
Core course

3 ECTS

Professor: Benoît HEILBRUNN

Customer Value and (Post)ownership

Objectives

Customer value is no longer created simply by manufacturing and selling products. Across many industries, organisations increasingly compete by designing experiences, services, uses, and long-term relationships rather than by transferring ownership of physical goods. At the same time, consumers are progressively moving from ownership toward access, participation, subscription, and shared usage. This transformation changes the way companies create value, the way customers evaluate offerings, and the very nature of consumption itself. It also blurs the boundaries between market exchange, cultural meaning and everyday practices.

Understanding customer value demands an interdisciplinary perspective combining anthropology, consumer culture theory, design studies, economics, service research, and sociology. The course reads customer value as a historical, social and cultural phenomenon.

Historically informed and critically oriented, this course examines how customer value has evolved from product-centred markets toward service ecosystems and the emerging post-ownership economy. It also explores the opportunities and tensions created by artificial intelligence, behavioural design and digital platforms.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand the historical evolution of customer value.
- Analyse value from anthropological, economic, and sociological perspectives.
- Explain the transition from ownership to access and service-based economies.
- Understand how organisations design customer value through products, services, and experiences.

- Critically assess the opportunities and ethical implications of AI-driven value creation.

Course Structure

PART I. RETHINKING CUSTOMER VALUE

Session 1 – What Is Customer Value?

Although customer value lies at the heart of marketing, the concept remains surprisingly unstable. Is value something embedded in the object, generated through exchange, or co-created in use? This opening session revisits the main traditions through which value has been understood in economics and marketing, from exchange value to use value, and from product logic to service logic. The discussion also introduces emotional, experiential, and symbolic dimensions that complicate any strictly utilitarian view of value.

Key topics

- Exchange value versus use value
- Functional, emotional, and symbolic value
- Value creation versus value capture
- Value-in-use and value-in-exchange
- Customer perceived value
- Why value has become increasingly experiential

Assigned readings

Holbrook, Morris B. (1999). *Consumer Value: A Framework for Analysis and Research*. London: Routledge. Introduction (pp. 1–28).

Holbrook, Morris B., and Elizabeth C. Hirschman (1982). "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 132–140.

Vargo, Stephen L., and Robert F. Lusch (2004). "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing." *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17.

Session 2 – Why Ownership Matters

Ownership is neither natural nor universal. It is a historical and cultural institution that organises identities, social relationships, and market relations. This session explores why people become attached to objects beyond their utilitarian functions and why possessions have such a powerful place in modern life. The point is not merely to describe property rights, but to show how ownership mediates memory, distinction, social order, and the moral life of consumption.

Key topics

- Ownership and possession
- Attachment to objects
- Symbolic consumption
- The social life of things
- Consumption rituals

Assigned readings

- Appadurai, Arjun (1986). "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." In Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–63.
- Kopytoff, Igor (1986). "The Cultural Biography of Things." In Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–91.
- Rochat, Philippe (2011). "Possession and Morality in Early Development." In H. Ross & O. Friedman (Eds.), *Origins of Ownership of Property. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 132, 23–38

PART II. DESIGNING VALUE

Session 3 – From Products to Experiences

Products increasingly serve as platforms for experiences rather than as ends in themselves. This session explores how organisations create memorable, meaningful, and engaging forms of value by staging atmospheres, narratives, and participation. The experience perspective is important because it shifts the focus from what is sold to what is lived, and from attributes to interpretation.

Key topics

- Experience economy
- Customer experience
- Emotional value
- Co-created value
- Experience design
- Customer journeys
- Experience as competitive advantage

Assigned readings

- Carù, Antonella, and Bernard Cova (2003). "Revisiting Consumption Experience." *Marketing Theory*, 3(2), 267–286.
- Holbrook, Morris B., and Elizabeth C. Hirschman (1982). "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 132–140.
- Pine, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore (1998). "Welcome to the Experience Economy." *Harvard Business Review*, 76(4), 97–105.

Session 4 – Designing Customer Experience

Design shapes attention, behaviour, and decision-making. This session shows how interface design, service design and behavioural design contribute to customer value while raising questions about usability, emotion and power. The discussion will move from the legibility of objects and interfaces to the more troubling issue of how design can guide, nudge or constrain action. In that sense, design is not only an aesthetic practice; it is also an ethical and political one.

Key topics

- Human-centred design
- Affordances

- Behavioural design
- Emotional design
- Ethical design
- Dark patterns

Assigned readings

- Krippendorff, Klaus (2006). *The Semantic Turn: A New Foundation for Design*. CRC Press. Chapters 1–2.
- Norman, Donald A. (2004). *Emotional Design*. Basic Books. Chapters 1–3.
- Norman, Donald A. (2013). *The Design of Everyday Things*. Revised Edition. Basic Books. Chapters 1–2.

