



Crafting customer insight: What we can learn from the revival of the vinyl record



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Abstract The recent resurgence of the vinyl record and the proliferation of so-called craft and artisanal products offer unique opportunities to observe ongoing shifts in the contemporary consumer's values and attitudes. In this article, we explore such thought-provoking market developments and their implications by contrasting them with the conventional understanding of markets and consumers. This understanding can lead to marketing myopia as it works from the utility-oriented assumption that what ultimately matters for both the company and the customer is cost efficiency and convenience. Against this backdrop, in this article, we discuss how market developments representing the contemporary consumer's mindset prove valuable in creating customer insight that highlights aspects often obscured by an exaggerated focus on cost efficiency and convenience. We provide an alternative approach to evaluating markets and consumers that encourages companies to build their customer-centric market strategies around questions of context, authenticity, story, and resonance. This will help them narrow the gap between their market offerings and the actual wants and needs of their customer, and consequently allow them to revitalize their market.

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1. "The times they are a-changin'"

While conventional wisdom would have you believe that the contemporary consumer unequivocally yearns for convenient, fast, and cost-

efficient solutions, several emerging market developments challenge this wisdom. As digitalization and its rationalizing effects ramp up the speed at which we communicate with each other, consume new products, and listen to music, many consider this rapid pace problematic and advocate for a slower and more deliberate approach to life. From a growing appreciation of everything hand-made and local to calls for a new, slow-fashion ethos to guide consumers' fashion consumption

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habits, signs of brewing seismic activity can be discerned in the periphery of consumer culture.

Ever since Theodore Levitt's seminal *Harvard Business Review* article was published in 1960, scholars agree that a gap exists between how managers view their customers' wants and needs and the actual wants and needs of the customer. Levitt (1960) identified managers' preoccupation with efficiency and low-cost production as the cause of this shortsightedness. He called it "the legacy of mass production", or "[the] parochial view that profit resides essentially in low-cost production" (Levitt, 1960, p. 51). Much has, of course, changed since Levitt first put forward his customer-oriented marketing philosophy, but the myopia he so convincingly exposed has shown itself to be of a resilient type and is consequently alive and well in boardrooms around the world.

The myopic understanding of markets and consumers that managers suffer from, according to Levitt (1960), is labeled here as the *utility mindset*, as it places a one-sided emphasis on convenience and cost efficiency. By focusing on how this mindset affects managers' understanding of their customers and how this, in many cases, leads to one-dimensional product and service development, we argue that there are several emerging market developments that challenge this paradigmatic understanding of the contemporary consumer as unequivocally yearning for convenient, fast, and cost-efficient solutions.

What is the reason for the shift? A growing concern for the environment is often identified as the cause of many of these recent changes in consumers' attitudes and values, but other revealing reasons tend to be overlooked. By taking the recent revival of the vinyl record as an illustrative example, we clarify how an exaggerated focus on convenience and cost efficiency tends to undermine consumers' ability to relate and their readiness to commit to the company's market offering, compelling consumers to seek more engaging alternatives beyond the mainstream.

By explicating vinyl's regained popularity against the backdrop of Max Weber's (1905, 1921) theory of rationality and Georg Ritzer's (2004) related notion of McDonaldization, we describe an emerging attitude among consumers, which we label the *craft mindset*. Both Weber (1905, 1921) and Ritzer (2004, 2017) were concerned with the proliferation of instrumental rationality in contemporary society and how its preoccupation with control, efficiency, predictability, and calculability increasingly restricts the behavioral patterns and social interactions of everyday life. We identify this form of rationality as underlying the

utility mindset that often guides product and service development.

Thus, in this article, we aim to reveal how product and service development—predominantly informed by the utility mindset—causes tensions to develop as consumers are unable to relate to these market offerings in a fulfilling and meaningful way. Accordingly, we make a case for companies to adopt a more reflective stance so they better align with their customers' sensibilities and aspirations and, consequently, gain customer insight revealed by an understanding of the emerging craft mindset. This *reflective thinking*, a customer-oriented outlook that emphasizes authenticity, story, resonance, and context, is highlighted as the framework within which companies' market strategies should be developed. We conclude by discussing how the gap between managers' understanding of their market and their customers' wants and needs can be narrowed with the help of reflective thinking and how this, in turn, offers opportunities for revitalizing markets currently perceived by consumers as impersonal and distant.

2. "Paint it black": How big is vinyl today?

