for, is it urgent, then it must come quickly. Then you look at the price, but then that has less influence…" (R3)

"…That I am helped at short notice. If there is urgency I want to be treated urgently, if there is no urgency we will schedule it…" (R5)

4.1.2 Supplier-Customer Relationship
Supplier-Customer Relationships are seen in this study as the aspects of the relationships between the supplier and the customer. These relationships contribute to a certain customer experience. The relationship is divided into five themes.

4.1.2.1 Customer and supplier agreements
According to respondents, agreements with the supplier appear to be important for customers to have a good experience. Customers perceive that it is important in a relationship to set clear agreements and goals. It is also important, from both sides, to stick to these agreements:

"…DustXpert and we have made agreements, we'll stick to them, and we're going to solve it together…" (R1)

"…Promising and not doing, that's the thing that is most frustrating for both parties…" (R9)

This way, they can build on each other towards the goals that have been set. This results in a positive customer experience, according to the quotes above. Making agreements starts at the front of the buying process. Customers express that they want everything to be delineated at the front so that they do not face surprises afterwards. Respondent 4 also tells this:

> *"…There will then be an invoice on the back of the transport, but you should have called ahead for that…"* (R4)

Customers wish that no additions or adjustments must be made that were not discussed beforehand. It is even indicated that they are willing to pay more money at the beginning, rather than getting the cost afterwards. As stated by one of the respondents:

> *"…With projects worth more than a hundred thousand euros, pre-engineering is very important. If it is carried out well and in cooperation, you won't encounter any surprises. Rather invest extra time and maybe extra money upfront, so you don't get the bill afterwards…"* (R7)

4.1.2.2 Interaction during a partnership
The way the customer and supplier interact in the relationship is important for a good customer experience. Within this interaction, the supplier should completely unburden the customer:

> *"…This is very important to you, you naturally want a company that unburdens you completely…"* (R8)

The customer should not have to think for themself about what needs to be figured out and the status of the project. The supplier should proactively inform the customer, which is evident from the following quote:

> *"…I want to hear the different stages an order is in…"* (R1)

When the customer does not contact the supplier, the supplier should contact the customer. When this does not happen, the relationship may be diluted, according to a respondent:

> *"…The relationship may be diluted because I am busy with many things at once and I like being reminded, and not the other way around…"* (R7)

The supplier should communicate information about an order or delivery to the customer. The customer wants to be kept informed about its status and what the delivery time will be. The interaction is so important that the customer understands delays if this is communicated by the supplier. A couple of responses highlighting the importance of the interaction are given below:

> *"…Frustrating, I'd rather they say it will be in three weeks, then I know where I stand…"* (R2)

> *"…We must be quick here, of course quick is nice, but a quick response in communication is even more important than being quick here. So, knowing when I expect someone is at least as important as the fact that they are here…"* (R9)

In addition, interaction must be maintained, which is not a given. Customers want to keep an interaction even after the installation has taken place. This is important for a good relationship, but also for the service of the installation. As talked about by some of the respondents:

> *"…You are a partner in good times and not so good times, that's what it's about. You can never hear back after a deal. Everyone wants attention…"* (R4)

"…When something is placed and installed and it is commissioned and works well, but in addition to that you also get maintenance and that falls and stands with the relationship and interaction…" (R7)

Before the interaction, some customers mentioned that they appreciated it when the supplier visited them on-site. In this way, they hope the supplier can better understand the situation, by seeing where the installation needs to operate. It is expected that the relationship and interaction will be smoother this way because this way the supplier has seen what the customer is talking about. As also indicated by respondent 6:

"…Ideally, I would like to invite them and then you can just come here and see the situation and then you know what we are talking about when I call …" (R6)

4.1.2.3 Relationship maintenance

Relationship maintenance is preferred by many customers in this case study. Customers prefer doing business with their current suppliers, rather than looking for or engaging with a new supplier. Here, customers seek a long-term relationship to build trust and familiarity with each other.