PART III. VALUE WITHOUT OWNERSHIP

Session 5 – Value Beyond Ownership: The Functional Economy and the Future of Customer Value

One of the major transformations of contemporary capitalism is the gradual shift from ownership to access, performance and service. Rather than creating value through the transfer of property, organisations increasingly compete by delivering functionality, long-term relationships, and continuous access to resources. This evolution challenges traditional conceptions of customer value and invites us to rethink what it means to consume, possess and use. Beyond new business models, the post-ownership economy raises broader cultural and political questions. If ownership is no longer the dominant way of relating to goods, how should value be conceived? Can durability, sharing, maintenance and repair become new sources of customer value? How can organisations reconcile economic performance with environmental responsibility and social sustainability? The session concludes by considering customer value not merely as a managerial objective but as a historical, ethical and societal issue that shapes the future of markets and consumption.

Key topics

- From ownership to access
- Product-Service Systems
- The functional economy
- Servitization
- Platform and subscription models
- Circular economy
- Repair and maintenance
- Durability and long-term value
- Commons and sharing
- Sustainability and post-growth
- Value and responsibility
- The future of customer value

Required readings

- Botsman, Rachel, and Roo Rogers (2010). *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*. New York: Harper Business. Chapters 1–3.

- Stahel, Walter R. (2010). *The Performance Economy*. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapters 1–3 and Conclusion.
- Tukker, Arnold (2004). "Eight Types of Product-Service System: Eight Ways to Sustainability?" *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 13(4), 246–260.

Session 6 – Platforms and Service Ecosystems

Value in a post-ownership economy is rarely produced by a single firm alone. It is distributed across platforms, partners, infrastructures and user communities. This session looks at service ecosystems as arrangements in which value emerges through coordination, interaction, and institutional support. Students will examine how platform logics, subscription models and ecosystem strategies reorganize the relation between firms and users.

Key topics

- Service ecosystems
- Co-creation
- Platform strategies
- Omnichannel experiences
- Long-term relationships
- Measuring customer value

Assigned readings

Prahalad, C. K., and Venkat Ramaswamy (2004). "Co-Creation Experiences: The Next Practice in Value Creation." *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5–14.

PART IV. CONTEMPORARY CONTROVERSIES

Session 7 – AI, Personalisation, and Behavioural Value

Artificial intelligence profoundly transforms the creation, personalisation, and management of customer value. Recommendation systems, predictive analytics, and adaptive interfaces increasingly shape what users see, choose and do. This session critically examines the promise of frictionless personalisation while asking how behavioural design, surveillance, and algorithmic governance alter the meaning of autonomy and choice.

Key topics

- AI-assisted customer experiences
- Recommendation systems
- Adaptive services
- Predictive personalization
- Behavioural engineering
- Surveillance capitalism
- Responsible AI

Assigned readings

Eyal, Nir (2014). *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*. Portfolio. Chapters 1–4.

Sunstein, Cass R. (2015). "The Ethics of Nudging." *Yale Journal on Regulation*, **32**, 413–450.

Session 8 – Group presentations

Assessment

Individual written exam (50%), based on in-class active discussions, analyses and short exercises throughout the semester. Participation is understood as an informed and constructive engagement with the materials rather than simple attendance.

Group project (50%), based on student teams proposal of a customer value strategy for an organisation moving from product ownership to access-based, service-based, or usage-based models. The project should integrate customer value analysis, service design, sustainability considerations and a critical reflection on the implications of post-ownership business models.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun (1986). *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Belk, Russell W. (1988). "Possessions and the Extended Self." *Journal of Consumer Research*, **15**(2), 139–168.
- Botsman, Rachel, and Roo Rogers (2010). *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*. New York: Harper Business.
- Carù, Antonella, and Bernard Cova (2007). *Consuming Experience*. London: Routledge.
- Crawford, Matthew B. (2009). *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Crawford, Matthew B. (2015). *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dewey, John (1934). *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.
- Eyal, Nir (2014). *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin.
- Grönroos, Christian (2007). *Service Management and Marketing: Customer Management in Service Competition*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Holbrook, Morris B., and Elizabeth C. Hirschman (1982). "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun." *Journal of Consumer Research*, **9**(2), 132–140.
- Ingold, Tim (2000). *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- Ingold, Tim (2013). *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge.
- Kopytoff, Igor (1986). "The Cultural Biography of Things." In Arjun Appadurai

- (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–91.
- Miller, Daniel (2010). *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Norman, Donald A. (2004). *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*. New York: Basic Books.
- Norman, Donald A. (2013). *The Design of Everyday Things*. Revised and Expanded Edition. New York: Basic Books.
- Pine, B. Joseph, and James H. Gilmore (2020). *The Experience Economy*. Updated Edition. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Prahalad, C. K., and Venkat Ramaswamy (2004). *The Future of Competition: Co-Creating Unique Value with Customers*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Rochat, Philippe (2014). *Origins of Possession: Owning and Sharing in Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmitt, Bernd H. (1999). *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate to Your Company and Brands*. New York: Free Press.
- Simon, Herbert A. (1996). *The Sciences of the Artificial*. 3rd ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Stahel, Walter R. (2010). *The Performance Economy*. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tukker, Arnold (2004). "Eight Types of Product-Service System: Eight Ways to Sustainability? Experiences from SusProNet." *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 13(4), 246–260.
- Vargo, Stephen L., and Robert F. Lusch (2004). "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing." *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17.
- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books.