UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

TOWARD A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PERSPECTIVE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Larissa Becker

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ABSTRACT

Customer experience has become a key priority in marketing research and practice. Researchers largely recognize that the customer experience emerges as responses to stimuli along a customer journey. Extant research often anchors the customer journey to an offering, losing sight of a customer's goals. This firm-centric perspective hampers the understanding of customer experience, since in practice customers actively integrate resources from multiple firms, organizations, and social actors in pursuit of their goals. The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Such a perspective focuses on customers' goals and seeks to understand customer experience as it emerges in a customer's lifeworld.

This dissertation comprises three articles. Article I examines the extant customer experience research to develop a theoretical foundation for the customer-centric perspective. Based on a systematic literature review of 136 articles, the study identifies eight literature fields in customer experience research: services marketing, consumer research, retailing, service-dominant logic, service design, online marketing, branding, and experiential marketing. Applying a metatheoretical analysis, the study divides extant literature into two research traditions that see customer experience as either responses to (1) managerial stimuli or (2) consumption processes. Through integrating compatible elements between these two research traditions, the paper develops four fundamental premises that define what customer experience is, the stimuli that affect it, its key contingencies, and the role of firms and organizations in its management.

Article II offers suggestions on how customer experience can be empirically studied through a customer-centric perspective. Using selected literature, the study identifies the methodological requirements for the study of customer experience, namely: first-hand description of experience, description of relevant actors and institutions in a customer's ecosystem, and capturing the processual nature of the journey. The article also offers specific guidelines for three data collection methods that fulfill those methodological requirements: phenomenological interviews, event-based approaches, and diary method.

Article III conceptualizes the customer journey through a goal-oriented view to generate a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. A hermeneutic-

phenomenological field study is conducted to examine recovering alcoholics' journey toward a sober life. The findings reveal three essential journey processes: recognizing the problem and setting the goals, changing habits and behaviors, and overcoming obstacles and temptations. Interpreting the findings with the self-regulation model of behavior, the study develops a goal-oriented view of customer journey, depicted as a hierarchical structure with three levels: consumer journey, customer journey, and touchpoints. The findings show the role of customer experience as a driver of behavior along this journey.

This dissertation creates new knowledge of the concept of customer experience in marketing. It integrates extant literature, thus solving theoretical conflicts in this fragmented research area; it provides methodological insights on the empirical inquiry of customer experience, specifying its requirements; and it puts forward a goal-oriented conceptualization of the customer journey that supports the development of a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. The study also produces important implications for marketing practitioners and public actors who wish to benefit from the customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

KEYWORDS: Customer experience, customer journey, customer-centricity, consumer experience, consumer journey, goal, self-regulation model.

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Asiakaskokemuksesta on tullut keskeinen prioriteetti niin markkinoinnin tutkimuksessa kuin käytännöissä. Nykytutkimuksen näkemys on, että asiakaskokemus syntyy vasteena erilaisille asiakaspolun ärsykkeille. Asiakaskokemustutkimuksessa asiakaspolku kiinnitetään tyypillisesti tuotteisiin, jolloin käsitys asiakkaan varsinaisista tavoitteista hämärtyy. Tämä yrityskeskeinen näkökulma rajoittaa ymmärrystä asiakaskokemuksen muodostumisesta, sillä käytännössä asiakkaat ovat tekemisissä erilaisten yritysten, organisaatioiden ja sosiaalisten toimijoiden kanssa pyrkiessään kohti tavoitteitansa. Tämän väitöstutkimuksen tarkoituksena onkin kehittää asiakaskeskeinen näkökulma asiakaskokemukseen. Tutkimuksessa tavoitellaan asiakaskokemuksen ymmärtämistä asiakkaiden maailmasta käsin asettamalla keskiöön ne prosessit, joiden kautta asiakkaat pyrkivät saavuttamaan omat tavoitteensa.

Tutkimus koostuu kolmesta artikkelista. Artikkeli I integroi asiakaskokemusta käsittelevän kirjallisuuden antia asiakaskeskeisen näkökulman muodostamiseksi. Systemaattisen, 136 artikkelia kattavan kirjallisuuskatsauksen pohjalta tunnistettiin kahdeksan tutkimuskenttää: palvelujen markkinointi, kuluttajatutkimus, vähittäiskauppa, palvelukeskeinen logiikka, palvelumuotoilu, online-markkinointi, brändäys ja kokemusperäinen markkinointi. Metateoreettisen analyysin avulla hajanainen kirjallisuus jaettiin kahteen tutkimustraditioon, joista toinen tarkastelee asiakaskokemusta vasteena yrityksen tuottamiin ärsykkeisiin ja toinen vasteena kulutuskokemukseen. Artikkelissa kehitettiin neljä premissiä, jotka luovat yhteisen pohjan asiakaskokemuksen tutkimukselle. Premissit määrittelevät asiakaskokemuksen käsitteen, kokemukseen vaikuttavat ärsykkeet, kokemuksen kontingenssitekijät sekä yritysten ja organisaatioiden roolin kokemusten johtamisessa.

Artikkeli II tuottaa suosituksia asiakaskokemuksen empiiriseen tutkimiseen asiakaskeskeisen näkökulman kautta. Valikoivaa kirjallisuuskatsausta käyttäen tutkimus tunnistaa metodologisia vaatimuksia asiakaskokemuksen tutkimiselle. Metodien tulee taltioida asiakkaan ensikäden kokemukset, asiakkaan ekosysteemissä olevat keskeiset toimijat ja instituutiot sekä asiakaspolun prosessimainen luonne. Artikkeli tarjoaa lisäksi ohjeita kolmen alihyödynnetyn tiedonkeruumenetelmän – fenomenologisen haastattelun, tapahtuma-pohjaisten metodien ja päiväkirjamenetelmän – asianmukaiseen soveltamiseen.

Artikkeli III kuvaa asiakaspolun käsitteen tavoitelähtöisen näkökulman kautta tuottaakseen aidosti asiakaskeskeisen jäsennyksen asiakaskokemuksesta. Tutkimus toteutettiin fenomenologis-hermeneuttisena kenttätutkimuksena, jossa tarkasteltiin toipuvien alkoholistien polkua kohti päihteetöntä elämää. Empiirisen aineiston pohjalta voitiin identifioida kolme keskeistä prosessia tällä matkalla: ongelman tunnistaminen ja tavoitteiden asettaminen, tapojen ja käyttäytymisen muuttaminen sekä esteiden ja houkutusten voittaminen. Empiirisiä havaintoja tulkittiin käyttäytymisen itsesäätelymallin kautta. Tuloksena syntyi tavoitelähtöinen jäsennys asiakaspolun käsitteestä, jossa polku kuvataan kolmesta tasosta – kuluttajapolusta, asiakaspolusta ja kosketuspisteistä – muodostuvana rakenteena. Tulokset tuovat esille asiakaskokemuksen tärkeän roolin käyttäytymisen ajurina.

Väitöstutkimus luo uutta tietoa asiakaskokemuksen käsitteestä markkinoinnin tieteenalalla. Tutkimus integroi olemassa olevaa hajanaista kirjallisuutta ratkoen tutkimuskenttien välisiä ristiriitaisia näkemyksiä, tarjoaa uutta metodologista näkemystä tunnistamalla asiakaskokemuksen käsitteen empiiriselle tutkimukselle asettamia vaatimuksia ja esittää tavoitelähtöisen käsitteellistyksen asiakaspolusta, joka tukee asiakaskokemuksen asiakaskeskeistä tarkastelua. Tutkimus tuottaa tärkeitä, asiakaskeskeisen lähestymistavan toimeenpanoon liittyviä johtopäätöksiä markkinoinnin ammattilaisille ja julkissektorin toimijoille.

ASIASANAT: Asiakaskokemus, asiakaspolku, asiakaskeskeisyys, kuluttajakokemus, kuluttajapolku, tavoite, itsesäätelymalli.

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Whenever I pick up a dissertation, the first thing I read are the acknowledgments. As researchers, we strive to keep an impersonal tone in our texts where it is difficult to properly acknowledge the diverse types of contributions during a PhD journey. In the acknowledgments, however, one can see the person beyond the researcher and the community beyond the collaborators. While in the rest of this dissertation you can read a text written by Becker, here it's Larissa speaking.

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Aino, just as Elina, you have your mark all over this dissertation and me. Thank you for always going above and beyond when commenting on my articles and dissertation. Your thoughtful comments encouraged me to think more deeply about the topics of my dissertation and philosophical issues. With your passion for good-quality research, you are a role model. I remember the first conference I attended after coming to Finland (NoRD), where you were passionately defending good quality research. I felt so proud and thought to myself: "that's my supervisor!" Beyond that, you have always made me so comfortable with your caring and humble ways. Chatting with you over non-planned Hesburger lunch or in the corridors have always guaranteed loud laughs. I could not ask for better supervisors!

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May 2020
Larissa

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I Becker, L. & Jaakkola, E. (2020). Customer experience: Fundamental premises and implications for research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, doi:10.1007/s11747-019-00718-x.

II Becker, L. (2018a). Methodological proposals for the study of consumer experience. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *21*(4), 465-490, https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-01-2017-0036.

III Becker, L., Jaakkola, E., & Halinen, A. Toward a goal-oriented view of customer journeys. Manuscript in review in the *Journal of Service Management*.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and motivation

Customer experience has become one of the central foci in marketing literature and practice. Firms compete now not only on products or services but also on delivering superior customer experiences throughout the entire customer journey (Duncan et al. 2016; Rawson et al. 2013). Customer experience is thus considered a source of competitive advantage (e.g., Edelman & Singer 2015; Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Rawson et al. 2013), as it can lead to value (e.g., Helkkula & Kelleher 2010), satisfaction (e.g., Klaus & Maklan 2012), and loyalty (e.g., Lemke et al. 2011). For this reason, more than 90% of executives consider that improving customer experience is a managerial priority and critical to a firm's success (Oracle 2013). Firms are creating positions dedicated to managing customer experience (e.g., chief experience officer) (e.g., Edelman & Singer 2015) at the same time that specialized consultancy firms and services dedicated to helping other firms deliver superior experiences are emerging in the market (e.g., "COPC" n.d.; "Welcome to Oracle Customer Experience" n.d.). Therefore, understanding customer experience is extremely important for firms and organizations seeking to better serve their customers.

Understanding customer experience—defined as a customer's cognitive, affective, sensorial, physical, and social responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli (Becker & Jaakkola 2020; Lemon & Verhoef 2016)—is challenging because many elements beyond interactions with a single firm affect it. Customers actively integrate resources from multiple firms, organizations, and social actors in pursuit of their goals (Hamilton & Price 2019; Lipkin 2016; Patrício et al. 2011; Tax et al. 2013). Furthermore, studies recognize that there are many elements in a customer's context that affect the customer experience (Helkkula & Kelleher 2010; Helkkula et al. 2012; Jaakkola et al. 2015). These include customers' activities, partner- and customer-owned touchpoints, social touchpoints, and even institutions and institutional arrangements that coordinate interactions between multiple actors (e.g., Akaka et al. 2015; Heinonen et al. 2010; Jaakkola et al. 2015; Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Tax et al. 2013). Therefore, from a customer's perspective, the customer experience is influenced by more than interactions with a single firm: rather, it is influenced by a multiplicity of actors and contextual factors.

Despite the practical relevance of customer experience and increasing research efforts in this field, the current literature provides limited understanding of the customer experience, because it tends to overlook these influent elements outside the firm's control. Researchers largely recognize that the customer experience emerges as responses to stimuli that reside in touchpoints throughout a customer journey—the process customers go through before, during, and after the purchase or the service encounter, encompassing direct and indirect interactions with a firm or offering (i.e., touchpoints) (Homburg et al. 2015; Lemke et al. 2011; Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Most of the customer experience research focuses on the analytical level of the customer journey with a single firm to create understanding of customer experience (Patrício et al. 2011). For example, researchers have provided knowledge on how to measure customer experience with a brand (e.g., Brakus et al. 2009), the managerial stimuli that affects it (e.g., Verhoef et al. 2009), its effects for firms (e.g., satisfaction) (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou 2013), and how to manage it (e.g., Homburg et al. 2015). However, with few exceptions (e.g., Baron & Harris 2010; Tax et al. 2013; Teixeira et al. 2012), studies that present a more holistic view of the contextual elements and the complex networks of actors that affect customer experience are missing. It follows that studies focusing only on the customer journey level provide a limited understanding of the customer experience.

This dissertation argues that a truly customer-centric perspective can increase understanding of customer experience. Marketing scholars have been advocating a customer-centric approach since Levitt's (1960) *Marketing Myopia*. Levitt (1960) suggested that the lack of a strong customer orientation was why many businesses failed. Over the years, a customer-centric approach has been discussed in the literature by proposing that firms look at what jobs customers need to do (Christensen et al. 2005), how offerings are integrated into customers' processes (Heinonen et al. 2010; Grönroos & Gummeros 2014), and how customers integrate resources to co-create value (Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2008; 2016). These perspectives share the idea that a truly customer-centric perspective changes the focus from the firm and places it on the customer. A customer-centric perspective thus requires that one understand the customer experience as it emerges in a customer's lifeworld instead of solely focusing on responses and reactions to interactions with a single firm.

A customer-centric perspective of customer experience avoids a myopic focus that loses sight of what the customer wants to achieve when engaging in a customer journey. Instead, it sheds light on the contextual elements and the multiplicity of actors that affect the customer experience. By considering what customers want to achieve in their lifeworlds as a departure point to study customer experience, one can identify multiple actors that affect the customer experience and better understand how firms' offerings fit into a customer's overall context, how distinct customer journeys are connected, and what other elements outside the firm's direct control affect a customer's overall experience. Such a holistic and customer-centric picture can increase the understanding of how customer experience emerges in a scenario with multiple actors and contextual elements, offering firms opportunities for innovation (Patrício et al. 2011), for developing compelling solutions (Epp & Price 2011), and for facilitating value creation (Grönroos & Ravald 2011; Hamilton & Price 2019; Heinonen et al. 2010).