"…We would like to build a relationship with a supplier for a longer period…" (R8)

Not only for these reasons, customers prefer not to enter projects with new suppliers, but it can also be complex for customers to make this choice. The supplier of an installation has also engineered the installation and has all the documentation ready. When maintenance needs to be carried out or something is wrong with the installation, the house supplier can provide information or help the customer more easily, customers' experience proves. As told in the quote below:

"…If I must get another party involved, it becomes difficult, as they need to get the model in and be able to edit it. This was explained and engineered by DustXpert…" (R1)

"…It may be that you can continue with what you have in-house, the existing suppliers. Suppose there is something new that you are not familiar with, then we still look from the existing network we can involve in that…" (R7)

For other customers, it is complex because they must screen new suppliers before they are allowed to do business with them. This costs time and money, so a supplier that has already been screened is more likely to be chosen. This is what one of the respondents said about it:

"…With us, it is difficult because we must meet firms that are known and screened. That must be screened and checked, once that is the case you are in the system, and you are soon a regular/court supplier of ours. That makes it easy to do business with you. The threshold is higher to do business with someone else, but certainly not impossible…" (R9)

So, for a new project, most customers prefer to choose a supplier from their network. This was a common reflection of the respondents:

4.1.2.4 Trustworthy

In the customer-supplier relationship, trust is important to the experience. Trust is important enough that there are customers who seek a new supplier if it is continuously damaged:

"…Make sure it stays good because if it doesn't go well once or twice, as a customer I tend to look elsewhere. Because I think it is important to build and trust a supplier…" (R2)

To build trust, customers prefer to have one contact person within an organization. A respondent said that the contact person from the supplier can deliver good advice, which in a follow-up project creates trust to give another good advice, by the same person. If the customer can trust the contact person, and therefore the supplier, this can positively change the customer experience. As told in the following quotes:

> *"...You know who you are dealing with, because the work delivered, and the advice has always been good. Now if he says again what we should do, it might also be a better solution. Because you've spoken to the guy before and have always been right, you go along with it easily and trust that he has the expertise. With someone new, you must build again, so that makes the relationship important..."* (R12)

> *"...It is important to have a single contact you can rely on and help..."* (R5)

When customers need to approach a new supplier, they also consider trust to be important. However, trust is something you must build, and you don't always know beforehand whether a supplier can be trusted. Respondents say that they prefer suppliers who are already known within the group or another branch. They have more trust in this supplier because other companies already have experience with it. When customers start doing business with an unknown supplier, they will often ask for references. In addition, customers would want to test the installation, to check if the quality is as desired. Some of the respondents shared the same:

> *"...We have many different factories and multiple suppliers, so we do business with them at other sites and that bond is already there..."* (R12)

> *"...If we are looking for a type of supplier, we should do more reference visits and long-duration testing..."* (R1)

4.1.2.5 Contact preferences
Several contact preferences emerged from the interviews that are experienced as desirable in a relationship with a supplier. First, it is important that a supplier can be reached by the customer, which does not appear to be obvious to the respondents. Customers want to call the supplier and have a person pick up, as stated below:

> *"...If you have a problem, you need someone to call, a helpline to help you..."* (R5)

Furthermore, it appears important to some customers that there are short lines of communication, in which they can expect quick and clear answers to questions. It was also indicated that the amount of contact with the supplier is not the most important thing. When contact is good, there does not need to be much contact. This also applies to information: good information is important and not a lot of information. Two respondents commented:

> *"...The moment I call, that someone answers right away and has a good and clear story. That is very positive..."* (R2)

> *"...The right information, too much information does not make a person happy..."* (R8)

With acquisitions, of both current and unknown suppliers, the same is perceived:

> *"...If they then call regularly, you do think, we've been clear now. But you're allowed to try. As long as I keep it alive that there is a possibility, then they will keep trying..."* (R9)

Customers are fine with suppliers calling to make a proposal or to sell something, but customers do not appreciate being approached continuously. As mentioned earlier, customers wish to have one contact person with a supplier, for trust and familiarity. However, this also appears to be a preference for having contact. Customers ask questions to one contact person beforehand, rather than being sent from department to department. This way, the customer has one contact person who takes up the project internally at the supplier and provides feedback to the customer. This is affirmed according to what someone said:

> *"…I have already taken the initiative to call, whether you are the designated person yes or no, just answer my question. As a customer, that is nicer than being sent from disk to disk…"* (R6)

4.1.3 Supplier Aspects
Supplier Aspects are seen in this study as the aspects of the supplier which are important for the customer. These aspects contribute to a certain customer experience. The supplier aspects are divided into three themes.

