

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF FOOD DELIVERY SERVICE IN FINLAND

Case Company Wolt Enterprises Oy

Abstract

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	Number of pages 49 pages	
Title of publication The Development of Customer Experience of Food Delivery Service in Finland Case Company Wolt Enterprises Oy		
Name of Degree Bachelor of Business Administration		
Abstract <p>The concept of platform-based services has become more relevant in developed and developing markets alike and Finland is no exception. This thesis seeks to uncover the effects of customer experience strategies on the development of platform-based food delivery service, especially on the acquisition and maintenance of customers, and the support which the service provision participants could receive to achieve better performance. The study is carried out in collaboration with the case company Wolt.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of two concepts, which are sharing economy and customer experience. The literature review provides the necessary information for the reader to understand the topic and the research question. It also helps the author set the foundation for the empirical research.</p> <p>The study employs a deductive approach with a qualitative research method. The data for qualitative research is collected through reviews that users left on Google Play and Apple App Store. The author also interviewed a courier partner to gain an in-depth knowledge about the service of Wolt and its operation process. By studying the case company Wolt, it is hoped that details about the approaches and strategies in operations will come to light to serve as examples of platform economy done right.</p> <p>The study results show that the customer experience approaches do benefit the platform and by supporting the other participants of the service, customers of Wolt could enjoy a better service and customer experience. Further research could be conducted with the suggestions listed at the end of this thesis.</p>		
Keywords Sharing economy, platform economy, platform-based, customer experience, strategy Wolt Enterprises Oy, peer-to-peer, decentralization		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background and Motivation

In recent years, the concept of “sharing economy” has been greatly embedded into the everyday life of people around the world. The first major engagement of humans with the sharing economy is through commercial platforms such as eBay and Amazon. From then on, more and more aspects of life have fallen in line with the development and expansion of the overall trend of the sharing economy.

Finland, as a country noted for the latest technologies, has been late to catch on with the trend of sharing economy. Only a few years ago, there were only a handful of sharing economy services, in their basic form no less. Some of the most well-known sharing services a few years prior are Tori.fi, Foodora and Uber. Yet, even those most well-known leaders in the market suffer at their own issues. Tori.fi lacks a central dispute settlement center so buyers and sellers have to take their own risks and resort to coming up with hasty methods by themselves. Foodora is notorious among its own ranks of associates for unfair treatment as well as poor technical and operational support. Uber suffocates at legal endeavors on a regular basis and even has their business rights revoked at some points. In fact, there exist other sharing platforms other than the aforementioned examples. However, the market coverage and value generation ability are rather fragmented and regional-specific and thus unable to make any significant impact on the national level.

Thankfully, in the recent years, countless new start-ups and major enterprises have been participating in the Finnish sharing economy market, generating new ways of service provision, creating new values and providing employment along the way. These new players either form the foundation for or take advantage of the development of existing industry within the Finnish economy. Of the rising industries in the Finnish economy, the food-and-beverage (F&B) industry is among the fastest developing, both in terms of quantity and quality as well as diversity. However, the rise of the F&B industry has been met with a variety of hindrance factors such as rising real estate cost, overwhelming demands, geographic distance and poor marketing approaches. To tackle such problems, a service called Wolt has come into existence, rising quickly in popularity and market acquisition.

This thesis aims at familiarizing the readers with the growth of platform-based food delivery service and finding out how customer experience affects the development of the case company Wolt Inc. in the Finnish market.

1.2 Thesis Objectives and Research Questions

This thesis is based on the author's interest in the platform-based food delivery service and its rapid development in Finland. The main objective is to discover the changes platform-based delivery makes on Finnish consumers. In order to improve customer satisfaction, the elements that affect customers opinion on platform-based food delivery will be analyzed. The results of this study could benefit the companies in the food delivery industry as well as the future market participants.

Thus, the main research question is:

How do customer experience strategies affect platform-based food delivery service in Finland?

In addition, for a better understanding of customer experience approaches and other characteristics and views of platform-based services in general and Wolt in particular, the following two sub-questions are brought into discussion:

- What are the characteristics that define a successful customer experience approach within the platform economy?
- What are the approaches Wolt has taken to support other participant sides other than the customer side?

The study mainly focuses on exploring the success factors of platform-based food delivery service. The research data can be used as a foundation to gain an understanding of the effect of online platform on the food delivery industry. Platform-based food delivery may not be treated as other types of food delivery and therefore, the research is recommended to be used as a reference for other research about food delivery with consideration.

The research is conducted solely in Finland. Considering the unique characteristics of Finland, Finland must be acknowledged as a country with its own factors such as national policies, cultures, potentials and drawbacks. The study has been done with those factors in mind, thus making the results applicable only in the Finnish market under the current context. As a result, applying the theories and approaches of this study to different national markets requires thorough research on the differentiation between such markets and the national market of Finland.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Gabriel Abend (2008) defines theories as a way to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the boundaries of

assumptions. The theoretical framework is a conceptual model that builds the structure and offers guidance to a research study. The theoretical framework discloses the theories which are used to explain why the research problem in the study exists.

This thesis focuses on exploring the effect of customer experience on the platform-based food delivery service. To further explain the relation between customer experience and platform-based food delivery service, both customer experience and sharing economy, which is the foundation of platform-based food delivery, are presented and explained.

The second chapter is about the concept of the sharing economy. In this chapter, origin, definition and characteristics of the sharing economy is explained, followed by the related modern industry and the current state of the sharing economy in Finland.

The third chapter focuses on explaining the customer experience. This chapter starts with the definition of the customer experience. After that, the technique to develop a successful customer experience strategy and its usage is described. Since the research focuses on the platform-based food delivery service, the last part of this chapter is used to point out the requirement behind a good customer experience in the platform-based service.

1.4 Research Methodology

According to O'Leary (2004, 85), research methodology is a framework affiliated with basic assumptions that will be used in conducting a research. A methodological design needs to meet three prerequisites addressing the research question, being within the capacity and interest of the researcher, and being doable and reasonable. Neglecting those three requirements, the methodology will not be able to lead researchers to the final answer.

The research methodology including the research approach, research method and data collection, is shown in the figure below.

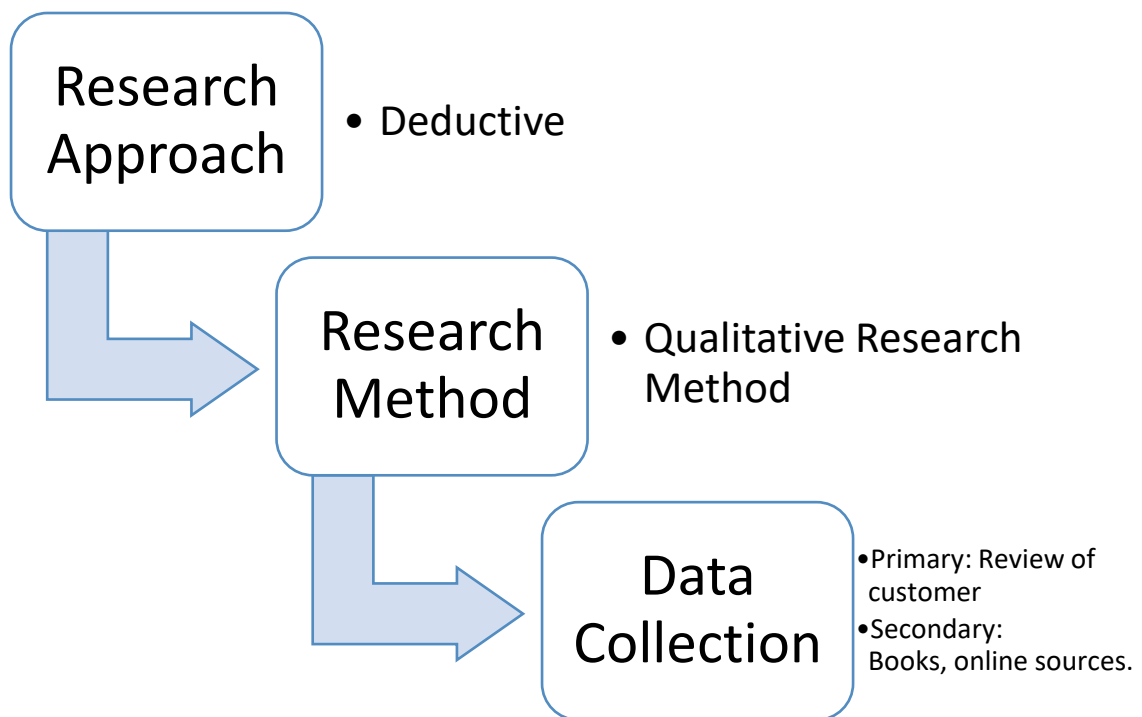


Figure 1 Research Methodology

There are two known research approaches: inductive and deductive. In the deductive approach, the theory is developed with knowledge from academic literature; then, the researcher will conduct research to confirm or reject the preceding hypothesis. The inductive approach, on the other hand, promotes the collecting of data, which enables the researcher to delve into a phenomenon from which theory will be generated. In this research, the author decides to follow the deductive approach to identify the phenomena and generate the theory based on the literature review and data collection. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 145.)

Qualitative research, so-called exploratory research, is to seek for hidden perspectives, explanations of the problem and try to bring new light to it. Qualitative research studies the mean and connection behind the phenomena, using an array of data collection methods and analytical strategy, to establish a theoretical framework. This type of research is also used to discover new trends, ideas for future Quantitative research. (Saunders et al. 2016,166-168.)

Quantitative research evaluates a problem by finding out facts from the collected and trans-formed numeric data. By measuring and evaluating the data with statistical tools and charts, the researcher can perceive the relation between different variables to figure out

the pattern of phenomena. (Saunders et al. 2016,166-168.) Hence, quantitative research is mainly used to test the validity of a theory or hypothesis.