Previous studies state that they offer a customer-centric perspective of the customer experience (e.g., Baron & Harris 2010), yet most of them do not focus on the concept of customer experience as defined in this dissertation. In other words, they are very valuable for identifying multiple actors who customers interact with, but they do not focus on understanding the affective, cognitive, sensorial, social, and physical responses and reactions to these interactions (e.g., Patrício et al. 2011; Teixeira et al. 2011). Other studies propose a more customer-centric view of customer experience but do not incorporate the concept of customer journey or customer experience as here defined (e.g., Akaka et al. 2015; Heinonen et al. 2010). They present ideas somewhat detached from the previous customer experience literature and, thus, contribute to the fragmentation of this conceptual domain. Others broaden the scope of stimuli to which customers respond beyond a single firm, but these stimuli are still seen in relation to the purchase process (e.g., Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Overall, although there are studies that are valuable for increasing our understanding of customer experience, the development of a truly customer-centric perspective of customer experience—one that connects with previous literature, offers guidelines for its empirical study, and conceptualizes the customer journey—is missing (see Table 1).

Table 1. Studies that advance a customer-centric perspective of customer experience

Study	Goal	Main contributions	How the study differs from this dissertation?
Baron and Harris (2010)	To suggest a framework for taking a consumer-centric perspective on experiences and interactions, especially customer-to-customer (C2C).	The study provides a method to identify customer interactions with multiple actors/ enablers instead of isolated interactions with a focal firm in an experience domain—a field of knowledge, activity, and discourse—defined by the customer.	• Use of "experience" as a customer's gap year process (empirical context), not as responses and reactions to some stimuli. • Focus on value instead of customer experience. • The study does not incorporate the concept of customer journey.
Heinonen et al. (2010)	To introduce customer-dominant logic as a customer-based approach to service.	The study positions a customer, rather than the firm, at the center of a system and focuses on what customers are doing when pursuing their goals and how firms can support customer's processes. It sees customer experience as orchestrated by customers and emerging from their own activities.	• Customer experience is not defined as responses and reactions to some stimuli. • Customer experience is not the focus of the study; therefore, no framework of customer experience is provided. • The study does not incorporate the concept of customer journey.
Patrício et al. (2011)	To present multilevel service design as a method to design complex service systems.	The study presents three levels for understanding customer experience, including the value constellation experience, which is co-created through interactions with multiple service organizations that enable a customer's activities. It highlights the embeddedness of customer journeys into this broader context.	• Focus on service design for the customer experience. • Focus on interactions with firms, not addressing other actors (e.g., social actors). • The study does not explicitly address the cognitive, affective, sensorial, social, and behavioral responses to stimuli.
Teixeira et al. (2012)	To present customer experience modeling as a method to capture the rich and complex elements that influence the customer experience.	The study considers the embeddedness of a firm's offering into a customer's value constellation. It also broadens the customer experience context to include technology-enabled systems, artifacts, and multiple actors (beyond service providers).	• The study does not explicitly address the cognitive, affective, sensorial, social, and behavioral responses to stimuli.

Table 1. Studies that advance a customer-centric perspective of customer experience (cont.)

Study	Goal	Main contributions	How the study differs from this dissertation?
Tax et al. (2013)	To introduce the service delivery network logic to understand the customer experience.	The study acknowledges the embeddedness of interactions with a single firm into the service delivery network, defined as the organizations responsible for the provision of an overall and connected service from a customer's perspective. In this logic, the customer journey encompasses a network of firms.	• The study focuses on an overall and connected service from a customer's perspective, not necessarily on a customer's lifeworld. • Focus on interactions with firms, not addressing other actors (e.g., customer-to-customer interactions). • The customer journey is still grounded on the service or offering. • The study does not address the cognitive, affective, sensorial, social, and behavioral responses to stimuli.
Akaka et al. (2015)	To integrate consumer culture theory and service-dominant logic to gain deeper insights into the context of experience.	The study extends the context of the experience to include (1) signs systems and service ecosystems (including multiple actors), (2) multiplicity of structure and institutions; (3) value-in-cultural-context, and (4) co-construction of context. It recognizes that experiences are evaluated in this broader context.	• The study does not address the cognitive, affective, sensorial, social, and behavioral responses to stimuli. • The study does not incorporate the concept of customer journey.
Lemon and Verhoef (2016)	To bring together research on customer experience, identifying its roots and gaps.	The study recognizes that the customer journey encompasses firm-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external touchpoints. Broader externalities also influence the customer experience.	• The customer journey is grounded on the purchase process. • Multiple actors and contextual factors are seen in relation to the purchase process and focal firm.
Hamilton and Price (2019)	To introduce the special issue on consumer journeys.	The study recognizes that the customer journey is embedded into consumer journeys toward higher-order goals, which can involve multiple firms, other customers, events, and activities.	• The editorial focuses on journeys, not on customer experience per se. • Because it is an editorial, it does not fully conceptualize the ideas proposed.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

Given this scenario, the aim of this dissertation is more than just to fulfill a gap in the customer experience literature; rather, it is to broaden the understanding of customer experience through the development of a customer-centric perspective. The purpose of this dissertation is:

To develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

Three research questions (RQ) must be answered to achieve this goal. The first step to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience is identifying how extant literature can be used as a conceptual basis for developing this perspective. The customer experience literature in marketing has been growing exponentially since Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) publication about the experiential aspects of consumption. However, this increased number of studies led to a scenario of theoretical fragmentation with distinct definitions, characterizations, and analytical levels of customer experience across research streams within marketing literature (Chaney et al. 2018; Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Such fragmentation hampers the development of a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. For example, how can a customer-centric perspective of customer experience be developed when there is no clear definition of customer experience? Therefore, an integration of this literature is the first step needed to develop the customer-centric perspective.

The different research streams that address customer experience in marketing literature hold different assumptions (Helkkula 2011; Jaakkola et al. 2015), making this integration challenging. In such cases, integrating the literature involves a metatheoretical approach that can accommodate perspectives that were generated based on different assumptions (Gioia & Pitre 1990). An interesting approach for developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience is to compare the nature of the phenomena across research streams to analyze what elements can be combined (cf. Okhuysen & Bonardi 2011). The result is the development of a common perspective on the nature of the phenomena of customer experience that reconciles contradictions in the extant literature and is applicable across research traditions that hold different metatheoretical assumptions.

So far, the reviews of the customer experience literature did not focus on integrating and reconciling extant literature but rather focused on reviewing certain aspects of this concept. For instance, Helkkula (2011) identified three characterizations of customer experience in the literature—phenomenological, process-based, and outcome-based. Lipkin (2016) identified three theoretical perspectives that explain the formation of customer experience—stimulus-, interactions-, and sense-making-based—and three contextual lenses that set its boundaries—dyadic, service ecosystem, and customer ecosystem. Kranzbühler et al. (2018) classified the customer experience literature into two levels—static and dynamic—and into two theoretical perspectives—consumer and organizational. In sum, no effort has been made to integrate the customer experience literature considering the nature of the phenomena addressed in different research streams. Therefore, this dissertation asks:

RQ1: How can the current customer experience literature be integrated to form a customer-centric perspective of customer experience?

A customer-centric perspective of customer experience departs from what customers want to achieve in their lifeworlds and illuminates the elements beyond interactions with a single firm that affect the customer experience, such as customer-owned touchpoints, social touchpoints, multiple actors, and institutions and institutional arrangements (e.g., Akaka et al. 2015; Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Therefore, the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective should be able to capture how customers experience these elements in their lifeworld.

Capturing how customer experience emerges from these elements involves some methodological requirements. Methods need to be able to capture these elements from the customers' perspectives, as well as their thoughts, feelings, sensations, and other types of responses. Additionally, methods should be open enough to let the customers describe their context in enough detail so these elements emerge. Therefore, a more detailed examination of the methodological requirements involved in empirically investigating customer experience through a customer-centric perspective would guide researchers in selecting methods and collecting and analyzing data.

Investigating customer experience through a customer-centric perspective then requires methods that fulfill these requirements. Surveys, which are the most common data collection method in customer experience research, are often structured in a way that completely exclude these elements, because they restrict statements to a customer's experiences with a single firm. Qualitative methods are more appropriate to capturing a customer's lifeworld, but they are also often restricted to a firm-centric perspective in the current customer experience literature. Therefore, the identification of specific data collection methods and the provision of guidelines to meet the methodological requirements involved in empirically studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective would advance this perspective.

However, the current customer experience research lacks specific guidelines for the study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. A few studies offer some methodological suggestions that might be appropriate to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (e.g., Baron & Harris 2010; Thompson et al. 1989), but no study has developed tailored guidelines for data collection methods that tackle the methodological requirements involved in such a study. Some studies provide methods to understand the customer experience beyond the customer journey (e.g., Baron & Harris 2010; Patrício et al. 2011; Teixeira et al. 2012), but they do not provide specific and tailored guidelines for data collection that can guide future empirical research. Therefore, it is relevant to ask:

RQ2: How can customer experience be empirically studied through a customer-centric perspective?

Finally, research largely recognizes that customer experience is defined as responses and reactions to stimuli that reside in touchpoints throughout the customer journey (e.g., Følstad & Kvale 2018; Kuehl et al. 2019; Lemon & Verhoef 2016). Therefore, the customer journey can be seen as an important determinant of customer experience; thus, it is essential to understand it (Følstad & Kvale 2018). The customer journey has traditionally been conceptualized as a series of firm-owned touchpoints, referring to direct and indirect interactions with a single firm (e.g., Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Zomerdijk & Voss 2010), which is the level that the customer experience literature has focused on (Patrício et al. 2011). This traditional conceptualization of the customer journey, thus, does not highlight its relationship with other elements in a customer's context or with other customer journeys. A conceptualization of the customer journey that supports a customer-centric perspective of customer experience should highlight its embeddedness into a customer's lifeworld.

Some studies are moving toward a customer-centric conceptualization of the customer journey, even though they are not quite there yet. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) have recently expanded the concept of customer journey to include touchpoints outside the firm's control, but the focus of the journey is still on the firm and on how these other touchpoints relate to it. In other words, the customer journey is still conceptualized through a firm-centric perspective. Other authors present a somewhat less firm-centric definition of customer journey that includes interactions with other firms (Halvorsrud et al. 2016) and the customer interactions to achieve a goal (Edelman & Singer 2015), although not fully conceptualizing it. Despite great variation as to how a customer journey is addressed—from single touchpoints to touchpoints with multiple firms—a conceptualization of the customer journey that highlights its embeddedness into a customer's lifeworld is missing. Such a renewed conceptualization is needed to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Therefore, this dissertation asks:

RQ3: How can the customer journey be conceptualized to generate a customer-centric perspective of customer experience?

This dissertation consists of a compilation of three articles. Table 2 presents the articles and their role in answering the research questions of this dissertation.

Table 2. Role of articles to answering the research questions

Article	Title	Type of research	Role of articles to answering the research questions
I	Customer experience: Fundamental premises and implications for research	Systematic literature review and metatheoretical analysis	• The article integrates the literature to develop fundamental premises of customer experience (RQ1) • The premises generate methodological implications for the study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (RQ2) • The premises form the basis for a conceptualization of the customer journey through a customer-centric perspective (RQ3)
II	Methodological proposals for the study of consumer experience	Selective literature review	• The article identifies three methodological requirements for the study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (RQ2) • The article offers specific guidelines on three data collection methods that fulfill these requirements (RQ2)
III	Toward a goal-oriented view of customer journeys	Hermeneutic-phenomenological field study	• The article applies two data collection methods that fulfill the requirements to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (RQ2) • The article develops a customer-centric conceptualization of the customer journey that focuses on the goals customers have in their lifeworlds (RQ3)

1.3 Positioning and research approach

This dissertation aims to contribute to the customer experience literature by developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. The main literature on which this dissertation is based is the customer experience literature. Considering the fragmentation of this conceptual domain (Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Lemon & Verhoef 2016; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2015b), this dissertation first employed a systematic literature review to identify the literature fields that study customer experience in marketing and then a metatheoretical analysis to integrate extant literature, resulting in the development of fundamental premises of customer experience. Therefore, the knowledge basis of customer experience used in this dissertation follows a rigorous and systematic review of the customer experience in the marketing literature.

How the customer-centric perspective is interpreted in this dissertation was inspired by more specific literature fields within the customer experience literature, namely: service-dominant (S-D) logic, consumer research, and service design. S-D logic focuses on customers' processes and activities, as well as on the multiple actors that are part of their ecosystem. S-D logic also focuses on experiences embedded in customers' contexts connected to value-in-use (e.g., Akaka et al. 2015; Baron & Harris 2010). Consumer research focuses on the consumption process of diverse types of services or products that do not necessarily involve interactions with a firm (e.g., eating dinner at home) (e.g., Carú & Cova 2003). Therefore, it presents a less firm-centric perspective of how customer experience emerges in a customer's lifeworld. More recent research focuses on the journey customers undergo to achieve their goals and how customers use products and services in this process (Hamilton & Price 2019). Finally, recent studies in service design also focus on the embeddedness of offerings in the customers' contexts (e.g., Patrício et al. 2011; Teixeira et al. 2012). In this dissertation, developing a customer-centric perspective means more than just focusing on a single firm through a customer's perspective. A truly customer-centric perspective starts with what customers are doing in their lives and how then they seek resources in their lifeworld to support these processes and achieve their goals.