4.1.3.1 Characteristics of mechanics
The supplier's mechanics have often been mentioned by customers, making it a theme within the supplier aspects. The mechanics are seen as the supplier's selling point, as told by the following quote:

> *"…We have contact with the service mechanic, who does his job well and that is often good for the company's selling point…"* (R8)

This is because the mechanics are often on the customer's site installing but also maintaining the installations. In addition to having a single contact person, as mentioned before, customers also prefer having one single mechanic. Because the same mechanic visits the customers, the mechanic can work independently given that he knows the customers' site. Cited by the following respondent:

> *"…If we must explain and arrange someone's way every time, it is inconvenient for us. If you have someone in-house, you know where the equipment is here on site and that is easier for us, to send someone in here without having to walk there ourselves…"* (R8)

In addition, the way mechanics work is important for a good customer experience. Customers say they have a positive experience when mechanics do what is asked, following the rules that are in place at the customer's site. It is also important for the customer experience that mechanics leave the workplace clean and tidy after the work is done. As expressed by a few of the respondents:

> *"…If the service engineer has a clean work outfit on and introduces himself and sticks to the protocols and follows the ground rules that exist, then you have a good relationship running with a company…"* (R10)

> *"…It is nice if they clean up after they are gone and don't leave a mess…"* (R7)

4.1.3.2 Solution-oriented
Within the aspects of the supplier, solution orientation is important. Ultimately, there is a reason why the customer and the supplier are in contact. In many cases, the customer has a problem for which the supplier can provide a solution. For a positive customer experience, it is therefore important that the supplier can offer good advice and a solution. Here, the solution may be developed from a collaboration between the customer and the supplier. The customers experience good cooperation in this respect when the supplier shows commitment to achieving the best solution for the customer. Which is shown by the quotes below:

> *"…I think we can reach a solution in cooperation with each other…"* (R1)

"…That's the feeling. You know the contact with each other, that when you call you want to be helped and you notice if a company is doing everything, they can help you…" (R8)

The interviews indicated that customers expect the supplier to gather the necessary information from the customer. The supplier knows best what information is needed for a good solution, so in doing so, it will have to take responsibility for gathering this information. As cited below:

"…That they ask me through, they know what they need to be able to help me, and they actively try to get that information out of me. I don't know what they need, so proactively working on that and unburdening me as a customer, so that I can engage with the organization here…" (R2)

The customer therefore wants to be able to trust the supplier when a solution is developed. Choices can be based on the fact that the customer trusts the supplier because of its knowledge and expertise.

"…We choose an alternative part and trust the supplier if they say it is one-to-one interchangeable…" (R3)

If there is then a solution, which turns out not to be the right solution afterwards, there is an even greater importance for fixing the mistakes. The customers tend to accept that mistakes are made and don't necessarily see this as a negative experience the experience can be positive if the mistakes are handled well by the supplier. One of the comments also portrays this:

"…What we think is most important: every company does something wrong. No company does something 100 per cent right. There are those on projects, but there are mistakes in most of them. How do you address that as a company? Do you leave it and the client in the dark, or do you come back to it months later…" (R11)

4.1.3.3 Specialism

The specialism a supplier possesses within the industry they operate in can change the customer's experience. The supplier's employees can exude a specialist image of the supplier towards the customer, according to data collection from this study. A positive customer experience can occur when a supplier employs skilled staff that know the business in the industry they operate in. More specifically, mechanics are also important in this. Mechanics are often present at the customer's site, where they can show that they have both knowledge and expertise of the installation they are working on. This is representative of the supplier's specialism. The following quotes confirm this:

"…The right people in the right place, the right people at the table, the people who give the impression that they know what you are talking about. The experiences you go through in production, that they have recognition, but also can think through what the impact is that you put away a big installation. I think that's important, and it wins me over…" (R1)

"…If your mechanic understands the business, that's easier to talk to than a mechanic who doesn't understand the business…" (R10)

Specialism can also be exuded by properly answering the questions. For example, more respondents indicated that this is sometimes missed:

"…Answering the questions I missed with the other party, but that was good with you…" (R4)

"…The moment you are no longer provided, you start calling. Then if you don't get the right answers, you do look for something else…" (R8)

Answering the questions does not mean that the customer must always just do what the customer asks. If the supplier is not convinced by the solution the customer asks for, the customer appreciates it if the supplier rejects the request. Rejecting a request because it is not a technically sound solution exudes specialism. As reinforced by a respondent:

> *"...I prefer that someone doesn't want to offer something for a particular reason and doesn't get an order because they took that risk. That appeals to me, that you are so confident..."* (R4)

4.1.4 Presentability
Presentability is seen in this study as the overarching dimension. This dimension can influence the three dimensions mentioned before. Presentability can contribute to a certain customer experience and stems from three themes.

