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# Embodied knowledge in customer experience: reflections on yoga

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on embodied knowledge in customer experience. The study draws from literature on embodiment within sociology, consumption, organizational, and management studies, where the active and skillful role of the human body is acknowledged. Based on an autoethnographic study of online and offline yoga services, I identify five dimensions representing how the knowing body enables customer experiences to evolve: knowing the body as situational, physical, social, affective, and transformative. The embodied approach advances current customer-dominant logic studies within service research by highlighting how the active, holistic involvement of the human body allows the customer to engage in the experience.

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## Introduction

I extend my chest into the dancer's pose, my right hand reaching forward, my left hand uniting with my left leg, and together pursuing power to bend my spine. I breathe. Everything feels so easy and right ... As I open my heart toward the front of my mat, I feel all the heavy worries fade away. Instead, I feel ease and serenity. This comfort surrounds me and builds like a shield between me and the rest of the world. At the moment, everything is all right. (Diary note on April 2, 2020 [online])

This is a quote from my research diary, which includes the written flow of my personal yoga experiences. The quote highlights the performative aspects of experience, especially how my knowledge, which allows me to consume yoga, is strongly embodied. To perform a dancer's pose, I first draw on my embodied knowledge of how to move and be in my body to perform the *asana*. Second, mastering the movement allows me to perform without thinking about exactly how; rather, it enables me to focus on the feelings of joy and serenity arising from my lived body.

As in yoga, the human body is central for many customer experiences, particularly in service contexts, as what we know and how we learn is shaped and enabled by our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). However, while the subjectivity of customer experience (CX; e.g. Helkkula 2011; Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015) and the centrality of the customer's life-world for experience (e.g. Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014; Heinonen and Strandvik 2015) have received growing attention in recent years, the fundamental role and abilities of the human body remain neglected. Hence, this study focuses on expanding our understanding of embodied knowledge in CX. Further, it enhances studies on customer-dominant logic (CDL) by exploring how the customer's life-world, the locus of experience, is situated in the human body. To fully understand how embodied knowledge shapes CX, I explore my personal experiences in the context of yoga by combining the perspectives of the customer, instructor, and researcher.

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Interest in customers' lives has begun to challenge traditional company-centric perspectives within service research on CX. In particular, the CDL research stream considers the customer's life-world primarily as a locus of experience (Heinonen et al. 2010; Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014; Heinonen and Strandvik 2015). According to current studies on CDL, value is created within experiences (e.g. Heinonen et al. 2010; Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014). Heinonen et al. (2010, 537) explain how "within this experience, the customer uses all input, current and remembered, to form an impression of value influenced by both cognitive and emotional perceptions." In other words, the capabilities, skills, and previous experiences residing in the customer's body are determining factors for CX.

In the CDL approach, value co-creation is understood as a process in which customers integrate physical, cultural, and social resources within their subjective life-world (Vargo and Lusch 2008; Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlström 2012). Customers draw services to their individual value creation processes, and services become embedded in the customer's contexts, activities, practices, and experiences (Heinonen et al. 2010). Thus, experience emerges as a result of the fit between customers' subjective goals and realities and a specific service (Heinonen et al. 2010). However, the life-world has not been conceptualized as embodied before. Thus, this study highlights the embodied perspective on CDL and opens up the customer's life-world for greater exploration (Helkkula 2011).

In this study, embodied knowledge is defined as personal, temporal, and experiential knowledge, which is rooted in the human body and senses (Strati 2007; Gherardi et al. 2013; Molander 2017; Steadman, Banister, and Medway 2019). Senses (i.e. sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell) are experienced phenomenologically, constructed culturally, and adjusted socially, based on the premise that senses are an integral part of the human body and are always interwoven in experiences (Nichter 2008). Identical sets of embodied knowledge or abilities to utilize this knowledge in action do not exist – embodied knowledge is always tied to an individual's unique lived body (Crossley 2007; Strati 2007). Second, embodied knowledge is shaped and accumulated over time (Molander 2017; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). Third, the lived body is the experiencing body itself, and thus knowledge is always shaped and gained while experiencing the world in relation to ones' self, others, and the environment (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Gherardi et al. 2013).

Embodied knowledge is nonverbal information that helps us know how to act and behave (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Crossley 2005). Learning to ride a bike is not only learning to perform a certain set of movements; it also involves gaining a sense of how to perform (see Mauss 1973; Crossley 2004). However, describing bodily skills verbally is often challenging: it may be hard to describe what you are actually doing when cycling, as the skill is situated in our bodies, and we are able to ride a bike without paying special attention to it. The actions and sensations arise from our bodies – the embodied knowledge guides us. Similarly, in a service context, embodied knowledge enables the customer to consume services without thinking about it explicitly (Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019).

This paper represents the first attempt to introduce the concept of embodied knowledge in CDL research and focuses on the central role of the human body in service experiences. The embodied approach advances current studies by showcasing how value is co-created in experiences within and between lived bodies (Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). This study draws from theoretical discussions in sociology, consumption, organizational, and management studies in which the active and skillful role of the human body is acknowledged (e.g. Strati 2007; Gherardi et al. 2013; Molander 2017; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). As these streams of research have not previously been applied in studies on CX in service research, this study provides new theoretical tools for considering CX. The present study argues for the wider relevance of this phenomenon by highlighting how embodied knowledge first makes customers capable of acting and consuming services (Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019), and then enables experience to evolve. The accumulation of knowledge allows customers to immerse themselves in the experience. This study has valuable implications for understanding and examining embodied knowledge in CX.

## Theoretical background

### *The experiencing body*

Experience has been defined as rooted in the body and experienced as lived (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993). However, in CDL studies, only a little light has been shed on how our bodies constitute not only active subjects but also objects of thinking, learning, feeling, and interacting socially (see Yakhlef 2015; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). Even less is known about how embodied knowledge shapes an individual's experience. To approach yoga practice theoretically and build an understanding of the relationship between knowledge and CX, phenomenology represents a useful foundation from which to move forward.

One pioneering advocate of phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, defined the human body as the site of human experience (1962, 1964). According to Merleau-Ponty (1964), we connect to the world and engage in experiences primarily through our bodies. Within social science, experience is described as “a subjective episode in the construction/transformation of the individual” (Carù and Cova 2003, 273). This sheds light on the notion that experiences are not only other-oriented, but also strongly internally constructed for the customers themselves (Haanpää 2017). This highlights how experience is always subjective as well as socially constructed and context-specific (Helkkula 2011). Crossley (2007) reminded us that we were our bodies and that all our interactions took an embodied form, whether as visible bodily movement or interconnectedness between or within the bodies. Following these concepts, in this study, the customer is defined as an experiential subject precisely because of their embodiment.

The phenomenological approach has also been utilized in CDL studies (e.g. Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014; Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlström 2012), focusing on exploring experience as a matter of alignment between a customer's subjective life-world and service, involving all past and future experiences (Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlström 2012). While this approach places the customer at the center and considers CX as temporal in nature, experience still seems to be considered as co-created between thinking minds rather than living and sensing bodies, even though, according to phenomenological understanding, it is through the body that the world becomes real for us (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

By taking a phenomenological stance, this study understands the human body as a locus of experience. Thus, the customer's body is understood as an origin of experiences, an access point, and a limitation to the acquisition of knowledge, as well as a connection point for co-creation. While the current studies on CDL identify how service is “embedded in the customer's contexts, activities, practices and experiences” (Heinonen et al. 2010, 533), this study understands service as embedded in the lived body, being a union of mind and body. However, in CDL studies, value co-creation is considered merely physical, mental, and emotional activity, through which the customer aims to accomplish their individual goals (Heinonen, Strandvik, and Voima 2013). Heinonen et al. (2010) stated that “value-in-use emerges not only in interactive processes, but also in customers' non-interactive processes,” referring to mental, invisible activity related to value creation.