After identifying the conceptual bases for developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience, this dissertation identified the methodological requirements to study it by focusing on the specific literature fields previously mentioned. This dissertation drew on phenomenological research (e.g., Thompson et al. 1989), S-D logic (e.g., Vargo & Lusch 2016), and process research (e.g., Halinen et al. 2013) to describe the methodological requirements. The philosophical assumptions of phenomenology were followed to provide guidelines for the three methods presented (e.g., Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016; Mitchell & Cody 1993; Thompson et al. 1989). Additionally, specific literature about the data collection methods was sought within and outside the marketing literature (e.g., Bevan 2014; Bolger et al. 2003; Carú & Cova 2008; Halinen et al. 2013; Thompson et al. 1989). Guidelines were then adapted to fit the methodological requirements involved in developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

This dissertation proposes that one way to generate a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience is through thinking about the goals customers want to achieve in their lifeworld, here denominated as higher-order goals. This reasoning is compatible with research that suggests that the focus of customer experience research should not be on specific touchpoints but on the pattern of activities customers undergo to achieve a goal (Heinonen et al. 2010; Heinonen & Strandvik 2015). Hamilton and Price (2019) also emphasized that customer journeys are directed at more concrete goals (e.g., getting a medication) and are subordinate to consumer journeys, which are directed at more abstract goals, higher-order goals (e.g., getting healthy).

Using this rationale, this dissertation followed the methodological requirements previously identified and employed the data collection methods suggested to empirically investigate the recovering alcoholics' transformative journey toward a sober life (i.e., a journey toward a higher-order goal). This context was chosen for three reasons: (1) this journey represents an extreme case that facilitates conceptual development (e.g., Pratt et al. 2006); (2) this journey is compatible with the consumer journey, a concept that breaks free from a firm-centric perspective and involves customer journeys with multiple firms and organizations (Hamilton & Price 2019), and (3) this context has societal importance, given the negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption for the alcoholic, surrounding individuals, and society in general.

This dissertation empirically investigates the journey toward a sober life to provide a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Three clarifications about the empirical context are important to guide the reader. First, this journey is conceptualized as a consumer journey (cf. Hamilton & Price 2019), which in itself contains several customer journeys with different market and organizational actors. One can identify the multiple actors customers interact with when pursuing their goals by studying this broader consumer journey. Therefore, this dissertation does not depart from a single, focal firm or organization to study customer experience, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) or a clinic. Rather, it departs from the journey toward a higher-order goal, which enables the identification of these multiple actors that are part of this journey. Second, this dissertation uses the term customer in a broad way to refer to client, member, user, citizen, and consumer (cf. Heinonen & Strandvik 2018). Therefore, recovering alcoholics can undergo customer journeys with A.A., health clinics, hospitals, and other market and organizational actors. Third, it follows that the object of the customer experience is the stimulus the customer encounters during the consumer journey when interacting with these market and public actors. Nonetheless, this dissertation also acknowledges that experiences can emerge in response to diverse stimuli in the consumer journey (e.g., recovering alcoholics can respond affectively to social actors).

After empirically studying the recovering alcoholics' journey toward a sober life, the results of the phenomenological study, obtained inductively, were interpreted in light of the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998) to create a goal-oriented view of customer journeys. Therefore, the self-regulation model of behavior is a theoretical tool that helps to conceptualize the customer journey through a customer-centric perspective, because it describes how individuals behave when pursuing their goals, which are organized hierarchically. Consequently, it helps to understand how customer journeys toward lower-order goals (e.g., getting medical treatment) are embedded into journeys toward higher-order goals (e.g., a sober life). Figure 1 graphically presents the positioning of this dissertation and indicates the role of the distinct literature used.

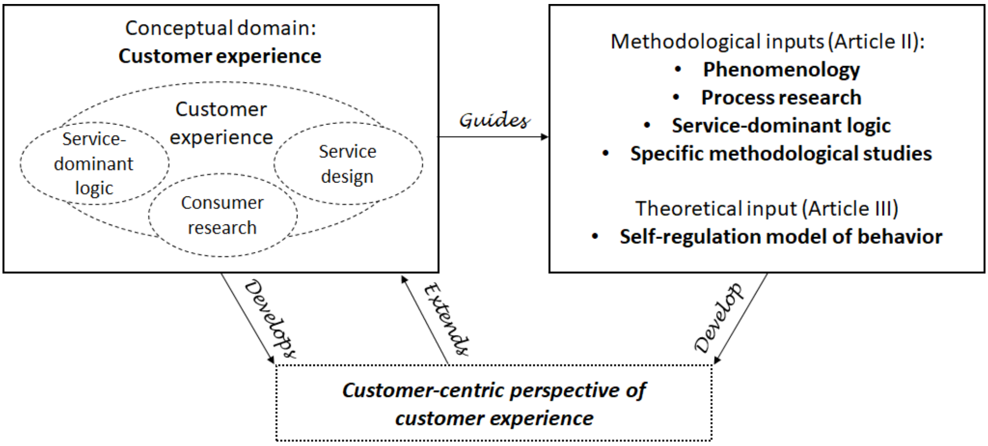

Figure 1. The role of the distinct literature in the dissertation

1.4 Outline of the dissertation

Following the introduction (chapter 1), chapter 2 presents the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this dissertation. Section 2.1 focuses on the literature on customer experience. Section 2.2 focuses on the literature on goals, in general, and on the self-regulation model of behavior, specifically, as this literature serves as a theoretical tool that help in the development of the customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

Chapter 3 presents the rationale for and the methodological choices for answering the research questions. Three methods are presented in detail: (1) systematic literature review, (2) metatheoretical analysis, and (3) hermeneutic-phenomenological field study.

Chapter 4 presents a summary of the findings of the three articles that are part of this dissertation. Article I reviews and integrates the customer experience literature in marketing, providing fundamental premises that can be used in the development of a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Following this literature, Article II derives methodological requirements for the study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective and presents guidelines for data collection methods to empirically study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. Using these data collection methods to empirically study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective, Article III presents a goal-oriented view of customer journeys.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings that answers the research questions. Then, it presents the theoretical contributions to the customer experience literature, a research agenda, followed by the implications to practice and society. Finally, the chapter presents an evaluation of the study. Figure 2 presents the dissertation's outline.

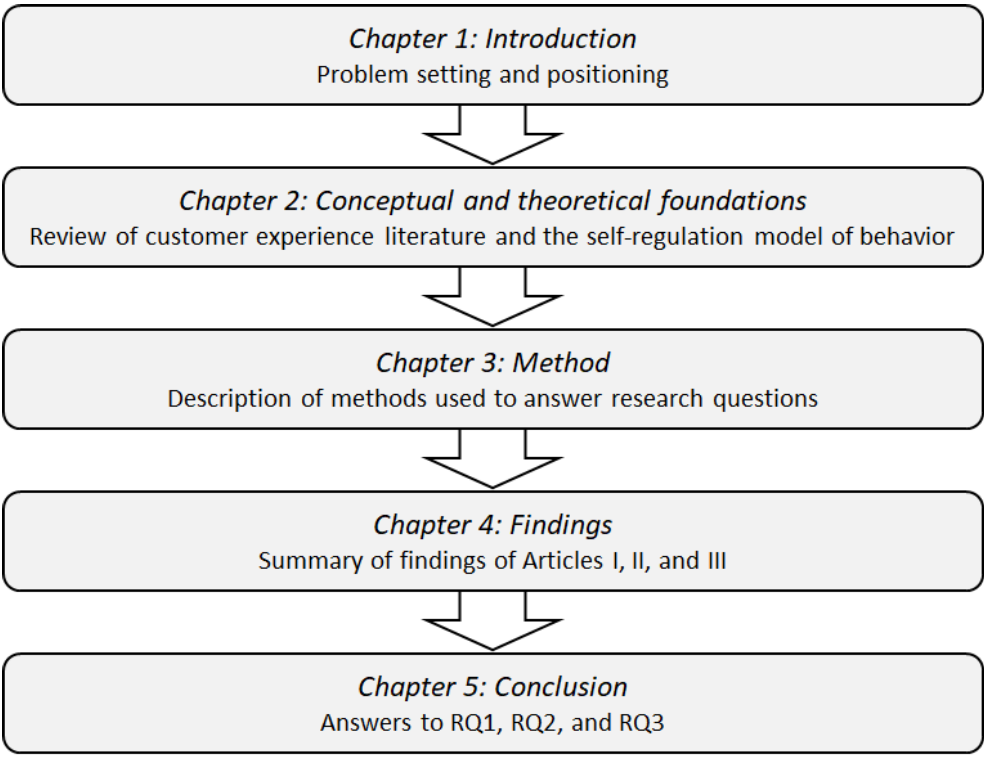

Figure 2. Outline of the dissertation

2 Conceptual and theoretical foundations

2.1 Customer experience

This section reviews the literature on customer experience. Section 2.1.1 presents a brief review of the evolution of the customer experience literature. Section 2.1.2 defines customer experience and describes how it differs from related concepts. Section 2.1.3 defines customer journey and explores its relationship with customer experience. Section 2.1.4 describes the developments in the customer experience literature toward a customer-centric perspective. Section 2.1.5 then presents the methods currently used in the customer experience literature.

2.1.1 Overview of the customer experience literature

The experiential aspects of consumption have received increasing attention in the literature since Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) publication questioning the hegemony of information processing in consumer behavior. The authors argued that traditional research in consumer behavior failed to incorporate experiential aspects of consumption, such as fantasies, fun, and feelings. The experiential view then starts considering "consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meanings, hedonic response, and esthetic criteria" (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982, 132). Studies about these experiential aspects followed this publication, focusing on hedonic and extraordinary experiences (e.g., Arnould & Price 1993) and customers' affective responses (e.g., Addis & Holbrook 2001).

Soon after the development of the literature on the experiential aspects of consumption, the service literature was also introducing the concept of service experience, albeit with a different meaning. Service experience was considered the perception or assessment of the service encounter in this view (e.g., Grove & Fisk 1992; 1997). It was common that these studies did not provide a clear definition of experience and used satisfaction or perceived quality as synonyms (e.g., Grove & Fisk 1997).

Almost parallel to the development of the literature on service experience, Pine and Gilmore (1998) published a more managerially oriented article where they introduced the idea of customer experience as an offering. In their view, staging an experience through themes, cues, and senses is a way of differentiating from competitors (e.g., Pine & Gilmore 1998; Schmitt 1999; Zomerdijk & Voss 2010). Interestingly, this literature also focused on experiential aspects of consumption, such as feelings and senses. One difference from the consumer research perspective, however, is that experiences were no longer seen as appropriate only for specific contexts (e.g., river rafting), but any firm could apply these elements to create a memorable experience.

Carú and Cova (2003) criticized the exclusive focus on extraordinary experiences. Based on a review of the meaning of experience in several disciplines, they incorporated ordinary and non-market-related experiences (e.g., eating in a friend's house) within the experience domain. Accordingly, Berry and Carbone (2007) affirm that an experience is inherent, and anything that the customer perceives or senses can be considered an experience clue that form a customer's total experience. In other words, customer experience researchers started to agree that customers always have an experience whenever they interact with a firm or any aspect of the offering (Åkesson et al. 2014; Berry & Carbone 2007).

At this point, customer experience started to become a more established concept, as authors started to agree on the multidimensional definition of customer experience as a construct distinct from satisfaction and perceived quality and as applicable to any, not only an extraordinary, offering. More specifically, customer experience was defined as a customer's affective, sensorial, cognitive, behavioral, and social responses to any direct or indirect contact with a firm (Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Meyer & Schwager 2007). The series of touchpoints (i.e., direct and indirect interactions with a firm) form the customer journey (Berry et al. 2002; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Patrício et al. 2011), which starts to develop as an essential concept to understand the customer experience.

With the development of S-D logic, some studies started recognizing co-creation as part of the experience (e.g., Sandström et al. 2008; Vargo & Lusch 2008). Customers are then seen as active participants in the service who integrate resources from multiple actors to co-create their experiences (Helkkula & Kelleher 2010; Sandström et al. 2008; Vargo & Lusch 2008). Experience is linked to value-in-use (Helkkula & Kelleher 2010; Sandström et al. 2008), thus emphasis is given to a customer's context and lifeworld (Akaka & Vargo 2015; Helkkula & Kelleher 2010), presenting a different perspective compared to the focus on firm-centric interactions prevailing in customer experience literature.

Two conclusions can be made from this short review. First, most of the literature on customer experience presents a firm-centric perspective, because it considers customer experience as responses to interactions with a single firm. Second, these parallel developments in different research streams resulted in a fragmented field of customer experience, with a variety of definitions and overlaps with other concepts in the marketing literature (Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Lemon & Verhoef 2016; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2015b). For this reason, the next section defines customer experience and describes how it differs from related concepts.

2.1.2 Defining customer experience

Many definitions and characterizations of customer experience exist in the literature (Chaney et al. 2018; Helkkula 2011; Jaakkola et al. 2015; Kranzbühler et al. 2018). Based on a systematic literature review of 136 articles on customer experience in the marketing literature, it was possible to conclude that the definition of customer experience as a customer's *responses and reactions* to some stimuli is the most prevalent one (e.g., Brakus et al. 2009; Meyer & Schwager 2007; Patrício et al. 2011; Verhoef et al. 2009).

Studies usually agree that the customer experience consists of cognitive, affective, sensorial, physical, and social responses and reactions (i.e., dimensions) (e.g., Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Schmitt 1999; Verhoef et al. 2009). *Cognitive responses* relate to thinking and mental processes, making the customer engage in intellectual activity, usually through surprise, intrigue, provocation, curiosity, and problem-solving stimulation (Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Schmitt 1999). *Affective responses* range from slight changes of mood to experiencing strong emotions in response to stimuli (Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Schmitt 2009). *Sensorial responses* relate to the five senses: sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell (Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Schmitt 1999). *Social responses* relate to how a stimulus affects a customer's social relationships or feelings in relation to others (Gentile et al. 2007; Schmitt 1999). *Physical or behavioral responses* refer to responses related to making the customer want to adopt a lifestyle or behavior (Brakus et al. 2009; Gentile et al. 2007; Schmitt 1999). Although these are the most common types of responses, any spontaneous response can be considered part of the customer experience, such as flow (e.g., Schouten et al. 2007) and feelings of self-transformation (e.g., Arnould & Price 1993).

