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## MODULE\_4 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

### Lesson\_1\_MY CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

#### CONTENT OVERVIEW

We all have experiences from service encounters. Some of us may have worked as service persons on the “other side” of a desk, as a host, or as a service provider’s employee or even as an entrepreneur serving customers. However, we all must have experiences also from the customer’s viewpoint, being a customer, a tourist, or a guest. Therefore, it is a good, practical, and fertile way to reflect on one’s own customer experiences and own observations and to learn about the key elements that make (or break) the customer’s experience for instance in tourism and hospitality service contexts.

The customer experience covers and consists of all encounters, situations, and moments the customer faces and goes through on one’s trip, for instance in the case of tourism. Or in the case of a restaurant dinner, the customer’s experience, obviously, goes beyond the food on a plate, the customer service of a waiter or the atmosphere in the surroundings – all these together form the customer’s experience along with other important things, already before and after the visit.

This essay calls for a both self-oriented and comprehensive way of understanding services and customers’ experiences in the field of tourism and hospitality industry: an empathy map, customer as a multisensory character and a sensory walk.

An empathy map helps to deepen the customer understanding and to form a holistic overview about the customer’s experience. It is beneficial to use empathy map throughout any user experience process. In user-centered design, the best benefit comes when empathy map is used from the beginning of the process. In that way the company can form an understanding of the needs and emotions their customers have, from the very beginning.

The purpose of a sensory walk is to stimulate oneself to observe and experience the surroundings and the environment (be it nature, service, commercial, everyday life etc.) with all senses. Combined with customer service, sensory walking research gives valuable and deeper understanding of the services, customers, and possible problems.

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## 1. An empathy map

An empathy map is a tool that helps both to understand customer needs and to make correct choices in terms of customer experience. Visualizing a particular type of user is a way to become more aware of whom you really are designing and developing your services. Using these types of methods can give very valuable and unexpected insights about customers and their needs. Empathy map can be used to categorize and understand research and survey answers, discover possible gaps in current knowledge and create wider user profiles by aligning and grouping different maps of individual customers.

There is more than one way to make an empathy map, but in the traditional version empathy map is split into four quadrants. Each quadrant has its own key trait that answers questions about what the customer said, did, thought and felt during the customer experience. When filling the part *what did the customer say*, write down what the customer said using direct quotes and keywords. Then describe *what the customer did*, what kind of actions and gestures customer had. When filling the last two quadrants *what did the customer think* and *what did the customer feel*, think about customer's potential motivations, goals, needs and desires. Also pay attention to body language, choice of words and tone of voice.

It can be quite easy to fill in what the customer said or did but knowing what they felt, and thought is a lot more difficult. Therefore, filling the map requires careful observations of behaviour and responsiveness. It is also possible to let the customers fill the map themselves.

Read more about empathy map here:

<https://www.interactiondesign.org/literature/article/empathy-map-why-and-how-to-use-it>  
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/>

## 2. Multisensory character

There are five basic human sensory systems: vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Each of these play a significant role when it comes to customer experience. Visual elements in both web design and physical space such as colours, patterns, shapes, typography, and navigation are something that should be chosen with care. One reason why visuals are important, is that the human brain can process visual information a lot faster than any other stimuli.

With audio landscapes, music choices and overall acoustics, the general mood can change drastically, from soothing and pleasant to restless and irritating. For example, echoing is

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something that easily reduces pleasantness. When serving food and drinks it goes without saying that the taste is a really important factor. Although each person has their own preferences and opinions about taste, fresh and good ingredients and right kind of preparation can go a long way.

One of the reasons why using scents in spaces can increase sells, is that unlike other stimuli, scent travels a direct route from smell receptors to the part of the brain that deals with emotions. For example, supermarkets are using scents of fresh fruits and freshly baked bread in different grocery store departments. Also, many hotels have their own specific scent to create a desired atmosphere. When using scents in marketing, it needs to be taken into consideration, that everything is in lined with company's brand and image. Also, one important thing is to remember that some people have a hypersensitive sense of smell, therefore, scents should only be used in small amounts. Waking up the sense of touch makes the sensory marketing complete. Opportunity to touch and to do things such as crafts, can be very special to many people in a modern world. The best customer experience, which leaves the strongest memory trace, can often be the one that evokes all the senses and is overall balanced and diverse sensory experience.

### 3. Sensory walk

It is common that we get carried away with visual elements and things we can see with our own eyes. However, emotional experiences are more connected with not just vision but also taste, smell and touch. They all take us closer towards experimentalism. Trough sensory walking, participants focus on the present time and surroundings with all their senses, observing and verbalizing them. Sensory walk also gives a possibility to experience even a familiar setting and situation in a new way.

Sensory walking research can give understanding of customer's practices, perspectives, and experiences. The goal is not just to investigate what customers think and feel, but to understand their sensory perception of the service. This method helps to understand context, mindsets and lived embodied experiences, as well as create insights that are beneficial when developing services and becoming more customer oriented.

Explore more about the topic here:

<https://medium.com/takingservicedesignforawalk/background-1fd9dbe71827>

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## Conclusions

There are many different methods that are helping companies to understand their customers better and to be more customer centric. The two methods presented here, empathy map and sensory walk are approaching that goal from a slightly different angle. Empathy map is more of a ready-made template, a map that is split into four sections (says, does, thinks and feels). Each of these sections are then filled with knowledge about the customer. Sensory walk is a less structured tool. It is more of an examine how the information based on the customer's sensory experience can benefit the development of a better customer experience.

Last but not least is a reminder of an important point, that the customer experience starts before the actual experience, and that it never really ends. Advertisement, social media, word of mouth, after-sales, follow-ups, and feedbacks are just as important as what happens during the actual customer experience. This makes possible to engage the customer and build a lasting customer relationship.

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