

IT SOFTWARE PURCHASE DECISIONS IN TERMS OF BUSINESS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Anna Szwajlik
University of Szczecin
Poland
ORCID 0000-0002-8972-2020

Abstract: The aim of this study is to compare experience of customers making decisions in teams and individually during the process of purchasing IT software supporting management processes in their organization. The research sample consisted of 114 companies from all over Poland that purchased management-supporting software in the last 3 years. Quantitative research method was used to achieve the adopted research objective. A questionnaire was applied as a research tool, while Mann-Whitney U test - was used to determine differences in experience levels. This article refers to the models of organizational behavior, paying special attention to group and individual factors that business customer experience. The research results show that the experience of people who decide to purchase software as a team is better at all stages of the decision-making process compared to the experience of people making decisions individually. The collected research material, and, above all, the conclusions drawn from it, contribute to the knowledge about the quality of business customer experience in the IT sector, and outline the differences in the quality of such experience between those making decisions in the organization in a team and in an individual manner.

Keywords: *organizational buyer behavior, customer experience, IT software.*



INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, research related to customer experience, understood as a multidimensional construct focusing on cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory and social customer responses to the company's sales activities, has gained importance (Lemoni and Verhoef, 2016). Rawson, Duncan, and Jones (2013) noted that organizations that efficiently manage customer experience achieve greater revenues and employee satisfaction, but most of all, better customer satisfaction. Moreover, Klaus (2015) emphasizes greater customer loyalty and the WoM (Word of Mouth) effect in his research.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the customer experience surveys conducted so far have mainly adopted a consumer perspective (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Homburg, Jozić and Kuehn, 2017; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Few researchers have investigated the issues of business customer experience (Mikolan et al., 2015). Which is surprising, in the light of the complexity of factors influencing purchasing decisions in business markets.

The aim of this study is to compare the experience of customers making decisions in teams and individually when purchasing IT software supporting management processes in their organization.

The collected research material, and, above all, the conclusions drawn from it, contribute the knowledge about the quality of business customer experience in the IT sector, and outline the differences in the quality of such experience between those making decisions in the organization in a team and in individual manner.

The research sample consisted of companies 114 companies from all over Poland that purchased software supporting management processes in the last 3 years. Quantitative research method was used the adopted research objective. A questionnaire was applied as a research tool, while Mann-Whitney *U* test- was used to determine differences in experiment levels.

This article starts with a theoretical section which presents the factors influencing the purchasing behavior of the organization, and then outlines the stages of the purchase decision-making process. The following parts contain a description of the research methodology and research conclusions. The article ends with a discussion referring back to the set research goal.

THE ESSENCE OF BUSINESS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

There is no consensus among researchers regarding the precise definition of business customer experience. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) define business client experience in a holistic approach as a multidimensional construct focusing on the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial and social reactions of the client to the company's offers and activities. Klaus and Maklan (2012) emphasize in their research that customer experience has both an emotional and functional dimension, and includes the assessment of use value and the social context of the customer. It should be noted that researchers investigating customer experience collectively underscore that experience manifest at various points across three stages of the purchasing process: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. Moreover, Court et al. (2009) refers to customer decisions made in digital realm and introduce three phases of the customer

journey known as the "loyalty loop". In this way, the researcher emphasizes the importance of client experience in each subsequent phase, and interprets the transition between the phases as a positive assessment of the client (Court et al., 2009).

The pre-purchase stage covers customer experience from the initial recognition of a need to the considering satisfying that need with a purchase. Biggemann et al. (2013), emphasizes in his research the importance of informal discussions between the customer and the supplier in order to understand business goals and priorities. The degree of formalization of the information exchange between the customer and the supplier as well as the importance of trust is emphasized by Zaheer (2006). In turn, Court et al. (2009) point out that in the era of developed communication channels, the client engages in searching for information, especially online, and is often guided by the opinions of other buyers posted there. Klaus (2015) believes that from the customer's point of view, during the first stage of the journey, the attributes related to the way products are presented, the behavior of front-line employees, and the quality of the offer, are important. The above-mentioned factors reflect the brand image and influence the customer's decision to continue cooperation at the next stages of the purchase decision-making process. Klaus (2015), in his works, differently than others, describes the first stage of the purchasing process as "experience with the brand".