For this study the author focuses on using qualitative approach with case study. Case study is a well-known research method to find an explanation of a phenomenon by collecting and analyzing the data of an organization, a company, or an event. Through case study, the researcher can narrow down the pre-existing data into a specific topic. Despite the fact that case study does not have the ability to completely answer the research question, it allows the researcher to have an in-depth understanding on the phenomena and develop a hypothesis on the narrowed topic. (McLeod, 2018.)

Data collection is an essential stage that directly contributes to the findings of a research. Data collection is known as a process of collecting information from all related sources to help answer the research question, test the hypothesis and assess the final result. Data collection methods consist of two major categories: primary and secondary methods. Primary data is collected by using quantitative or qualitative method in different format such as interview, survey, observation or case study. Secondary data collection methods utilize the published data from books, newspapers, magazines, blogs, articles, journal, etc. (Research Methodology 2020.)

In this study, the primary data mainly comes from the review of customers on Google Play and Apple App Store. By analyzing the review left by customers, and personal website, it is possible to understand the customers experience when using the service, the strong and weak points, challenges and the potentials of the service. Furthermore, to thoroughly understand the operating process of Wolt delivery service, this research will also a the face-to-face interview with a courier of Wolt. The interviews will consist of several sessions to help the author get an in-depth understanding of the service and the delivery process through the eye of a long-term courier. Lastly, the observation and personal knowledge of the author on the case study, Wolt Enterprise Oy, are also employed in this research. Through the secondary data, author is able to set the foundation for the study and gain the necessary knowledge for the theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of two crucial components, literature review and empirical research. Through the literature review, the foundation for the research is set and helps establish the empirical research.

Chapter 1 is the introduction of the thesis. It briefly describes the background of the “sharing economy”, its development in the Finnish market, and the rise of food delivery service in Finland as well as stating the research problem of this study.

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of the “sharing economy”, how does it start and develop throughout the year. After that, the definitions and characteristics of “sharing economy” is specified, followed by the implementation of the concept in the current age as well as the state of “sharing economy” in Finland.

Chapter 3 is about the customer experience. It starts with the definition, then, some common techniques to develop customer experience are introduced. After mentioning the technique, the requirement behind a successful customer experience strategy is introduced briefly. The final part is about the development of customer experience in platform-based service, the foundation, the method and the decisive factor.

Chapter 4 briefly introduced the origin of Wolt and its achievement in the recent years. The mobile and web application for customers is also mentioned. Chapter 5 discusses the important factors that affect customer experience at Wolt. The benefits of a good customer experience and how Wolt further improves the customer experience by providing the finest support to its partners, the couriers and restaurants. At the end of this study is chapter 6, it concludes the research finding and answers the research question. It also explains the practicality of this study and suggests some ideas for future research.



Figure 2 Thesis Structure

2 THE SHARING ECONOMY

2.1 Origin and Concepts

The sharing economy can sound like a very new concept to many, but the act of “sharing” has been happening for several years. The original form of “sharing” was known as collaborative consumption, then evolved into the modern sharing economy concept since the 2000s. People in communities have always been sharing unused assets in one way or another. Farmers, who cannot afford a piece of equipment, can share the cost with other farmers and use it together as common property. In a different situation, a group of friends can buy a large amount of food and beverage to share instead of having individual portions. These actions include collaborative consumptions since acquisition and distribution has occurred. (Chen 2020.)

Collaborative consumption is the phenomenon in which assets are shared mutually between people through multiple joint actions (Felson & Spaeth 1978). Collaborative consumption is a broad concept that can be easily misunderstood. According to Nwaorgu (2018), collaborative consumption is interpreted as “traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping”. This definition is broad and includes other concepts such as market exchange and sharing. For a phenomenon to be called collaborative consumption, the asset must be acquired and distributed conjointly among the associated parties. At the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of collaborative consumption developed into the sharing economy thanks to the emergence of Airbnb.com. (Nwaorgu 2018.)

2.2 Definitions and Characteristics

Traditional collaborative consumption can be commonly observed on a small scale and vary in purposes but due to the rise of the Internet, it became a global phenomenon. People have a chance to bring out their unused assets and share with others through different platforms such as eBay or Tori. Selling used assets may sound like traditional market exchange but it is a form of collaborative consumption as the buyer pays a portion of the original price to have the product when the original owner does not use it anymore, it can be interpreted as both of them share the right to use the item collectively in different time windows. (Chen 2020.)

Sharing economy is a new term but its concept is not. The term “sharing economy” was first introduced in 2008 by Professor Lawrence Lessig of Harvard Law School (Lee 2014). Chappelow (2019) defined the sharing economy as a peer-to-peer (P2P) economic model

that involved acquiring, providing, or sharing access to goods and services that is promoted by a crowds-based online platform. Even though sharing economy and collaborative consumption share the same core concept, what makes the sharing economy more innovative is the use of online platforms.

Sundararajan (2016, 27) distinguishes sharing economy with five characteristics listed below.

- Sharing economy is largely market-based. The economy allows more transactions as it creates markets that facilitate the commutation of goods and services. “Sharing economy” is mainly used to describe the peer-to-peer market which involves procuring, supplying or sharing goods or services. Unlike traditional markets which mostly consisted of goods, the sharing economy markets also include skills and services.
- The sharing economy allows all the available resources to be utilized at levels closer to their full capacity whether they are assets, skills, time or money. Through the sharing economy market, people can make good use of their assets when they are not necessary and also acquire the usage of some assets that are needed once in a while. The sharing economy markets do not have a clear set of products since it depends on the demands of the buyers and it also allows the sellers to develop a new type of service such as accommodation like Airbnb or learning platform like Skillshare.
- Sharing economy is more about crowd-based “networks” rather than centralized institutions or “hierarchies”. The sharing economy market is driven by community, both the capital and labor comes from individuals rather than any corporates or centralized institutions. Most of the activity on a sharing economy market is between different individuals that come to the market to find their required resources. On platforms such as Airbnb and Skillshare, most of the available products come from the users of the platforms. Even though those platforms do have their own set of regulations and requirements related to the products that are presented, they only exist to provide a means to communicate between the buyers and the sellers. It is believed that in the future the sharing economy platform should be run on a distributed crowd-based marketplace instead of the current model of centralized third parties.
- Sharing economy is blurring the line between the personal and the professional. Most activities that were deemed personal in the past can be turned into commercial service through sharing economy platforms and generating income for the owners. In the past, letting someone sleepover or giving someone a ride is a

personal matter, in which the clients may or may not pay anything to the owners. These activities can be considered as a supply of labor and services, which is a huge opportunity to turn into a successful story in the eyes of some entrepreneurs. By creating sharing economy markets for these personal activities and scales it up, some companies can rise to the top of the industry and even become a threat to the traditional market. Through the sharing economy, activities which were thought to be personal can be commercialized and turned into a professional service.

- Sharing economy is blurring lines between fully employed and casual labor, between independent and dependent employment, between work and leisure. The sharing economy has been bringing a new employment concept to the market. Traditional full-time workers are bound by contract with a level of commitment, on the other hand entrepreneurs are considered as business owners and not as workers. In the sharing economy market, people offer labors and services through the platforms, which some can be considered as a full-time worker like Uber drivers and others can be considered as entrepreneurs like a host of Airbnb, though both of them do not meet the requirements to be called either full-timer employers or entrepreneurs. The sharing economy creates a new type of employment which is currently called self-employed, it is considered a type of entrepreneurship but instead of starting their own business, service providers become users of a platform and offer their service through the platform and under the regulation of the platforms.

2.3 The Sharing Economy Implementation

Sharing economy is a driving force responsible for shifting traditional purchasing methods to the notion of asset sharing. A huge market opened by the sharing economy is projected to multiply from \$15 billion in 2014 to \$335 in 2025 (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2015, 14). Sharing economy has been emerging from every nook and cranny of the world and of our lives. People can enjoy their trips without any regular services, like transporting with Uber, finding accommodation with Airbnb, ordering meals through Wolt and taking pictures with the camera of Lensrentals. As the sharing economy grows bigger and stronger every day, it is no longer possible to overlook the potential the economy holds.

Sharing-economy-shaped transportation is such a revolution in commuting. In the past, people only have a few options, such as using their own vehicles, public transport or taxi. Purchasing a vehicle seems to be a better option because it is always ready to move but the maintenance fee, tax and parking fee are relatively high. Public transport is an affordable and environmentally friendly solution as it cuts down carbon dioxide emission, but it is

not always available, and the waiting time can be long and the trip itself, tiring. Taxis, on the other hand, run 24 hours a day and can take passengers to anywhere very quickly without making them worry about navigation, yet traveling by taxi is not a cost-effective option. As a result, in 2009, with the solution it offered to passengers, Uber has become a phenomenon in the transportation industry and opened a new page for the penetration of the sharing economy in the daily life of people around the world. (Hagan 2018.)

Letting someone use your spare bed is nothing new but it has become trendier than ever before. In the past, when traveling to rural areas, travelers used to ask the locals for a place to sleep if the nearby inns were not available, but nowadays, hotels or hostels can be found everywhere, and the hospitality business has become highly competitive. Staying in hotels is probably the finest option when traveling but the price is relatively expensive, so it is not the most popular choice for most travelers who are conscious of the cost of their trips. When price is the most important factor in trip planning, nothing can beat hostels as they come with reasonable price, acceptable services which make them the most attractive option. However, in August 2008, Airbnb showed up with its never-seen-before business model that has been challenging the traditional hotel. Airbnb is a platform that lets users rent out their unoccupied rooms or even houses so that travelers can have a comfortable place with a reasonable price to spend the night. (Pesonen 2017.)

Redistribution of unused assets has been a long-established practice. With the rise of the sharing economy, the act of redistribution has reached a new era and can be seen more frequently in all communities. Nowadays, purchasing second-hand assets is a popular option to obtain necessary tools, or merchandise for cheaper prices but it was hard to come by a desirable flea market due to the lack of shared information. Thanks to the Internet, information sharing has become more effortless, and numerous online platforms that redistribute pre-owned assets has surfaced everywhere on the planet. Most redistribution platforms allow users to sell locally or within the national borders, but there are also websites such as eBay that enable users to have access to goods from all around the world. As the sharing economy grows, redistribution activities have become easier for both buyers and sellers. (Urban hubs 2019.)