Music lovers and the music industry alike first noticed the resurgence of vinyl around 2006. Since then, vinyl sales have increased in the U.S. by around 30% year-over-year (RIAA, 2019), making it by far the fastest-growing physical format for music reproduction. Similar trends have been observed around the world (IFPI, 2019).

The numbers offered by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA, 2019), the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI, 2019), and other compilers of music sales are generally thought to be grave underestimations of actual sales, as a large chunk of the vinyl market is upheld by brick and mortar stores that do not necessarily pass on their sales data to relevant organizations (Rosenblatt, 2018). Moreover, second-hand vinyl constitutes a substantial part of the overall supply, but used-record sales are of little interest to the music industry as it does not generate any revenue for artists or record labels, so they omit these numbers from their calculations (Rosenblatt, 2018). This unsurprising revenue bias, which guides the music industry's attempts to estimate the size of the vinyl market, has led some to speculate that the actual size of the market may very well be twice the size suggested by industry figures (Rosenblatt, 2018). In 2020,

revenues from vinyl sales will likely surpass revenues from compact disc (CD) sales (RIAA, 2019).

Remarkably, much of the recent growth in sales is predicated on the willingness of millennials and younger generations to consume music on vinyl. A recent study by YouGov in the U.S. shows that as many as 28% of millennials and 26% of Gen Z are willing to pay for music on vinyl records; it also shows that one in four consumers age 18 to 24 bought a vinyl record in the last month (Ballard, 2019). The burgeoning popularity of vinyl among younger generations has encouraged the opening of new vinyl pressing plants, and it has caught the attention of major recording artists (e.g., Beyoncé, Arctic Monkeys) who view this newfound consumption habit among their most enthusiastic fans as an opportunity for generating new revenue streams.

All of this amounts to a thought-provoking market development that has implications for how companies should think about their value propositions and the needs they are assumed to serve. Next, we give a short overview of the evolution of the music industry and how the development of the technical means for music reproduction has influenced consumers' listening habits. In so doing, we show that this evolution follows a trajectory guided by an understanding of consumers' yearning for unlimited alternatives for the least possible effort or cost. While this is certainly the case to a large extent, the revived popularity of vinyl records should nonetheless be understood as a reaction to unanticipated consequences of this utility mindset and the impact it has had on valued aspects of music consumption.

2.1. How our headphones reached into the clouds

The first step toward a market for mass consumption of music was taken with the introduction of the phonograph in the late 19th century. Since then, the music industry has undergone many major transformations driven by technological innovations. Each transformation "has involved a rearranging of the sociotechnical infrastructure of music, affording new modes of production and consumption [...]" (Fuentes, Hagberg, & Kjellberg, 2019, p. 484). These innovations have had ramifications on two dimensions with a direct effect on people's listening habits: (1) the availability of music (i.e., how much of it is available to the consumer), and (2) the portability of music (i.e., where and when it is available to the consumer).

The phonograph moved music consumption from the public sphere (i.e., live musical performances,

etc.) to the home of the consumer, but it was the vinyl record—which followed its technically less sophisticated predecessor, the shellac disc—that had a huge impact on the music industry and laid the groundwork for its present state. Vinyl is durable and cheap to manufacture, making it a highly accessible and user-friendly consumer commodity. This broadened the availability of music, making listening to records possible for a larger number of consumers. It also helped facilitate the commodification and distribution of music on a greater scale.

Although the popularization of transistor radios during the 1950s allowed people to enjoy music beyond the confines of their homes, it was the cassette tape—released in the early 1960s—that led to the development of portable music players such as the Sony Walkman, which truly revolutionized people's listening habits (Dholakia, Reyes, & Bonoff, 2015). Thus, the cassette and the Walkman had a major impact on the second dimension of music consumption (i.e., portability, by making it possible to listen to music practically anywhere).

The digitalization of music began with the introduction of the CD in the early 1980s. It became the main medium for music reproduction in the early 1990s and reigned supreme until the early 2000s. However, the CD in and of itself did not radically revolutionize people's listening habits. Rather, it was received as an updated and improved version of previous technologies, combining the sound quality of vinyl with the portability of the cassette (Dholakia et al., 2015). The first manifestation of the transformative power of digitalization on music consumption came in the form of peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing internet services—most notably Napster, released in 1999. Napster made it possible for its users to share their music for free, albeit illegally, in the form of mp3 files stored on hard discs. The next major transformation came with the introduction of audio streaming platforms such as Spotify, which was released in 2006. Spotify gives users who pay a monthly fee access to a vast amount of music without the need to store anything on their smartphones or computers. This allows users to listen to virtually any music practically anywhere.