When considering these concepts through an embodied lens, it could be argued that rather than conceptualizing these “non-interactive processes” as mindful activities, they could be understood as the customer's internal, subjective reflections within their body, as reflexive embodiment (Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). Hence, in this study, value co-creation is understood as a strongly embodied process. By introducing an embodied approach to CDL, this study aims to provide a clearer articulation of the locus of value by focusing on the human body as a center of experiences.

### *The knowing body*

For studies in sociology, organization, management, and the emerging streams of consumption research, the relationships between the body, knowledge, and experience are more fully explored.

The human body is characterized as a source of knowledge and experiences (e.g. Gärtner 2013; Gherardi et al. 2013; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). According to Bourdieu (1990), we embody everything we learn through our bodies in our *habitus*. The habitus is a fluid and dynamic concept, as it evolves constantly as a result of our experiences, reflections, and interactions with others and the environment (Bourdieu 1990; Crossley 2004). Moreover, knowing is tied to doing – individuals are agents of knowing-in-action and becoming skillful through repetition (Mauss 1973; Bourdieu 1990; Crossley 2005).

Organizational and management studies have identified how employees become skillful in their work through their lived, sensing body (e.g. Strati 2007; Sandberg and Dall'Alba 2009; Gärtner 2013; Viteritti 2013). Gärtner (2013) has identified six approaches of embodied knowledge: *brute, physiological, intelligible, situated, social, and lived*. The first two identify knowledge as a rational outcome, originating from the cognitive mind. Physiological embodiment explains the body as a neurobiological system, while the intelligible body describes how bodily experiences shape abstract knowledge. Situated body stresses the body-environment relationship, whereas social body focuses on social relations as a source of knowledge. Finally, lived embodiment is a phenomenological approach that describes the lived body as experiencing body itself, being a unity of the mind and body. This view is particularly relevant for this study, as it shifts the focus to the moving and sensing body as a locus of knowledge. This view emphasizes knowledge as tacit, pre-knowledge residing in our bodies, making us skillful here and now (Gärtner 2013).

Gherardi et al. (2013) offered another classification of the relationship between the body, senses, and knowing: *body that works through the senses, body that experiences through the senses, and body that knows through the senses*. The first classification emphasizes how employees become skillful in their work through the knowledge residing in their bodies. The second underlines subjective, tacit knowing as rooted in feelings and emotions that guide behaviors, thoughts, and actions, and the third classification emphasizes the importance of sensible knowledge in learning (Strati 2007). This division provides three different perspectives for considering the body as a source of knowledge. In this study, rather than focusing on different perspectives, I treat the human body holistically as an active and continually evolving source of abilities – all the aforementioned elements together make a lived body skillful and capable. Overall, these views identify knowing as a “bodily, emotional and cognitive activity” (Yakhlef 2010, 146), and thus, these classifications work as an inspiration to examine embodied knowledge in CX.

In recent years, researchers have turned their attention to consumption research, including from the consumer's perspective. Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley (2019), in their study on high-speed motorcyclists, noted that experiences could not only be consumed, and that certain skills and knowledge were minimum requirements for consumption. Similar rules apply to customers when creating experiences in service contexts. The accumulation of experience through repetition and practice allows customers to immerse themselves in the experience (Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). Valtonen and Närvänen (2015) studied the sleeping body and described how it learns a range of techniques to ensure that people sleep in culturally appropriate ways. In terms of knowledge in experiences, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) studied transformations in the embodied and gendered *habitus* of women in the context of roller derby. Molander (2017), in her study on mothering, highlighted consumer learning as an embodied experience by illustrating how mothers' knowledge evolved through their bodily practices over time. Common to all of these studies is the approach to the body as lived, considering the body as both a subject and an object (Merleau-Ponty 1962). These studies provide valuable insight into embodied knowledge to introduce the concept to CX in service research, especially in CDL studies.

### ***Reflexive body techniques in yoga***

The concept of body techniques was developed by Mauss (1973) and later refined by Crossley (2004, 2005). Crossley (2005, 10) introduced the term reflexive body techniques (RBTs) as

techniques of the body, performed *by* the body and involving a form of knowledge and understanding that consists entirely in embodied competence considering below the threshold of language and consciousness; but they are equally techniques *for* the body, techniques that modify and maintain the body in particular ways.

RBTs enable me to open up the yoga context and clarify the fundamental relationships between knowledge, body, and experience in yoga practice. Thus, a new understanding of the social, physical, and mindful aspects of embodied knowledge and their relationship to culturally and contextually specific modes of bodily movement is generated.

On one level, a yoga class consists of a series of RBTs configured in a specific structure (Crossley 2005). RBTs in yoga constitute bodily practices and specific ways of moving and being in the body through which value emerges for a customer (Heinonen et al. 2010). Yoga practice consists of different body techniques (yoga *asanas*, e.g. *adho mukha shvanasana*, *malasana*, *virabhadrasana II*, *supta baddha konasana*) and sequences of these techniques (flow). Besides bodily movement, breathing is an important body technique of yoga, referring to RBTs *not only as bodily movement*, but also *as a way of being in a body* in a certain way (Crossley 2004, 2005). Body techniques also involve participants' ability to use props, equipment that assists practitioners in their yoga practice (e.g. yoga blocks, bolsters, straps, and pillows). Body techniques in yoga are socially constituted and performed when the instructor guides the practice with verbal and embodied instruction. Likewise, a customer's interactions with other customers and their environment shape their experience. Thus, other bodies serve as an example and inspiration for individuals (Kuuru and Närvänen 2019).

Mastering diverse body techniques during a yoga class is not sufficient for "successful participation in and doing of it" (Crossley 2005). Knowing, for example, what "*adho mukha shvanasana*" is, is a matter of practical know-how; to understand what *adho mukha shvanasana* represents the ability to do it. In vinyasa yoga class, participants mutually attune to one another via body movement and breath. Yoga classes are instituted through the activities and interactions of the embodied agents and the practical knowledge and understanding incorporated into those activities. At the same time, a yoga mat constitutes a lived yoga space for every individual, where participants can perform the techniques for themselves within their lived reality (Crossley 2004). Thus, in yoga class, value is created in diverse spheres via RBTs: social and individual, active and passive, conscious and unconscious, specific to every customer's lived reality (Heinonen et al. 2010; Heinonen, Strandvik, and Voima 2013).

The mastery level of techniques naturally varies between newcomers and more skilled participants (Crossley 2004). Engaging in yoga practice requires practical knowledge to become embodied; thus, other levels of experience open up through RBTs. Practical knowledge transforms into embodied knowledge over time through repetition, interaction, and imitation (Mauss 1973). Thus, less experienced participants will begin to incorporate body techniques with practice and time. When the knowledge becomes embodied, customers can perform yoga *asanas* without thinking about them first (Crossley 2004).

Crossley (2001) underlined that body techniques are more than just ways to modify and maintain our physiological bodies; they are also ways to generate a bodily "me." This sheds a light on the transformative power of yoga, as body techniques connect individuals to the world. Normally, yoga studios do not contain mirrors to encourage participants to "turn inside" and feel and sense their bodies better. RBTs are used for different purposes (Crossley 2004), which underlines the subjectivity of experiences. The spectrum of customers' goals is also always present in yoga class and body techniques performed for various reasons: one participant may practice yoga mainly to enhance mobility, whereas another primarily aims to escape daily life on the yoga mat. Yoga can be described as a possibility to explore, referring to the physical, embodied, and mindful aspects of yoga practice.