2.4 The Sharing Economy of Finland

Identified as a country with persisting commitment to democracy and a free market, Finland has great potential to facilitate entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, in other words, Finland is an exceptional place for the sharing economy to develop. Additionally, Finland has always been heavily investing in technology-related fields and fostering new talents for future development of tech-driven industries. The Ministry of Economic Affairs

and Employment of Finland (2017) predicts that the sharing economy will grow several-fold in just a few years. According to data from The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2017), sharing economy market value will grow from around EUR 100 million to EUR 1.3 billion in four years from 2016 to 2020. Thanks to those aspects of Finland, the sharing economy has a high chance to flourish in the long run.

To fully support the rapid growth of the sharing economy, Finnish government has decided to execute new tax regulation for business activities of the sharing economy. As reported by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2019,52), a neutral tax system is applied, which means that all incomes from sharing economy activities will receive the same taxation as other activities in the same nature. Similar to traditional activities, different income earnings through sharing economy activities have to be registered separately and taxed differently.

Thanks to the support of the Finnish government, many sectors of the sharing economy have shown great growth and had some successful examples. Tori, which is the most used platform for redistributing used goods in Finland, and Nettix, which provides several well-trusted platforms for selling vehicles, are both Finnish based companies. In the field of accommodation, the Finnish market is dominated by foreign companies such as Airbnb and HomeAway. On the other hand, Wolt successfully captivates multiple cities of Finland in a very short time and expands to several countries, despite the presence of Delivery Hero, a strong competitor from Germany. Even though, Finnish sharing economy market is still rather new, several companies have success in the local market and expand overseas.

3 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

According to Frichou (2020), about 68% of marketers devote most of their time and talent into customer experience. The economy has developed through several stages since the primitive time, agrarian economy, the industrial economy, and the service economy, and now it is an experience economy. In an experience economy, people not only pay for services, products or ingredients, but they are also willing to pay even more to have the best experience. To satisfy the customer, companies have to adapt and improve their service with customer experience in their mind.

3.1 Definition of Customer Experience

Buttle and Maklan (2019, 207) define customer experience as the subjective perceptions of customers of their exposures to, or encounters with resources (people, processes, technologies, places), and output (products, services, communication etc.) of a company. An experience can be both conscious and subconscious (SAS 2020). When customers interact with a company, it can be making transactions or communicating before, within the purchasing process or after service.

There are several channels that lead customers to encounters with a company. Customers might come across an advertisement while watching TV or using any social media platforms. Customers also get to know a company by purchasing from its website or application. Moreover, perceptions of customers can be built upon reviews that are left by other customers or word of mouth.

3.2 Techniques to Develop Effective Customer Experience Strategies

Designing customer experience strategy needs trial and error, it cannot be designed in a hustle. Many companies employ specialist 'service engineers' or 'service laboratories' to help design, verify and assess their customer experience. But most of the time, the important factor, which is the perspective of the customer, is neglected in the process of developing customer experience, which results in a poorly designed customer experience. By understanding customers and taking customer perspectives into consideration, companies can design the most effective strategy for their service. To design and improve customer experience, several tools and techniques were developed, such as customer journey mapping, walk-through audits, emotion mapping and customer experience analysis (Johnston, Clark & Shulver 2012, 177).

Customer journey mapping, or route map in web development, is the first technique and also the first step in designing effective customer experience. Journey mapping is a course of actions that the customers come across when using the services. The journey mapping does not have to be complicated; it just requires a list of events that the customers encounter during the service. Journey mapping requires the companies to look at their service in the perspective of their customers, outside-in and not what the companies see from the inside-out perspective. (Johnston, Clark & Shulver 2012, 177.)

The second step is to evaluate the experience with walk-through audits. The walk-through audit can begin with a staff, a manager or an advisor acting as a customer. The stand-in customer then starts to assess their experience of the service using the checklist as guidelines for the evaluating process. To have an accurate assessment, the choice and scale of attributes have to be selected carefully. It is also important to identify the crucial factor of the customer experience through the whole service process. The audit should not be developed entirely by people with sufficient knowledge about the service because they may not notice the minor detail that can be a hindrance to the customers. Another benefit of this technique is that managers can evaluate the key point of customer service regularly and compare the result to figure out the important factor in the process. (Johnston, Clark & Shulver 2012, 177-178.)

Emotion mapping extends journey mapping to the emotional level. In journey mapping, the list of events experienced by customers was captured and can be utilized as a base for walk-through audit. However, for companies to be able to understand even more thoroughly about customer experience, emotion mapping is used. Emotional mapping is a straightforward yet vigorous extension of journey mapping as it records the feeling of customers or stand-in customers when they go through the whole service. By capturing both the positive and negative feelings of the customers, the company can use it as a reliable resource to assess and improve for the better customer experience. (Johnston, Clark & Shulver 2012, 178-179.)

Customer experience analysis (CEA) is developed based on the combination of walk-through audit and emotion mapping. Customer experience analysis is a simple but powerful tool for evaluating customers experience, it also acts as a reliable guideline for the company to improve their service. CEA not only records the service concept, the set of events when customers go through the service with their assessment, but also the messages and emotion of the customers. Johnston, Clark and Shulver (2012, 179-180) explain the six crucial point of customer experience analysis:

- The companies have to agree and specify the service concept. By identifying the service concept, the employees can understand the nature of their service and the experience and emotion that they wish to deliver to the customers.
- Stand-in customers follow customer journey mapping and go through the whole service to assess how the customers might feel about each event in the process, it would be better if the stand-in customers are staff and managers. Each event will be evaluated in the scale of three which are delighting, satisfactory and unsatisfactory.
- After grading each event, the surrogate customers can then take note about what they think and write down the short explanation behind their grading.
- It is also important to record the emotions that the customers feel in each individual step throughout the service. It is also a good choice to note the feeling of the customers before the very first event with the companies.
- The evaluations are then joined together to give a clear profile of the service outcome and the overall assessment is documented.
- Based on the score and the information generated through the service, the service designer, managers and other employees can interpret how the customer might think about the service process and work on the improvement by correcting the unsatisfactory and develop new strategy to provide better customer experience. The company can then evaluate the new strategy and compare it to the previous process for a better understanding and develop a better strategy.

3.3 The Requirements of a Customer Experience Strategy

3.3.1 Understanding the Customers

Listening to customer feedback is a great way to set the foundation for developing customer experience. By listening to the customers, companies can understand the mindset and expectation of the customer to design a great customer experience. Especially in the early stages of the business, entrepreneurs should focus on interacting with the customers as much as possible to understand what they should deliver to the customers to achieve the greatest customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers or customers with great experience will become a regular and they are not likely to switch to other alternative brands. (MacDonald 2020.)

Collecting feedback from customers is not a simple task, however it is utterly essential for the development of the companies. The feedback from customers contains many important pieces of information to develop a sustainable business, such as the reason they purchase from the business, what the customer expectation is and how the business can improve in the future. Collecting feedback is relevant and suggested in all stages of the business, not only needed in the beginning but also in later stages. (Jain 2020.)

3.3.2 Designing an Effective Customer Experience Vision

A clear vision tremendously helps develop and deliver a solid and consistent customer experience strategy. With the predefined vision, the company can stay true throughout the development and implementation process. It also gives employees a definite orientation on what to deliver to the customers in the service process. (Jain 2020.)

To develop an engaging vision, an emotional connection between customers and employees is required. Improving customer lifecycle involves many teams and departments, so it is not an easy task for a whole company to collaborate and decide on a customer experience vision. Jain (2020) suggests that a good customer experience vision should have these important requirements:

- Customer experience vision should associate with mission and values of the company
- It should be simple, clear and concise.
- It must be sincere and achievable. Exaggerated and false promise is not tolerable.
- Transparency is important since customers want to know about the company they are associated with.

3.3.3 Constantly Improving the Service

Continuously improving services based on customer feedback is the right move for every business. As companies are aiming to grow each and every day, their competitors are striving with the same intention. Thus, companies need to understand their strengths and weaknesses to be able to deliver better customer experience. Through the feedback and review from customers, companies will have a clear vision about the current level of customer satisfaction and what they can do to improve in the future. (Smartwerks 2020.)

Beside customer feedback and reviews, social media platforms also give great information to develop the customer experience. In the time of booming social media platforms,

customers tend to share their experience on social networks instead of the company website or the shopping sites. A great experience from one customer will bring some more customers but a negative post will affect the image of the company. Therefore, enterprises should look through those posts and solve the problems if possible. By understanding and clearing concerns of customers, the companies can improve their customer experience, keeping the engagement with customers as well as boosting their brand images. (Mali 2020.)

3.3.4 Diligent Employees Benefit Customer Experience

A great customer experience can only be delivered by a good working team. Employees play a significant role in a company since employees are directly in contact with the customers. Having a good strategy is not enough to deliver a great customer experience, companies need to focus on training and promoting self-development of its employees. Each employee is different so deciding an effective training method is not a simple task. To help with this matter, several tests are available to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the individual employees and how they should improve themselves. (MacDonald 2020.)

Listening to employees is also an important and unignorable step in developing great customer experience. When employees have an emotional attachment with a company, they will have a better understanding about the company, try to give their best performances, and contribute more to the success of the company. Employees know more about the real, and honest reaction of customers to products and services. By listening to employees, the companies will have another reliable source of information about customer opinions. Moreover, employees may also share about their own struggles and what they need for further self-development. Companies should frequently listen to their employees to help them with their difficulties and gather ideas for customer experience development. (MacDonald 2020.)