The digitalization of music consumption could be said to have taken the transformation started by the phonograph in the late 19th century to its logical conclusion. On both dimensions—the availability as well as the portability of music—an endpoint seems to have been reached. It is hard to imagine how music could be made any more

available and portable than it already is, thanks to services like Spotify and devices like smartphones.

3. Feeling the rhythm: Using consumers' reactions as road signs

The comeback of the vinyl record needs to be understood within the wider context of the transformation of the sociotechnical infrastructure of music and the subsequent rearranging of music consumption patterns and consumers' listening habits (Fuentes et al., 2019). This transformation has had a clear trajectory toward the increasing availability and portability of music, which suggests an underlying logic guiding this transformation. On a more general level, this paradigmatic understanding of markets and the needs and wants of the contemporary consumer can be discerned in tendencies toward cost-efficient solutions aimed at making commodities increasingly available by streamlining the acquisition process and lowering the price. The focus of this mindset is, in other words, predominantly on utility. For example, the fashion industry has made clothing more available than ever before by implementing processes similar to the fast-food industry to decrease costs and increase availability. The furniture industry also seems to have adopted the same prefix to cater to the contemporary consumer's seemingly vacillating desires. The travel industry has made traveling so convenient and cost efficient that mass tourism is increasingly seen as an existential threat to many UNESCO world heritage sites.

While this utility mindset and the form of fast consumption it helps bring about has been mainly criticized with ecological concerns in mind (e.g., Evans, 2011), the regained popularity of vinyl points to an alternative view to this mindset and its consequences. This view has been most famously advocated by George Ritzer (2004, 2017), who built on Max Weber's (1905, 1921) theory of the rationalization of modern society and culture. Ritzer (2004, 2017) explored the effects of instrumental rationality on patterns of action and thought in various social contexts, focusing especially on the context of consumption. Whereas Weber (1905, 1921) viewed the modern bureaucracy as emblematic of the rationalization process, Ritzer (2004, 2017) argued instead that McDonald's restaurants serve as the most illuminating example of the proliferation of instrumental rationality to increasingly mundane aspects of contemporary society. As such, consumption patterns are increasingly structured by four rationalizing dimensions: control, efficiency,

predictability, and calculability (Ritzer, 2004). The logic underlying this process and, by implication, the utility mindset, gives priority to calculability to achieve predictability, which increases control and, by extension, efficiency. Ritzer (2004) called this process "McDonaldization" and argued that it leads to exaggerated standardization and predictability. However, it is important to point out that even though this process may subject society to the assembly-line feel of fast-food restaurants, it also leads to a high degree of dependability and efficiency, which many consumers appreciate.