## Research design

### *Research method*

This study focuses on generating a new understanding of embodied knowledge in CX, and thus follows the hermeneutic research tradition by seeking to highlight the shared cultural meanings that underlie the understandings expressed by individual customers (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989; Gummesson 2005). As CX is strongly personal and subjective as well as socially constructed (Helkkula 2011), access to individual experiences and to the customer's life-world is required to effectively explore these often-hidden dimensions of experience.

After carefully considering how to explore the active, sensing, and experiencing human body from a first-person perspective without ignoring the social aspects of experience, I decided to turn to autoethnography. Autoethnography is a research approach that draws on personal experiences to understand greater cultural phenomena (Ellis 2004). In this study, autoethnography allows me to open up the "black box" of a customer's subjective life-world and increase my understanding of how embodiment shapes experiences (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Helkkula 2011) by placing me, my living, feeling, and breathing body, in the middle of "the social reality." Observation of my bodily experiences allows me to examine the subjectivity of embodied knowledge in CX and how it is inseparable from emotions and feelings (Heinonen et al. 2010).

Experiences are reported as they unfold in ongoing movements and interactions between bodies, spaces, and objects (see Hill, Canniford, and Mol 2014). Autoethnography also recognizes the broader time span of experience, from the time of service consumption to the consideration of all lived experiences. This encourages a slightly different ontological stance, which expands the understanding of the intertwining of the subjective and social (Hill, Canniford, and Mol 2014); that is, how experiences are created in the customer's life-world in social reality through the affective and sensing human body.

The emic view is a central purpose of autoethnography and is essential for providing accurate findings that are understandable to others (Boyle 1994; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). However, the dual role of the researcher presenting both emic and etic perspectives in autoethnographic studies challenges the traditional guidelines of reflexivity in research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011), as is the case in this study. The distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred as I present both emic and etic perspectives by simultaneously taking on the roles of the researcher and subject via my lived body.

Indeed, subjectivity is an integral part of autoethnography and raises issues concerning the ethics and reliability of research (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). It is important to understand that researchers do not exist in isolation. We live in a social reality, and when we conduct research, we not only implicate ourselves with the research, but also with others. They live in our fieldnotes and observations and are part of our experiences as well as our analysis (Ellis 2004). These relational concerns are relevant in autoethnographic studies, and I reminded myself of them throughout the research process. I protected the privacy and safety of others by altering identifying information (e.g. name and appearance), and informed the business owner and the teachers whose yoga classes I took during the data collection about my research.

It is also important to acknowledge the reliability and generalizability of autoethnographic research. The empirical data of this study consist not only of written notes and the research diary, but also of my personal memories in yoga, which complement the documented material. Even though autoethnographic descriptions are always personal and subjective, this does not mean that they are not generalizable (Ellis 2004). The reported experiences are always related to reality and surrounding culture, which embraces the unique strength of autoethnography – its ability to enhance cultural understanding through personal experiences (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). These kinds of non-presentational ways of conducting research enable us to distinguish "new realities in interesting ways" (Hill, Canniford, and Mol 2014, 383).

### **The research context**

Originating in India, yoga practice focuses on body–mind unity to achieve “oneness” through meditation (Leledaki and Brown 2009). Today, yoga is a growing business and lifestyle, as well as a popular leisure activity, which illustrates how it spreads diverse interests and motivations generated by bridging different Eastern and Western philosophical traditions within Western institutions (e.g. Brown and Leledaki 2010; Caplan, Portillo, and Seely 2013). Yoga practice has grown worldwide over the past 20 years as a way to enhance physical and mental health, reduce stress, and improve emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Mangiarotti 2019). Yoga can be described as a modern practice with ancient roots that is subject to cultural variations and subjective meanings for yoga practitioners in their daily lives (Brown and Leledaki 2010).

There are a variety of yoga forms, ranging from dynamic practices (e.g. flow, vinyasa, and ashtanga) to gentler variations (e.g. hatha and yin). In this paper, I focus on vinyasa flow, a form of yoga that consists of dynamic and holistic sequences targeting physical improvement and the harmonious unity of mind and body. In yoga, the union of mind and body is emphasized, and deep breath is considered a bridge between the two. Yoga is defined as an experience of movement, change, and transformation, both at the individual and social levels (Helkkula 2011; Mangiarotti 2019), experienced first and foremost through the lived body (see Merleau-Ponty 1962). Yoga is regarded as a practice “for all” that is accessible to everybody regardless of gender, age, skills, or social and cultural background. Thus, yoga offers an interesting context for studying the relationship between embodied knowledge and CX.

### **Introduction to the research data**

In this study, my body constituted a basis *for*, provided access *to*, and selected *what* would be relevant for this research (Engelsrud 2005; Valtonen 2013). My observations and reflections are rooted in my personal experiences of yoga in two different domains: as a yoga instructor and as a customer in both offline and online contexts. Yoga has been a part of my life for 10 years, varying in form, quantity, and regularity. I started to practice yoga in yoga studios and have continued ever since, with varying levels of practice. In 2014, I participated in yoga teacher training and began teaching yoga in a group fitness studio where I work as an entrepreneur. Since 2014, I have taught approximately 1,100 h of yoga. In this particular study, in line with its positioning within the CDL perspective, the primary focus is on my personal experiences as a customer of yoga. My background as a yoga instructor works more as a complementary perspective, illustrating how all my embodied knowledge of yoga gained through diverse roles naturally shapes the study.

As research methods, I primarily used participatory observations and self-reflection. I wrote field stories and vignettes (Thanem and Knights 2019) based on my observations and reflections of my experiences between February and June 2020 in a yoga studio in Rome, Italy, and practices conducted via online services (e.g. online classes by Zem yoga studio in Rome and Yoga with Cassandra on YouTube). The empirical material was collected during the COVID-19 crisis, which provided me with novel circumstances to reflect on my experiences.

I wrote field stories and vignettes, often right after yoga practice, which allowed me to capture my thoughts, sensations, and feelings of the practice as “freshly” and authentically as possible. Sometimes, I even wrote notes during the practice, but mostly, I aimed to stay focused on the practice until the end of the class so as not to violate the flow. The notes varied in terms of length, from a few sentences to several pages. As my lived body carries all of the previous experiences shaping my reality here and now (Merleau-Ponty 1962), my personal memories also work as empirical material (Chang 2008). Thus, when something that could be relevant for this study came to mind, even in the middle of the day, I always wrote it down. These memories often reveal “effects that linger: recollections, memories, images, feelings, even long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished” (Bochner 1984, 595). Still, even though the material is well documented, memories and emotions remain that can color the documented material. My living, active body is ever-present in this study, and recognizing this is one of the basic requirements of autoethnography (Chang 2008).

The richness and quality of the data in autoethnography are not evaluated in terms of the amount or its systematicity; rather, the thickness and openness of the material is what matters (Ellis 2004). Autoethnography is all about telling life as it unfolds in all its messiness (e.g. Law and Urry 2011).

### ***Analysis process***

Representing the self in research may arouse tensions that derive from issues of sensitivity, validity, theorization, and questions about the ways in which the researcher's identity is presented in the manuscript (Haynes 2011). In this study, the analysis was conducted using inductive thematic analysis (see Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). To provide some structure for the analysis, the process can be described as involving three phases. The first phase of the analysis aimed to construct a general understanding of the relatively messy and extensive empirical data. I read the notes several times and consciously paid attention to elements that emerged repeatedly in the material and appeared to have relevance for how embodied knowledge shapes CX. This can be viewed as a second phase of the analysis: developing themes. When developing themes, I labeled them and analyzed and created links between them. For example, it seemed that certain practical skills (e.g. how to perform *asanas* and how to line one's body) need to become embodied before resources can be released to enable more holistic affective aspects of experience to emerge. At the same time, I continuously reflected on and compared my personal experiences with existing research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000; Gummesson 2005). In the third phase of the analysis, I focused on identifying more detailed descriptions and characteristics of the themes.