3.4 The Characteristics of an Effective Customer Experience Strategy

For the companies, it is hard to grasp the concept on how to deliver a great customer experience but for customers, it is clear when they receive the excellent customer experience and how it should be. (Johnston, Clark & Shulver 2012, 435.) Customers are quick on noticing and grading their experience with a brand as customer experience is a level of service that can leave customers with impression and emotion. An impressive customer experience leaves customers with a powerful emotional impact and a deep feeling that affects the customers loyalty and the future growth of the business. For that reason,

creating and delivering a good customer experience has become a crucial challenge for every business.

Customers perceive a service with excellent customer experience as “easy to do business with” (Johnston 2001, according to Johnston et al. 2012, 435). It is not necessary for an organization to exceed the expectation of the customers to be called an excellent service, but it will help improve customer experience. The descriptions of a great customer experience answered by the respondents of the study divided into four distinctive categories: consistently delivering what was promised, handling problems and queries professionally, providing a personalized customer experience and surpassing the expectation. (Johnston et al. 2012, 435.)

Consistently delivering what was promised does not mean meeting or exceeding the expectation. In the study of Johnston (2001, according to Johnston et al. 2012, 435), this category received the most answers when it came to excellent customer experience. When a clear promise is made, the customers will have their expectation about what is going to be delivered, but it is not necessary for the business to meet or exceed that expectation to be an excellent service in the eyes of the customers, since the customers tend to feel satisfied when the promise is delivered. A reliable, competent company completed their work with the agreed amount of payment is enough to make most customers delighted. (Johnston et al. 2012, 435-436.)

Handling problems and queries professionally is the next important factor in a great customer experience. For customers, it is understandable for problems to occur in the process, so most of the time, it is not the reason behind the dissatisfaction. The cause of discomfort in this case is how the organization handles the problems. When dealing with problems, the company may even have a chance to improve customer satisfaction by delivering a sensible solution, which will protect the interest of both the customer and the service provider in the situation. This phenomenon is called the recovery paradox (Johnston et al. 2012, 436). Organizations that handle problems and queries professionally will have satisfied customers, continually improving processes, well supported employees who are able to solve the problems and a culture that inspires employees to find and solve the problems before they happen. In fact, a clear crisis handling protocol will go a long way in such situations since the company’s personnel will know exactly what to do and the customers can be assured they are being treated with a professional and well-trained staff, which, in turn, will greatly help mediate the situation in constructive manners.

A personalized customer experience is an enhancing factor, it is not mandatory, but it will help improve customer experience. It is not necessary for employees to provide a

personal touch to customers, but it is quite common, and the customers appreciate it. A company with a reliable service and ability to handle problems professionally is more than likely can and will put effort in giving customers a personalized customer experience. (Johnston et al. 2012, 437.)

Although surpassing the expectation is, again, not required for most services to be called excellent, it is an enhancing factor for the customer experience. Surpassing the expectation is that the employees put some more effort in helping customers when it is not too troublesome or giving something extra that is outside the expectation of the consumers. Surpassing the expectation is not a deciding factor for a great customer experience but by giving a small additional touch to the service, the organization can deliver a great customer experience and acquire a tremendous leverage. (Johnston et al. 2012, 437.)

3.5 Customer Experience Development in a Platform-Based Service

Customer experience in a platform-based service starts with the infrastructure of the digital platform. Before planning on how to develop a good customer experience strategy, the companies need to focus on providing reliable infrastructure of the website and its response time. Customers do not want to spend their time on a slow loading website. About 70% customers admitted that the loading speed affects their buying behavior (Loughran, Dinh, Gooding, Pepper, Martinez, Tims, Scott & Hildebrand 2020) and the longer they have to wait the more likely they will exit (An 2018). So, the companies have to focus on optimizing their website loading speed before they can start with anything else. After having a good infrastructure, the companies can focus on developing a good customer experience strategy.

The companies need to understand their customers and what they need to be able to design a good strategy. Customers always enjoy a tailor-made experience more than a generic one. In order to have a personalized customer experience, organizations can create some customer personas as a visual presentation for their customers. The more customer personas companies create, the more personalized the customer experience can get and the more the landing page can be improved. Additionally, companies can also utilize previous search terms or orders of the customers to personalize the suggestion since each customer will have their unique interest even if they are in the same customer group. (Michelli 2018.)

Companies can implement traditional techniques in an e-commerce environment to understand more about the current state of customer experience of their platforms. Using tools and techniques such as route mapping and customer experience analysis will give an

insight on how the customer interacts with the website and what the company needs to improve. Unlike the traditional methods, necessary data for the assessment can be obtained through analytics tools which collect data from real customers instead of using stand-in customers. Companies can also collect feedback from customers through surveys and their conversation with the customer support. Collected information can then be assessed through customer experience analysis to develop a better strategy for the platforms. (Jain 2020.)

The final and most important thing in an e-commerce environment is the design of the platform itself. An excellent design is simple and effortless to navigate since 76% of customers want a website that is easy for them to find what they need (Volpe 2017). The navigation through the website should be effective yet simple for customers to go through the whole website without any obstacles. By only providing the necessary or important path, customers will not get lost and the journey becomes more enjoyable. Similar to the navigation system, the content of the website has to be clear and visualized. Companies can cut down all the unnecessary information, highlighting the important piece of data, sorting information by the level of relevance and put them in separate blocks to improve the visibility of the website. Since the number of smartphone users is already over 3.2 billion devices in 2019 (Gu 2019), companies should focus on making their website accessible everywhere and the experience on every device should be the same. The last thing, which is also the most neglected in designing, is the accessibility. Having a clear design is good but the marketer is also required to put emphasis on the color scheme and contrast level to deliver a good experience for customers with eye disorders. It may be rare but visually impaired people also use the internet with the assistance of the screen reader. In order to assist those customers, marketers are expected to use the correct tag for each element on the website to give them a better experience on the platform (Volpe 2017).

3.5.1 Surpassing Customer Expectation Through Mobile Experiences

It is almost mandatory for businesses to put emphasis on delivering exceptional mobile experiences. As mobile devices are widely used, purchasing through mobile devices has become a norm and mobile transactions accounted for 34.5% of e-commerce transactions in 2017. It is predicted that mobile e-commerce sales will keep growing and surpass 50% of the total e-commerce sales in 2021 (Clement 2019). Hence, focusing on mobile experience beside the traditional desktop sites is a good way to boost the businesses.

When mobile visitors accounted for more than 30%, developing a dedicated mobile application is a good decision (Genge 2019). Mobile accessibility is important, and it should be fast and reliable since Google reported that more than 50% of customers will leave the

website if it takes more than three seconds to load (An 2018). Compared to the websites, mobile applications always have a shorter loading time since the base components are already downloaded beforehand. Mobile applications are more efficient than responsive website design because it runs on the native components developed solely for the mobile devices and it will offer a better customer experience. Another strength of mobile applications is the usage of built-in features such as notifications, offline functionality and mobile payment methods. With mobile payment methods, consumers can go through the whole purchasing process without remembering their payment details and it is considered more secure than putting the credit card on the website (Mali 2020).

3.5.2 Personalized Customer Experience and Loyalty Program

In e-commerce, it is a necessity to utilize tracking and analytical service to deliver personalized customer experience. To consumers, tracking can be controversial as it may violate their privacy, but it is necessary for the businesses to know more about their customers to tailor a personal recommendation. Through the collected data, the company can develop a friendlier touchpoint in their customer experience strategy. The more companies know about their customers, the more relevant the suggestion and other services become. Although customers prefer personalized experience, it is also important to ensure that the tracking is not viewed as invasive in the eyes of the consumers since it definitely affects the image of the company in a negative way. (Genge 2019.)

Loyalty programs will increase customers retention and boost sales. According to the study of Wassel (2019), about 70% consumers prefer loyalty programs and gift card rewards and half of them will spend more on their purchase than what they expect. Customers are also more likely to pick several smaller rewards than saving for a bigger one. Company unique currency is also attractive to customers, it can be a gift to a customer or a reward from a referring program, which is a reliable marketing channel and an effective customer retention booster.

3.5.3 Transparency Is Essential

Being transparent is one way that companies can show appreciation to their customers. For customers, having their privacy protected is very important, that is why legislation like GDPR and CCPA is enacted. Under those legislations, mistakes related to privacy or violations of privacy in any form are intolerable and companies have to take immediate measures to fix the problems. In recent years, because the number of data breached have increased significantly around the world (Swinhoe 2020), the safety of personal data of customers and transparency are being valued more than ever before.

Customers value their privacy of their personal information but sometimes they do not give enough attention to it. Besides providing a good customer experience and transparency about customer data, companies also have to prepare for data breach, it could be from the weakness in the infrastructure or even mistakes made by customers. Nowadays, customer information becomes more valuable than ever before since it may not only contain the private information but also payment details and authentication. More and more cybercriminals are tempted to steal private data of customers so companies have to focus on setting up their security measures, avoiding storing sensitive data, such as payment details, passwords, in plain text or using reliable third-party payment solutions to avoid handling payment details from the beginning.

4 EMPIRICAL CASE – WOLT

4.1 Wolt as a Company

Wolt Enterprises Oy is currently one of the largest food delivery companies in Finland. Wolt was founded in 2014 and in 2015, the company introduced its platform, which only offered pick-up only in the capital region of Finland. In 2016, after surpassing a hundred thousand registered users in Finland, Wolt launched its delivery service and managed to acquire ten million euros funding from EQT Ventures (Takahashi 2016). EQT Ventures is a part of the Swedish based global investment company EQT, it is first started with 566 million euros funding and mainly focus on investing in potential Europe and US based tech company ranging from 1 to 75 million euros (EQT Ventures 2020). Thanks to the funding from EQT Ventures, Wolt managed to expand its service to Stockholm, Sweden (Takahashi 2016). Also, in 2016, Wolt launched its service in Tallinn, Estonia (Nordic9 2017), and started partnering with Starship Technologies to test out food delivery with robots (Wolt 2016).