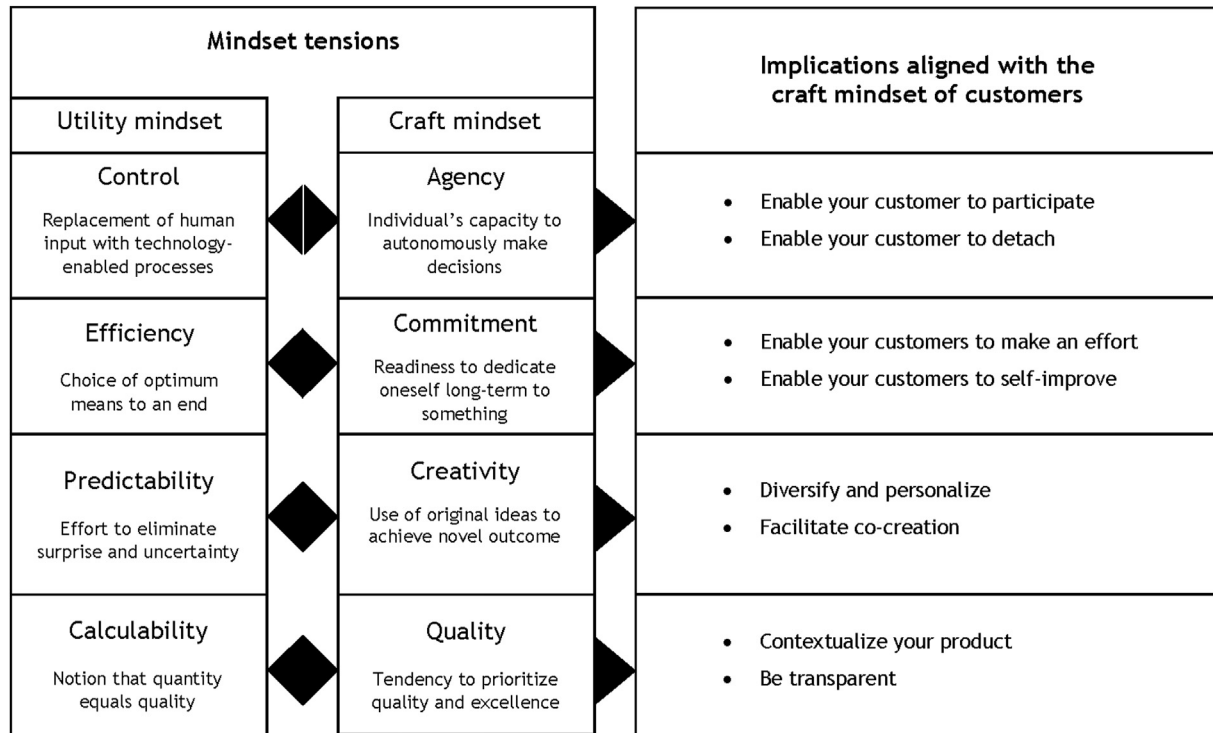
Against this backdrop, it is possible to view the resurgence of vinyl as a reaction to the rationalizing effects of the digitalization of music consumption. It may also be viewed as a means of identifying flashpoints in which tensions generated by these processes are counteracted with the help of practices afforded by vinyl. Moreover, with the help of the theoretical framework articulated above, other seemingly irrational consumer trends will be considered as manifestations of consumers' efforts to counteract some impersonal and disengaging aspects of contemporary consumer culture, which is predicated on the utility mindset guiding much of contemporary product and service development. These efforts will be framed as emblematic of an alternative mindset (i.e., the craft mindset) that shifts the emphasis from control, efficiency, predictability, and calculability, toward agency, commitment, creativity, and quality (Fig. 1).

3.1. Tension #1: Control vs. agency

The tendency inherent in efforts aimed at optimizing processes to achieve a more cost-efficient outcome is partly predicated on the elimination of—or at least diminishing—the role played by humans in the process. This tendency is about control and concerns the replacement of human with nonhuman technology (Ritzer, 2004). Hence, human agency is incorporated into technology to an increasing degree. In the context of consumer goods, such measures are often justified by an allusion to increased usability and functionality (Ritzer, 2004).

This aspect of the rationalization process is best exemplified by the automation evident in a wide array of current technological and societal developments; its proliferation is accelerated by digitalization (Ritzer & Miles, 2019). Interesting consumer trends suggest that the impact of digitalization and automation are being felt in surprising ways by many consumers and not in an entirely positive sense. In addition to the

Figure 1. Tensions between the dimensions of the utility and craft mindsets and their practical implications



comeback of vinyl records, other seemingly obsolete consumer goods are returning to the foreground of consumer culture. The growing popularity of film among photographers—and not only among professional photographers but hobbyists too—was confirmed last year by Kodak's decision to bring back the Ektachrome 100 film (Garage Staff, 2019), which was discontinued in 2009 due to declining sales. The popularity of old, secondhand bicycles that often require restoration before use is another telling example, as is the growing popularity of knitting and other traditional crafts. Just as in the case of vinyl, consumers who prefer these alternatives appreciate the hands-on active participation they require.

3.1.1. Enable your customer to participate

We are moving from a culture of passive entertainment toward a more hands-on culture in which consumers increasingly look for stimulating challenges and project-oriented activities. This cultural shift has only been fueled by the internet, especially by Web 2.0 and the possibilities for user-generated content it has opened (Gauntlett, 2011). Etsy is a great example of a company that has been able to harness this creative power and thirst for a challenge among its customers, turning it into profit. Companies such as Spotify that

provide audio streaming platforms may facilitate more engaging consumption by supporting project-oriented activities such as playlist creation among their customers (Tronvoll, 2019).

3.1.2. Enable your customer to detach

The most prolific consequence of digitalization on everyday life can be noticed in how devices like smartphones have occupied almost every aspect of our daily activities. Smartphones have essentially been designed to give us constant and limitless access to commodities like news, communication, and music. The negative and disruptive impact that these devices have on several valued aspects of our lives are becoming increasingly clear and more critically addressed (Newport, 2019). Surprising market trends, like the resurgence of vinyl, need to be understood as consumers' attempts to take back control of their lives that they feel are increasingly structured and coordinated by technology.