Throughout the analysis process, I noticed how reading the notes evoked diverse thoughts and feelings, even sensations in my body, by reminding me of autoethnography's reflexive nature in terms of how experiences are mediated and created in connection between our past and current self (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000; Haynes 2011). The analysis assisted in understanding human experience "in flesh" (Merleau-Ponty 1962) by making visible how embodied experience always involves our senses, mind, and body, tightly intertwined and complementing the notion that the "body is the obvious point of departure for any processes of knowing" (Rudberg 1997, 182).

### ***Sensory anthropology as an analysis tool***

The analysis was supported by concepts from sensory anthropology, which assisted in capturing the holistic and embodied aspects of knowledge in CX (Scott and Uncles 2018). The framework included four concepts (kinaesthetic schema, bodily mimesis, mindful body, and local biology). The kinaesthetic schema considers how position, movement, force, and balance affect individual experiences. The concept captures how changes in posture, position, and movement in space influence the body's orientation to creating CX (Scott and Uncles 2018). Bodily mimesis focuses on the social and visceral aspects of embodiment: first, how the bodies interact, and second, how they become and behave like something else. Mimesis helps to locate how bodies work upon each other in various ways by interlinking the cognitive, affective, and bodily aspects of experience (Kir-mayer 2003).

The mindful body illustrates how the mind, body, and senses unite through embodiment. It captures how we understand and make sense of our bodies through body movement and the attunement that connects us to social and material worlds. For instance, in yoga, I interpret my surroundings and collect new information through my lived body – within embodied perspective, the lines are not drawn between cognitive, emotional, and embodied perceptions, but rather, understood as intertwined, and the body as a locus of all our experiences. Local biology conceptualizes the body as an active agent in the relation between culture and biology (Scott and Uncles 2018) and focuses on the active agent's relationship to the environment and context – how we perceive reality through our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962). In the context of yoga, local biology helps us understand how yoga practice may go beyond the practice itself and transform daily routines, habits, and even

the way one perceives the world. Utilizing the guiding analytical support described above, I identified five dimensions of knowing the body relevant for CX.

## Empirical insights

Through my analysis, I improved my understanding of the relationship between embodied knowing and CX. The analysis identified embodied knowledge as a precursor and enabler of CX to evolve. The accumulation of knowledge allows CX to take various shapes and meanings. I distinguish five dimensions of the knowing body, which disclose how embodied knowledge allows customers to move, act, and attune to consume the services.

### *The knowing body is physical*

I feel how my lungs expand as I exhale. I feel how they condense as I inhale. I feel the soles of my feet rooting down to the mat ... I'm ready to go. As I inhale, I raise my hands up to the sky and feel my sides lengthening. I feel the thick, warm air playing on my skin. I bow forward, relax my upper body entirely before I breathe in, stretch my back flat, and feel the core muscles turning on. I breathe out and relax my upper body again, position my fingertips on the mat next to my feet, and as I inhale, I jump my feet back to plank position. I feel how my heart's tempo is speeding up, and blood is flowing intensively in my veins, reaching every cell of my body. I feel my body warming up and becoming more alert to my internal sensations, as well as opening to sense the environment and others. (*Diary note on February 14, 2020 [in studio]*)

These diary notes emphasize the lived body; rather than understanding the body solely as a physiological phenomenon, it is considered a sensing and active entity connecting consumers to themselves, others, and the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Gärtner 2013; Scott and Uncles 2018). Hence, yoga not only acknowledges the existence of the external world but also utilizes the relationship between the self and the world as a tool for meditation (Morley 2001). The diary notes above illustrate how I experience and sense the world through my body positioning and movement together with my breath: I develop a sense of my muscles, veins, joints, and deep tissues; my “fleshy” elements, as well as my awareness of body alignment, movement, body parts, and the kinaesthetic schema (Scott and Uncles 2018).

The kinaesthetic schema grounds my lived body to a specific time and space by building a foundation for how to be in the world and aware of my body (Scott and Uncles 2018). Thus, the knowing body as physical turns attention to how I continuously perceive and store new knowledge through my body. The lived body is the embodied consciousness, both an active perceiver and an object of perception (Morley 2001). Thus, it cannot be separated into subject and object or self and world, but is an irreducible foundation (Morley 2001) involving the physical, sensorial, emotional, and spatio-temporal dimensions of human experience grounding personal life.

When I started yoga, a whole new world appeared to me: all the names of the poses and how they were actually done ... The names of the poses by themselves, for example, three-legged dog or wild thing, didn't reveal much of what I was expected to do with my body. The instructor played a key role, as well as the others around me. It was more or less about mirroring and copying others' movements until I gained enough skills to not need to observe others all the time. It took quite a lot of time and repetitions, before I could focus on anything else ... You are never ready, I'm still improving, but the difference is that at the beginning, the learning wasn't so much fun; now it is. (*Diary note reflecting my old experiences in yoga on February 15, 2020*)

Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley (2019) noted that experiences could not always simply be consumed. As the diary note above reveals, consuming yoga also requires engagement and knowledge. Knowledge is gained through body mimesis, mirroring and copying the bodily actions of the instructor and other practitioners (Scott and Uncles 2018). Here, body mimesis captures the union between the body, mind, and emotions; synchronization of bodily actions increases the practitioner's embodied knowledge and shapes their bodily state and emotions. The practical knowledge about how the *asanas* and transitions should be done is not enough – the embodied knowledge of

how to both be in and move the human body through the practice is required to establish experience (Crossley 2004). The body techniques are learned, and practical knowledge transforms into embodied knowledge when they are put into action (Mauss 1973; Crossley 2004; 2005; Roberts 2020).

The diary notes above identify how learning a new skill can be demanding, but through practice, learning becomes easier, thanks to the accumulation of knowledge and understanding in a lived body (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Bourdieu 1986; Crossley 2005). Skill acquisition is a fundamental precondition for CX to evolve and to make diverse sensations and emotions accessible to customers. As noted in Murphy and colleagues' study (2019) on high-speed motorcyclists, mastering body techniques allowed me to tune into the action in yoga and enabled my CX to transform and evolve.

Today, we practiced headstands. I always travel back to the day I was able to do it for the first time. I had been practicing different modifications of the headstand for a long time, but I just didn't get it. How could it be possible to get my legs up to the sky? I felt insecure and even scared. I was just stuck—me upside down, my head and hands on the ground, but my legs as well. But then, on a Tuesday in January 2017, it just happened. I was there, doing exactly the same thing as earlier, but suddenly, my legs just turned up to the ceiling! I still don't know what I did or what happened, but I felt that my legs did it on their own. It felt easy and right; all the struggle I had faced earlier was gone. Just like that. The feeling was unbelievable! I was so excited that I fell down from the pose after a few seconds. I was so happily confused. Then, I tried it again and succeeded. Since that day, I have been able to do headstands, and feel confident when doing them. (*Diary notes on March 1, 2020 [in studio]*)

This embodied description of my yoga practice underlines how the mind and body become one: mindful body (Scott and Uncles 2018). The diary note captures how the accumulation of embodied knowledge allowed me to immerse myself in experience and gain a strong embodied feeling (Crossley 2004). I was able to engage with the "presence of the past" (Bourdieu 1990, 304), and thus did not need to concentrate on how to perform yoga; rather, the knowledge and action fused together and allowed my body to attune to the practice (Scott and Uncles 2018; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019).

