

Is UX the new CX?

By [Johan Kruger](#)

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By nature, mankind is resilient, constantly driving towards a shared aspiration to grow, not only on a physical level, but also in terms of skill, ability, wisdom and legacy. Mankind is also adaptable.



2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic unequivocally tested our ability to pivot as circumstances stretched our limits. Many people also made a fascinating discovery - there are seemingly no limits to our ability to adapt and evolve as circumstances demand.

One of the most significant pivots we had to make was to adapt to digitisation – quickly! There isn't an industry or business model that was exempt from having to push all existing digitisation efforts to the next level. From online shopping, online teaching and learning, online meetings, online technical support, online conferences, online networking, online customer service – pretty much everything that was previously tactile and face-to-face morphed to a virtual, online space. The transition to 'digital everything' was rapid, and for many businesses, it was not the planned, phased and smooth process hoped for.

As much as the digitisation shift was a Darwinian survival tactic, it has also delivered numerous unintended consequences. The most significant of these consequences is paradoxical - as much as the intention was to deliver solutions in a digital format to ensure that customer needs are met for a product or service, the customer has been forgotten in this pursuit and in fact, has become 'out of sight and out of mind'.

The same applies to brands – many major, traditional brands that were built on their physical and market presence are now much less visible in the lives of their customers as they navigate the digital hyperspace, and where their customers only

engage with them when they choose to do so, online.

In the world of customer experience (CX) management, concepts and tools such as maturity-level indexes, journey mapping and differentiation are well known. Businesses that adopted 'Customer Centricity' as a strategic objective have all invested heavily in ensuring the best possible customer experience through these digital platforms and interventions.



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With the advent of Covid-19, many businesses experienced a serious threat to their survival, and we saw demonstrations of the Triune-brain theory popularised by the neuroscientist Paul D. McClean back in the 1960s. The model postulates that the human brain consists of three functional zones:

- The Neocortex responsible for rational thinking.
- The Limbic system which controls our emotions, and
- The Reptilian Brain which controls 'survival' behaviour of which fight, flight and freeze responses are the most prominent examples.

The model further suggests that mankind has a tendency to regress to more basic brain functions in situations where high levels of stress are experienced. With the imminent threat to survival presented by a worldwide pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, many business leaders were guilty of approaching their digitisation efforts from a limbic and even a reptilian model. The digital solution became the obsession and key focus. As these digital solutions started to take shape, many of the efforts to be more customer-centric unintentionally regressed because the prize slipped from being customer centricity, to product centricity.

In banking as one example, the customer journey in a bank branch is significantly different to the customer banking experience via an online app. Similarly in the fast-food industry, the ordering and delivery of food is often outsourced to third-part providers, depriving the fast-food company of the opportunity to deliver the 'tangible experiences' associated with their brand.



A widely accepted definition of CX is that the 'experience' is made up of a person's holistic, provisional disposition about a brand and the customer's cognitive (thoughts), affective (emotions), social and physical reactions when interacting with that brand. The section of most relevance to digitisation is the customer's cognitive, affective, social and physical reactions.



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Think of someone who needs a new garment for a specific function. On a cognitive level, the rationale for the new garment is actually quite clear – a specific event is coming up. This has not really changed with the advent of COVID-19. Even on a social level, the drivers behind the choice of the new garment will always entail a social element - a desire to stand out from the rest of the crowd. Even here, although social functions could be a less frequent activity, not much has changed.

Think about the actual experience of going to a clothing retailer to choose the garment. The tactile experience is one of the most noticeable components of the shopping experience. People touch the fabric and imagine how it would feel on their skins before they go to the fitting room. This speaks directly to the physical experience. When in the fitting room, the focus shifts to the emotions. When the person looks in the mirror and has to decide if this is actually the right garment, self-esteem and emotions are ignited from the image in the mirror.

The bottom line is, businesses must evaluate their propositions on all dimensions of customer experience before they can actually be convinced that their digital offering is on par with their competition. While so much of a consumer's life may have moved online, it does not change the fact that they still evaluate their experience based on their cognitive, affective, social and physical reactions.

So how do they do this?

#1: Know and understand the digital maturity of the business - in exactly the same way that businesses differ in their customer centricity maturity levels, so do businesses differ in digital maturity. The reality is that many businesses that were on high levels of customer centricity maturity dropped a few levels on the maturity scale with the migration of their solutions to digital platforms. Businesses familiar with the maturity levels, both in terms of customer centricity as well digitisation, are in a much better position to regain their previous levels of customer centricity maturity and grow than a business that ignores its digital maturity.

#2: Map the digital journey - Identify the 'experience moments' in the customer's digital interaction with your product, service or solution. Revisit your brand identity and the experience you want to associate with your product or brand. Chances are that you may discover that many 'experience moments' that differentiated your brand in a tactile world are actually weakened by the digital migration, and will need a new strategy to create new meaningful 'experience moments' online.

Chances are that your business may never return to the customer engagement model that existed prior to Covid-19. Take a few steps back and revisit everything you have done to improve your customer experience prior to Covid-19. User experience (UX) through digital platforms will most definitely influence the overall experience of your customers and may even become the entire new CX (Customer Experience). The question is whether or not your business is geared to navigate this new fraught journey with insight and proven methodologies?

In navigating through the UX/CX journey, the process is being able to overlay the customer centricity maturity of your business and product/service with the digital maturity of same. In doing so, the process often reveals blind spots that you may not even be aware of. By adopting this dual CX/UX approach, the remedies are often relatively easy to implement and are instrumental in putting your business back on track towards its aspirational (digitized, Covid-proof) state.

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