3.2. Tension #2: Efficiency vs. commitment

Another prevalent tendency of the rationalization process is the continuous optimization of means to increase efficiency. Efficiency as an element of the process of rationalization may lead to an

exaggerated focus on optimization that often has dehumanizing effects, such as turning customers into employees (e.g., McDonald's) or generally substituting valued aspects of some service or operation with more cost-effective solutions.

As with control, efficiency has also made inroads to increasingly mundane aspects of contemporary society. Such developments are rarely met with criticism because they are viewed as liberating, allowing people to choose how to spend their time. In the context of music consumption, vinyl clearly requires more money, time, and effort than digital alternatives. Yet, the higher degree of effort required constitutes a positive aspect as it increases consumers' sense of commitment. As such, this suggests that the prevailing thinking—the assumption that a reduction of means (i.e., requirements of human effort and commitment in the pursuit of some end, such as a meal or music) equals progress—has a very particular and one-sided emphasis that fails to bring to our attention the engaging and value-enhancing aspects inherent to the investment of time and effort to achieve something valued.

3.2.1. Enable your customer to make an effort

What market trends such as the revival of vinyl, home baking and cooking, bicycle and furniture restoration, and the Ektachrome 100 film suggest is that ostensibly tedious and time-consuming practices—like building for a vinyl record collection or developing photographs—serve as anchor points that enhance consumers' sense of involvement and facilitate long-term commitment (e.g., Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012). This is predicated on the fact that potential for achievement is inherent in instrumental practices. If practices serving as means are incorporated into technology and thus separated from their ends, then the sense of achievement is diluted or perhaps eliminated. Therefore, to keep your customers engaged, you may have to allow them to make an effort.

3.2.2. Enable your customer to self-improve

At a time when many jobs have been deskilled (Campbell, 2005), people increasingly seek opportunities for self-improvement and self-fulfillment in the sphere of leisure. This development can be noticed in emerging consumer trends such as film photography and do-it-yourself (DIY) projects. Companies should look for opportunities to develop their products and services in a direction that facilitates forms of consumption that allow customers to improve as practitioners. Such consumption has, in turn, a tendency to facilitate long-term commitment as the consumer commits

to his or her projects and wishes to improve further, which requires the acquisition of further products and services. The craft beer trend serves as another example of a consumption culture that evolved as a reaction to what was perceived as culturally empty and disengaging mass consumption. Crucial to the success of the craft beer trend is that it encourages the type of consumption that aims to develop consumer capabilities and knowledge regarding the culture in which the consumption is embedded.

3.3. Tension #3: Predictability vs. creativity

A third tendency of the rationalization process is to render things increasingly predictable. Predictability leads to an exaggerated standardization and homogenization of products and services. As such, it enables more efficient production and distribution while simultaneously running the risk of impoverishing the cultural depth and significance—and, by extension the personalizing potential—of that which is produced (Ritzer, 2004).

This tendency of the rationalization process is also spreading to increasingly mundane corners of everyday life, as exemplified by a fast-food restaurant where customers' consumption patterns are made increasingly predictable by making sure the experience they are being offered is virtually identical every time, no matter where or when it takes place (Ritzer, 2017). However, consumers who turn to vinyl find the element of surprise inherent to looking for records—as well as the exclusivity inherent to owning a record—engaging and meaningful as it counteracts the monotonous and predictable click-and-play feel characteristic of consuming music through streaming platforms.

3.3.1. Diversify and personalize

As the artisanal and craft trends suggest, consumers are easily disenchanted by overly predictable and standardized experiences and instead increasingly value personal and authentic experiences afforded by small-scale, labor-intensive, and high-quality production. The success of Etsy suggests many consumers are willing to pay a premium price for something unique and well-made. The surprising success of niche products that cater to specialized and personal needs and desires should be understood as enabled by the virtually unlimited shelf space provided by the internet (Andersson, 2006). Moreover, as the temptations offered by automated solutions make many companies go for increased efficiency at the

expense of personal customer service, opportunities for standing out and capitalizing on personalization increase. TD Bank's Unexpectedly Human campaign is a good example of a successful market strategy that emphasizes human interactions in its competitive positioning.