This dissertation also posits that customer experience refers to *non-deliberate and spontaneous* responses and reactions to some stimuli (Becker & Jaakkola 2020). This characterization is important, because it differentiates customer experience from other types of more deliberate responses, such as evaluative concepts. For instance, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) suggest that satisfaction could be considered part of the cognitive dimension of customer experience. This dissertation argues that customers experience first, only then do they evaluate. Jiang et al. (2018) seem to agree with this claim when stating that customers first have an experience and subsequently make an assessment or judgement based on the experience.

Perceived service quality is defined as a global attitude or judgement about the superiority or excellence of a service (Parasuraman et al. 1988). Satisfaction is defined as the judgement of whether a characteristic of or the product/service per se provided a certain level of pleasant consumption (Oliver 2010). Value is defined as the overall assessment of the utility of an offering based on perceptions of costs and benefits (Zeithaml 1988). All of these definitions seem to involve a more deliberate assessment or judgement of a service, purchase, or consumption situation in comparison to customer experience. Therefore, even though some studies treat customer experience as similar to these evaluative concepts (e.g., Frow & Payne 2007; Grace and O'Cass 2004), these definitions suggest that they should be treated as more deliberate evaluations and, thus, as consequences of customer experience (cf. Brakus et al. 2009; Sandström et al. 2008).

2.1.3 Customer journey

As seen in the previous section, customer experience is defined as responses and reactions to some stimuli. The most common view in current literature is that the stimuli to which customers respond reside in the customer journeys (Kuehl et al. 2019; Lemon & Verhoef 2016).

Traditionally, the customer journey has been defined as the process customers go through before, during, and after the purchase or the service encounter, encompassing a series of touchpoints (Halvorsrud et al. 2016; Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Patrício et al. 2011). Although the literature does not present a settled definition of touchpoint (Følstad & Kvale 2018), many studies emphasize the direct and indirect interactions or every point of contact with a firm (Grewal et al. 2009; Jiang et al. 2018; Lemke et al. 2011; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019; Meyer & Schwager 2007). Touchpoints then refer to the moments or episodes a customer directly or indirectly "touches," contacts, or interacts with a firm (McColl-Kennedy et al. 2019; Zomerdijk & Voss 2010).

However, the customer experience literature is varied regarding the stimuli to which customers respond (Følstad & Kvale 2018). Some literature fields tend to study customer experience emerging as responses to stimuli in single touchpoints, such as a website (Rose et al. 2012), a service encounter (Gazzoli et al. 2013), or even a more specific stimulus within the retail atmosphere (Dennis et al. 2013).

Gradually, researchers started acknowledging that the customer experience is influenced not only by single touchpoints but also by the entire customer journey with a firm (e.g., Zomerdijk & Voss 2010). Researchers already recognized early on that customer experience originates from all direct and indirect interactions with a firm, although not necessarily using the term customer journey (e.g., Gentile et al. 2007; Grewal et al. 2009; Meyer & Schwager 2007). The concept of customer journey is closely linked to the concept of customer experience in the literature (Følstad & Kvale 2018), as the customer journey is the analytical level that most of the customer experience research has focused on (Patrício et al. 2011).

Still, more recent conceptualizations of the customer journey have been broadening its scope by including touchpoints beyond interactions with a single firm or offering. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) added three types of touchpoints beyond those the firm controls. Partner-owned touchpoints are those jointly managed or designed with other actors (e.g., a channel partner). Customer-owned touchpoints are customer activities that are part of the journey (e.g., evaluating alternatives). Finally, independent, social, or external touchpoints are those interactions with other types of actors (e.g., other customers outside the service encounter and independent information sources) (Lemon & Verhoef 2016).

At a broader level, some customer experience studies adopt a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience and suggest that customer experience emerges in response to stimuli beyond the customer journey, for example, focusing on customer experience that emerges in the consumer journey toward higher-order goals (Hamilton & Price 2019) or in service ecosystems (Akaka et al. 2015). The next section presents the developments that can be valuable in developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

2.1.4 Developments toward a customer-centric perspective of customer experience

Even though most of the customer experience literature focuses on interactions with a single firm, studies are increasingly adopting a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience, emphasizing its embeddedness into a customer's processes and lifeworld (e.g., Akaka & Schau 2019; Hamilton & Price 2019; Heinonen et al. 2010; Kelleher & Peppard 2011; Teixeira et al. 2012). Calls for a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience are not necessarily new. For example, Schmitt (1999) proposed that practitioners should think about their offerings' fit into contexts of consumption as a way to improve the customer experience. Based on the systematic review of the customer experience literature in marketing, it was possible to identify three literature fields that more heavily contribute to the development of a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

Consumer research expands the scope of stimuli to which customers respond by considering stimuli across the entire consumption process (Carú & Cova 2008; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982), giving special emphasis to the consumption phase or an offering's use (Addis & Holbrook 2001). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were the first to present a phenomenological view of consumption experience, in which they considered a series of determinants beyond managerial stimuli (e.g., task definition, customer's resources, and customer's personality). Studies in this literature field emphasize the role of other actors beyond a single firm (e.g., Arnould & Price 1993), collective experiences (e.g., Carú & Cova 2015), and a customer's activities involved in consumption (e.g., planning and remembering the experience) (e.g., Wikström 2008). Customer experiences are interpreted and given meaning in a customer's context and lifeworld (Arnould & Price 1993; Schembri 2009; Schouten et al. 2007). Therefore, experiences are seen as embedded in everyday practices (Ryynänen et al. 2016). Studies also emphasize that an offering's consumption can occur without a market relation (Carú & Cova 2003) or involve several products and services that together create an experience (Addis & Holbrook 2001; Woodward & Holbrook 2013).

The most recent customer-centric development in the customer experience literature transpired when Hamilton and Price (2019) introduced the concept of *consumer journeys* to refer to journeys that customers undergo in their lives that do not necessarily aim at consumption but that nonetheless implicate interactions with market actors. Moving to a new home and treating cancer are examples of such journeys (Hamilton & Price 2019). *Consumer* indicates the role of a customer of many firms, but also indicates the role of resource integrator of non-market resources to achieve a particular goal, breaking free from a firm- or offering-centric perspective (Hamilton & Price 2019).

Service design also presents a more customer-centric view of the customer experience because some studies consider the embeddedness of offerings into a customer's value constellation. Patrício et al. (2011) and Teixeira et al. (2012) specifically present three levels to understand the customer experience. The first level corresponds to the service encounter experience, referring to the experience that emerges in the moments the customer interacts with a given touchpoint. The second level corresponds to the service experience, referring to the experience that emerges during the customer journey, comprising all interactions between a customer and a firm that enable the customer to do an activity. Going beyond a firm-centric perspective, the third level corresponds to the value constellation experience, referring to the experience that emerges from the interactions between customers and the multiple actors that enable them to perform an activity (Patrício et al. 2011). Teixeira et al. (2012) go further and explore customer activities in context, which includes physical artifacts, technology-enabled systems, and other actors beyond other firms as stimuli that influence the customer experience.

S-D logic presents a systemic view on customer experience that focuses on value-in-use (Akaka & Vargo 2015; Lemke et al. 2011; Vargo & Lusch 2008). Instead of having the customer journey with a single firm as the context where experience emerges, S-D logic posits that experiences emerge in dynamic service (eco)systems, which consist of multiple actors and institutions that guide their interactions (Akaka & Vargo 2015; Åkesson et al. 2014; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2015a). Therefore, customers actively integrate resources from multiple actors to achieve their goals (Akaka & Vargo 2015; Tax et al. 2013). This literature field then considers how these multiple actors and the service they offer can be integrated into a customer's lifeworlds (Helkkula & Kelleher 2010) to create value-in-use or value-in-context (Akaka & Vargo 2015; Vargo & Lusch 2004). The value of the experience depends on a customer's context, situation, and frame of reference (Kelleher & Peppard 2011).

Overall, these studies indicate that a customer-centric perspective of customer experience should change the focus from interactions with managerial stimuli to what customers are doing in their everyday lives and how they interact with firms, organizations, and other actors (e.g., social actors) to support their everyday processes and practices. Such a view emphasizes the embeddedness of the firms and offerings into a customer's lifeworld. By departing from what customers are doing in their lives rather than from the customer journey, one can infer that many elements beyond interactions with a single firm affect the customer experience, such as customer activities, events, multiple actors, and contextual factors in general.

A customer-centric perspective unveils multiple elements beyond interactions with a single firm that affect the customer experience, so the methods currently used in the literature might not be the most adequate to empirically study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. Therefore, it is important to identify what is required to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective and what data collection methods are most appropriate to do so. The next section presents the methods currently used in the customer experience literature; the findings present the proposed methodological requirements and data collection methods.

2.1.5 Methods currently used in the customer experience literature

As previously seen, the developments toward a customer-centric perspective indicate that data collection methods should focus on a customer's lifeworld and how firms and offerings are integrated into it. Some elements that need to be captured to empirically study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective include multiple actors, a customer's activities and everyday practices, and elements present in a customer's context, as well as a customer's responses and reactions to these elements.

Based on the systematic literature review, the methods of 104 empirical articles in the customer experience literature were identified. Table 1 in Article II presents a full list of the methods used (Becker 2018a, 471). Most of the studies use a quantitative method to collect data on customer experience, especially surveys. However, quantitative methods are very structured and tend to restrict data collection to interactions with a single firm. For example, Brakus et al. (2009) developed a scale of customer experience that presents statements about experience with a brand. Contextual factors sometimes appear as moderating variables. It follows that these contextual factors do not emerge from the data but are predetermined by the researcher(s) (e.g., Ngobo 2005).

Of the 104 studies, 45 collected data through qualitative methods. Interviews and case studies were the most common methods used. Even though qualitative methods are often less structured than quantitative methods, some of them still presented a rigid structure regarding the stimuli that affect customer experience, excluding the elements that literature points to. Most of these methods focus on a single firm. For example, Patterson et al. (2008, 32) used an “entirely open-ended” means of data collection, subjective personal introspection, where customers had to write an essay about their experience in a retailer. However, restricting the data to a retailer excludes the many elements a customer-centric perspective should shed light on. Others restrict the interview script to very specific managerial stimuli, such as Walls et al. (2011) who confined them to human interaction and physical environment.

Not surprisingly, studies in the consumer research and S-D logic literature fields present data collection methods that follow a less firm-centric perspective, as they tend to adopt interpretive methods (e.g., Ryynänen et al. 2016). Interpretive methods see individuals as embedded and inseparable from their context (e.g., Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016; Thompson et al. 1989) and are, therefore, more capable of revealing the elements that a customer-centric perspective of customer experience should reveal. Nonetheless, a few empirical studies do, indeed, study the elements involved in a customer-centric perspective.

Some exceptions can offer starting points (Baron & Harris 2010; Teixeira et al. 2012; Thompson et al. 1989), but they do not offer specific guidelines on how to collect data in a way that tackle the methodological requirements involved in empirically studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. Baron and Harris (2010) hint at some requirements, such as capturing the “voice” of customers through qualitative data, but they do not provide more specific guidelines than this for data collection. Patrício et al. (2011) and Teixeira et al. (2012) also use qualitative methods to collect data in a customer-centric manner, but they do not provide specific and tailored guidelines for future studies. Thompson et al. (1989) offer a method to study consumer experiences through an existential-phenomenological perspective, but their focus is not on tackling a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. This review shows that choosing the appropriate data collection method is not enough, because it still needs to fulfill some methodological requirements (e.g., capturing multiple actors that affect the customer experience) that have not yet been systematically identified.

2.2 Goal and the self-regulation model of behavior

This dissertation argues that one must understand the goals that customers want to achieve in their lifeworlds to develop a customer-centric conceptualization of the customer journey. For this reason, section 2.2.1 addresses goals, in general, while section 2.2.2 describes the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998) as the more specific theoretical tool used in the study. Section 2.2.3 then describes how this literature can advance the customer experience research toward a more customer-centric perspective.

2.2.1 Defining and conceptualizing goals

This dissertation defines goals as desired states, which can be construed as end states, events, or processes (Austin & Vancouver 1996, 338), that individuals "intend to attain through action" (Van Ossealer et al. 2005, 336). According to Austin and Vancouver (1996, 341), "the dominant conceptualization of the structure of goals […] is hierarchical." Lower-order goals are subordinate to higher-order ones in this conceptualization (Bettman 1979; Carver & Scheier 1982; Gutman 1997; Powers 1973). These goals vary in levels of abstraction, from more abstract goals at the top of the hierarchy—usually related to the self-concept—to more concrete goals at the bottom (Austin & Vancouver 1996; Carver & Scheier 1982; Nair 2003). To identify the lower-order goals, one asks how to achieve the higher-order goal; to identify the higher-order goals, one asks why to achieve the lower-order goals (Gutman 1997; Powers 1973). Subordinate goals, then, can be seen as means to achieve superordinate goals (Gutman 1997; Kruglanski et al. 2002), and setting subordinate goals is determined by the superordinate goal (Nair 2003). It follows that a higher-order goal can be connected to various subordinate goals (Kruglanski et al. 2002), because they can be achieved through multiple means (Austin & Vancouver 1996).

For example, a recovering alcoholic can have a higher-order goal of becoming a sober person; to become a sober person, one must stop drinking; to stop drinking, one must learn how to avoid temptations; to learn how to avoid temptations, one must go to A.A. meetings; to go to the meetings, one must transport oneself to the meeting place, and so on. There are different labels for goals at different levels of abstraction across the literature (e.g., Carver & Scheier 1998; Nair 2003). For the purpose of this dissertation, the acknowledgment of the hierarchy of goals and understanding how they relate to each other (i.e., acknowledging that there are superordinate and subordinate goals) are more relevant than specifying specific labels for each level.

Concerning how individuals pursue goals, a common idea in the literature is that the discrepancy between the goal (i.e., desired state) and the current state drives individuals to behave in a way to reduce this discrepancy (Austin & Vancouver 1996; Carver & Scheier 1982; Gutman 1997; Powers 1973). This process of monitoring and comparing the goal to the current state and acting in a way to reduce the discrepancy between them is carried by the self-regulatory system (cf. Bettman 1979; Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998). The next section describes the self-regulation model of behavior, the model used in Article III to interpret the phenomenological findings and advance the literature on customer experience.