Wolt is now available in 24 countries with 267 million euros funding (Wolt 2020c). In 2019, Wolt managed to acquire 160 million dollars funding from ICONIQ Capital, a privately held investment firm founded in 2011 in California, mainly focus on investing in technology company, and 83North, an Israeli based venture capital firm founded in 2006 with portfolio consist of companies in several field across Europe, Israel, to further expand its platform to even more countries (Ohr 2019). Following the success in the Nordics, Wolt launched their service in several countries in Europe and Asia, with the latest country being Japan.

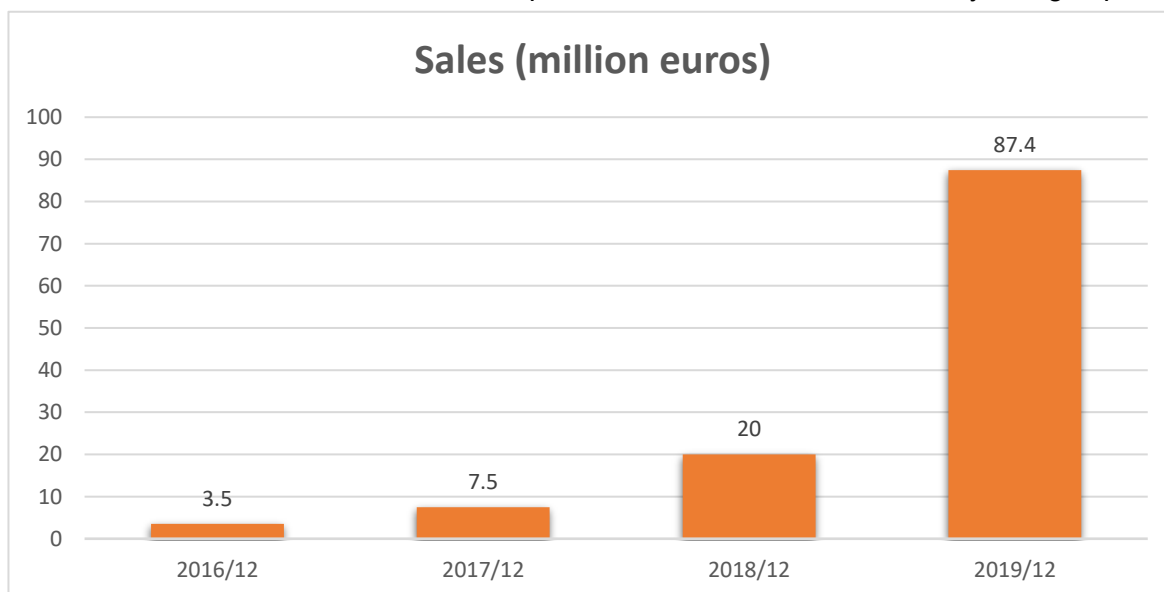


Figure 3 Sales of Wolt (Adapted from Finder 2020)

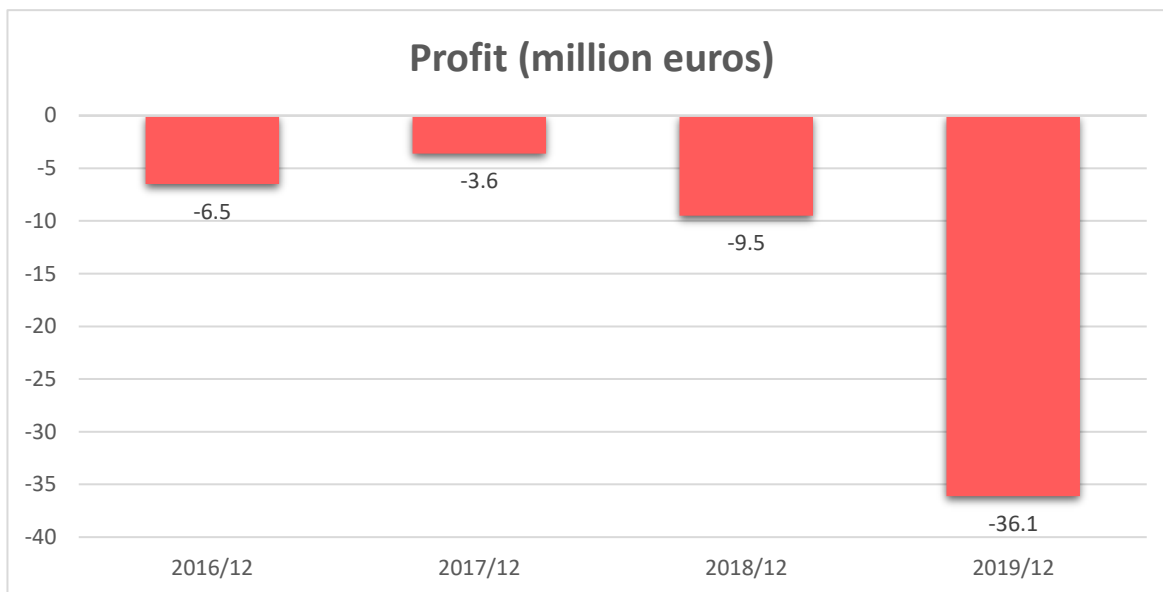


Figure 4 Profit of Wolt (Adapted from Finder 2020)

Wolt growth rate is exceptional and in 2020, Wolt managed to rank second in the FT 1000 ranking. From 2015 to 2019, Wolt annual sales increase significantly from just 190 thousands in 2015 to 3.5 million euros in 2016, nearly 20 times the annual sales in just a year, and managed to double the annual sale in 2017 to 7.5 million euros and nearly triple the sales in 2018 to 20 million and at the end of 2019 end up with 87.4 million, more than four times the previous year. Since Wolt expanded its service to several countries in this time period, it is understandable that the sales would increase significantly, and the cost of expansion is also shown clearly in the profit report. Since 2016 till 2019, the profit of Wolt is always below 0% with -183.6% in 2016, -44.2% in 2017, -43.6% in 2018 and -40.3% in 2019. Even though Wolt does not make any profit yet, it still managed to grow rapidly throughout the years which result in the second place in the FT 1000 ranking in 2020. FT 1000 is the annual ranking list published by Financial Time, It contains the list of Europe company with the highest compound annual growth rate in revenue in three year periods, The FT 1000 ranking of 2020, consists the data between 2015 and 2018 gathered by the FT 1000 and Statista. In this year ranking, the highest ranking with absolute growth rate of 37,462.5% is OakNorth Bank from United Kingdom, and Wolt stands proudly at the second place with absolute growth rate of 15,641.9%. In 2018, Wolt had 293 employees across the branches and in 2020, that number is well over 1700 employees. (Kelly 2020; Finder 2020.)

Table 1 Financial Information of Wolt (Adapted from Finder 2020)

	2016/12	2017/12	2018/12	2019/12
Sales (thousand euros)	3516	7524	200019	87436
Change in net sales %	2201%	114%	166.1%	336.8%
EBITDA %	-183.2%	-44.1%	-41.7%	-40%
Profit %	-183.6%	-44.2%	-43.6%	-40.3%
Profit (thousand euros)	-6457	-3620	-9495	-36133
Employees in Finland	33	50	75	427

4.2 Wolt as a Service

Wolt is a Finnish food delivery app that is on the rise to conquer the global market. Even though Wolt only launched their service in 2015, it manages to acquire 45% of Finnish food delivery market share with more than five hundred thousand registered users in Finland (Statista). Wolt currently partners with more than 27,000 restaurants, 48,000 couriers to serve about five million users around the world.

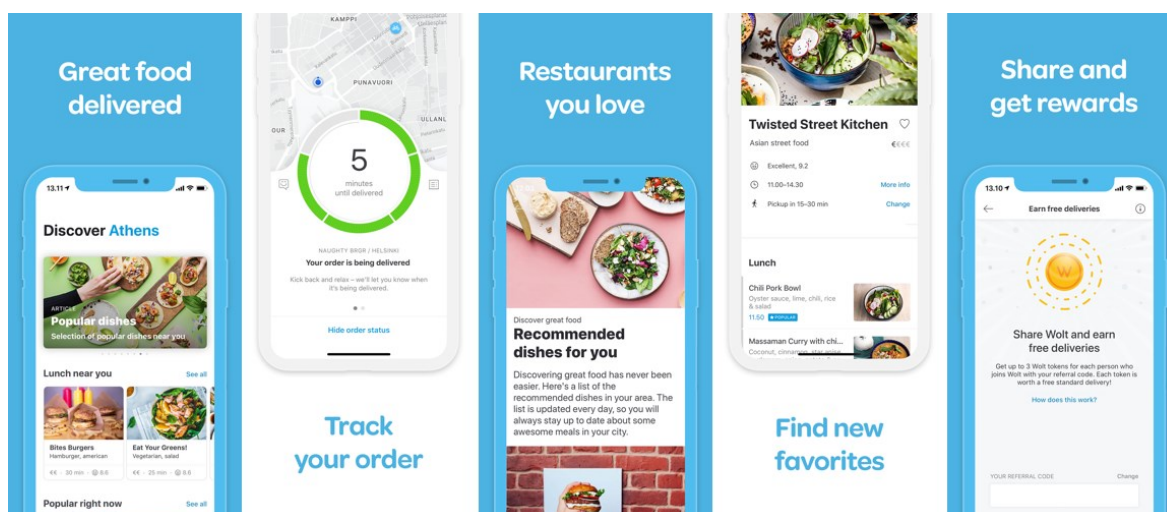


Image 1 iPhone Screenshots of Wolt: Food delivery (Wolt d)

Wolt provides its service to customers through a native mobile application, Wolt: Food delivery, and a web application, Wolt.com. Both platforms of Wolt share the same interactive design and functionality. Customers can use its platform to discover food options in their area or in other areas as well. After picking out a restaurant, customers can look through

the menu and pick their food as well as choosing the method to receive their food, which is eat-in, takeaway or delivery, and an option to pre-order. In case of eat-in, a reservation for the order will be made and shown on the platform. For Takeaway and delivery order, the application will show the remaining time until the food is ready and notify customers when their food is available to pick up. Delivery orders also show that the food is picked up by courier and the remaining time till it arrives.