3.3.2. Facilitate co-creation

As we have already pointed out, the contemporary consumer is looking for opportunities to participate, make an effort, and improve. From the companies' point of view, this is fertile ground for engaging in co-creation activities that can unleash the creative potential of their customers. A leading example of clever use of co-creation interaction with the customer base is offered by Unilever's Open Innovation platform. Through this platform, Unilever offers challenges to the public that encourage individuals to develop creative solutions and submit them through the platform to the company for evaluation and, incidentally, implementation. The challenges on offer include a range of topics, such as intelligent product packaging and oil oxidation technology as well as freezing and cooling systems (Fournier, 2019). The platform has shown itself to be highly productive and full of useful ideas, which is proven by the fact that more than 60% of Unilever's research projects involve external collaboration (Fournier, 2019).

3.4. Tension #4: Calculability vs. quality

The fourth tendency of the rationalization process is the emphasis on quantity over quality (i.e., to prioritize calculability). As an element of the process of rationalization, calculability leads to a myopic understanding of progress and success as the idea of quality is reduced to quantity and availability.

The tendency to emphasize quantity over quality is a typical characteristic of contemporary consumer culture where, for example, the tenets of fast fashion are making the cycles of the fashion world ever shorter (e.g., Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017) and cheap furniture has turned refurbishing into a hobby. A consequence of this tendency is not only an increase in the commodities available to the consumer but also an increasingly transient environment where things seem to appear from nowhere and without context. The regained popularity of vinyl should be understood as partly predicated on the contextual aspects associated with vinyl consumption—mainly the buying of records from brick-and-mortar stores—as well as the so-called biography of used records (i.e., where

and when they were produced, which edition, and so forth). The so-called Slow Movement, which originally emerged as a reaction to fast-food restaurants, is another example of consumers' desire for context and transparency.

3.4.1. Contextualize your product

The growing popularity of production with an emphasis on tradition and heritage points to the importance of context and story in the offering of products and services that consumers find attractive. The recent increase in artisan alternatives for everyday commodities such as beer, tea, coffee, chocolate, and even salt, implies that knowledge of the context and process of the production of commodities can help consumers establish a more personal relationship with the commodities they consume. This, in turn, facilitates long-term commitment. As niche markets have become more profitable thanks to the internet, companies engaged in small-scale production may find that strategies focused on communicating the origin of and the story behind their products contribute to the perceived quality of the market offering. It also helps their customers feel an affinity toward their business.

3.4.2. Be transparent

The contemporary consumer's often critical and creative approach to consumption makes transparency increasingly important. The popularity of artisanal food, for example, is largely predicated on the willingness of artisanal businesses to disclose everything from their work philosophy to the actual process of production. This curiosity among consumers stems from environmental concerns as well as a need to understand the origins of these commodities to better relate to them. A great example of the benefits of a transparent-market approach is Patagonia, which provides transparency throughout its supply chain and encourages customers to point out CSR deficiencies via its Footprint Chronicles platform. Not only does this allow Patagonia to ensure accountability, but it also facilitates customer loyalty. Such a transparent approach to markets and consumers has been referred to as an *open strategy* (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007).

4. Staying in tune with the customer

How, then, should companies accommodate the craft mindset of the contemporary consumer? Whereas it is a long shot for most companies to align perfectly with the craft mindset, certain

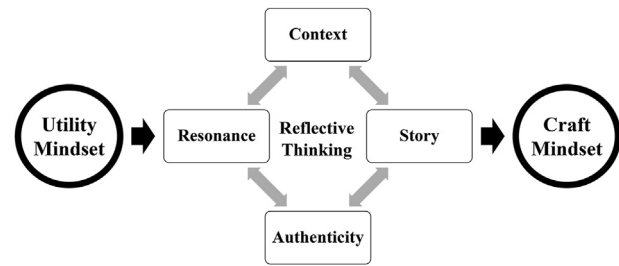
measures can go a long way. As we pointed out, the utility mindset tends to lead to a myopic understanding of the market due to its paradigmatic focus on cost efficiency and convenience that, in turn, distorts the company's understanding of its customers in a way that leads to one-dimensional and stagnant market offerings and, consequently, suboptimal customer alignment.

The reflective approach to markets and consumers conceptualized in this article remedies these issues by bringing into focus context, story, authenticity, and resonance as the cornerstones of a customer-oriented market strategy. In practice, this entails expanding the scope from questions on how to provide your customer with products and services for the lowest price possible and as effortlessly as possible to include questions addressing your customers' aspirations and sensibilities that motivate them to turn to your services in the first place.