4.1.4.1 Ways of influencing
The way customers influence supplier experience can change the customer's overall experience with the supplier. A respondent says they find it an influence when suppliers try to sell more when a solution has already been sold.

> *"...There is an attempt to expand the business you are already doing with them..."* (R2)

So, when the supplier does business with a customer, they try to get everything out of it. The interviews show that customers perceive influencing as positive when it contributes positively to customer needs. An influence is also perceived as positive when the customer himself had not thought of the option or did not know there was another option. If the customer perceives that an influence is positive for them, it can contribute to a positive customer experience. Like in the quotes below:

> *"...It may be that a supplier says to me, you want to do this but if you do this and that, those are aspects that we haven't thought about at all and get a wake-up call. We then get through that man is right, let's do that and then it is in our favour..."* (R6)

> *"...If they influence me to make a choice, and they think it's a good choice for us, I'm always willing to go along with that as far as it goes..."* (R2)

However, in the opposite situation, it contributes to a negative customer experience. For instance, several respondents indicated that influencing from the supplier only contributes to the supplier's needs. This was called manipulation by a respondent, where the customer did not experience the supplier trying to help the customer. One of the responses further supports this:

> *"...That is manipulation because he is manipulating me towards the product he wants to sell and not the best, so he is not actually helping me..."* (R5)

4.1.4.2 Perception of influencing
A customer's perception of influence is important in what the customer experiences when they are influenced. For example, when advice is given, the customer does not experience being influenced:

> *"...No, they don't influence, they advise, and I have confidence in that..."* (R12)

When a supplier encourages customers towards a certain option, this is perceived as advice and not as influencing. In addition, some customers believe that they cannot be influenced. These customers indicate that they buy what is needed and no stimulation takes place in this context. Customers are not obliged to do anything and make their own choices. As shown by the following comment:

"...Nudging is fine by me. Whether it's non-transparent or transparent, I'm fine with it. In the end, you stand there, and you decide and nothing is compulsory..." (R4)

It was also indicated that there are companies that provide training for employees not to be corrupted. For example, at a firm listed on the stock exchange, employees are not allowed to accept gifts from suppliers, as this is seen as an influence. Besides there are customers who are not allowed to be influenced, some customers indicate that they do not want to be influenced. These respondents indicated that when they realize that they are being influenced, they will not go along with it. However, this mainly occurs when the customer feels that only the supplier can benefit from the influence and that it is not beneficial for the customer's own needs. Some of the responses also demonstrate this:

"...Getting a bottle of wine at Christmas, that's possible, but if it's a value above 50 euros, that's not going to happen, and you can take it back nicely..." (R7)

"...I don't like that if I get noticed I wouldn't do it anymore..." (R5)

4.1.4.3 Presentation and appearance
The way suppliers present a solution and the appearance of the solution and the firm itself can change the customer experience. As mentioned earlier, customers consider the supplier more important than the price or installation. Moreover, the appearance of the supplier can contribute positively to this. When the supplier has a good appearance, it can develop a positive customer experience. For example, the following respondent mentioned that the supplier was given time to tell their story because that person was so enthusiastic:

"...He was so enthusiastic about what he told, you just grant him the time to tell it..."
(R6)

The presentation of a solution can also contribute to the image customers have of a supplier. According to respondents of the interviews, the presentation of a solution shows what type of firm is behind it. However, the way a solution is presented is not more important than the result of the solution.