Van Weele (2002) observes that during the purchasing stage, the customer primarily provides information about their activities and current needs to make the right supplier choice. Other researchers emphasize the importance of business relations and the quality of interaction with the customer, which can significantly prevent customer information overload and support the decision-making process. Court et al. (2009) emphasize in his research that personal contact and the use of various communication channels are important for a business client. It should be emphasized here that the purchasing stage is the most recognizable and often considered the most important stage in the process of making a purchase decision by a business client. It is also referred to as the negotiation stage between the customer and the supplier and is related in particular to the price conditions (Tuli et al., 2007). This approach underscores treating purchases made by the organization as based mainly on rational arguments. A different opinion is presented by Klaus (2015), who regards purchasing decisions as an outcome of the customer's prior experience with the brand (understood as the first stage) and are an equivalent construct of rational and emotional arguments. The researcher draws attention to the essence of such elements as the ease of contact between the customer and the supplier through various communication channels and the need to create personal relations between the customer and the staff during in-person interactions.

The purchasing behavior of business customers at the post-purchase stage, including use, consumption and service requests, has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. The product itself becomes a critical point of contact at this stage. The more extensive and more strategic the exchange, the greater the number of interactions and actors involved at different hierarchical levels of the client's organization (Kowalkowski and Ulaga, 2017). Klaus (2015) emphasizes in his research that activities at the post-purchase stage, such as maintaining contact with the customer and solving emerging problems with the use of the product, are important in the context of purchasing decisions as well as in the case of positive opinions about the supplier.

The concept of the purchasing process stages proposed by Klaus (2015) is a comprehensive construct that exposes the nature of experiences, based on both emotional and

rational aspects of business customer purchasing decisions, as well as proposes specific variables to study these experiences. Due to these reasons, this approach will be used in this article in the research part.

GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS IN ORGANIZATIONAL PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

Robinson et al. (1967) divided the purchases made on the B2B market into: rebuy, modified buy, and completely new buy. The more innovative the purchase, the greater the uncertainty and the more people involved in the purchase decision. The same authors emphasized the importance of three fundamental dimensions of the B2B purchasing: the type of purchase, the stages of the purchasing decision-making process and the roles played by people in the purchasing center. On the other hand, Webster (1984) mentioned important models that applied to a wide spectrum of organizational purchases, and identified the most important variables in the process and the relations between them. Among the selected ones are: Sheth (1973), Choffray and Lilien (1978) as well as Webster and Wind (1972). Sheth (1973) in his research on organization purchasing decisions primarily focused on variables describing the behavior of an individual in a purchasing team and the sources of decision conflicts in teams. Choffray and Lilien (1978) proposed a model that essentially focused on the composition and interaction of purchasing group members that formed the purchasing center in the organization. The authors of the model emphasized the fact that organizations with similar needs, but with a different composition of the purchasing center, acquire different products due to differences in the behavior of team members. On the other hand, Webster and Wind (1972) developed a model of organization purchasing behavior based on four types of factors: environmental, organizational, group interactions and individual behavior of individuals in a group. These model's author's concur and emphasize that the purchasing behavior of an organization involves a complex process involving many people at various levels of the organization.

Purchasing centers play a significant role in resolving issues and attaining purchasing objectives within an organization. They don't necessarily need to be a formally designated entity; rather, they constitute a collection of roles performed by various individuals across different purchases. In the context of business customer purchasing decision processes, there exist five typical roles: user, influencer, decision-maker, buyer, and gatekeeper (Webster and Wind, 1972). Purchasing center members collectively make decisions employing one of several principles: weighted probability, proportionality, unanimity, or acceptability (Choffray and Lilien, 1978). As evidenced in literature on the topic, the significance of the group factor grows in tandem with the complexity of the purchasing issue and the level of novelty associated with the purchase within the organization. According to the group dynamics model, the purchasing team may, in a situation of threat or uncertainty, develop an internal functional structure, which will enable the achievement of goals and facilitate understanding of the task by team members (Schindler, 1957).