Companies' preoccupation with cost efficiency and convenience can alienate consumers who feel disconnected from the context and origin of the products and services they consume and at odds with the purposes they are designed and assumed to serve. Whereas the pursuit of cost efficiency is and will undoubtedly remain an axiom of any sound market strategy, managers will have to learn how to balance it with their customers' demands for market offerings that resonate with the values and attitudes that ultimately guide them in their decision making. Accordingly, to better align with the craft mindset, companies should pay attention to the context of their production and how this is perceived by their customers. Because the contemporary consumer is increasingly interested in the origin of the products they consume and is in a better position to influence other's perceptions of companies and brands (e.g., [Fournier & Avery, 2011](#)), customer alignment is increasingly contingent upon the realities of this context and how it is disclosed to the consumer.

Consequently, as [Figure 2](#) illustrates, companies hoping to avoid myopic marketing should adopt reflective thinking that helps hone in on the contemporary consumer's worldview. The elements guiding the focal outlook of reflective thinking (i.e., context, story, authenticity, and resonance) are interconnected in such a way that they facilitate and support one another if properly attended to. Thus, authenticity is predicated on a context that is fully and candidly disclosed through a well-communicated story that resonates with the customer's values and sensibilities. This implies not only transparency, but—more importantly—a conscious effort to bring the context of production

Figure 2. Bridging the gap between the utility and craft mindsets with reflective thinking



and, by implication, the origin of the product closer to the customer's sphere of interest and influence. To achieve resonance, the story through which the company communicates its value proposition needs to have an aura of authenticity (i.e., correspond sufficiently well with the context). Thus, a story isolated from or misaligned with its context will inevitably be exposed as disingenuous and harm the perceived authenticity of the brand, resulting in dissonance. Next, we will analyze a few cases from the perspective provided by reflective thinking to show how it helps create customer insight that is better attuned to the contemporary consumer's values and attitudes.

4.1. Reflection in crisis

A good example of such misalignment is the Volkswagen crisis that hit the German car-manufacturing giant in 2015. The crisis stemmed from the revelation that Volkswagen had been systematically cheating on emissions tests by manipulating the software that supposedly discloses the emissions rate of individual cars to make them appear more environmentally friendly than they actually were ([Campbell, Rauwald, & Reiter, 2018](#)). The magnitude of the revelations was great enough to warrant speculation of the imminent collapse of the crown jewel of the German car industry. From the perspective developed above, Volkswagen's exaggerated preoccupation with driving costs down and profits up resulted in such a hopeless utility-oriented market approach that a company with a world-class brand and pedigree resorted to blatant deception of the overseeing authorities and, worst of all, its customers. The company's dogmatic utility orientation allowed it to disregard the precariousness of the contextual nightmare it was creating, one that, if exposed, would inevitably lead to an existential crisis. In retrospect, this seems to have been bound to happen and when it did, every

dimension that makes up the cornerstones of reflective thinking was affected: The *story* was exposed as suffering from serious *inauthenticity* because of its complete misalignment with the *context*, which, in turn, undermined *resonance* as values and sensibilities communicated by Volkswagen were shown to be nothing but idle talk.

Since then, rather miraculously, Volkswagen has been able to step away from the precipice and begin its long journey toward redemption. As its former CEO Matthias Müller stated: “The crisis was an unmistakable wake-up call—a warning that things couldn’t stay the way they were” (Campbell et al., 2018). In other words, the crisis forced Volkswagen to abandon its exaggerated utility orientation and reflect on not only its business but also its place in a world that is increasingly critical and unforgiving of profit-motivated dishonesty. Striving to have electric vehicles account for up to 25% of global sales by 2025 (Campbell et al., 2018), Volkswagen seems to be trying to reconfigure its context to develop an authentic story that resonates with its customers.

4.2. Electrical resonance

The question is, of course, whether such measures will be enough to help Volkswagen retain its place as the world’s top car company. If we consider the craft mindset postulated as emblematic of the contemporary consumer’s attitude toward consumption and production, reasons for questioning the sufficiency of Volkswagen’s efforts emerge (see also Ferràs-Hernández, Tarrats-Pons, & Arimany-Serrat, 2017).