My notes of my previous trials to master the headstand illustrate how disconnects of mind, body, self, and other may also occur and shape CX (Scott and Uncles 2018). This kind of breakdown of the mindful body is reminiscent of the dualistic representation of body and mind as separate entities, yet they need to operate together so I can make sense of my experience (Leledaki and Brown 2009). All my trials to master the headstand culminated at that very moment, as described above. Here, my kinaesthetic schema and my body orientation shaped my CX: before, I had struggled to shift my stance and position to find the balance to take my legs up and master the headstand, but on that day, everything (my body, mind, emotions, space, and time) came together as a culmination of bodily knowledge as a bodily act. The quote also illustrates how it occurred, yet it remained difficult for me to understand and verbalize how I performed the headstand because I felt like *it just happened*. As embodied knowledge is primarily lived and sensed rather than documented, it is often hard to reflect verbally (Roberts 2020). Hence, kinaesthetic schemas provide an excellent tool to unpack bodily experiences, turning the focus from doing (*What I do when doing a headstand*) to sensing (*How I feel when doing a headstand*).

When I feel tired and sore, I sometimes wonder if it was a clever idea to come. Still, as I believe yoga nurtures both my mind and body, in these cases, I usually need to step on the mat for reasons other than a physical challenge... Nowadays, I modify my practice and deviate from the instructor's guidance if I feel I don't have energy to do something. I may rest a few minutes in a child's pose and just breathe. Earlier, I was afraid to improvise as I was too worried about what others would think if I didn't follow the practice, and I forced my body to move along with the practice even if it didn't feel good at all. (*Diary notes on March 9, 2020 [in studio]*)

Body techniques transform and improve continuously, and this formulates the habitus (Bourdieu 1973; Crossley 2005). Improvement of my skills shapes my trust in myself and thus expands my CX. Poses I previously thought to be challenging and even scary now seem possible and fascinating. Indeed, habitus is a living and flexible concept, evolving all the time in our interactions with the

world (Bourdieu 1986; Crossley 2004). For example, newcomers to yoga need to invest time in incorporating body techniques, so their experience is linked more to technical performance, whereas practitioners with more experience may improvise their movement by performing their own variations of *asanas* or moving to a more advanced version of the pose, while the instructor guides the class to perform simpler versions (Crossley 2004).

Improvising can also mean choosing a “low” version of RBTs or even having your own break in the middle of yoga practice, as illustrated in the diary note above. Here, the lens of the mindful body allows us to distinguish how the continuous interpretation within one’s body allows the modification of CX to respond to individual goals (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Heinonen et al. 2010; Scott and Uncles 2018). In these situations, when customers go beyond the shared rules, body techniques transform and evolve. Local biology and interconnection between the body and culture allow customers to sense and shape experiences differently (Scott and Uncles 2018), depending on the level and richness of their embodied knowledge. In this manner, customers customize their experiences and “label them their own” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Helkkula 2011; Scott and Uncles 2018), resulting in the emergence of value within the customer’s life-world (Heinonen et al. 2010; Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014).

The knowing body as physical establishes the foundation for CX to occur and evolve by introducing the concept of the lived body as the locus of knowledge and experience. This dimension illustrates how body positioning, movement, and the feeling of “being in the world through my body” influence CX (Scott and Uncles 2018).

### ***The knowing body is social***

Today, Titti guided us through the practice by talking. The practice was challenging, the flow fast, and the transitions demanding. I really had no time to think about anything other than the practice. You just need to know what to do and move. Of course, the first round of the sequence served only to understand the flow, but when we repeated the sequence various times, I just got into it and let my body move. I felt strong and capable. Titti always reminds us to trust our bodies as our guide, and that is just what happened. Only at the end of the practice did I realize how exhausted I was. It was amazing! (*Diary notes on March 3, 2020 [in studio]*)

The diary note above emphasizes how body techniques are related to embodied forms of knowledge and understanding that are first social (Mauss 1973). In yoga practice, an instructor leads the class through talk, movement, or both. The instructor tells the names of various body techniques, and bodily mimesis occurs as participants copy the instructor’s bodily actions (Scott and Uncles 2018). They guide the lived bodies to act both at the collective and individual levels: instructions are given for the group, but also for individuals. The instructor may correct my technique or posture, encourage me to push forward, or offer me a specific variation of some *asana* to try. Thus, the dyadic relationship between the customer and the instructor is relevant (Vargo and Lusch 2008) for CX to emerge.

Mimesis constitutes a central activity for the co-creation of value in yoga classes (Heinonen et al. 2010). For customers with less experience with yoga, bodily mimesis plays a more crucial role in their value creation processes than for customers with more experience, as beginners do not yet hold the level of embodied knowledge that allows experience to emerge through their bodies (Gärtner 2013; Scott and Uncles 2018). As a yoga instructor myself, I usually introduce the sequence by talk and movement, staying on my mat for the first round. In this way, I familiarize customers with the sequence and orient their bodies toward the pattern. Then, I leave my mat and walk around to adjust and support customers individually while guiding them verbally. They can either move, follow my talk, or go at their own pace. When customers master the sequence at a certain level and knowledge turns embodied, CX evolves, and experiencing a range of sensations and emotions becomes possible.

I loved the person who practiced next to me today! We did some challenging stuff related to hips, which is my weak spot, and when she had such a beautiful technique and way of moving, I took advantage of it and

followed her example. I think I understood the hip alignment inside the angle better just by observing her. (Diary notes on March 1 2020 [in studio])

This diary note emphasizes the yoga class as a social structure: customers shape each other's movement (Crossley 2004) and thus co-create the experience (Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015). The role of other bodies is significant when learning the techniques and aiming to improve them (Crossley 2004; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). Bodily mimesis, mirroring, and absorbing others' bodily actions becomes real through the embodied relationship between customers (Scott and Uncles 2018). In yoga practice, I may copy another person's movement or breathing, or even aim for a similar bodily state (Nichter 2008). This social, embodied interaction forms the basis for value co-creation in experience (Heinonen et al. 2010; Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). I feel that sometimes the other bodies help me even more than the instructor when I am struggling with a pose or do not understand the instructor's guidance. Copying others' bodily actions helps me to improve my awareness of my kinaesthetic schema (Scott and Uncles 2018). Indeed, customers are shaping not only their own but also others' techniques, like the person next to me shaped by mine (Valtonen and Närvänen 2015). The mirroring role of the bodies in CX should not be taken for granted. My capacity to mirror is based on my existing knowledge of yoga, and thus, my habitus always shapes the action (Crossley 2004).

Practicing yoga alone in our living room felt a bit weird. I am used to a living and breathing instructor in front of me, as well as to being surrounded by people when practicing ... The practice itself was nice, but I struggled with following the instructor on the screen. I felt it was demanding to match my movement and breath to the instructor's guidance, and I needed to turn my gaze to the screen once in a while. So it could have been better, but at least I felt my body opening and enjoying the practice, even though I couldn't concentrate on how I was doing or how it felt at all. It was more about what to do next. (Diary note on February 15, 2020 [online])

In an online yoga class, the social aspect of learning takes a different form – it is just me and the instructor on the screen. The other bodies are not guiding me with examples or support. At first, I found practicing yoga through online classes rather demanding, as the instructor had her own style and pace to guide the practice as well as her own ways of performing body techniques (e.g. she used transitions that I was not familiar with or called *asanas* by different names) that I was not familiar with at first. I struggled to tune in to the class (Crossley 2004), and I had to reorient myself to the practice (Scott and Uncles 2018). I needed time and repetition to familiarize myself with the instructor's RBTs before I could immerse myself in the experience (Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). After practicing more through online services, it became easier to focus on my embodied feelings and sensations, which shaped my experience (Hewer and Hamilton 2010; von Scheve 2018; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). This shows that at first, practicing yoga through digital services without any prior experience can be rather demanding, as the lack of direct interaction affects the customer, especially when the knowledge is not yet embodied, and the customer is still learning the basics of the body techniques.