Individual purchasing decisions within an organization are typically associated with rebuying or minimally modified purchases. While Webster and Wind (1972) underscore that team members ultimately make decisions individually, their support can be crucial for the

quality of decisions, particularly in the case of intricate or novel purchases. Within the scope of this article, such support has a direct bearing on the business customers' experience. Moreover, in a situation where the environment of the organization is changeable and the environmental factors shaping it are difficult to predict, making decisions individually becomes risky for both the decision-maker and the entire organization.

METHODS

The aim of this study is to compare the experience of customers making decisions in teams and individually when purchasing IT software supporting management processes in their organization. The research hypothesis is as follows: there is a significant difference in the business customer experience who make purchasing decisions in a team, and those who make them alone (individually).

The research was carried out using the quantitative method. The research sample consisted of 120 companies that in the last 3 years purchased software supporting management processes in various areas of the company's operations (finance, sales, marketing, logistics, production). The surveyed entities were people who participated in the decision-making process of purchasing software in the surveyed company. After conducting the research, 114 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained and analyzed using the StatSoft (statistica software).

For the purposes of achieving the above goal, the Customer Experience Quality measurement method was used. EXQ measures customer experience in three dimensions: "brand experience", "experience at the purchase stage" and "post-purchase experience" (Klaue, 2015). Respondents rate their impressions on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) or as Don't know/Not applicable. The Customer Experience Quality method was chosen to measure the experience of respondents as it assumes that, in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of both C2C and B2B customer experiences, measurement should be made at all three stages of the purchasing process described by Howard-Sheth (1973). Hence, EXQ includes variables describing the purchasing behavior of the organization at all three stages of the purchasing decision process.

The Customer Experience Quality method is characterized by the following features:

1. Holistic Cognitive and Emotional Appraisal. This method centers on an inclusive assessment of cognitive and emotional value from the customer's standpoint, rather than relying on benchmarks or expectations.
2. Utility Value Verification. It evaluates the utilitarian value of an organization's offerings, encompassing more than just the attributes of products and services.
3. Validation through Behavior and Attitudes: The method is substantiated through both behavioral measures and attitudes.
4. Precision and Specificity. In comparison to other related measures like Servqual or NPS, it provides a more accurate and focused analysis of the unique aspects of client experience.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that the EXQ method was developed in accordance with established principles governing the creation of measurement scales.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that the EXQ method was developed in accordance with all requirements defining the principles of creating measurement scales.

RESULTS

In the conducted research, the distribution of the research sample was as follows: 69% were people who were part of the team deciding about the purchase of software, whereas 31% were people who made decisions individually. Due to whether the respondents made the decisions to purchase software in a team or individually, the average response ratings regarding the quality of experience were as shown in Figures 1,2,3.

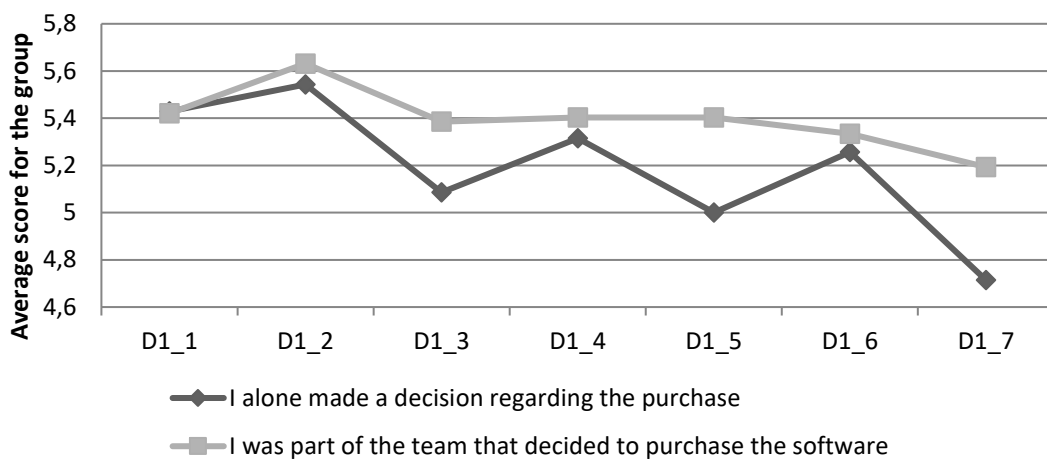


Figure 1. Average assessments the quality of experience with the brand depending on making purchasing decisions as a team or individually.