As Joas, Nienhaus, & Diaz (2018) pointed out: “Customers demand real-time satisfaction, transparency, control, convenience, and uniqueness in both the experience and product.” When making a considerable investment like buying a car, the customer naturally wants to get as much out of not only the final product but also the experience of deciding what to buy. As the internet offers opportunities for consumers to educate themselves and compare different alternatives before even entering a car showroom, car manufacturers and retailers need to get together to make this transparency work for—and not against—them. Moreover, such an approach presents great opportunities for customer engagement that are in line with expectations emblematic of the craft mindset: “The point is to develop a more nuanced, customer-segmented approach that allows the consumer to connect and engage with the car company, the dealer, and the car—and still feel in control” (Joas et al., 2018).

Car manufacturer Tesla has managed to stay fresh and interesting over the years despite the criticism and doubt aimed at the organization. While traditional car companies have a difficult decade behind them, Tesla has been able to dictate how we think about the future of cars and what we expect from car manufacturers. By promoting values of sustainability and responsibility, and by being 100% committed to a customer-oriented strategy alignment, Tesla has been able to articulate their value propositions in a way that resonates with many potential customers, despite the many setbacks it has experienced on the way (Fell, 2016). By working toward making their customers feel part of a common cause rather than passive recipients of impersonal one-size-fits-all commodities, companies like Tesla can provide something that feels more authentic and less aloof than the average value proposition on offer. In other words, by implementing reflective thinking when assessing their market and customers, Tesla has been able to actively shape the context of their car manufacturing in a way that resonates with an increasing number of consumers. They have been able to communicate this to their potential customers openly and transparently, notwithstanding some embarrassingly unrealistic promises they have had to retract. Their *story* has, in other words, been sufficiently aligned with the *context* to afford the Tesla brand with an aura of *authenticity*, which, in turn, *resonates* with the contemporary consumer’s values and attitudes.

4.3. Like more than money in the bank

A McKinsey report on the future of banking (Deninzon, Malik, & Kapoor, 2019) makes some well-founded predictions concerning the growing importance of customer-centricity for banks. While automation has already changed how banks operate and the role of their employees, these changes come with some interesting opportunities. Instead of having to concentrate on the practical details of evaluating credit risks and deciding on mortgage approval, automation will allow operations staff to take their customers’ idiosyncratic needs and desires into consideration when developing customized products. Consequently, “employee roles will shift toward product development” (Deninzon et al., 2019). This presents banks with valuable opportunities to involve the customer in the process and to diversify and personalize their value propositions.

TD Bank has been successful in prioritizing the customer and emphasizing human interactions in an industry that is increasingly troubled by clinical

and impersonal customer experiences (Streeter, 2019). By building a marketing campaign around the slogan Unexpectedly Human, TD Bank seems to embody much of the contemporary consumer's craft mindset. Instead of indiscriminately investing in efficiency and convenience, TD Bank's approach utilizes the opportunities brought by digitalization in a customer-oriented fashion by allowing the customer to interact with the bank's employees based on customer needs. Thus, TD Bank's strategy seems inspired by a reflective approach that validates the contemporary consumer's wish for retaining a degree of human contact when automation seems to reduce banking services to its mere essentials (i.e., standardized transactions and rigid automated customer service). In other words, the edge for TD Bank is investing in a humanized context in an increasingly automated world, which it communicates through its "unexpectedly human" story. This, in turn, affords its brand authenticity, which causes resonance with an increasingly alienated customer base looking for something beyond mere utility.

5. Moving forward with a craft mindset

Notwithstanding the disruptive and, at times, negative impact of digitalization and rationalization on many areas of everyday life, these developments are ongoing and very real. Therefore, the question is not how to counteract these processes, but rather how to reign them in and make them work to the benefit of the customer. The perspective developed in this article helps us better understand where to begin and what to look for. As the analysis of the revived popularity of vinyl records shows, this market development is not solely about vinyl records but concerns the emergence of a new mindset among consumers catalyzed by the utility mindset typically underlying companies' understanding of markets and consumers. With the help of reflective thinking, companies will be better able to gain customer insight and to find resilience in times of disruption. While reflective thinking is helpful as companies aim to innovate to find growth, it will also offer significant opportunities for companies to find resilience in times of disruption of a major magnitude such as a global pandemic. Such thinking may very well be even more called for when many consumers adhered to a more meaningful and deliberate approach to life and consumption. For the future, we recommend exploring the opportunities of a practice approach focused on how consumers' craft mindset

translates into novel and creative consumption patterns and how it affects market formation.

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