2.2.2 Self-regulation model of behavior

The self-regulation model of behavior is concerned with understanding how behavior happens (Carver & Scheier 1998) and describes the process of how individuals move toward their goals through the negative feedback loop (Figure 3) (Carver & Scheier 1990).

The negative feedback loop consists of four elements: input function, reference value (i.e., goal), comparator, and output function (Carver & Scheier 1982). The *input function* senses the individual's current situation (Carver & Scheier 1982), bringing information into the loop (Carver & Scheier 1998). Individuals use several sources of information to create the input (e.g., assessing other people's reactions to detect if one is making the desired impression) (Carver & Scheier 1998). The input is then compared to a *reference value*, the goal that is guiding the individual (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1990; 1998; Powers 1973). Here, the goals are not necessarily end states, but they are construed as processes (Carver & Scheier 1982). Input and reference value (i.e., goal) are compared through a mechanism called *comparator* (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998). If no significant discrepancy exists, the individual maintains his or her behavior (Carver & Scheier 1998). If a significant discrepancy does exist between the input (i.e., current situation) and the reference value (i.e., goal), the individual adjusts his or her behavior to reduce this discrepancy (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1990; 1998). Such behavior does not address the discrepancy directly, but affects the individual's environment, seen as anything external to the individual (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998; Powers 1973). The individual's goal pursuit does not exist in a vacuum, so *disturbances* can occur (i.e., other forces that operate in the environment and that are independent of the individual's behavior) (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998; Powers 1973). The impact of the behavior adjustment (output) on the environment then changes the individual's current situation, leading to a new perception that is compared to the reference value (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998).

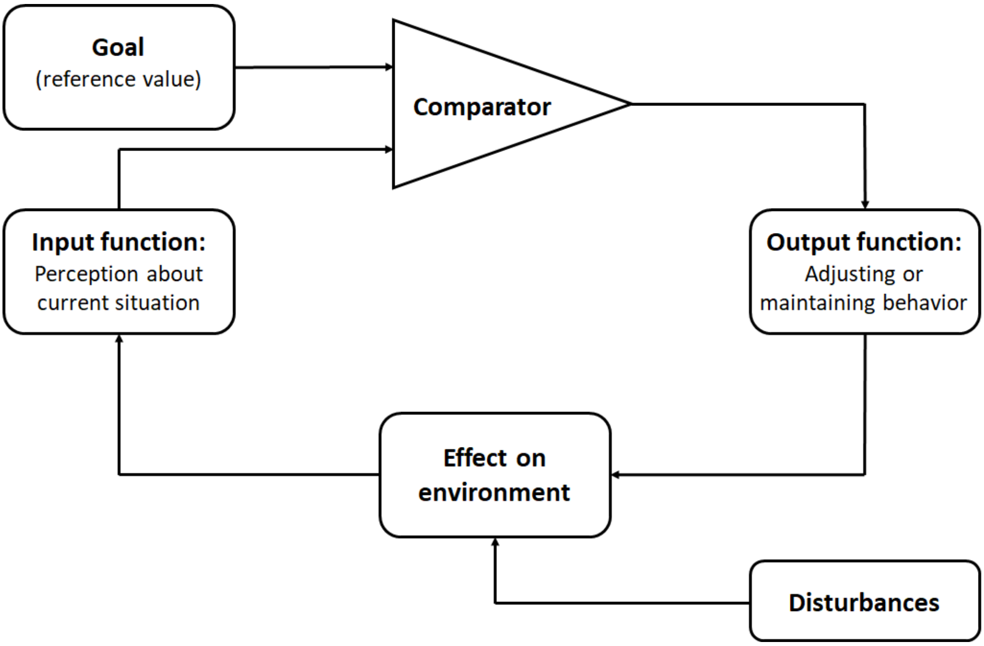

Figure 3. The negative feedback loop of the self-regulation model of behavior (adapted from Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998)

Two clarifications are noteworthy. First, the feedback loop is called *negative* because the individual is almost always trying to *reduce* the discrepancy between the current situation (input) and the goal (reference value) (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1990; Powers 1973). Positive feedback loops exist when the goal guiding the individual is an avoidance goal (e.g., an undesired state) and the individual tries to increase the discrepancy between the current situation and the goal to be avoided (Carver & Scheier 1998). However, these usually operate in the service of negative feedback loops (Carver & Scheier 1998) (e.g., when trying to avoid A, one is automatically trying to approach B); therefore, they are not mentioned in this dissertation anymore.

Second, individuals try to control what they sense (input), not what they do (output) (Powers 1973). In other words, the feedback loop's function is not to create behavior but to create and maintain the perception of a desired situation (Carver & Scheier 1982). According to Carver and Scheier (1998, 29), "a lot of human behavior […] is an extended process of maintenance activity—buying groceries, washing dishes, driving from place to place to get things." It follows that much of the behavior (output) is directed at opposing the disturbances (Powers 1973).

So far, the feedback loop was described for a particular goal. However, the model also assumes that goals are organized hierarchically (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998; Powers 1973). The feedback loops operating toward goals at higher levels of the hierarchy (i.e., superordinate loops) provide the goals (i.e., reference values) for feedback loops operating at lower levels (i.e., subordinate loops) (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1990; 1998; Powers 1973). In other words, the outputs of feedback loops toward higher-order goals are setting the goals for feedback loops at lower levels (Carver & Scheier 1982).

Lower-order, concrete goals are attained faster than higher-order, abstract goals (Carver & Scheier 1982). However, it is important to note that attaining lower-order goals is not only a means of attaining higher-order goals but is also the simultaneous process of attaining higher-order goals (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998). Attaining lower-order goals signals progress toward higher-order goals (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998).

Goals can continually change, especially lower-order goals that are ineffective in reducing the discrepancy between current situations and higher-order goals (Carver & Scheier 1982). When this happens, individuals can set new subordinate goals that are more effective in attaining higher-order ones (Carver & Scheier 1982). A higher-order goal can be attained through multiple pathways (Carver & Scheier 1998). The more a lower-order goal helps to achieve the higher-order goal, the more important it is (Carver & Scheier 1990).

According to Carver and Scheier (1982, 117), the hierarchical organization of goals is the only approach that successfullly accounts "for the fact that exceedingly restricted and concrete behavioral acts […] are used to create behavioral events that are often so abstract as to seem completely unrelated to those concrete acts." In this way, the self-regulation model of behavior serves as an appropriate theoretical tool to understand how engaging in customer journeys is related to a customer's higher-order goals and to viewing customer journeys as embedded in higher-order journeys.

2.2.3 Advancing customer experience with the goal literature

Understanding customers' goals is extremely important for understanding behavior. According to Powers (1973, 352), "there can be no rational explanation of behavior that overlooks the overriding influence of an organism's present structure of goals." Therefore, many researchers agree that most behaviors are goal-directed (Austin & Vancouver 1996), including consumer behavior (Bagozzi & Dholakia 1999). Goals, then, direct and motivate consumer behavior (Bettman 1979; Gutman 1997). It follows that, when customers engage in customer journeys, they are engaging with means to achieve a goal (cf. Bagozzi & Dholakia 1999; Gutman 1997; van Ossealer & Janiszewski 2012; van Ossealer et al. 2005).

As previously stated, most of the customer experience literature grounds the customer journey to a firm or an offering. Nonetheless, a few authors have included a customer's goal in their definition of customer journey as interactions with one or more firms to achieve a specific goal (Edelman & Singer 2015; Halvorsrud et al. 2016). However, these goals refer to the immediate goals of the customer journey, not to the goals customers want to achieve in their lifeworlds (i.e., higher-order in the goal hierarchy). In marketing and consumer behavior literature, goals are also usually related to customers' preferences and product choices (i.e., immediate, concrete goals) (e.g., van Ossealer & Janiszewski 2012; van Ossealer et al. 2005).

If goals are organized in hierarchies and customer journeys are goal-directed, it follows that customer journeys can also be analyzed through a hierarchical organization. Hamilton and Price (2019) recently proposed that customer journeys can be seen as journeys toward concrete goals (e.g., getting a medication), subordinate to consumer journeys toward higher-order goals (e.g., getting healthy). Other authors, although not explicitly recognizing the goal hierarchy, also proposed a layered organization of journeys. For example, Patrício et al. (2011) and Teixeira et al. (2012) presented three levels of understanding the customer experience: (1) service encounter experience, emerging in specific touchpoints; (2) service experience, emerging throughout the customer journey with a single firm; and (3) value constellation experience, emerging through interactions with a network of organizations that enable a customer's activity.

Most of the customer experience literature recognizes that customer journeys involve a series of touchpoints (e.g., Følstad & Kvale 2018; Kuehl et al. 2019; Lemon & Verhoef 2016) (i.e., the literature focuses on two levels of the customer journey). Therefore, although researchers have been advocating to understand customers' higher-order goals and the embeddedness of customer journeys into their lifeworlds, a conceptualization of the customer journey grounded on customer goals is missing in the literature. Therefore, the goal literature, and specifically the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998), can offer theoretical tools to develop a renewed conceptualization of the customer journey that advances the customer-centric perspective of customer experience proposed in this dissertation.

3 Method

3.1 Overview of the methods

This section describes the methods adopted in this dissertation. The methods were chosen based on their suitability to answer the research questions. RQ1 asked how the current customer experience literature can be integrated to form a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Therefore, a systematic literature review was chosen to identify and select articles on customer experience in the fragmented marketing literature. Systematic literature reviews use explicit criteria and procedures for selecting articles, enabling the overcoming of possible biases in comparison to traditional reviews (Barczak 2017; Littell et al. 2008).

After selecting the articles, a metatheoretical analysis was chosen to assess the extent to which the fragmented customer experience literature could be integrated. A metatheoretical analysis describes and compares the nature of phenomena and the metatheoretical assumptions in different literature fields (cf. Burrell & Morgan 1979; Gioia & Pitre 1990; Möller 2013; Okhuysen & Bonardi 2011). Therefore, it is particularly relevant for fragmented, scattered literature about a concept or phenomenon, as its goal is to rise above different literature fields that study a particular concept and analyze them through a metatheoretical plane (Gioia & Pitre 1990; Möller 2013). By doing so, one can understand the position of each of these literature fields in a theoretical map and evaluate whether they can be integrated (Gioia & Pitre 1990; Möller et al. 2009).

RQ2 asked how customer experience can be empirically studied through a customer-centric perspective. Considering that a systematic literature review is less biased in comparison to traditional reviews, it is a good start to give an overview of the methods currently used in the customer experience literature. However, answering this research question also involves (1) identifying the methodological requirements involved in the study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective and (2) providing guidelines for data collection methods that fulfill these requirements. These tasks involve selecting specific literature that can inform about the elements that need to be addressed in a customer-centric perspective, as well as specific literature about appropriate data collection methods in a way to tailor the guidelines to fulfill these requirements. Therefore, a selective literature review was used to answer RQ2. A selective literature review does not involve any specific structured method; thus, it is not discussed as a separate method in this chapter.

RQ3 asked how the customer journey can be conceptualized through a customer-centric perspective. To answer this question, first, a hermeneutic-phenomenological field study was conducted to investigate the journey of recovering alcoholics toward a sober life. The hermeneutic-phenomenological philosophical orientation is followed because it “seeks to describe experience as it emerges in some context(s) or […] as it is lived” (Thompson et al. 1989, 135), so it reveals what people experience and how they experience it (Creswell 2013). In this way, this orientation can reveal the elements involved in a customer-centric customer journey, as well as the emerging customer experience (i.e., how customers respond and react to these elements). The specific data collection methods chosen were two of the three methods identified when answering RQ2 (Article II), because they tackle the methodological requirements to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. Data analysis followed an inductive approach based on the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g., Thompson et al. 1989). This resulted in a contextual description of a customer-centric journey. To create a more decontextualized customer-centric conceptualization of customer journey, the findings were then interpreted with theoretical lenses that help understand the research problem (e.g., Conroy 2003). Table 3 offers an overview of the methods used in each article that is part of this dissertation.

Table 3 shows that the methods employed in each article help to answer a specific research question more strongly (Articles I, II, and III answer more strongly RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, respectively). However, it is noteworthy that the results of the articles give input to answer other research questions as well. For example, by integrating the literature and developing fundamental premises of customer experience, Article I’s findings provide input to answer all the research questions.

3.2 Systematic literature review

A systematic literature review was used to select articles that study customer experience in marketing. The process followed strict guidelines (e.g., Booth et al. 2012; Moher et al. 2009) and used other systematic literature reviews as benchmarks (e.g., Danese et al. 2018; Helkkula 2011; Mustak et al. 2016; Watson et al. 2018) when developing the research protocol (cf. Littell et al. 2008). Figure 4 presents an overview of the process.

Table 3. Overview of the methods

Article	Philosophical positioning	Research approach	General rationale
I	Metatheoretical perspective	• Systematic literature review • Metatheoretical analysis	• Systematic literature reviews are less biased in comparison to traditional reviews in identifying articles in a broad yet fragmented conceptual domain. • Metatheoretical analyses are appropriate for fragmented research fields, enabling their integration based on specific elements of comparison.
II	Phenomenology	• Systematic literature review • Selective literature review	• A phenomenological orientation is identified in the study as suitable to the study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. • A systematic literature review gives an overview of the methods currently used in the customer experience literature. • A selective literature review allows the use of studies that adopt a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience—which form the basis for identifying the methodological requirements involved in its empirical study—and the use of methodological studies that can fulfill the methodological requirements.
III	Hermeneutic phenomenology	• Empirical study (phenomeno-logical interviews, diaries, and observation) • Interpretation of empirical findings with theoretical lens	• A hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective is adequate to tackle the methodological requirements to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective identified in Article II: (1) first-hand description of experience, (2) capture of multiple actors and institutions, and (3) capture of a processual perspective. • The data collection methods fulfill the methodological requirements. • Interpretation with a theoretical lens helps generate knowledge and create a more decontextualized conceptualization.