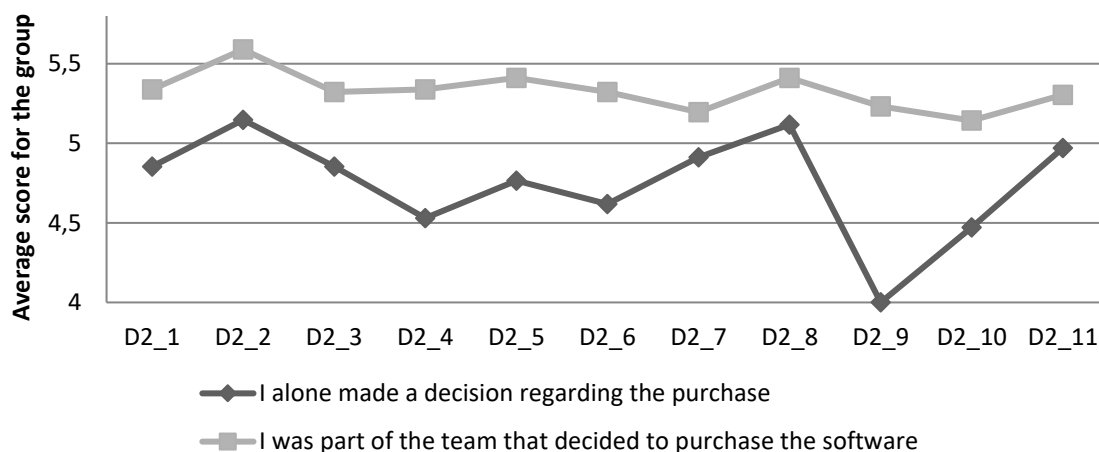


Figure 2. Average assessments the quality of experience at the purchasing stage depending on the purchasing decision made by a team or individually.

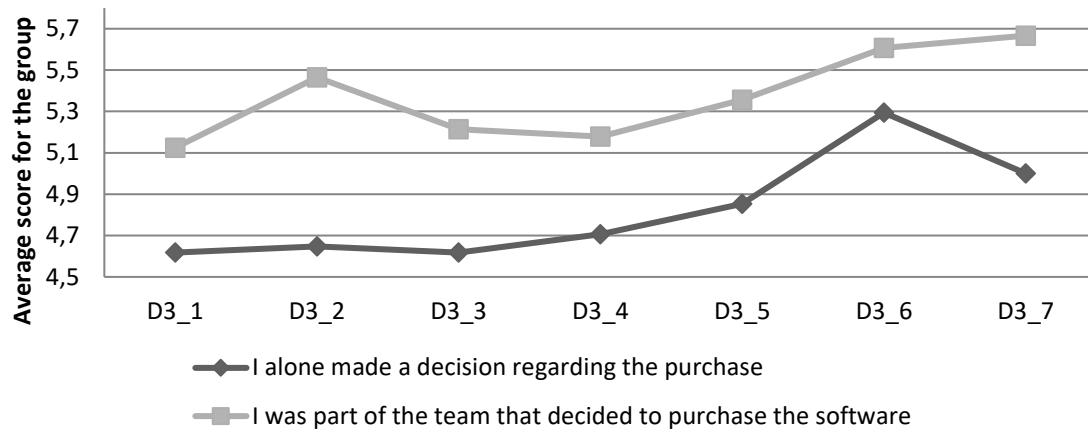


Figure 3. Average assessments the quality of post-purchase experience depending on purchasing decisions as a team or individually.

