Chapter 1

Beyond the Embodied Digital Service Encounter:
The Co-Creation of a Web Service Recovery

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ABSTRACT

When a digital service encounter develops differently than anticipated, the client becomes a user. This transformation reveals the ambiguous nature of digital service encounter being neither well-functioning tools, nor having the same sensitivity to and tolerance for service failures as in human service encounters. Through the case-study of a service failure and subsequent co-creation of the service recovery, this chapter introduces and unfolds the concept of 'cognitively dominated service encounters'. This category is suggested to supplement and criticise Paul Dourish's (2001) concept of Embodied Interaction. With a micro analysis of the interaction in this service journey, we identify the need for a category of knowledge intensive service encounters that acknowledge both the complexity of the service provided, but also the constraints and possibilities in the digital design material.

1. INTRODUCTION

When a service encounter develops differently than expected we are offered the possibility to reflect not only about the direct reasons of the failure, but also about the character of, and the assumptions behind the service encounter. Examining the breakdown, our attention turns to the medium for the service encounter, and to the structures in which it is embedded. When the service encounter is a digital self-service, e.g. a website, we would talk about 'bad usability' or 'system problems'. If the service encounter takes place between humans, we would talk about 'service failure'. However, as customer journeys often includes both interaction with automated systems and with humans, and as service failures thus involves both digital and human touch points, we need to develop our understanding of the characteristic of each type

of service encounter, particularly what characterizes digital service encounters (Henten, 2012; Scupola, Henten, & Westh Nicolajsen, 2009; Sørensen & Henten, forthcoming, 2014).

For decades, the approach to the interaction design of digital services has been to create references to or even simulate the user's real physical world in the interface. Most famous is possibly the 'desktop' office metaphor (Johnson et al., 1989) with its icons, folders and trashcan. While a useful metaphor for the interaction with the PC, it also conceals the inner mechanics of the computer. Similarly, using real world referenced for the design of digital service encounters conceals their inner digital nature. When the digital service encounter breaks down, we are confronted with the logic of the digital systems, far away from the logic that governs human service encounters. In this chapter, we discuss whether it is productive to apply the human service encounter as blueprint for the design of digital self-service encounters. We discuss a conceptual conflict between encounters and digital services; between the role of a client / customer and the role of a user. The conflict, we claim, blurs the conceptualization of the cognitively dominated service encounter.

2. BACKGROUND

The traditional approach to the design of digital self-service solutions combines two strategies. One approach is to formalize the service via service blueprints (Patricio, Fisk, & Falcao e Cunha, 2008; Shostack, 1982), design patterns (Gamma, Helm, Johnson, & Vlissides, 1994; Sikici & Topaloglu, 2004) and to map and analyze customer journeys (Halvorsrud, Kvale, & Følstad, 2016; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2011) and their service touch points (Clatworthy, 2011; Voorhees et al., 2017). A supplementary approach is to involve users at different stages of the design process to identify needs and goal, possible misconceptions, and expectations (Brandt & Messeter, 2004; Buur & Bødker, 2000; Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010) as well as applying usability and interaction design techniques to optimize the way the interface communicates available user actions. A central effort within the research field Human Computer Interaction has thus been to improve the design of interfaces to minimize physical and cognitive constraints for users. Via Gibson's (1979) theories of affordances, brought into software design by Gaver (1991, 1996) and Norman (1988), the design goal has often been to create a unity of man and machine. The ICT-system should be the natural extension of the human mind and body; it should be a tool 'ready at hand' for the user.

On the contrary, the service encounter is historically a face-to-face interaction between two, or more, humans: the service provider and the customer / client. As individual persons or organizational entities, these may have different plans, intentions and interests in the service encounter, different positions in power leads to negotiations of solutions in a customer encounter (Schipper, 2002). Now, service encounters encompass more than only customer encounters, the service encounter can also e.g. be between a citizen and a public institution, as well as it can be mandatory for citizens (Reinders, Frambach, & Kleijnen, 2015). We will thus in the following discuss 'service encounters' as a broader term than 'customer encounters', to include service encounters that do not have a direct commercial purpose, such as service encounters with public authorities.

When is a digital service encounter a real encounter, and when is it a tool? The human service encounter requires mutual understanding. It can be more or less deep, but the human service encounter includes at least two thinking entities. The human service provider is not just a tool in the hands of the customer / client. The digital service encounter, has only one thinking entity – the user. The interface

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