First, 43 articles about customer experience within different research streams were reviewed to become familiar with the phenomenon. The goal of this non-systematic “scoping search” was to discern the volume of relevant research and help decide on the methodological procedures (Booth et al. 2012; Littell et al. 2008), such as the selection of the database, choosing the keywords, and establishing search criteria. Strict criteria were established because of the large volume of research (Mustak et al. 2013).

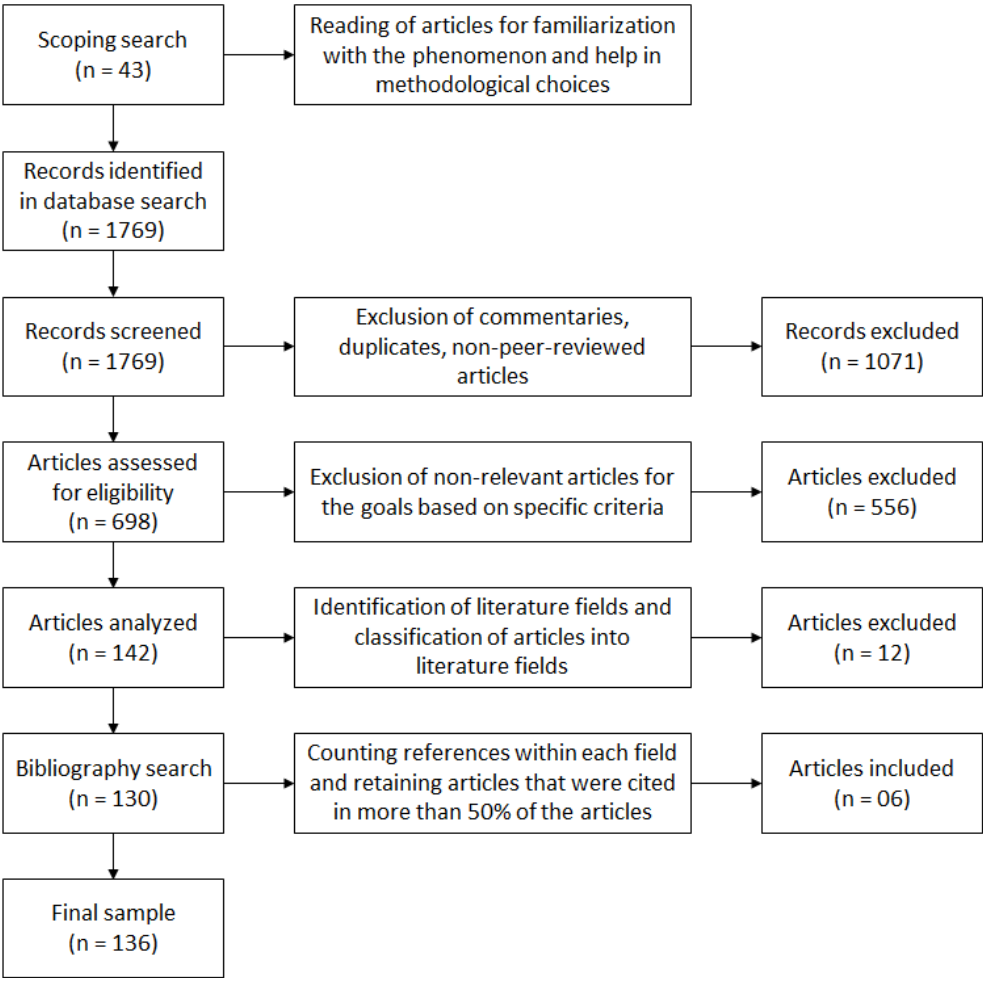

Figure 4. Systematic literature review process (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 16)

Second, articles were searched in EBSCO Business Source Complete and Science Direct databases as both cover a wide range of high-quality journals and their search engines offer precise results (Johnston et al. 2018; Mustak et al. 2016). The following keywords were selected, separated by the term “OR”: “experiential marketing,” “service experience,” “customer experience,” “consumer experience,” and “consumption experience,” One of these expressions had to be present in the title, abstract, or keywords (Danese et al. 2018; Mustak et al. 2016). The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles to maintain a high quality level (Booth et al. 2012; Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Mustak et al. 2016). The search was conducted at the beginning of May 2016 and temporal limits were not set.

Third, in the screening phase, repeated articles, articles written in a language other than English, articles outside the marketing scope, and/or articles not peer-reviewed were excluded (Steward 2004). Fourth, the relevance of each article to the study was assessed (Steward 2004) through three criteria, as shown in Table 4. The title and abstract were reviewed first to assess the criteria and, if necessary, the article was skimmed or read (Booth et al. 2012; Littell et al. 2008). This resulted in 142 articles.

Table 4. Eligibility criteria for inclusion of articles in the sample

Criteria	Exclusion of articles	Justification
Article had to refer to business-to-customer (B2C) or general customer experience	Exclusion of articles that investigated exclusively business-to-business (B2B) customer experiences	The focus is on B2C customer experience, represented by the final customer or consumer
Article had to approach customer experience (or related term) as one of the central concepts (Danese et al. 2018).	Exclusion of articles that treated customer experience as previous use, expertise, or familiarity and articles that approached it not as focal a concept but as the context of the study	These articles were not referring to customer experience as intended in the article (i.e., how the customer experiences something)
Article had to provide a definition or characterization of customer experience (or related term) (Helkkula 2011)	Exclusion of articles that did not present a definition or characterization of experience	The absence of a definition or characterization would hamper the classification of articles into literature fields

After identifying the articles, the next step was to analyze and classify them into the literature fields—a group of studies that share a common focus on the study of customer experience. Identification of the literature fields was an iterative process that started with four previously identified fields (Jaakkola et al. 2015) and added new categories when an analyzed article did not fit them. The four initial literature fields were S-D logic and service logic, consumer culture theory, service management, and service innovation design (Jaakkola et al. 2015). These fields were clearly distinguishable in the analyzed article pool, though the labels were changed to be representative of the sample (to S-D logic, consumer research, services marketing, and service design, respectively). When articles did not fit these fields in their primary research foci (see Table 5), a new category was added, ultimately resulting in four additional literature fields: retailing, online marketing, branding, and experiential marketing. For example, retailing emerged as a category after realizing the articles in the services marketing literature field had too much variance, with some articles focusing exclusively on service encounter elements and others focusing on the marketing mix, including price and merchandise (e.g., Verhoef et al. 2009).

Table 5. Criteria for classification of articles within the eight literature fields (Becker & Jaakkola 2020)

Literature field	Primary customer experience stimuli studied	Context	References	*N* of articles
Services marketing	Stimuli related to the service encounter(s) (e.g., service environment, service personnel, and core service)	Service encounter(s)	Bitner (1990) Grove and Fisk (1992)	31
Consumer research	Stimuli related to hedonic/experiential, symbolic, and social aspects of the consumption process (e.g., social bonding)	The entire consumption process (not necessarily market-related)	Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) Arnould and Price (1993)	24
Retailing	Stimuli related to the retailing context (e.g., price and merchandise)	Direct or indirect interactions with a retailer	Verhoef *et al.* (2009) Grewal *et al.* (2009)	18
S-D logic	Stimuli not restricted to a single firm or offering; the whole service ecosystem affects the experience, resulting in value-in-use	Service ecosystem	Vargo and Lusch (2004) Vargo and Lusch (2008)	18
Service design	Stimuli related to the design of the customer journey, its phases, and stages (e.g., smooth transactions across multichannel touchpoints)	The entire customer journey, usually multi-channel	Shostack (1984) Patrício *et al.* (2008)	12
Online marketing	Stimuli restricted to the online environment (e.g., website layout, ease of use, privacy)	Online environment (e.g., virtual retailer, online community)	Hoffman and Novak (1996) Novak *et al.* (2000)	13
Branding	Stimuli related to the brand (e.g., communication, events, brand-related advertising)	Direct or indirect interactions with a brand	Schmitt (1999) Brakus *et al.* (2009)	11
Experiential marketing	Stimuli staged by the firm (e.g., cues, thematic content, sensorial stimuli) that form the experience as an economic offering	Physical encounters during the customer journey	Pine and Gilmore (1998)	09

Table 5 outlines the criteria developed to classify the 142 articles into the literature fields. The first criterion was the primary customer experience stimuli studied. For example, an article was categorized in the field of services marketing if it focused mainly on elements of the service encounter, such as servicescape and personal interaction with employees. The second criterion was the customer experience context. The third criterion was use of seminal references in defining and/or characterizing customer experience. For instance, if the definition of customer experience was grounded on Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) study, the article was more likely to be classified in the consumer research literature field. An article had to meet at least two of three requirements without significant overlap to be classified into a literature field. Hence, 12 articles that did not present a major focus in one of the literature fields (i.e., presented foci in more than one literature field) (e.g., Helkkula 2011; Jaakkola et al. 2015) were excluded from the sample. The process of reading the articles and categorizing them into literature fields was iterative and stopped when it reached theoretical saturation (i.e., the majority of the articles could clearly be classified into one of the literature fields).

After classifying all the articles into the literature fields, a new search for articles based on a bibliography search was conducted, that is, the identification of articles cited in more than 50% of the articles in each literature field (Booth et al. 2012; Johnston et al. 2018). This was important in order to avoid a possible bias that may have occurred in the first search (Johnston et al. 2018). This procedure resulted in the addition of six articles to the sample, resulting in a final total of 136 articles[1].

3.3 Metatheoretical analysis

The metatheoretical analysis of the articles identified in the systematic literature review involved three steps: (1) the description of the nature of customer experience phenomena and metatheoretical assumptions, (2) the comparison of these elements across the literature fields to position them in a theoretical map, and (3) the integration of compatible elements across research traditions to develop fundamental premises of customer experience.

The nature of customer experience phenomena refers to the customer experience sub-phenomenon that a study is addressing or trying to explain (Okhuysen & Bonardi 2011). Metatheoretical assumptions refer to the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that each literature field adopts (Gioia & Pitre 1990; Möller & Halinen 2000; Okhuysen & Bonardi 2011). Ontological assumptions refer to assumptions related to the nature of the existence of a phenomenon and structure of the reality (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Curd & Cover 1998). These are concerned with questions such as whether there is an objective, external reality or whether reality is the product of one's mind (Burrell & Morgan 1979). Epistemological assumptions are related to the creation and grounds of

[1] These numbers refer to Article I. There is a slight difference in the final number of articles in Article II (145) because, during the review process of Article I, the articles were re-classified into the literature fields based on more strict criteria. This change does not interfere with the results of the systematic literature review for Article II, since it still fits the purpose of giving an overview of the methods used.

knowledge about customer experience (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Helkkula 2011; Curd & Cover 1998). These are concerned with questions such as whether regularities and laws or subjective experiences can be considered forms of knowledge. Closely related to epistemological assumptions, methodological assumptions refer to the techniques adopted to collect evidence of customer experience (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Helkkula 2011). These are concerned with, for example, understanding reality through techniques that use systematic protocols or through techniques that obtain first-hand knowledge of a phenomenon (Burrel & Morgan 1979).

The articles were analyzed through content analysis (Booth et al. 2012), ordering and reading them within each literature field in chronological order. The first step in this analysis involved extracting material from the articles and transferring them to a Microsoft® Excel codebook (Littell et al. 2008; Randolph 2009). A frame of reference with explicit detailed procedures and rules for coding was developed to increase objectivity (Kolbe & Burnett 1991; Littell et al. 2008) (see Appendix 1 for the procedures and rules). In line with the goals of the research (Littell et al. 2008; Randolph 2009), the codebook comprised elements that operationalized the key elements of the metatheoretical analysis (Table 6).

The second step in data analysis involved extracting material from the codebook to describe the nature of customer experience phenomena and metatheoretical assumptions for each literature field. Each article's goals, characterization of customer experience and coded level of aggregation (ranging from dyadic to systemic) were identified to describe the nature of customer experience phenomena. In this way, it was possible to understand what the article was trying to explain or address and at what level of aggregation the customer experience was studied. Notes about these variables were recorded in a Microsoft® Word document. After coding all the excerpts in each literature field, the analysis involved grouping similar codes to form theoretical dimensions that helped understand what customer experience is and how it is characterized in each literature field. To describe the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, the analysis was based on counting the instances of codes, given their succinct descriptions (see Table 6).

After describing the nature of customer experience phenomena and metatheoretical assumptions in each literature field, the next step was to compare these elements across literature fields and situate the literature fields in a theoretical map. The theoretical map is here defined as a spatial allocation of different literature fields, according to some theoretical criteria. It enables navigation between literature fields and conclusions about grouping them into research traditions (Gioia & Pitre 1990; Möller 2013), defined here as groups of studies that share metatheoretical assumptions (Laudan 1977). Integrating the literature fields into higher-order research traditions necessitates consideration of two dimensions, the proximity of the phenomena studied and the degree of compatibility between metatheoretical assumptions. This process resulted in grouping the eight literature fields into two research traditions.

Table 6. Operationalization of the elements for the metatheoretical analysis (adapted from Becker & Jaakkola 2020)

Element	Description	Operationalization	References
Nature of customer experience phenomena	The customer experience sub-phenomenon the study is addressing or trying to explain; what researchers are actually studying when they use the concept of customer experience	- Stated goals, aims, or research questions in the article - Definition of customer experience and its dimensions - Characterization of customer experience - The level of aggregation of customer experience: • Dyadic • Other customers • Systemic	Möller (2013) Möller and Halinen (2000) Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011)
Ontological assumptions	Assumptions about the nature of the reality of the customer experience—whether there is an objective, external reality or whether reality is the product of one's mind	- Stated or implicit assumptions about the nature of reality in the article: • Objective: social world exists independently of the individual; there is an external reality "out there" • Subjective: reality is the product of one's mind; reality is based on individual sense-making of the world	Burrell and Morgan (1979) Curd and Cover (1998)
Epistemological and methodological assumptions[a]	Assumptions about what can be accepted as knowledge and evidence and how data are collected and analyzed in the study of customer experience	- Stated or implicit epistemological and methodological assumptions in the article: • Positivist: knowledge is obtained by searching for regularities and causal relationships; the method is based on systematic techniques • Interpretive: knowledge is obtained through the viewpoint of individuals directly involved with the phenomenon under investigation; first-hand description of experience is favored - Method - Data analysis technique	Burrell and Morgan (1979) Curd and Cover (1998) Helkkula (2011) Möller (2013) Möller and Halinen (2000) Tadajewski (2004)

[a] Epistemological and methodological assumptions are closely aligned. Therefore, they are described together as in previous studies (e.g., Möller 2013).