The research shows that when making a decision to buy software in a team, the average scores are the highest and reach the level of 4 or even above 5. This means that the respondents mostly express positively about the experiences before, during and after the purchases made in IT companies. In a situation where the respondent single-handedly decided to purchase the software, the average scores are the lowest at all the three mentioned stages.

In order to confirm the statistical significance of differences between the experiences of the studied groups of respondents, the Mann-Whitney U test was used. A non-parametric test for comparing two independent groups. The scheme of its calculations consists in ranking the results, i.e. giving them weights in ascending order. It is used when the measurements are not normally distributed or their variances are different but at least on an ordinal scale. It is one of the most popular non-parametric tests for examining differences between two independent groups (Corder and Foreman, 2009).

The test verifies the hypothesis:

H_0 : no difference between groups;

H_1 : there are statistically significant differences between the groups.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Manna- Whitney *U* test.

		making purchasing decisions individually		making purchasing decisions as a team		U	p-value
Variables describing experiences		Mean	Median	Mean	Median		
Experience with the brand	D1_1 XYZ has a good reputation	5.412	5.5	5.421	6.0	0.103	0.918
	D1_2 I am convinced of the expertise of XYZ	5.559	6.0	5.632	6.0	0.357	0.721
	D1_3 XYZ provides independent advice	5.029	5.0	5.386	5.0	1.091	0.275
	D1_4 I chose XYZ not only because of the price	5.294	6.0	5.404	6.0	0.685	0.493
	D1_5 XYZ employees represent their brand well	4.971	5.0	5.404	6.0	1.468	0.142
	D1_6 XYZ's offer is the best in terms of quality	5.265	6.0	5.333	6.0	0.123	0.902
	D1_7 XYZ's offer is exceptional	4.706	5.0	5.193	5.0	1.415	0.157
	D2_1 XYZ advised me throughout the purchase process	4.735	5.0	5.333	6.0	1.395	0.163
Experience at the purchasing stage	D2_2 Working with XYZ is easy	5.147	5.0	5.596	6.0	1.366	0.172
	D2_3 XYZ kept me informed	4.735	5.0	5.333	6.0	1.530	0.126
	D2_4 XYZ was flexible with me	4.441	5.0	5.368	5.0	2.531	0.011
	D2_5 For me, working with XYZ means not changing the rules and/or working with the same people	4.706	5.0	5.439	5.0	2.117	0.034
	D2_6 XYZ employees listen to my wishes and concerns	4.559	5.0	5.351	5.0	2.186	0.029
	D2_7 XYZ employees have good interpersonal skills	4.882	5.0	5.228	5.0	0.800	0.424
	D2_8 XYZ provides good customer service	5.147	5.0	5.439	6.0	0.919	0.358
	D2_9 I built a personal relation with the people of XYZ	3.941	4.0	5.263	6.0	3.068	0.002
	D2_10 Buildings, warehouses, shops, XYZ office are better designed, friendlier than the competition	4.441	4.0	5.123	5.0	2.051	0.040
	D2_11 The XYZ website has been designed in such a way that it is maximally useful for me	5.000	5.0	5.281	6.0	0.603	0.547
Post-purchase experiences	D3_1 I will stay with XYZ because they know me	4.588	5.0	5.140	5.0	1.768	0.077
	D3_2 XYZ knows my needs exactly	4.647	5.0	5.474	6.0	2.482	0.013
	D3_3 XYZ is in constant contact with me	4.559	5.0	5.228	5.0	1.797	0.072
	D3_4 XYZ will also take care of me in the future	4.618	5.0	5.193	5.0	1.752	0.080
	D3_5 XYZ will treat me well even when I get into trouble	4.853	5.0	5.368	6.0	1.407	0.159
	D3_6 I am satisfied with XYZ as my service provider	5.324	6.0	5.614	6.0	0.677	0.499
	D3_7 The fact that I am a customer of XYZ accepts my surroundings	4.971	5.0	5.667	6.0	2.465	0.014