"...At the end of the day, I am result-oriented, and I look at the bottom line. Whether it is put in a silver or gold jacket, I try to pierce through that..." (R6)

Customers perceive a good presentation when it contains a good and clear substantiation. A good substantiation can be done based on figures, but also on examples, images and animations. For example, one of the customers says:

"...A picture says more than a thousand words..." (R11)

However, there are also occasions among the customers in this case study where the presentation of a solution in advance did not meet expectations afterwards. As one of the replies indicated:

"...We have sometimes bought something that was presented in a certain way, but it didn't quite go as planned..." (R2)

4.2 An integrative framework of nudging and customer experience
In this section, we will zoom out to interpret and make sense of the findings. Figure 2 shows the integrative framework that is developed based on these findings. It illustrates the relationship between customer experience and nudging. Nudging is any attempt to influence people's judgment, choice, or behaviour predictably (Hansen, 2016). So, when a supplier can predictably influence a customer's intended experiences, this involves a nudge strategy.
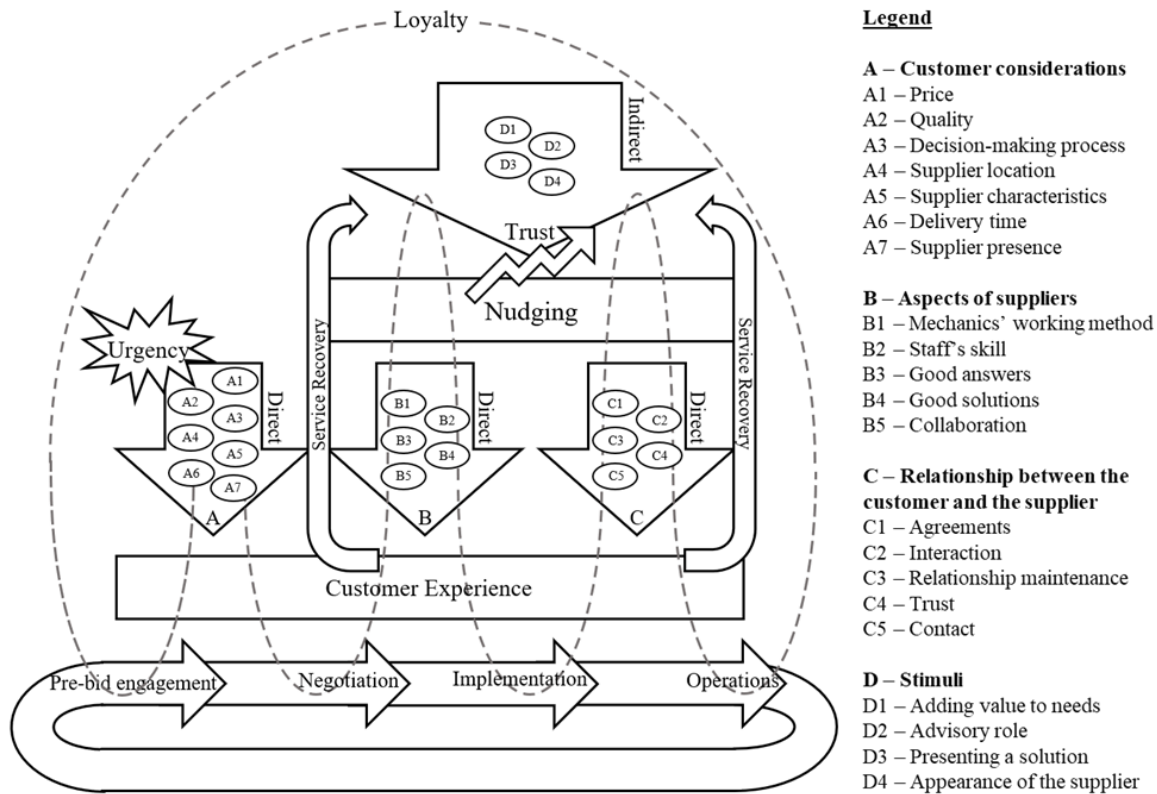
Figure 2. Integrative Framework of the Role of Nudging on Customer Experience

The integrative framework showing the role of nudging on the customer experience also includes the customer journey of B2B. Whereas B2C's customer journey flows from pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), B2B's customer journey is defined as an ongoing process of pre-bid engagement, negotiation, implementation, and operations (Brady et al., 2005; Witell et al., 2020). As it is known, customer experience evolves at different stages of the customer journey, which is also reflected in the data collection. Respondents expressed what is important for them with a supplier to create a positive customer experience. 3 themes directly influence the customer experience (see arrows A, B, and C in Figure 2). These themes are shown above the stage of the customer journey in which the themes influence the customer experience the most. The themes are specified with aspects on which this customer experience depends, which are shown within the arrows.