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1 Data collection

5.1.1 Interview with Courier Partner

This section discusses the interview in depth. A courier partner of Wolt was contacted to have an interview with the author. The interview main focus is the operating process of Wolt, which will help the author to understand the service and operation of Wolt. Beside the operating process, the interviewee also shares their story about their working days, the interaction with the customers, staff of restaurant and also the Wolt support line.

In order to ensuring that the author understand correctly the concept of the service and avoiding occupy too much working time of the courier, the interview was split in multiple session. In the first session, the courier partner was asked to introduce about their works, how they start and their workflow. In the second session, the courier explains about the operation of restaurant partner and the interaction between staff of the restaurant and Wolt support line when problems arise. In the third session, the couriers also tell the author about the interaction between them and the customers and how Wolt support team helps them fix the issue. After that, the courier is asked to go through the empirical part of this thesis to ensure the validity and the reliability of the study. Since the information only came from one courier, the study could not visualize the detailed operating process of Wolt, but it is possible for the author to grab the big picture on how the service is operated.

5.1.2 Customer Review

After the first three sessions of the interview, the process of collecting customer review is started. By checking the customer reviews of Wolt: Food Delivery application on Google Play and Apple App Store, it is possible to learn about the user experience of real registered users about the service.

The customer reviews are collected from both stores at different time to avoid sudden problem with the infrastructure. On Apple App Store, at the time of collected, Wolt has 4.8 out of 5 stars with about 8,500 ratings. Because Apple does not provide the option to sort reviews in any kind, the author could only collect the shown reviews. Since some reviews are from 2017, it will not be able to represent the state of the service and the customer experience of the current date, so the author decides to only collect the reviews, posted in 2020 and the second half of 2019. Regarding the Google Play, Wolt: Food delivery app

also receive 4.8 out of 5 with more than 70,000 reviews. Because the option to filter the reviews is available on Google Play, the author decides to use the “most relevant” and “all ratings”, which is the default setting of the service, to collect the data.

Since this study focuses on the development of customer experience in Finland, it is arguable that collecting customer reviews on the stores is not a good decision because the users are from all over the world. Though, the author believes that it is a viable choice, because according to the interviewee, Wolt share the same infrastructure and services in every available country. Furthermore, Wolt support team also operate in more than one country, the interviewee mentioned that Wolt also let support team of different countries take over the service in Finland on Finnish holiday to keep the service operates smoothly without interruption.

5.2 The Benefits of Customer Experience Management in the Case of Wolt

In the modern market, customer experience has become one of the most crucial elements in building a successful business. According to Magids, Zorfas and Leemon (2015), brands with good customer experience have a higher chance to connect with their customers on an emotional level. Customers value the emotional connections they have with the company and are willing to pay more for a good customer experience and even repurchase.

In a time when most companies are doing a great job for their product quality management, products and services have become more standardized. In order to stand out among other competitors that also offer quality products, Wolt has to shift its focus on improving customer experience. Today, food delivery service is offered by both food delivery platforms and restaurants. In order to attract customers, Wolt can differentiate its service by lowering the delivery fee or investing on customer experience to increase user engagement. Additionally, companies with good customer experience and high user engagement also have higher profit. Taking Starbucks as an example, instead of investing in improving sales quantity by price reduction, it puts emphasis on service quality and enjoys higher profit margin compared to competitors. As the economy develops and shapes, Customer experience has grown into the real differentiator of the modern market.

5.2.1 Maintaining Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is irreplaceable in any business. Nowadays, as the market has become more saturated, customer satisfaction does not guarantee repurchasing, gaining customer loyalty is the deciding factor for long-term customer acquisition. In the article, Morris

(2016) stated that attracting a new customer costs up to six or seven times than keeping a customer, but the chance for an existing customer to repurchase is 14 times higher than a new customer (Farris, Bendle, Pfeifer & Reibstein 2011). Correspondingly, loyal customers tend to preserve long-term relationships with the companies, despite the presence of other competitors.

There are many ways to build customer loyalty, but none are as effective as providing a great customer experience. Customer loyalty can be built up from campaigns such as offering discounts, price reduction, gift giveaway, or reward. Even though they can be effective methods in the short-term, it is not sustainable in the long run. Customers who are attracted through a special campaign will easily switch to other alternative brands if they find the campaigns of other companies more appealing. To have better customer loyalty, the companies have to deliver a solid customer experience from the beginning. In order to attract new customers, Wolt regularly organizes campaigns that let new users try the service for a lower price. Additionally, delivery orders of new customers are also marked as “New customer” in the partner app to notify the couriers since first time users are more likely to make mistakes in the ordering process. Besides campaigns for new users, Wolt also offers various events for the current users. According to the research of Magids, Zorfias, and Leemon (2015), the customers, who have a great experience, are unlikely to shift to another brand because of the emotional bond with the company and they believe that the company will treat them appropriately.

Cognitive fluency is an important factor to take into consideration when building customer loyalty. The New York Times defines cognitive fluency as “a measure of how easy it is to think about something”, it is not how difficult the task is but how the customers perceive that specific task difficult to complete. People tend to prefer simple, familiar and easy-to-use services, if first-time customers experience great purchase, they will be less likely to switch to different vendors and risk having a negative experience. In order to deliver great customer experience, Wolt frequently optimizes its service and trims down the unnecessary steps in the ordering process, such as using GPS data to pick the correct location of customers or using the built-in payment service on the device to shorten the payment process. By doing that, Wolt is able to retain their existing customers and leave a good impression on their new ones.

5.2.2 Word-of-mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth can beat any other marketing strategies with credibility and cost efficiency. Through the research of Kapadia (2016), referral makes a big difference in buying behavior of customers. Over 80% of Americans seek recommendation from friends and family,

and 62% stated that they are more likely to make a purchase if a friend or family shares their experience on social media. Word-of-mouth has a significant impact on customer decisions, and it is free of cost.

A satisfied customer can share their experience with others, which can be translated to free-of-charge marketing. According to a survey by The Nielsen Company (2012), nearly 50% of the global responders check review and feedback of other customers to make a purchase. Because a word from a positive customer can help boost the sale of the service and slowly provide organic growth to the company, Wolt also implements a referral program in its service. The referral program of Wolt is called "Earn free deliveries", in which the existing user can receive free deliveries for referring users and the new users can enjoy their food without delivery free. When customers introduce a brand, they will be less likely to use or prefer other alternatives since it will contradict their belief. Bosinoff (2014) stated that Airbnb witnessed a 25% increase in booking when they launched the referral program in 2014. When studying the case of Airbnb, Brown (2014) also found out that referred users also remain engaged with Airbnb by booking future trips and sending referrals to others.

By developing great customer experience, the company also enjoys the benefit of word-of-mouth from their customers. A happy customer is expected to spread their experience to others which will increase sales and customer engagement. Customer engagement helps companies avoid the outflow of customers and it can be boosted through referral programs. Companies can have better growth rates and expand their market while not having to spend more on marketing.

5.2.3 Avoiding Unnecessary Communication Barriers

In order to deliver a great customer experience, companies need good communication with customers. Customers always want to contact the brand when they have complaints or inquiries but in his study, Alex (2016) learnt that 96% of frustrated customers participating in American Express Survey do not express their opinion because the companies do not provide a simple and straightforward communication channel. To make the encounter positive and leave a good customer experience, the brands have to be responsive, helpful and the contact form should be easy to find and simple to use.

In the age of booming social media, people tend to share their negative experience on social networks rather than contacting the companies. According to the research of Touch Agency (2011), there are a million twitter users check tweets about customer experience every week in 2011, in which around 80% are negative stories about their experience. The

research of Touch agency was conducted in 2011 when there were around 180 million tweets posted per day but in 2014, this number jumped to over 500 million tweets per day (Sayce 2020). Because of the increasing number of customers using social platforms, and a negative post on social media could taint the brand image and chase away both existing and potential customers, companies have to put emphasis on leaving customers with good experience through their communication channels.

To improve communication channels, Wolt customer support is always ready to receive feedback from the customers, both inquiries and complaints. Besides being contacted by customers, Wolt also takes the initiative to contact customers when receiving inquiries from the couriers before hands. By being more sympathetic toward customers and providing customers with suitable solutions, Wolt manages to raise customer loyalty and retention significantly. Being proactive in giving customers a satisfying solution helps Wolt avoid unnecessary legal problems and PR fiascoes because everything can start from just a single unsolved complaint.

5.2.4 Saving Customer Recurring Costs

Improving customer experience is a sustainable and long-run strategy compared to going for a sales race. When companies only focus on serving as many customers as possible by reducing service time and effort spent on individual customers, they might have to spend even more resources on providing after-sale service. According to Goodman (2014, according to Alex 2016), because sales representatives of an appliances company were taught to rush the customer to save a minute of reply time that cost about fifty cents, a secondary repairing fee with the value of \$84 and a second technician visit is required to solve the problem. With better customer support, the company would have been able to reduce customer discomfort and avoid the undesirable expenses (Alex 2016). Goodman (2014, according to Alex 2016) also shared that, when sales representatives were inspired to focus on asking detailed questions, the number of second visits was cut down by 30% and the customers also felt more satisfied with their purchases. Understanding the importance of customer support, Wolt encourages its partner to contact the support whenever a problem arises and employees to analyze the situation thoroughly and provide a suitable solution to the customers.

Customers do not have to contact support if the information they need is easy to find. In the study conducted by American Express (2017), more than six out of ten American consumers prefer digital self-serve tools for simple inquiries. When using a platform with simple, clear design and easy to access information, customers will not have to spend too much time looking for what they need, and they will be more pleasant to check through

the service. Companies can improve their services even more with personalized experience by adopting up-selling and cross-selling products to give customers accurate recommendations. To eliminate the frustration when using the service, Wolt split its functionalities across 5 pages which are “Discovery, Delivery, Nearby, Search, and Profile”. In Discovery, most information is listed here from news, restaurants, to food categories. In order to help customers reordering with ease, Wolt App also has a section called “Order again”, which includes the most recently ordered restaurants. At the end of the first page, there is the Quick links section which consists of some frequently used actions for easy access, such as contact customer support. As a result, customer experience can help companies like Wolt cut down customer recurring costs and improve on qualitative growth.