Table 1 shows the results of the Mann Whitney *U* test along with the given values of the mean and median for individual questions in the analyzed groups. At the significance level of 0.05, it can be seen that only in seven cases the differences turned out to be statistically significant. They are on the stage "Experience at the purchasing stage": „XYZ was flexible with me”; „For me, working with XYZ means not changing the rules and/or working with the same people”; “XYZ employees listen to my wishes and concerns”; “I built a personal relation with the people of XYZ”; “I built a personal relation with the people of XYZ”; “Buildings, warehouses, shops, XYZ office are better designed, friendlier than the competition”; “XYZ knows my needs exactly”; “The fact that I am a customer of XYZ accepts my surroundings”

In the mentioned cases, both the mean and median values are noticeably lower in the “making purchasing decisions individually” group than in the “making purchasing decisions as a team” group, which may be related to the emotional reactions of individual group members to specific supplier behaviors support the cognitive component of purchasing decisions. However, in most cases, there are no statistically significant differences in the answers to the questions in these two analyzed groups.

DISCUSSION

This article delves into the aforementioned models of organizational behavior, with a particular emphasis on both group and individual factors that have been subjects of research within the context of business customer experience. The research findings indicate that individuals who make purchasing decisions for software as part of a team experience higher satisfaction across all stages of the decision-making process compared to those making decisions individually. Teams tend to create "peer effects," where individual ratings strongly correlate with the mean scores of the group. These effects are strengthened by improved interaction within the group (Cortez and Johnson, 2017).

Individual and collective experiences mutually reinforce one another. As a result, purchasing groups are more apt to concentrate on the objective cognitive aspects of the experience, such as functional benefits, key performance indicators, purchase and operational costs. Additionally, the emotional responses of individual group members toward specific supplier actions support the cognitive component of purchasing decisions. On the contrary, individuals making decisions in isolation without team support may be susceptible to negative emotions. As suggested by Beer et al. (2006), these emotions can foster unfavorable judgments during the purchasing decision process and lead to an excessive perception of risk.

It's worth noting that the variables identified by the respondents in this study, which distinguish experiences during the purchasing stage, pertain to the quality of relationships ("personal relation") and the manner in which they were established ("it was flexible"). This aligns with the findings of previous research by Klaus (2015) and Court (2009), both of whom underline the significance of direct communication in shaping positive customer experiences. Many conceptual models posit that emotions play a pivotal role in initiating, developing, and sustaining relationships (Andersen and Kumar, 2006).

The inclusion of the place of purchase ("buildings ... are better designed") as a noteworthy variable may seem surprising. However, this can be elucidated by considering the nature of the purchased product (IT software), the ultimate value of which becomes apparent

only upon its usage—often a distant point in the future. Consequently, clients aim to assure the correctness of their decisions, which can encompass tangible aspects like the quality and nature of the place of purchase for an IT product. This parallels cases involving services, where the core often centers around a creative idea.

Returning to the interplay of rational and emotional components that shape business customer experiences, it's important to highlight that the prevailing understanding of the nature of purchasing decisions had largely centered on cognitive elements. Prevailing views suggested that business customers primarily engaged in rigorous cognitive analysis (Erevelles, 1998) and relied on arguments linked to the functionality of the purchased product (Ho et al., 2010) when making purchasing decisions. Additionally, the buyer-seller relationships were often seen as outcomes solely driven by quantifiable business values.

Numerous studies exploring emotions (Helgesen and Nettet, 2011) demonstrate that positive emotions positively impact satisfaction, while negative emotions can influence judgments and lead to an overestimation of risk. Consequently, Simon (1990), aligned with the concept of bounded rationality, advocates for an approximation approach that considers both rational criteria and intuitive components. This approach acknowledges the blending of these dimensions without a distinct demarcation (Lakowski and Evers, 2010). Similarly, Klaus (2015) recommends incorporating both dimensions—rational and emotional—in the method used to measure experiences.

The significance of the environmental factor also deserves emphasis. The author of this article concurs with Spekman and Stern (1979), who contended that environmental uncertainty has an impact on an organization's purchasing decisions and the structure of its purchasing centers. Notably, it has been observed that the technological factor, encompassed within the group of environmental factors, holds particular importance for the purchasing behavior of organizations acquiring IT software. Digital technologies usher in new circumstances for an organization's operation, facilitating broader and more collaborative open actions.