Finally, a method analogous to triangulation was used to develop the premises of customer experience (Gioia & Pitre 1990; Lewis & Grimes 1999). This process involved juxtaposing the two research traditions from a metatheoretical plane, seeking to identify common elements, distinct yet compatible elements, and incompatible elements across the two research traditions (Gioia & Pitre 1990; Lewis & Grimes 1999). The integration of compatible elements resulted in the development of the fundamental premises of customer experience.

3.4 Hermeneutic-phenomenological field study

3.4.1 Philosophical orientation

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, things as they appear in conscious experience from the subjective point-of-view (Smith 2013). This dissertation follows a hermeneutic-phenomenological orientation (i.e., Heideggerian phenomenology or interpretive phenomenology) in the empirical study (Mitchell & Cody 1993; Reiners 2012; Smith 2013).

Ontologically, phenomenology assumes that the understanding of social reality is grounded in people's experiences (Smith 2013; Thompson et al. 1989) and that individuals and their context are co-constituting; in other words, the nature of being is "in-the-world" (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016; Mitchell & Cody 1993; Thompson et al. 1989). Therefore, the ontological assumption is that reality is grounded in the participants' experiences, socially constructed, and contextualized.

The hermeneutic-phenomenological orientation holds three epistemological assumptions. First, the phenomenon must be understood not from a detached observer's perspective but from the participant's first-person and subjective experience and worldview (Conroy 2003; Goulding 2005; Schwandt 1998; Thompson et al. 1989). Second, this research orientation inductively generates theory (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016), but interpretation always involves a previous understanding of the phenomenon (Conroy 2003; Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016; Mitchell & Cody 1993; Reiners 2012). This previous understanding cannot be held in abeyance; hence, the researcher has the role of making previous assumptions, beliefs, and understanding explicit while giving primacy to the subjective experience (Goulding 2005; Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016; Mitchell & Cody 1993; Reiners 2012). Third, because the meanings of the experiences must be situated in a context, an understanding of the whole presupposes an understanding of its parts and vice-versa (i.e., hermeneutic circle) (Reiners 2012; Thompson et al. 1989).

3.4.2 Empirical context and participants

This dissertation proposes that one way to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience is through considering a customer's higher-order goals. The literature suggests that customer journeys directed at concrete goals are subordinate to consumer journeys directed at higher-order goals (Hamilton & Price 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand the journeys customers undergo to achieve their goals in order to develop a conceptualization of customer journey that generates a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

The journey toward a sober life was chosen as the empirical context for at least three reasons. First, such a journey presents a clear higher-order goal—a sober life—and a variety of activities (e.g., going to meetings, staying away from triggers), events (e.g., dreaming about alcohol, A.A. events), and interactions with multiple actors (e.g., other A.A. members, health service providers, relatives) (Hänninen & Koski-Jännes 1999; Humphreys 2000; Longabaugh et al. 1998). As seen before, customer experience researchers have been suggesting that these elements in a customer's lifeworld influence the customer experience. Therefore, such a context enables the identification of multiple customer journeys that customers engage in when pursuing their higher-order goals. A customer-centric conceptualization of these customer journeys can be developed by departing from the customers' higher-order goals.

Second, the context selected must facilitate an inductive generation of theory to generate a renewed conceptualization of the customer journey; thus, extreme cases serve this purpose by making the dynamics of the phenomenon under investigation more visible than other contexts (Pettigrew 1990; Pratt et al. 2006). Given the drastic lifestyle changes involved in becoming sober, recovering alcoholics' transformative journeys represent an extreme case of consumer journeys (cf. Hamilton & Price 2019). The specificities of this extreme context might pose problems for generalizing the findings, but they also facilitate conceptual development (see section 5.5 for a more complete evaluation on the generalization of findings from the empirical study). Given that the aim of RQ3 is to create a conceptualization of the customer journey that generates a customer-centric perspective of customer experience, conceptual development is more important than generalization at this stage, thus, making the choice of an extreme case appropriate.

Third, this context potentially generates relevant societal implications. It is estimated that alcohol consumption not only causes more than 200 health conditions but also that 5.3% of deaths in 2016, for example, were attributed to alcohol consumption (World Health Organization 2018). An individual can also experience socioeconomic harms, such as lower employability and stigma (World Health Organization 2018). Excessive alcohol consumption is also associated with harming other people, such as spouses, children, co-workers, and neighbors and with expenditures in the health, criminal, and welfare systems (OECD 2015; World Health Organization 2018).

Many treatments are available for addiction and alcoholism. A treatment can consist of medical interventions (such as detoxification and use of medicine), psychological interventions (such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing), and self-help groups (such as A.A.) (for an overview, see Martin 2008a). The author chose to collect data with A.A. members in order to identify and recruit participants who are undergoing a journey toward a sober life. A.A. is an international non-professional self-help group of people who have a drinking problem. The program offers 12 steps so the member can develop a life without alcohol and recover from alcoholism ("What is A.A.?" n.d.). A.A. was chosen because (1) it is one of the most common approaches to treat alcoholism; (2) it is usually combined with other treatment approaches; and (3) recovering alcoholics who are sober for many years attend the meetings, compared to other treatments that focus on the beginning of the recovering alcoholics' journey (Martin 2008b).

It is important to clarify that a recovery journey from the individual's perspective was the focus of this study, not the A.A. experience or the recovery experience from the A.A.'s perspective. Recruiting A.A. members was only an easier way to find individuals who are experiencing the journey toward a sober life. Participants described interactions with different health service providers during their journeys, such as clinics, hospitals, and psychologists.

Data collection occurred in Brazil, since the author is Brazilian and does not speak Finnish. Collecting data in Portuguese allowed participants to describe their experiences in their native language. Considering that the description of the experience is analyzed in text in the hermeneutic-phenomenology orientation, comfort with the language is very important.

Participants were recruited from open meetings (i.e., meetings open to anyone interested in A.A.) in three different groups chosen by convenience. Participants were invited through written invitations before or after the meetings or during intervals. The written invitation presented a brief description of the research, the incentives, and the data collection methods. The informed consent form was given to those interested and presented more complete information about the research, incentives, and participation. The author also spoke in some meetings and introduced the research. A monetary incentive was offered to participants, given that one of the data collection methods employed in the study (diary) required effort and time for completion. Additionally, a holiday trip for two people to a touristic city in the state was given for the participant who completed the best diary, encouraging complete and detailed descriptions of the drinking recovery journey.

The data were collected in two rounds through interviews and diaries. Participants could choose whether they wanted to give an interview and complete the diaries or only give interviews. In February of 2017, 14 participants were interviewed, eight of whom completed diaries (February to April). Four new participants were interviewed in July and August 2017, two of whom completed diaries (August and September). According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), the decision on the number of participants depends on pragmatic restrictions and the richness of the data. Hermeneutic-phenomenological studies with more than 10 participants are uncommon (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2012); therefore, data from 18 participants can be considered rich.

Only men participated in the study, because women represented a minority of A.A. members (e.g., one woman was present in two meetings). The length of time of sobriety was unrestricted. The different "sobriety lengths" allowed description of different periods or stages of the recovery journey. For instance, participants who are sober for 34 years can describe different stages of the journey in comparison to participants who are sober for only a few years. Table 7 lists information about the participants. Names were changed due to confidentiality agreements.

Table 7. List of participants (Article III)

Participant	Age	Recovery time, from last drink or use	Total recovery time	Length of interview (minutes)	Diary period	Member check
George	68	37 years	37 years	45	2 months	✓
Larry	62	35 years	35 years	89	-	
Steven	66	34 years	34 years	64	2 months	✓
David	69	34 years	34 years	67	-	✓
Mark	59	25 years	26 years	80	-	✓
Anthony	66	25 years	25 years	146	2 months	✓
Timothy	53	18 years	20 years	58	20 days	✓
Scott	54	2 years	20 years[a]	94	-	
Charles	48	5 days	~16 years[a]	135	-	
Joseph	65	1 year	13 years	51	2 months	✓
Michael	43	12 years	13 years	99	-	
Paul	27	2 years	9 years	82	-	
James	44	6 years	8.5 years	78	2 months	✓
Jacob	47	2 months	~8 years[a]	53	15 days	
Robert	38	5 years	5.5 years	72	-	✓
Thomas	65	2.3 years	3.5 years	104	2 months	✓
John	40	1.5 years	1.5 years	79	1.5 months	✓
Frank	56	1 year	1 year	90	1.5 months	

[a] Multiple relapses

3.4.3 Data collection methods

The method must allow participants to describe their experiences as a whole and in a contextualized form, so the researcher must become immersed in their world (Conroy 2003; Hirschman 1986). Therefore, a multi-method qualitative approach is preferred (Helkkula et al. 2012). Qualitative multi-methods can also help to understand the relation between the whole and its parts, with data collection techniques that allow capturing the "big picture" (e.g., interviews) complementing the data collection techniques that allow capturing everyday details (e.g., diaries).

The empirical study used three qualitative data collection methods: phenomenological interviews, diary method, and observation. Table 8 shows how each data collection technique contributed to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The ethics committee of University of Turku approved a research plan in January 2017 before data collection began.

Table 8. Data collection methods (Article III)

Method	Contribution of data collection method	Volume of data
Phenomenological interviews	Gaining understanding of participants' backgrounds (e.g., what they do, who they live with) and their histories with alcohol; gaining understanding of the emergence of experiences along the participants' journeys through their retrospective accounts (key events, activities, organizations, social actors, and feelings, thoughts, and general reactions to these).	18 interviews, 351 pages of text
Diary method	Deepening understanding of the journey as a real-time experience; capturing micro events as they happen in the participant's everyday life; detailed descriptions of events.	10 diaries between 15 days and 2 months in length, 100 pages of text
Observation	Understanding the context of the recovery journey and experience (e.g., terminology, interactions among members); confirming thematic findings while listening to participants' stories.	13 meetings, 7 pages of notes

Thompson et al. (1989) suggest using *phenomenological interviews* to study consumer experiences. The purpose of this type of interview is to obtain a first-person description of some domain of the experience (Høffding & Martiny 2016; Thompson et al. 1989) that contextualizes the experience in a customer's lifeworld (Bevan 2014; Stern et al. 1998). The derived narratives are useful for immersing the researcher in a customer's world (Conroy 2003) and understanding a customer's relationship with others (Stern et al. 1998).

The structure of the interview should be open and dictated by the respondent (Thompson et al. 1989), resulting in a free-form, customer-driven description (Stern et al. 1998). Bevan's (2014) method for phenomenological interview was followed, which structures the interview in three parts: contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon. Contextualization refers to the consideration of the context from which the experience gains meaning (Bevan 2014). The interviewer has the role of setting a context in which the respondent describes his or her experience (Thompson et al. 1989) as the departure point of the interview (Bevan 2014). The interview started with questions about the participant and questions about the history with alcohol to obtain these descriptions.

After describing the context, the next step in the interview is apprehending the phenomenon, which focuses on the experience of interest (Bevan 2014). The aim in this part of the interview is to obtain clear descriptions of events and activities. It is recommended that the interviewer ask descriptive questions followed by structural questions to clarify the phenomenon (e.g., "Could you please describe what you mean by X?") and avoid "why" questions to not change the focus from description to rationalization and causes (Bevan 2014; Thompson et al. 1989). According to Stern et al. (1998, 198), "the researcher strives to understand the informant's perception, asking questions that result in a narrative unit encompassing past, present, and future." The questions focused on what the participant did to become sober, on what they do to continue sober, on the actors who helped or hampered their journeys, and on what they felt, thought, and sensed during specific events (i.e., how they experienced them).

The third phase of the phenomenological interview, according to Bevan (2014), is the clarification of the phenomenon, and it uses imaginative variations (i.e., varying the structure of questions) (Bevan 2014; Stern et al. 1998). These were follow-up questions during the interview to understand specific parts of the narrative better. Table 9 presents the structure of the interview. It is important to highlight that there was an interview script (Appendix 2), although this was loosely used. Most participants were very active when telling their stories, making the interview easy and conversational. The interviews were conducted in a convenient place for the participant, such as their home or the A.A. space.

Researchers suggest that the *diary* is an appropriate technique to study the customer experience (Carú & Cova 2008; Helkkula et al. 2012) and a very relevant way of capturing the experiences of everyday life (Kenten 2010), as it "offers a unique window on human phenomenology" (Bolger et al. 2003, 610). Diaries are good for capturing a customer's experience, as the individual's reflexivity while reporting narratives allows researchers to understand hedonic and subjective dimensions of the experience (Carú & Cova 2008), thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Kenten 2010) as well as key events and actors relevant to the experience (Gibbs 2009). Additionally, the diary does not force any theoretical framework on participants and the data they provide (Hurmerinta & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2013).