The dimension of the knowing body is social and illustrates how embodied knowledge

flows in the shared sphere between the bodies, thus enabling CX to evolve (Helkkula 2011; Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019).

### ***The knowing body is affective***

Besides copying and mirroring others' body techniques (Mauss 1973; Crossley 2005; Scott and Uncles 2018), the roles of the other bodies extend beyond bodies having an emotional effect on others (Crossley 2005; Scott and Uncles 2018; von Scheve 2018; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). RBTs are implemented not only for individuals, but also for others, emphasizing the co-creative nature of CX (Vargo and Lusch 2008; Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015).

We were working on this challenging sequence, including demanding transitions and a lot of balancing. I was concentrating on my breath to get through the final round. I heard the heavy breathing around me and felt how the others were also giving their best. Even though I was enjoying it, it would be wrong to say that it wasn't hard. I tuned myself for the last round and focused on moving as well and as strongly I could. I can do this ... I felt my leg shaking when balancing at the end of the flow, and I saw my neighbor-yogi's leg shaking and felt her working so hard. I thought that she would make it for sure. It helped me to continue, as I felt that if she was not going to give up, neither would I ... The last vinyasa push up and we were done. Knees down and sit. I lifted my head, smiled—I did it—and saw another smiling face. My eyes met that of a person next to me, and we smiled even more. (*Diary note on March 10, 2020 [in studio]*)

These affects capture the interplay and interaction of bodily sensations and personal emotions in a social environment (Valtonen and Haanpää 2018; von Scheve 2018). The diary note above underlines the co-creative nature of CX: by moving my body during a yoga class, I shape my individual experience while simultaneously affecting and being affected by other bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Crossley 1995; Ahmed 2004). In the diary note, affect occurs in my own body through reflexive embodiment, as I continuously focus on and interpret my bodily sensations (Crossley 2005; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019).

There are a variety of emotions, from determination to despair, that are going on in my body. Through my body movement, I both allow my individual emotions to spread around (*I am strong and capable*) and try to hide them from others, as I do not want to give up and let my negative emotions (*uncertainty, despair*) spread (Ahmed 2004). At the same time, I feel and see the surrounding bodies, and the affective experience becomes shared as other bodies inspire and boost me.

As Merleau-Ponty (1964, 52) stated, emotions are not “inner realities” expressed for others, but rather “forms of conduct visible from the outside.” Thus, mimesis not only includes copying another person's bodily movement, but also involves absorbing other people's emotions and feelings, which are spread between bodies (Scott and Uncles 2018; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). The shaking leg of the woman next to me awakened my feelings of empathy and courage. I knew she was tired, and she must have felt her leg burning like I was, but I knew that she had energy left to finish the sequence. We shared the feelings of ultimate tiredness in our bodies, but kept on moving. At the end of the sequence, we shared feelings of relief and happiness, which we communicated through a bodily expression: a smile (Haanpää 2017). The smile signaled, *Well done, I am proud of you. And thanks, you supported me to keep moving.*

This event illustrates how affective knowing (Valtonen and Haanpää 2018) in action shapes CX. Affective knowing illustrates how our own moving body and other bodies awaken diverse sensations and emotions within and between the bodies (Kuuru and Närvänen 2019) – affective experiences are co-created but always individually reflected (Heinonen et al. 2010). However, it is important to note that the social aspect of affect takes a different form when I practice yoga via digital services.

Twists are so intense, especially in the morning. I had just woken up, brushed my teeth, and moved onto a mat. At the beginning, my body felt so stiff and sore that I thought how horrible the next 60 min might be ... Sometimes, you rush too much and try too-intense poses too early, so the body isn't even ready for them. The mind is hurrying ... After some time, I felt how my body warmed up, and it melted into the movement. It felt so good to feel my body active. The spine rotations really nurtured my spine ... I felt how my tiredness was fading away ... When I finished the practice, I was full of energy, ready for the day! (*Diary notes on February 13, 2020 [online]*)

Sometimes, yoga practice in the middle of the day is the best solution you can find. Today, I was so stuck with my work, and felt frustrated and annoyed. I'm so happy I got myself away from my desk and did a quick 30-minute practice. It was just the break I needed, and all work-related stuff faded away with the movement ... For a moment, I was somewhere else, breathing and moving, just for me. (*Diary note on April 20, 2020 [online]*)

The diary notes above highlight that the affective body is also relevant when practicing yoga through digital services. As the social aspect of affect takes a different form when I practice yoga alone in our living room, the affects occur mostly through my reflexive embodiment (Crossley 2005; Kuuru and

Närvänen 2019). As Hansen (2004a, 13) argued, bodily affect in a digital context is invited to transform “the unframed, disembodied, and formless into concrete embodied information intrinsically imbued with (human) meaning.” Hence, the moving image on the screen (the yoga class) works as a flowing source of information that is framed through my lived body and becomes meaningful (Clough 2008). Therefore, what links the customer and technology is the affective human body (Hansen 2004b).

My experience is built on my internal reflection on the sensations and emotions arising from my body. The digital context provides me with an opportunity to deploy my skills and knowledge to frame digital information as something human, emotional, and affective (Hansen 2004a; Clough 2008). The diary notes show how body techniques are used as a form of self-expression or action centered on experience through the senses (Schmitt 1999; Hewer and Hamilton 2009; Gherardi et al. 2013). The affective, moving body becomes central to emotions in various ways. The first note represents how my sensations made me think about whether I was doing the right thing, capturing my feelings of uncertainty and concerns related to the experience. Moreover, my morning practice allowed emotions from frustration to joy to emerge, as well as emotions to transform. Here, my first negative emotions transformed into positive ones through body movement and turned my mood from lazy and tired to bright and energetic (Crossley 2005).

There is a link between affect and temporality, as the digital image on the screen “inserts a technical framing into the present” and expands bodily affectivity, allowing me to experience how my emotions continually (re)shape throughout the practice (Hansen 2004b, 614). The second diary note not only describes body techniques as transforming emotions, but also showcases how they offer a way to escape from daily life and routines (Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017). The local biology of customers engaged in yoga may act as a response to today’s hectic lifestyle in many Western societies (Scott and Uncles 2018). I also remember times when yoga practice made me feel very sentimental, and I have even burst into tears, which shows that body techniques are also opportunities to reveal “the deepest dispositions of the habitus” (Bourdieu 1992, 190). As the diary notes together show, the embodied approach to examining CX focuses attention on how bodies affect each other, as well as on how bodily attunement and action turn the individual toward their reflexive embodiment (Ahmed 2004; Crossley 2005; Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). The knowing body is affective and captures the resonance between embodied knowledge, emotions, and CX.

### ***The knowing body is transformative***

Sometimes, I feel that on the mat, I can let go and just be me. In my daily life, I am known to be efficient, energetic, and the one who is always coping with ten projects at the same time. And getting these things done without ever getting tired. And of course, I am like that, but sometimes I am tired and fragile, and I feel like I can’t show it to others. On a yoga mat, I can be tired and vulnerable without being afraid of somebody judging me. Before I escaped to the yoga mat to breathe and stop for a while, but now I have gained courage through experience, and nowadays I dare to also express my sensitive emotions outside the studio, which is a huge thing. I am enough, just the way I am, and I don’t always need to be efficient. It is okay to relax and be lazy. (*Diary note on March 2, 2020 [in studio]*)

Crossley (2005, 13) noted that body techniques played a central role in “the construction of the reflexive sense of self.” As I noted earlier, it took some time and practice for my yoga experiences to become enjoyable and fun. Change and transformation also require time. The diary note above describes how yoga is much more than an exercise to modify my physical body (which naturally is also one relevant aspect of it; Crossley 2001, 2004). It has taught me much more than technical and physical skills. Today, the holistic, embodied orientation toward yoga is the baseline of my practice. My mind and body unite as one (Scott and Uncles 2018).