Despite the pervasive nature of digitization, it's worth highlighting that Polish enterprises have yet to fully harness the technological potential within their organizations. Even with widespread access to IT infrastructure, Polish enterprises remain unprepared for a technological revolution. This fact is underscored by the Digi Index survey conducted by Siemens in 2020, gauging the level of enterprise digitization. In this survey, the Polish manufacturing industry scored below two points on a four-point scale (1.9 points), indicating a substantial lag in implementing digital technologies compared to Western European counterparts.

In the context of technology development, it's pertinent to refer to the notion of "technological readiness," which pertains to individuals' inclination to use technology (Parasurman, 2000). Two factors in particular are recognized as inhibitors of technology advancement: discomfort and uncertainty, which evoke fear and resistance towards technology adoption.

Various types of uncertainties have been expounded upon in the literature (Sheinesh, 2004):

- Uncertainty about choice alternatives.
- Uncertainty about the consequences of comparing alternatives.
- Uncertainty about others' reactions within the environment to the choice made.

This article goes beyond Sheinesh's (2004) uncertainty framework by incorporating the uncertainty inherent in customers purchasing technological solutions. This form of uncertainty pertains to the buyers' comprehension of their own needs in the realm of technological solutions and their ability to articulate them. Empirical evidence from business practices demonstrates that this kind of uncertainty amplifies the perceived purchasing risk for buyers. When it comes to software purchase decisions, the sensation of uncertainty and discomfort can be more readily mitigated when decisions are made collectively by a team rather than individually.

It's important to highlight that purchases of software intended to support management processes occur intermittently, and the decision-making teams are formed specifically to achieve the objectives of these processes. This implies that individuals are more likely to find their footing within a team and assume a designated role, as opposed to navigating the decision-making process entirely on their own. Given the relatively low digital competences of individuals in Poland (Głomb, 2020), it's noteworthy that team collaboration, considering group dynamics models, could positively impact the accumulation of knowledge and skills among team members.

Conversely, individuals making decisions independently might be subject to an excessive influence of the uncertainty factor, potentially leading to a constant decline in their experience level.

The research findings presented earlier contribute to the understanding of business customer experiences. By aligning with organizational purchasing behavior models, they underscore the pivotal role of the group factor in shaping customer experiences across distinct stages of the decision-making process.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this study suggests that exploring the realm of business customer experience management, especially in the context of novel products, holds considerable potential for both advancing research and informing practical strategies for organizations aiming to cultivate lasting customer relationships and positive brand perception.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Looking forward, there are noteworthy implications for both research and practical applications in the field. In the realm of future research, there is merit in exploring the realm of business customer experience management, particularly in scenarios involving novel products that hold substantial value for organizations, yet come with an inherent risk for customers during implementation. As expounded upon by Klaus (2015), aligning customer experience management with strategies for increased customer loyalty, satisfaction, and positive word-of-mouth about the brand and product is of paramount importance. However, achieving this necessitates a more profound understanding of organizational operations and the prevailing culture governing customer experience management.

This calls for further investigation into the dynamics of customer experience management within organizations, delving into aspects such as operational procedures, cultural factors, and strategic decision-making. By delving into these facets, researchers can better illuminate how organizations effectively manage customer experiences and foster positive outcomes, even in the face of potential risks associated with new products.

From a practical standpoint, these insights underscore the need for organizations to adopt comprehensive approaches to managing customer experiences. This involves not only focusing on the immediate outcomes of purchasing decisions but also on the broader impacts on customer loyalty, satisfaction, and brand perception. Organizations should strive to create an environment that prioritizes positive customer experiences throughout the entire purchasing journey, and be prepared to mitigate potential risks associated with innovative products.

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Authors' Note

All correspondence should be addressed to
 Anna Szwajlik
 Management Institute
 University of Szczecin
 ul. Cukrowa 8
 70-004 Szczecin
anna.szwajlik@usz.edu.pl

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