5.2.5 Profitable Customer Base & Customer Lifetime Value

Customer lifetime value (CLV) is a crucial measurement in business development. The Economic Times defines customer lifetime value as the present value of the future resource that the customer will contribute to the company throughout their relationship with the business. Therefore, CLV is an important metric used when the companies need to make critical decisions or when marketer designs a new strategy for customer acquisition. When acquiring new customers, marketers have to calculate the cost of acquisition and compare it to the customer lifetime value. The ideal condition when acquiring new customers is that the CLV is greater than the cost of acquisition which can also be called the break-even point.

Delivering a great customer experience will also improve customer lifetime value. According to Zendesk (2020), 58% of customers will stop buying from the company after experiencing a single negative service and 52% will switch to the competitor, on the other hand, customers are willing to pay 17% more for a business with excellent service (American Express 2017). By offering a good customer experience, consumers will stay with the company for a longer time and new customers also have a higher chance to repurchase. When companies put emphasis on improving customer experience, all variables of the customer lifetime value, customer retention time, average order value and number of sales, also increase.

Striving to deliver good customer experience helps Wolt cut down expenses and have more resources for customer acquisition. By avoiding unnecessary operational expenses, Wolt can put more resources on customer acquisition, through campaigns and referral programs, and delivering better customer experience. When customer lifetime value is greater than customer acquisition cost, the companies will have a sustainable qualitative growth. In the end, delivering good customer experience helps boost the image of Wolt,

lower operational expenses, benefit the company with word-of-mouth marketing and increase customer lifetime value.

5.3 Supports for Other Participant Sides in the Platform

In order to achieve greater success, Wolt not only focuses on the customer but also focuses on improving the partnership between restaurants and couriers. Wolt strives to provide the best service to the customer by polishing the communication system between customer, Wolt, restaurant and courier. Besides the communication, Wolt also keeps a close connection with its restaurant partners and couriers.

5.3.1 Restaurant Partner

According to Ristal, head of the Baltic branch of Wolt, restaurants do not have to pay any fees to use the platform, Wolt only receives commission on orders which were made through the platform. When starting the service, Wolt provides an iPad to the restaurant for communicating and receiving orders. Delivery is also an option; restaurants do not have to provide food delivery if they do not wish to. When restaurants decide to have a food delivery service, Wolt will assist the restaurant in picking a suitable menu for delivery and suggest the correct container for each kind of dish. (Pärli 2020.)

To smoothen the ordering process, Wolt lets the restaurant decide the menu as well as the additional option on each dish. Wolt understands that every restaurant is different, that is why its platform is also very flexibly designed, restaurants can decide on how to serve their dishes, for example, eat-in, takeaway or delivery. Some restaurants only have a fixed menu, but some give the customers more flexibility in customizing their meals.

Besides the selection of individual dishes, restaurants also have a choice to offer meals or combos to the customers. Similar to single dish, meals and combo can also be customized based on customers preference. With meals and combo options, selecting food becomes easier and cheaper than choosing each individual component. Therefore, customers do not have to experience any difficulty when ordering food.

Since restaurants do not have to pay a fixed fee for Wolt, they can offer food with comparable price to their ordinary menu. Most restaurants using Wolt have both their normal menu and Wolt menu at the same price. It is possible because Wolt only receives commissions based on the order itself. Since Wolt also processes the payment, restaurants do not have to worry about the payment and credit card surcharge. When receiving delivery orders, restaurants also do not have to take care of the waiting service. (Wolt 2020e.)

Because joining Wolt is free, it can be considered a costless, reliable and effective channel for advertising. Wolt always promotes its restaurant partners on the front page of the platform in different categories. The restaurants in each category are changed regularly to help promote as many restaurants as possible. Joining Wolt is a great opportunity for restaurants to reach new customers, and Wolt also understands it. That is why the top category on the platform is always dedicated to new restaurants with the title of “New restaurants on Wolt”. The second category, called “Wolt specials”, containing all promotions from Wolt restaurant partners, is for customers to enjoy food with better value. After that, there are several different categories based on the location of customers, restaurant rating, food price and real-time popularity.

Resolving troubles is important for every service, and that is also the case for Wolt. According to the interviewee, Wolt is the middleman in the process, so every question or headache arises is directed to Wolt. To help answer the question or settle the situation, Wolt uses two reliable and efficient channels to communicate with restaurants which are the application on the iPad and phone call. The application allows Wolt employees to send notifications and chat with the staff of the restaurant in real-time. If messages are not answered, Wolt employees will have to call the restaurant directly to resolve the obstacles as swiftly as possible.

5.3.2 Courier Partner

Courier partners ensure the food is delivered to customers safely and timely. All delivery orders made through Wolt are delivered by Wolt courier partners. Wolt courier partners are not employees, they are a separate party bound by contract similar to restaurant partners. Wolt can only terminate the contract if the terms of the contract are violated, but courier partners can terminate the contract whenever they like. (Pärli 2020.)

In order to provide the best possible service for customers, Wolt tries to equip couriers with the best possible delivery gear. To deliver food, couriers can utilize three types of vehicle, which are bicycle, scooter and car. When courier partners start working with Wolt, they will receive a guideline about the service and delivery equipment. Courier partners receive a similar set of hat, T-shirt, jacket and different delivery equipment that is suitable for their vehicles. Couriers with bicycles and scooters receive a thermal backpack, a cooler bag and a phone holder. On the other hand, car drivers receive a thermal side bag and a cooler bag. With the provided delivery equipment, both Wolt and couriers can preserve the quality and hygienics of the meal. (Interviewee 2020.)

Wolt courier partners have the freedom and flexibility to decide their working time. Wolt do not set a minimum required working time for partners, so they can work full-time, part-time or just a few hours a week and stop for a long period if they are occupied with something else. Courier partners can start and stop working whenever they want, it is a flexible income suitable for most people and especially students. (Pärli 2020.)

Courier partners receive all delivery fees paid by customers. The income of courier partners is from delivery fees paid by customers and Wolt (Pärli 2020). Each delivery task with a straight-line delivery distance from restaurant to customer within a certain range receives only the base fee. For delivery tasks with distance longer than the based, courier partners also receive additional distance fee on top of the base fee. In case of promotion, lower deliver fee or free delivery, Wolt will cover the difference without affecting courier partner income. (Wolt 2020b.)

Besides income per delivery, Wolt also provides a guaranteed income for its courier partners. In order to ensure the continuous service (always running smoothly), Wolt introduced a scheduled time slot with guaranteed income to the couriers. Scheduled hours provide a fixed income in a time slot to couriers when orders are limited. When couriers booked working hours beforehand, the system will calculate the fixed income of the schedule. If the income of the courier in that time slot is less than the fixed income, the courier will receive the fixed income instead. With scheduled hours, Wolt always has available couriers ready to deliver food to the hungry customers and maintain a smooth service with exceptional customer experience. (Wolt 2020e.)

Being a courier partner is a new type of employment. Courier partners are not employees of Wolt, they are self-employed. Self-employed is not totally new but the support and guideline are not widely available for everyone. In order to help couriers working without burden, Wolt dedicates a channel to provide legal support for couriers. When the income threshold of a courier surpasses a certain amount, Wolt helps the couriers set-up self-employed businesses as light-entrepreneurs or companies. Wolt also partners with other service providers to bring the best possible option to its couriers. (Interviewee 2020.)

Smooth communication makes a tremendous contribution to a good service. Wolt keeps in touch with couriers via three communication channels, such as mobile app, phone call and email. Wolt Partner app is the main communication channel between Wolt and its couriers. When starting the partnership, couriers have to install Wolt Partner app and validate with their phone number. The main purpose of the application is to distribute delivery tasks. Besides that, it contains a summary of income and next payout as well as it lets couriers book the scheduled hours. Another important function of Wolt Partner app is the

real-time messaging service called Support. Through Support, couriers can have conversations with the support team of Wolt to resolve obstacles and vice versa. In time of urgent, support team can also contact couriers via phone call to rapidly and assuredly clear up trouble. The last communication channel is email, most of the important and detailed information is sent through email by Wolt, it can be an announcement of change of service or newsletters to update the current situation of Wolt. Couriers can also contact Wolt via email for advice related to terms of service, legal support or other concerns. (Wolt 2020a.)

Wolt understands that couriers are one of its most important partners, for that reason, Wolt always prioritizes the well-being of the courier partners. Every courier with a car or scooter already has their vehicle insurance but it does not apply to couriers deliver by bicycle. In order to aid the couriers, Wolt provides a free of charge insurance for its couriers. The insurance does not only apply to couriers driving bicycles but also couriers with cars or scooters. The insurance covers all accidents that happen to the couriers when working with Wolt and an hour after a work session. (Wolt 2020a.)

5.3.3 The Results of Partner Support Policies

With the enormous effort in providing the best cooperative environment to both restaurants and couriers, Wolt has managed to deliver even better service to customers. Customers always expect tasty and hygienic food to arrive rapidly but obstacles in the delivery process are also unavoidable. With the reliable communication channels and swift response of the support team, confusion can be cleared up quickly and the system is kept smoothly operated, which results in a higher customer satisfaction.

For restaurants, joining Wolt is a risk-free and simple yet rewarding process. According to Ristal, restaurants generate roughly 25% to 30% increase in sale when using Wolt. Restaurants can start using the platform without any fee and the contract can be terminated immediately. Wolt also provides a free-of-charge promotion for newly joined restaurants on its front page. More and more restaurants are interested in joining Wolt which also speeds up the expansion process of Wolt. (Pärli 2020.)