As I go over my yoga journey for the last 10 years, I admit that at first, my engagement in yoga practice was rather dualistic, and my mind-rationality dominated over my body-emotion (Leledaki and Brown 2009). It has been only through the accumulation of practice and knowledge that I have

achieved this transformation. My yoga practice has enabled me to experience not only yoga, but also the world more strongly through my body (Merleau-Ponty 1962). I have learned about my personality, identity, and inner self. Yoga has shaped my values and ways of thinking without these being my priority, but with the transformation emerging through bodily experiences. In other words, I have learned “to constitute myself for myself” through body techniques (Crossley 2005, 13). Even my husband says that yoga has changed me. Thus, my value creation processes are not limited to moments of service consumption but also extend beyond, to daily life (Heinonen et al. 2010; Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014; Bosangit and Demangeot 2016), aiming to improve holistic wellbeing.

Studies in experiential consumption have noted learning as a trigger for change and transformation (Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis 2001; Bosangit and Demangeot 2016), and include learning as one of the many outcomes of experience (Tynan, McKechnie, and Hartley 2014). However, my observations highlight the reflexive nature of learning and suggest that learning occurs throughout service consumption. Body techniques enable customers to learn through their experiences (Gherardi et al. 2013) and facilitate the lasting and transformational impact of experience to occur (Viotto, Zanette, and Brito 2020).

The knowing body as transformative enables CX to radiate outside the boundaries of individual embodied experiences. I carry everything I have learned in yoga into my daily life, to my actions, behavior, and thinking. This highlights the transformative nature of CX, which extends to both individual and social spheres (Viotto, Zanette, and Brito 2020).

### **The knowing body is situational**

Today, I was mad at myself! How is it possible that I can't do *kunvinyasa asana* at home, even though I have done it dozens of times in the studio? Anyway, I used a lot of energy following the instructor today to try and familiarize myself with her way of guiding the practice. It felt so mechanical, and I felt I didn't really get into the flow, which is usually the best thing in yoga practice. It was more just doing *asanas* in a row, and my focus was on the screen rather than on myself. (*Diary note on March 16, 2020 [online]*)

Only the reflections of my experiences between on- and offline contexts have made me realize that even though I am familiar with the language of yoga and many body techniques, they are always highly context-specific (Helkkula 2011). My embodied knowledge was mostly based on my experiences in yoga classes in a yoga studio, and when I began to practice online, I was surprised at how lost I was. I needed to step back and adjust my knowledge to online contexts. Only through practice and repetition did my experience turn fun again, and the affective aspects of CX became drivers of my experience (Mauss 1973). In other words, even though many body techniques are socially pre-choreographed (Crossley 2004), they are still dependent on the circumstances here and now.

The yoga practice has offered me the possibility to stop and breathe for the last month and forget all the hustle around. As we are not allowed to move more than a few hundred meters away from our house, my yoga mat represents the possibility of escaping outside the walls of our apartment. Even though I can't really go anywhere, it feels that I can ... I feel happy as my body knows the *asanas* so I can just immerse myself in the motion, and my moving body gives me a break from everything else. I don't think or feel anything else. It is me, my body, and my sensations. (*Diary note April 15, 2020 [online]*)

Usually, customers are free to choose where and when they wish to consume services, and similarly, companies have the possibility to choose their operating environment. Still, sometimes this choice is forced. We are living a radical example of this truth as I write this article. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies all over the world to adjust their businesses and shift to online services. At the same time, consumers are facing a massive change, as familiar ways of consuming services are no longer possible. Customers, who have been used to consuming services offline in direct interaction with service providers, are now forced to shift their consumption to an online environment. These exceptional circumstances challenge customers' abilities to consume experiences, and shifting to consuming services in a new context requires repetition to familiarize oneself with the new

circumstances (Mauss 1973). Thus, a customer's capacity to engage in experience is dependent not only on the level and richness of the embodied knowledge but also on the familiarity of the context.

I have faced this crisis from both perspectives, as a service provider and as a customer. We closed the doors of our fitness studio and now operate online. The digital leap and sudden lack of sociality of service, or the possibility of providing individual coaching, have forced us to think about our business again. The crisis has also changed my yoga experiences. Before, I did not find doing yoga at home very interesting and prioritized going to the studio, but now the moments on my yoga mat in our living room are my lifeline, providing me with an opportunity to escape daily life (Stevens, Maclaran, and Brown 2019), which is literally framed by the boundaries of our apartment. During these uncertain and extraordinary times, yoga has made me feel more alive (Stevens, Maclaran, and Brown 2019) and enabled me to deal with my sensations and emotions (Crossley 2005). It is also interesting how the instructor's face and voice on the screen feel close and comfortable now, whereas before, I felt the instructor was rather distant and impersonal.

The knowing body as situational underlines how the context always creates frames for the customer to reflect upon and utilize their embodied knowledge in experience (Hansen 2004a; Clough 2008).

## Reflection of findings

This article enriches the current discussion on CX in CDL studies within service research (e.g. Heinonen et al. 2010; Helkkula 2011; Heinonen and Strandvik 2015; Jaakkola, Helkkula, and Aarikka-Stenroos 2015) by identifying embodied knowledge as a premise for experience to occur and evolve. The findings outline embodied knowledge as a determining factor for value creation and illustrate the customer's life-world as it naturally unfolds and increases the understanding of service value.

This paper introduces the concept of embodied knowledge in the CX stream in service research and opens up a whole new perspective for considering CX. Embodiment provides a conceptual basis for uncovering unexplored bodily aspects of experience by generating a holistic understanding about how customers sense, feel, think, act, and relate when engaging in experiences (Schmitt 1999). As identified in organizational studies and sociology (e.g. Yakhlef 2010; Gärtner 2013; Gherardi et al. 2013), in CX, customers' knowing and learning are incorporated into the body through repetition and are expressed in their engagement and action when consuming services. In other words, an embodied approach helps to conceptualize the customer's life-world, which is considered the locus of CX (Heinonen et al. 2010; Heinonen and Strandvik 2015).

This paper also contributes to consumption studies (e.g. Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019), which mostly consider consumers becoming skillful primarily through body movement. However, the results of this study reveal how the accumulation and (re)shaping of embodied knowledge may derive from *being in the body* without bodily action. The human body is a sensing, active, and skillful agent. In yoga, *asanas* are often held for a long time. Even though the lived body remains still, it transforms its capabilities to engage in CX. Here, the ability to tune the body into the particulars of the situation is required. Being in the body can be characterized as pre-reflective self-awareness, a consumer's bodily orientation toward the world.

This study contributes to the discussion on resource integration in CDL. Current studies on CDL consider that customers integrate services and other external resources (e.g. other customers and surroundings) with their experiences (Heinonen et al. 2010; Heinonen, Strandvik, and Voima 2013; Heinonen and Strandvik 2015). However, this study indicates how the human body and the world are in constant interaction with each other, and clear boundaries between experiences cannot be drawn (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1964). There are no "outside" and "inside" of experience; rather, all actors immerse themselves in experiences and each other's value creation processes. Interaction takes place between and within bodies, resulting in the accumulation of knowledge, experiences, and value.

