

# Unpacking the Potential of Social Consumer Job Journeys

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A customer journey describes the individual phases that customers go through before deciding to purchase a product. Such customer journeys can be divided into the **pre-purchase** (e.g., search phase before entering the store or online shop), **purchase-** (in the store or online shop), and **post-purchase** phase (after the purchase) (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 77).

## Customer Journeys

The predominant view on customer journeys features a **consumption focus** (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 76). In this view, companies provide **company-induced** and controllable **touchpoints** (e.g., a company's website, salespersons, chatbots) in which customers engage along the journey to successfully make a purchase (e.g., Edelman & Singer, 2015). However, this view **neglects the reason why** customers go on a journey. The "why" can be investigated through customer needs and goals. In customer journeys needs and goal fulfillment is often only referred to as a **functional need satisfiable by a particular product** (e.g., Lee et al., 2018, p. 280). In sum, this **purchase-as-outcome focus** fails to fully grasp the **goals** or **needs** customers have in **each stage of their journey**.

## Consumer Journeys

Customers often go on a shopping journey to fulfill **personal and social needs**. These needs often cannot only be fulfilled through the purchase of a product or a service **but also through social others**, e.g., **family, friends, accompanying persons** (Kullak, Baier, & Woratschek, 2023, p. 1). This implies that **the reason and motivation why customers go on a journey** is not necessarily a product purchase (e.g., Block, Ridgway, & Sherrell, 1989).

**Consumer journeys** are not necessarily entangled with a product purchase but are more overarching and grasp "**the bigger picture**". This encompasses especially the investigation of what consumers do and feel in their lives including their **needs, goals, experiences, and emotions** (Hamilton & Price, 2019: 188). Hence, customer journeys and consumer journeys **are not the same**. **Consumer journeys** consist of the fulfillment of **higher-order goals** (e.g., feeling mentally healthy again) that consumers can achieve through one or more **customer**

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**journeys. Customer journeys** fulfill **lower-order goals, but they** are related to consumption (e.g., purchasing a coat for the sake of feeling warm).

Consumer journeys can also be referred to as **transformative journeys** (Becker, Jaakkola, & Halinen, 2020) as they can reach as far as they encompass a **transformative character**, marked by long-term, life-changing higher-order goals (e.g. pregnancy, recovering from a disease, doing a PhD).

The fulfillment of higher-order goals (e.g. feeling warm) is referred to as a **“job” to be done**. Therefore, the job to be done is a problem that consumers aim to solve on their **consumer job journey** (Bettencourt, Harmeling, Bhagwat-Rana, & Houston, 2021, p. 5). According to the **jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) theory**, a job is defined as “a fundamental problem a customer needs to resolve in a given situation” (Christensen, Anthony, Berstell, & Nitterhouse, 2007: 38). **Products and services or social others** can be a **vehicle** to support consumers in getting their job(s) done along their consumer job journey.

### **Social Consumer Job Journeys**

Particularly **social others** (e.g., accompanying persons during the recovery process of a disease) can influence the consumer’s journey (Kokins et al., 2021, p. 14) by actively participating and supporting the consumer in fulfilling his/her job. Therefore, **it is important to explicitly consider social others**. Hence, we extend consumer job journeys toward the **social consumer job journey**.

Why is it important to consider social others in consumer journeys?

- 1. Many consumers satisfy their needs without purchasing products or services.**
- 2. Consumers often prefer to trust the advice of their companions rather than the salesperson.**
- 3. For many consumers the shared shopping experience takes centre stage.**

However, the fulfillment of consumer needs, goals and/or jobs is the basis for consumers to go shopping. Marketers are advised to first, explore **why** consumers go on a social consumer job journey, that is the **exploration of consumer needs, goals and/or jobs** followed by, second, the provision of the product or service which can aid their consumers to fulfill their needs, goals and/or jobs (customer journey) without neglecting that it is often social others.

Since social interactions can play a central role, they should be taken into account when analysing a consumer job journey. Analysing the social consumer job journey therefore contributes to a much deeper understanding of customer needs when shopping. It enables

retail managers and salespeople to make more successful purchases by better addressing consumers.

### To put it in a nutshell:

1. **Customer journeys** have a **product focus** as an outcome by addressing lower-order goals.
2. **Consumer journeys** have a **job focus** as an outcome by addressing higher-order goals.
3. **Consumer journeys** are **superordinate** to **customer journeys**.
4. The **higher-order goals** of consumer journeys can be achieved through one or multiple **lower-order goals** of customer journeys.
5. Consumer job journeys need to be extended to **social consumer job journeys** to explicitly include **social others**.
6. Social consumer job journeys **extend the analysis to include social interactions** with accompanying persons.
7. **Social consumer job journeys** analyse the extent to which social interactions (e.g. advice, shared experience) have an influence on consumer's needs at individual touchpoints during shopping.

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