Couriers can take full control of their income with the independence of working time when working with Wolt. With a flexible working environment, couriers can make a good amount of income without affecting their daily routine. Couriers are also offered insurance which will cover all accidents when working with Wolt. Considering all the positive traits, working with Wolt becomes an optimal and sensible choice for many people who seek flexibility in earning a living. (Interviewee 2020.)

Wolt expansion brings even more value to customers. In the expansion process of Wolt, more restaurants have joined the platform which gives customers even more options to choose from. Wolt now has a variety of food choices, ranging from options with great value to authentic gourmet dishes. The network of courier partners also increases in density and quality, which helps speed up the delivery process and expands the area of service. As a result, customers can enjoy food in different pricing brackets at home without worrying about the difference in quality.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Answering the Research Questions

In summing up the entire thesis work, it is perhaps best to begin with seeing through the research questions and provide them with proper answers. The first one to be considered is the main research questions of this thesis, which is as followed:

“How customer experience strategies affect platform-based food delivery service in Finland?”

According to information discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis, there would be many benefits for a platform service if it could develop an effective and thoughtful customer strategy. The first of which is the maintenance of customer loyalty. As is the norm in the service industry, customer loyalty is one of the most important aspects of the success of the service providers. By taking good care of their customers, service providers can maintain a profitable population of customers willing to spend on the services for the current time and even in the future, ensuring a stable income stream and the continuance of the services themselves. This is especially valuable considering a market with a quite small population as in the case of Finland where every customer counts. Second, by offering customers the best value they deserve through customer policies, service providers can rely on the lot of satisfied customers to perform free marketing, spreading the providers' reputation through words of mouth and recommendations. This will allow the service providers to gain new customers without the need to invest significant sums into traditional marketing campaigns, which is very much the case in Finland where costs are usually high. Thirdly, while a satisfied customer population should mean there will be less unnecessary occasions of conflicts, there is no guarantee of trouble-free business conduct when the customer population grows so large. Thus, having an up-and-running customer approach strategies and policies will allow the service providers for smooth communication with customers and possibly clear guidelines for such events, thus minimizing the loss of reputation and other forms of damages greatly. If such is the case, then the service providers could again save themselves a great deal of resources in not having to deal with the consequences of having to regain their standings in the market as well as to recur lost customers.

After the identification of the effects that a well-defined and effective customer strategy can bring upon the service industry of food delivery, it would be beneficial to know the characteristics of a successful customer strategy so that businesses and industries have an overview parameter to follow in developing customer strategies, thus leading to the first sub-question:

“What are the characteristics that define a successful customer experience approach within the platform economy?”

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first characteristic of a successful customer experience approach should be to make the provided services themselves ‘user-friendly’. If the services can be comprehended and operated by a wide range of customers, they will be more likely to be accepted. The second characteristic is to understand and deliver what the customers expect from the services. In reality, such expectations mostly equal whatever features that are advertised and promised about the services by the service providers themselves. Therefore, the fulfillment of the second characteristics depends greatly on whether the service providers promise and deliver realistic and sufficient service features. Third, while it is commonly accepted that misunderstanding and disagreement with customers are an unavoidable part of business conduct, the way the service providers handle the crisis will make a large difference in the success of their customer experience approach. Generally, in crisis handling, it is best to study the situation entirely and put the interest of all sides into balance. Following a well-defined crisis handling guideline will also be a great plus, showing professionalism and efficiency. Apart from the three must-have characteristics, there are two more add-on, not required but good-to-have, characteristics that service providers can count on in developing their customer experience strategies. The first of these two is the personalization of customer interaction. While this may be hard on a grand scale since the number of customers and partners can number in the tens of thousands, the achievement of such can result in even better customers’ attitude and feeling toward the service provider. The second good-to-have characteristic is surpassing customers’ expectations. This, also, will help develop a better impression from the customers and ensure their loyalty as well as continuous patronage.

Yet, it would be incomplete to focus only on the consumers when considering a platform service. While it is true that, in this case, the revenues still come from the consumers, people who use the delivery services and pay for the food that they order, a platform-based sharing economy simply doesn’t work with all parties contributing. This means that the other participant sides of the platform must also receive adequate attention and support from the platform so as to optimize the functionality and well-being of the whole platform as a whole. The case study company of this thesis, Wolt, has realized the importance of supporting the other participant sides, the restaurants and the delivery partners within its network. This would set a good example for other platform providers to learn from for the betterment of their services as a whole, thus resulting in the second research question:

“The approaches in which Wolt has taken to support other participant sides other than the customer side?”

In the Wolt network, there are two other participant sides apart from the consumers: the restaurants and food courier partners. Each of these two participant sides receives a number of supports that are meant to help them carry out their operations in an effective and professional manner. The supports by Wolt are meant to provide them comfort of minds, knowing that someone will be there for them when troubles arise.

For the restaurant partners, in terms of material support, Wolt provides them, firstly, with devices such as free iPad for communication and order processing as well as technology assistance in forms of setting payment and customer reaching systems. In addition, the restaurant partners are advised on the right food container types for maximum preservation of food during preparation and delivery. Restaurants are also given advice on the customization of their menu options both are mostly left free to decide how they want their menu to be. Moreover, the restaurant partners always have the backing of crisis mediation helplines to guide them through should any situation arise. Best of all, the restaurant partners are charged on an order-basis, which means they only have to pay Wolt for orders received, not fixed installments. This provides them with a peace of mind for they do not have to worry about being in debt with regular financial burdens.

For courier partners, they are also given material support in the form of heat packs for delivery and accident insurances for car and motorbike couriers during their work sessions and an hour after. The couriers are also given delivery guidelines to make sure they perform their jobs well and helplines are always ready to answer their concerns and help them with unexpected situations. One attractive point for courier partners in working with Wolt is their compensation policy, which, despite the partnership status, still ensures couriers with some amounts of guaranteed income to cover for their expenses and added incomes for extended delivery trips, making the earning opportunity rather lucrative. Last but not least, Wolt allows its courier flexible work times so that they can focus on other matters of life.

6.2 Reliability and Validity

Reliability is the stability of measurement over an array of conditions in which will produce the same result (Nunnally 1978, according to Drost 2011, 106). The reliability of this study is ensured by the author. By collecting the review of several customers from different sources, the gathered data is not restricted, controlled or influenced. With the experience

and reviews of millions of users about the platform, it is possible for other researcher to reach the same conclusion under the same variable conditions.

Validity of the study focus on the meaningfulness of the research components (Drost 2011, 114). Therefore, the research study is conducted to collect necessary information to answer the proposed research question. In order to meet this requirement, the theoretical part of this study was written by using several academic resources. The sources for this thesis include books, journals, articles, and credible articles and blogs. Information regarding the case company is collected from well-known market research, trustworthy publisher and the website of the case company. Thus, the validity of this study can be assured.

Although the author has tried her best to ensure the validity and practicality of the information delivered in this thesis, the rapid development of technology and service provisions nowadays mean that certain information and technology can become obsolete or proven wrong any time. Therefore, any interested party intending to make use of information stated in this thesis should be taken with careful consideration, preferably with double-checking from various sources and constant update of the most current knowledge. Also, the study focus of the thesis is on a particular form of service, the food delivery industry, as well as a particular market, the Finnish market. Therefore, while a lot of information and knowledge is universal and can broadly be applied in other study settings, such as on a similar service or in another country, careful consideration and validation of information are highly advised. Among the possible market aspects that are likely to change in the future are factors such as (1) the development of new forms of services (other than the platform-based sharing sector), (2) the economic or legal policies of the nation, and (3) other unforeseeable occurrences that the service sector is vulnerable to such as economic sanctions, epidemic as well as man-made or natural disasters.

6.3 Suggestion for Further Research

At the time of writing, platform-based food delivery is on the rise and there are a lot of possible topics that can be explored. As mentioned before, the scope of this study only focuses on the Finnish market and a specific sector of food delivery and sharing economy. If continuous studies are conducted on this topic, they can continue from the foundation of this thesis and establish a precise approach to gain in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon.

A future research can be based on the existing framework of this study to start exploring other national markets with comparable background as the Finnish market, such as other Nordic countries. The Nordics, with the similarities in culture and history with Finland, is a

great place for sharing economy and platform-based food delivery to establish and develop.

Since the thesis only focuses on an aspect of the sharing economy, which is platform-based food delivery, it is possible for the future studies to explore other platform-based services, such as accommodation, redistribution and transportation, or analyze the effect of platform-based service on the food industry.

Also, another path to further research can be conducted on the various economic impacts the platform-based service industry as a whole or Wolt in particular could have on the market where they operate in.

7 SUMMARY

The concept of platform-based economy and services become more and more relevant in the world, and its effect on the food and beverage industry is undeniable, especially in Finland. In just a few years, platform-based economy and services has expanded significantly in Finland and to several industries, such as transportation, redistribution, accommodation. By riding on the wave of platform-based services, Wolt has managed to claim a great percentage of market share and even rival the existing company. By studying the case of Wolt, the author aims to learn the effect of customer experience in the food delivery service and provides an insight on the platform-based food delivery service to other parties.

The thesis consists of two main parts: theoretical and empirical. The theory behind the thesis was covered in chapter 2 and 3. In the first part of chapter 2, the origin, definition and characteristics of sharing economy or platform-based service were introduced. In the second part, the industries which have utilized the concept sharing economy were described, then the state of sharing economy in Finland is briefly stated.

Chapter 3 explained the concept of customer experience. At the beginning the definition and the technique to develop to develop customer experience strategies were disclosed. Then, the requirement of customer experience strategy in traditional and platform-based service is specified. Chapter 4 is used to briefly explain the background of the empirical case and its service platform.

Chapter 5 discusses the customer experience management in the growth of Wolt. The method and the benefits of the customer experience managed were introduced in the first part. In the second part, the characteristics of the customers experience approach was explained, and the last part is about the support for the partners of Wolt and the result of such policies.

The thesis ends with the conclusion in chapter 6. This chapter reveals the findings and answers the research questions, then the practicality of the study and the suggestion for future research are also included.

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