In yoga, I interpret my surroundings and collect new information through my lived body – within an embodied perspective, the lines are not drawn between cognitive, emotional, and embodied perceptions, but understood as intertwined, and the body as a locus of all our experiences. A similar idea of embodied unity also extends to discussion on customers' internal resources (e.g. values, knowledge, and prior experiences). Previous CDL studies have highlighted customer resources as separate, whereas my experiences emphasized that all my knowledge, previous experiences, background, values, and thoughts became real here-and-now experiences in my habitus and shaped my actions (Bourdieu 1990; Crossley 2004; Gärtner 2013). The embodied perspective on resource integration allows us to understand how our living and sensing bodies make us capable of integrating and using resources to create experiences.

As embodied knowledge accumulates over time and allows CX to emerge and evolve, the concept of embodied temporality becomes relevant to expand the awareness of how the embodied dimension relates to CX. The learning process is not linear, and more repetition and practice over time does not always mean a better ability to engage in CX. Rather, time shapes our ability to create experiences in various ways. Sometimes, it can even hinder the process. In addition, embodied practices, time, and context are always interrelated (Woermann and Rokka 2015). Regardless of how long the customer has gained accumulated knowledge in one context, this does not mean that they are able to utilize the knowledge in a new, unfamiliar context. Hence, “optimal” CX is a result of the perfect alignment between embodied actions, context, and affective state during service consumption (Woermann and Rokka 2015).

The temporal aspect of lived experience highlights how the customer's value creation process can extend beyond the actual moments of service consumption as the transformative power of experiences stretches outside the service context to daily life (Heinonen et al. 2010; Viotto, Zanette, and Brito 2020). The value of my accumulated yoga experiences is flourishing in my daily routines and practices. For instance, I am more sensitive to my bodily sensations and treat myself, as well as others, more gently.

Together, the five dimensions of the knowing body enhance the current understanding of the relationship between embodied knowledge and CX as an evolving value creation process by a sensing and active human body. The results underline that the dimensions do not exist in isolation but represent specific aspects of how embodied knowledge shapes CX. The facets of embodiment introduced in sensorial anthropology (i.e. kinaesthetic schema, bodily mimesis, the mindful body, and local biology; Scott and Uncles 2018) work as a gateway to clarify how people feel, sense, think, act, and relate when co-creating their experiences. *The knowing body is physical*, highlighting how the kinaesthetic schema always frames CX by anchoring the lived body to time and place, working as a foundation for CX to occur (Scott and Uncles 2018).

*The knowing body is social* is twofold. First, other customers provide support for an individual to improve their CX through mimesis, and second, bodies affect and are affected by other bodies, resulting in emotional experiences (Kuuru and Närvänen 2019). *The knowing body is affective* captures how customers sense experiences differently through the mindful body. The affective dimension outlines the interplay and interaction of bodily sensations and personal emotions resulting from a moving and knowing body. The affective dimension works in both individual and social spheres.

*The knowing body is transformative* describes how local biology, the interconnection between the body and culture within experiences, may allow CX to turn transformative, radiating outside the boundaries of service consumption to daily life. *The knowing body is situational* encompasses the whole process of CX formation and underlines how embodied knowledge is a floating concept, providing a diverse basis for CX to occur depending on context. This study adds to the current literature characterizing CX as a result of how a customer's subjective goals fit into a specific service (Heinonen et al. 2010) by highlighting in more detail how CX emerges from a customer's unique abilities to utilize their embodied knowledge in a specific context (Helkkula 2011).

In this study, I focused on the context of yoga, but from the perspective of managing and planning customer experiences, the five dimensions can also be relevant to many other contexts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants were forced to close their physical doors and invent new ways of doing business. One invention has been so-called dinner boxes: restaurants deliver ingredients and recipes to customers' front doors, giving them the possibility to cook restaurant-quality meals at home. However, the high-quality ingredients and detailed instructions do not guarantee that the end product matches restaurant-level dinners, so the CX depends on the customer's embodied knowledge (Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). If the customer lacks cooking experience, the experience may be framed by mechanical follow-up of the instructions (*the knowing body is physical*). If the customer is a more experienced cook, the accumulation of knowledge may allow them to immerse themselves in experience, allowing bodily sensations and emotions to occur (*the knowing body is affective*).

The environment, both physical and social, also shapes the cooking experience (Helkkula 2011). Here, the cooking experience varies if the dinner is cooked alone or with others (*the knowing body is social*) and if the cooking takes place in one's own familiar kitchen or at a friend's place (*the knowing body is situational*). After a certain amount of practice and repetition, the cooking experience may also become a revealing and relaxing moment of escape from daily life (Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017), or the CX may expand beyond the consumption of service, changing customers' attitudes and habits toward cooking (*the knowing body is transformative*; Viotto, Zanette, and Brito 2020).

The use of the emic approach to address the purpose of this study allowed me to present a detailed narrative of how embodied knowledge shapes CX. In this study, I aimed to stay reflexive throughout the research process by remaining conscious of my ideology, culture, and values, allowing all of my diverse roles to shine in turn (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). Here, the choices of research design and methodology (e.g. use of vignettes and thematic analysis) assisted in enhancing the transparency of emic and etic perspectives in the text. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that autoethnography enables the examination of research phenomena from a particular subjective perspective. Hence, this study enriches existing research by opening up a new avenue for CX research.

Furthermore, my observations in the context of yoga provide counterweight to the existing studies on embodiment, which have examined it in demanding contexts (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017; Murphy, Patterson, and O'Malley 2019). Exploration of yoga also shows that a gentler, softer, more nurturing approach to the human body enables customers to become aware of their embodied sensations and create experiences that shape their individual life-worlds (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017).

## Conclusion

By adopting the embodied approach, this study extends the current understanding of how experiences emerge in customers' life-worlds (Heinonen et al. 2010) and facilitates articulation of the locus of value by conceptualizing the human body as a premise for all experiences. This paper advances the current research on co-creation and interaction by defining embodied knowledge as a determining factor for value creation and describing how embodied interaction enables knowledge, experiences, and value to occur.

To provide a holistic, embodied approach to CDL, this study identifies five dimensions of embodied knowledge that highlight how the accumulation and level of knowledge continually shape CX. The studies of Mauss (1973) and Crossley (2001, 2004, 2005, 2007), as well as drawings from sociology, organizational, management, and consumption studies provide opportunities to conceptualize the lived body as a source of knowledge. Furthermore, this article demonstrates the merits of sensory anthropology (Scott and Uncles 2018) to reveal embodied ways of knowing. Scholars can adopt this kind of multidisciplinary, novel method to integrate an embodied approach to their studies and thereby help companies to better understand, orchestrate, and manage CX, and

help customers to consume more fulfilling, optimal, and holistic experiences. Furthermore, the autoethnographic method delves deep into the subjectivity of experiences and enables the conceptualization of the body as a site of experience and knowledge – the human body united.

This study opens up multiple avenues for further research. As one of the first studies discussing embodied knowledge in CX, further studies delving into the customer's life-world are necessary to expand our understanding of the embodied nature of CX. In addition, the five dimensions of embodied knowledge in CX identified in this study deserve more focus and detailed research in the future. As my study offered one approach while examining the embodiment of experiences in the context of yoga, studies in other service contexts, both online and offline, should be undertaken.

I did not thoroughly explore the spatial aspects related to knowing and CX in this paper, which is a relevant topic. Moreover, in-depth studies comparing offline versus online service contexts, as well as different cultural contexts, would add interesting layers regarding how embodied knowledge affects CX in diverse settings. The customer's life-world and the anatomy of CX will remain mysterious and difficult to grasp if we do not find the courage to invent and utilize novel ways to study the phenomenon. It is hoped that this research will serve as an inspiration for future studies.

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