Arrow A indicates the customer considerations which have a direct influence on the experience the customer has with the supplier. Customer considerations primarily influence the experience at the initial phases of the customer journey, in pre-bid engagement and negotiation. Seven aspects within this theme can influence the customer experience in these phases of the journey, defined in the following terms: A1 is the price, A2 is the quality, A3 is the decision-making process, A4 is the supplier location, A5 are the supplier characteristics, A6 is the delivery time, A7 is the supplier presence. These aspects are given and largely fixed, and no nudge strategy can be applied to alter the customer experience. However, it turns out that the degree of urgency affects the aspects. Urgency changes the balance between the importance of the aspects. For instance, in case of high urgency, the price becomes less important, and the focus is mainly on fast delivery and quick action. Arrow B indicates the aspects of suppliers from which the customer experience can directly alter. Supplier aspects influence the experience mainly in the middle phases of the customer journey, in the negotiation and implementation. Five aspects within this theme can directly influence the customer experience, namely: B1 is the mechanics' working method, B2 is the staff's skill, B3 is giving good answers, B4 is giving a good solution, and B5 is having a collaboration. Arrow C indicates the relationship between the customer and the supplier. This relationship can directly alter the customer experience. The relationship mainly influences the customer experience in the final phases of the customer journey, in the implementation and operations. Five aspects within this theme can directly influence the customer experience, namely: C1 are the agreements, C2 is the interaction, C3 is the relationship maintenance, C4 is the trust, and C5 is the contact.

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As discussed, the themes of arrow B and arrow C directly influence the customer experience. However, there are also indirect influences on the customer experience, which reach the customer experience through these two themes. What is understood by this are the stimuli that can be exercised on the aspects of B and C that can influence the customer experience indirectly. The indirect stimuli derive from arrow D and include four aspects that indirectly influence the customer experience. These are defined as follows: D1 is adding value to the customer's need, D2 is taking an advisory role, D3 is presenting a solution, and D4 is the appearance of the supplier. These four aspects will not in isolation change the customer's experience. This goes hand in hand with the aspects from arrows B and C. For example, if a firm has an incredibly well-crafted presentation, but this does not answer the questions or solve the customer's problem, this will not mean that the presentation results in a positive customer experience. However, it appears that when customers trust a supplier, this can enhance the effect of a nudge on the customer experience. Customers indicate that they are willing to go along with the supplier's incentives when they trust the supplier that it will work out positively for the customer.

Furthermore, it has been shown that nudges can contribute to service recovery. Customers indicate the importance of resolving errors and that this contributes to a positive customer experience. Service recovery is the actions taken by the supplier to address and resolve customer complaints or dissatisfaction resulting from service failures (Guo et al., 2015). Previous research shows that the effect of service recovery can lead to the restoration of customer satisfaction, increase customer loyalty, and enhance positive word-of-mouth (J. Singh & Crisafulli, 2016). The use of nudges can boost service recovery and thereby positively influence the customer experience.

Finally, a dotted line is shown throughout the framework, representing the loyalty of a customer. Customers indicate a preference for maintaining a relationship with the supplier. In addition, the B2B customer journey is an ongoing process. Customers prefer to continue the journey with the same supplier. The dotted lines show the path that can be taken with the customer, showing how nudges can contribute to the customer. When the nudge strategy results in predictably positively influencing the customer experience, it can ensure that customers remain loyal and do not look for a new supplier. In this way, the customer will remain in the ongoing customer journey.

5. Discussion

This chapter will discuss the key findings of this study. Based on these, theoretical contributions can be made, and the managerial implications will be explained. Finally, limitations and further research will be discussed.

5.1 Reflecting upon study

This study aims to explore the role of nudging in shaping intended experiences in business settings, by answering the following research question:

"What role does nudging play in shaping customer experience in B2B?"

Reflecting on this study, several insights and dynamics emerged that contribute to the understanding of nudging in shaping customer experiences within the B2B context. The study uncovered an integrative framework that illustrates how nudging can, directly and indirectly, influence customer experience. One of the discoveries was the identification of the three themes that all influence the customer experience directly: customer considerations, aspects of suppliers, and the relationship between the customer and supplier. These findings highlight areas where businesses can strategically apply nudges to alter the customer experience.

This study discovered the insight that nudges do not always have an effect, as in the case of customer considerations. As is known, customer experience is not always under a firm's control (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020), but by being familiar with the aspects in which customer experience is evaluated, a firm can apply stimuli to it to positively influence the experience. However, this only applies to those aspects in which the supplier can also exercise control.

Another discovery was the identification of the indirect effect on customer experience. This involves the stimuli which can be exerted on the aspects of the supplier and the relationship. A surprising aspect here is the role of customer trust in the effectiveness of nudging strategies. The data showed that when customers trust a supplier, they are more accommodating to nudges, which can

reinforce the positive impact on their experience. However, trust is inversely revealed to affect customer experience, reflecting the dark side of nudging. This suggests an intricate interplay between trust and influence than previously acknowledged. Trust not only enhances the impact of nudges but also contributes to longer-term customer loyalty and experience. This emphasises the importance of building and maintaining trust as a fundamental element in customer experience management.

The role of nudging in service recovery also emerged as a critical finding. The study revealed that strategic nudging can effectively mitigate the negative impacts of service failures, helping to restore customer trust and loyalty. This insight adds a new dimension to the understanding of service recovery, suggesting that nudging can be a tool for turning potentially damaging situations into opportunities for a positive customer experience.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to the field of customer experience by proposing three contributions. First, this study expands the understanding of customer experience in B2B (Sahhar et al., 2021; Witell et al., 2020; Zolkiewski et al., 2017), by presenting insights into signposting customer experience. To date, it is known in the literature that customer experience evolves over time (Grönroos, 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) and is not always under the control of firms (Becker et al., 2020; Grönroos, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2009). Since this omits what way the intended customer experience can be shaped, it has proven useful to focus on customer experience management through nudging. It has revealed the aspects on which the customer experience in this case study depends and on which nudging can have an impact. In doing so, the paper poses a picture of opportunities for a firm to shape the customer experience, by focusing on the influenceable aspects of the customer experience. These findings are brought together in an integrative framework that can be helpful for future research on these concepts.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on customer experience management in B2B (Court et al., 2009; Edelman & Singer, 2015; Sahhar & Loohuis, 2022; Siebert et al., 2020), by presenting insights on how nudging can help shape customer experience. To date, several concepts are known to contribute to customer experience management. For instance, this study has demonstrated that it is important for the customer that suppliers fix the mistakes made, thereby creating a positive customer experience. This contributes to the existing literature describing interruptions that help characterize the customer experience (Sahhar & Loohuis, 2022). This study expands on these descriptions, despite this study focused on shaping the customer experience in B2B, the grounded theory approach also allowed us to interrogate the role of interruptions. Alongside this, it is known that firms are advised to invest in streamlining techniques to keep the customer in an ongoing circle of experiences (Court et al., 2009; Edelman & Singer, 2015). Underlying the model of a smooth journey is the idea that companies should aim to make customers' lives easier by creating consistent and predictable experiences (Court et al., 2009; Edelman & Singer, 2015; Siebert et al., 2020). In doing so, nudging is a viable mechanism that can be used to influence customers' interaction channel choices (Maas et al., 2018). Since there is a lack in the literature on the role of nudging in contributing to shaping customer experience, it has proved useful to focus on customer experience management through nudging. It has revealed aspects on which nudge strategies can be built and which can have an indirect effect on the customer experience. In doing so, this study shows the opportunities for a firm to apply nudge strategies that can help with customer experience management. These findings are also reflected in the integrative framework that can be helpful for future research on these concepts.

Third, this study uncovers the role of nudging in service recovery (Guo et al., 2015; J. Singh & Crisafulli, 2016), by showing that nudging could be a tool for the recovery of errors. Current literature indicates the importance of service recovery. This can lead to restoration of customer satisfaction, increase customer loyalty, and enhance positive word-of-mouth (J. Singh & Crisafulli, 2016). This is confirmed by this case study, where customers indicate that fixing errors results in a positive customer experience. This study uncovered the way nudges can play a role in this recovery, which is important for a good customer experience.

5.3 Managerial implications

For firms, managing customer experience can be daunting (Edelman & Singer, 2015; Rawson et al., 2013). Thereby, customer experience in B2B is even more complex than in B2C (see, for example, Forkmann et al., 2017; Sahhar et al., 2021; Zolkiewski et al., 2017), making it crucial for firms to

develop strategies for customer experience management. Based on the findings, this paper offers practitioners insights into the role of nudging in managing customer experience through the integrative framework (see Figure 2). This framework can be deployed as a supportive tool to better understand and master customer experience or as practical guidance in the development of nudge strategies to predictably influence the customer experience.

The framework shows that nudges indirectly influence customer experience, which implies that managers can deploy strategies to manage customer experiences. In addition, the framework shows that trust can reinforce nudge strategies. When managers create a situation where customers trust the supplier, the nudge strategies will have a greater effect on the customer experience. Nudging can also be involved in service recovery. When errors have occurred, firms can use nudges to inform customers of the steps being taken to resolve the problem and reassure them that their concerns are being taken seriously. Customers have indicated a preference for one regular supplier and thus loyalty to the current supplier. By using nudging, managers can promote customer loyalty. By using nudges to predictably influence the customer experience positively, customers will not feel the need to look for a new supplier.

Managers need to strike a balance between influencing customer behaviour and avoiding manipulation. While nudging can be a powerful tool for shaping customer experience, it also has a potential dark side that managers must consider. Nudging strategies can cross the line of manipulation, which can raise ethical concerns. Some customers see nudges as manipulation and state that when they realize they are being influenced, they will look for a new supplier. So, if customers perceive nudging as misleading or compelling, it can damage trust and the customer relationship. Managers must ensure that nudging is applied transparently and ethically, putting the customer's interests first. Nudges should always be designed to meet customer needs and should be driven from an advisory role.

Furthermore, firms should be aware of the extent to which customers are present in the different phases of the customer journey. For example, in the early customer journey phases, it is mainly the direct effects that can result in a positive experience. In the middle and final phases of the customer journey, indirect aspects, nudges, can exert an effect on the customer experience, whereas in the early phases, this will have less or no effect.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study is built on a grounded theory approach to examine the role of nudging in shaping customer experience in B2B. The belief is that the approach taken, and the findings of this study can encourage other researchers to explore these concepts further. The point of departure was as follows: what role does nudging play in shaping customer experience in B2B? Along the way, there are also discovered practices to which nudging can contribute. For example, nudging contributes to service recovery. This study examined the role nudging plays in shaping customer experience exclusively, from which emerged that nudging also plays a role in service recovery. Previous research has shown the importance of service recovery, and this study did not delve deeper into the discovery that nudging plays a role in service recovery. Therefore, it would be valuable to improve the understanding of nudging strategies for service recovery. For instance, an interesting question would be as follows: what role does nudging play in service recovery?

In this study, the data was collected by conducting interviews with DustXpert's customers. By asking questions about customer experience and nudging, answers were given on which the findings are based. However, respondents may not be aware of their experiences in practice. There may be a difference between what customers say they experience and what they experience in practice. So, it may be relevant to explore these concepts through a different research method. By conducting experiments, for example, it may be possible to check whether customers experience what they say they experience.

Nudges can be implemented by a supplier, but this is not always consciously noticed by a customer. For example, the design of a website may involve several nudges. However, in doing so, a customer sees the website and does not necessarily experience every nudge involved. In conducting interviews with customers, it was noted that asking about influences and incentives from the supplier was felt to be difficult. Several customers indicated that suppliers do not influence the customer or that the customer does not perceive this to be the situation. This may have limited the ability to define the role of nudging in shaping customer experience. So, it may be relevant to explore these concepts

through a different research method. As also mentioned above, experimenting may be valuable to further define the role of nudging.

A final note is that this study focused specifically on a knowledge-intensive industrial dust extraction context. In other contexts, the role of nudging might be defined differently. Researchers are therefore encouraged to build on the integrative framework of this study, which can provide some empirical guidance while remaining open to new insights needed to expand upon our knowledge about the role of nudging in shaping customer experience.

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