Table 9. Structure of the phenomenological interview (cf. Bevan 2014)

Interview	Topics	Examples of questions
Contextualization	Background; knowing the participant; understanding his or her history with alcohol.	"To start, I would like you to talk a little bit about yourself: who you are, what do you do, your family" "I would like you to tell me a little bit of how you started drinking"
Apprehending the phenomenon	Understanding the moment the participant decided to get sober; descriptions of activities, events, and interactions with firms, products, services, and social actors; understanding the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that emerge in the recovery process.	"Do you remember the moment you realized you had a problem?" "Besides going to A.A., what else do you do to stay sober?" "How do you feel after going to the church?" "Can you give me an example of a moment you sought your sponsor?"
Clarifying the phenomenon	Different form of asking questions in order to clarify aspects (formulated during the interview).	"What you would do if [your tablet] broke?" [after the participant described the importance of the tablet for him] "What if you [didn't recover the chip], what would you do?" [after the participant described how he almost lost a chip in the bus]

When using this method, researchers should give clear but not too restrictive instructions to the participants (Carú & Cova 2008; Kenten 2010; Patterson 2005). Participants were given written instructions to report activities, events, interactions, and experiences related to the recovery journey for a month right after these happened (Hurmerinta & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2013). By the end of the month, seven participants were invited to continue writing for another month. Concerning the method of reporting, participants had three options to report their journeys and experiences: (1) paper and pencil written report, (2) electronic report, and (3) audio report (Bolger et al. 2003; Carú & Cova 2008). Seven participants chose to report their experiences in written form and three of them chose to report their experiences through audio. Finally, the participants were reminded that the researchers are not evaluating their writing/speaking skills and that the content of their descriptions is what is really interesting and the focus of research. They were instructed not to edit or correct their descriptions. Appendix 3 presents the instructions.

Maintaining participants' motivations is a challenge in this method. Researchers can meet the participants and give them feedback about the completion of the diaries (Hurmerinta & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2013). Most of the diaries were collected every two weeks, so the author was able to give participants feedback about the completion of their diaries. For instance, some participants were asked to focus more on their experiences (i.e., feelings, thoughts, and reactions). It was also highlighted that participants can increase their self-knowledge through their diaries, as previous studies have shown (Hurmerinta & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2013; Kenten 2010).

The author conducted *non-participant observation* in 13 A.A. meetings (seven in February 2017 and six in July and August 2017), contributing to the preunderstanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The author also spent two afternoons with A.A. members during duties, where they do service for A.A. and receive potential members. After the meetings, usually during the night or in the following afternoon, the author wrote notes about how the meeting works, what she did during the meetings, how participants interacted with her and with others, and so on. She did not write about A.A. members' stories, because not all of those members were participating in the research; therefore, they did not give consent to use their descriptions. However, they were aware of the research and her role as a researcher.

The meetings were important for better understanding the context. For instance, listening to stories increased familiarity with the terminology A.A. members use (e.g., Superior Power), the 12 steps, the 12 traditions, and so on. These meetings facilitated the interviews by increasing the author's understanding of the context (Pratt et al. 2006).The themes previously analyzed were apparent in members' stories in the second round of data collection. Therefore, the meetings also served to corroborate the thematic findings. Appendix 4 presents an example of notes from a meeting.

3.4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis followed systematic procedures grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology (deBerry-Spence 2008; Goulding 2005; James et al. 2011; Kleiman 2004; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990) that involve an iterative process between the parts of the textual material and the whole (hermeneutic circle). The first stage of analysis involves analyzing the textual material from each participant individually. The individual analysis followed three steps. First, for each case (i.e., for each participant), the author read all the material available as an immersive whole to gain a global sense of the data (Kleiman 2004; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989). The author did not take notes or try to form themes in this step.

Second, the author then reread the material and highlighted significant statements or units and made notes about them in a separate notebook (deBerry-Spence 2008; Kleiman 2004). Significant statements were those that described or were related to the recovering alcoholic's journey and emerging experience. Phenomenology gives primacy to subjective experience over preunderstandings, so the researcher remained open to emerging themes (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016;

Mitchell & Cody 2003), using the participants' own categories and terms (Thompson et al. 1989) instead of a priori codes or theory.

Third, the author extensively read the notes and started grouping similar themes together. Then, the author identified and described emerging themes or categories for each participant (deBerry-Spence 2008; Kleiman 2004; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990), keeping (1) the elements of the consumer journey, (2) the interactions with other actors, and (3) the emergence of customer experience as guides. When necessary, the author returned to the original texts to clarify the notes. This was done in an NVivo document for each participant, highlighting the research themes in bold. Appendix 5 presents one example of these documents.

These steps were repeated for each participant as the first level of the part-to-whole relationship (i.e., significant statements to entire transcript). Two aspects are noteworthy. First, although the researcher tried to maintain the description of the emerging themes as emic as possible (i.e., using participants' own terms and categories), this was more difficult when describing the emergence of customer experience. For instance, customer experience-specific nomenclature (e.g., cognitive experiences) was used, even though the participants themselves did not describe their experiences in these terms. Second, the analysis of previous cases naturally influenced the analysis of subsequent ones. However, the researcher was reflective about this issue when analyzing data and strived to keep an open mind to find contradictions and/or other emerging themes.

The second stage involved a new part-to-whole relationship (i.e., individual cases to common patterns, themes, and phenomenal structure). First, the author read all the NVivo documents with the emerging themes to gain a global sense of the data. Second, the author then started integrating these emerging themes according to similarities and tried to identify relationships between them (Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990). More specifically, from the emerging themes documents, the author created nodes with themes, making notes about the similarities between these. The author then grouped similar themes into broader themes. This "grouping-regrouping" step was iterative and was repeated until the author could reach a satisfactory thematic structure that described the structure of the phenomenon. Third, the author used these findings to describe the structure of the phenomenon (i.e., its essence) (deBerry-Spence 2008; Giorgi 1997; Kleiman 2004).

In the third stage, the author then revisited the textual material to check three aspects. First, the author checked whether the raw data supported the interpretations of themes and general phenomenal structure. Second, the author checked whether the final interpretation was described at the experiential level by assessing whether the description of the experience is grounded in the participants' terms and categories

(Thompson et al. 1989). Third, the author examined the context of the interpretations to ensure that they took account of previous passages of the interview (Thompson et al. 1989).

In the fourth stage, the phenomenological findings were later interpreted in light of the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998). Although the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition gives primacy to the subjective experience over preunderstandings (e.g., theories and concepts), the researcher moves from an emic to an etic perspective by interpreting the findings with conceptual and/or theoretical lenses that help to better understand the research problem (Conroy 2003; Pietkiwicz & Smith 2012). In other words, it is assumed that theory can be inductively generated based on the phenomenological data, but a researcher's interpretation of it always involves reflections from the theoretical literature (Goulding 2005; Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016). Figure 5 exemplifies the process.

3.4.5 Evaluative criteria for the hermeneutic-phenomenological study

This empirical study applies criteria that are compatible with the assumptions of the hermeneutic-phenomenological orientation. First, *primacy of subjective experience over preunderstandings* (Horrigan-Kelly et al. 2016; Mitchell & Cody 1993) was done by not imposing a theoretical or conceptual background on the data and by being reflexive (i.e., making the assumptions explicit). The author strived to show in the report how the assumptions about customer experience influenced data analysis. Primacy of subjective experience over preunderstandings also means not seeking external verification to corroborate participants' descriptions (Thompson et al. 1989). Therefore, the author took the participants' subjective experience as reality. For example, some participants believed that one is born an alcoholic, while others believed that alcoholism is a disease that develops over time. The author did not try to identify which information was true, because what mattered is what each participant experienced as truth.

Second, the *emic approach* means using participants' own terms and categories to describe their experiences (Hirschman 1986; Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990). An effort was made to present the phenomenological findings not in conceptual terms but in the participants' terms.

Third, the *description of essential meanings* (Giorgi 1997; Kleiman 2004) refers to the identification of the main themes and patterns essential to describing the phenomenal structure. Member checks corroborated that there is not an essential theme missing in the interpretation. Member check was conducted with 11 participants from the first round, and the feedback was very positive. Only wording adjustments were necessary. The most common reaction to presenting the experiential themes was "you got exactly what happens!"

Finally, *empirical support* means that the results must necessarily be grounded in (and directly seen in) participants' descriptions of their experiences (deBerry-Spence 2008; Kleiman 2004; Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990). This criterion was assessed when the researcher read the textual material again after having the results, confirming that the themes were found for all participants.

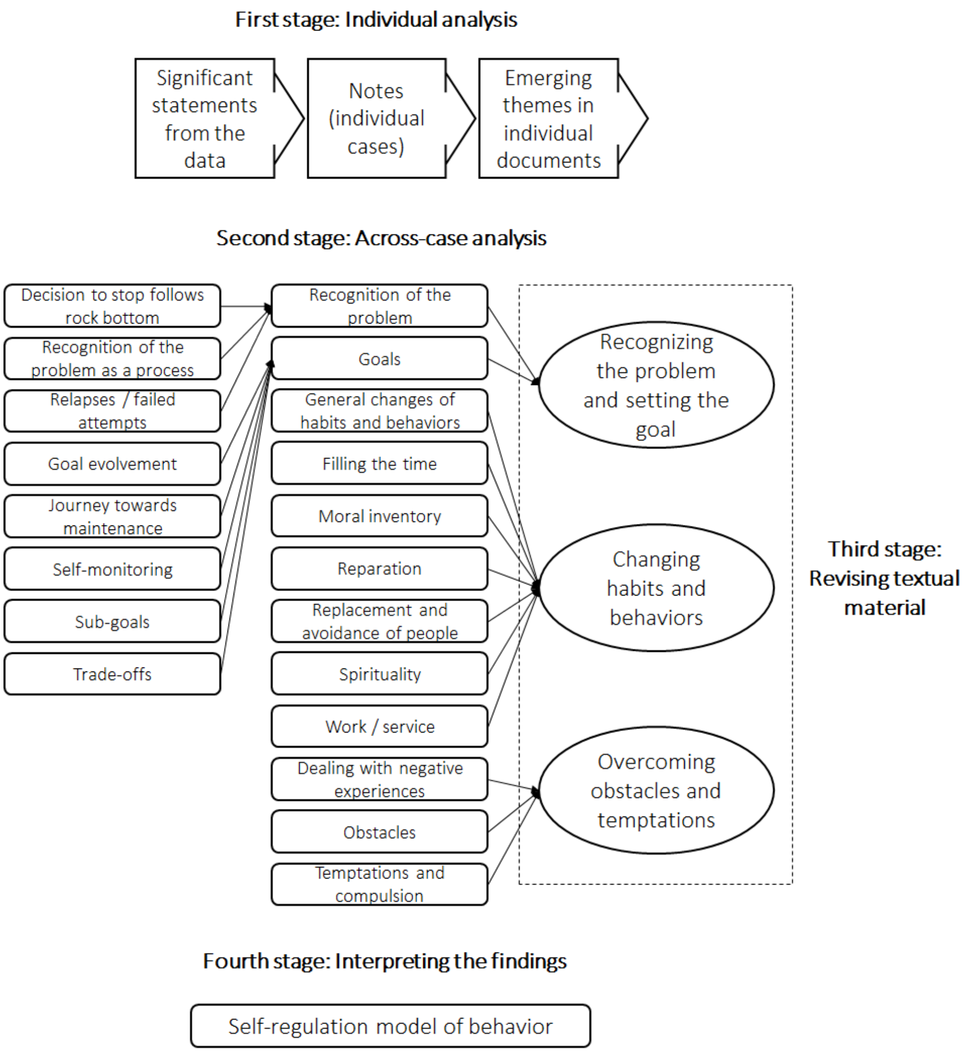

Figure 5. Data analysis process

4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the three articles that are part of this dissertation, giving more emphasis to the results that are relevant to answering the research questions.

4.1 Summary of Article I's findings

The goal of Article I was "to develop a set of fundamental premises that reconcile contradictions and dilemmas in the current customer experience literature and provide integrative guideposts for future research in the field" (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 2). The literature on customer experience is very fragmented (e.g., Chaney et al. 2018; Kranzbühler et al. 2018); thus, Article I first identified eight literature fields that study customer experience in marketing through the systematic literature review (4.1.1). Article I then classified these eight literature fields into two research traditions by analyzing and comparing the phenomena each literature field addresses and the metatheoretical assumptions it adopts (metatheoretical analysis) (4.1.2). Finally, Article I developed the fundamental premises of customer experience by juxtaposing these research traditions and integrating the compatible elements (4.1.3).

4.1.1 Customer experience literature fields

The eight literature fields that study customer experience in marketing are services marketing, consumer research, retailing, S-D logic, service design, online marketing, branding, and experiential marketing. Table 4 in Article I presents a summary of the main findings regarding the nature of the phenomena and the metatheoretical assumptions adopted in each literature field.

Regarding the nature of the phenomena, the literature fields present different definitions for customer experience. For instance, experiential marketing sees the experience as a distinct offering created and staged by a firm. Other literature fields see customer experience as evaluation of or responses and reactions to some stimuli. The distinct literature fields usually focus on a particular set of stimuli, ranging from a particular set of managerial stimuli to stimuli present in a customer's overall consumption process. For example, branding delimits customer experience to responses to brand-related stimuli; services marketing delimits it to assessment of or responses to stimuli in the service encounter or service process. In contrast, consumer research and S-D logic focus on stimuli in a customer's context or ecosystem beyond managerial stimuli.

Regarding the metatheoretical assumptions, the literature fields are divided. On one side, services marketing, retailing, service design, online marketing, branding, and experiential marketing present ontological assumptions more compatible with an objective view of reality, where certain stimuli trigger certain customer responses. In this way, they seek to explain this reality by searching for laws and regularities, usually investigating the relationship between customer experience and other variables. Conversely, consumer research and S-D logic adopt a more subjective view of reality in which experience is embedded in a customer's lifeworld and interpreted by him or her. It follows that these literature fields seek to understand how customers experience an object in context, giving preference to interpretive methods.

4.1.2 Research traditions of customer experience

Based on the analysis of the nature of phenomena and the metatheoretical assumptions of the literature fields, it was possible to infer that the scope of customer experience phenomena ranges from dyadic to systemic, while the metatheoretical assumptions range from positivist to interpretive approaches. The eight literature fields were then grouped into two research traditions (see Figure 1 in Article I).

The first research tradition, *customer experience as responses to managerial stimuli*, includes experiential marketing, services marketing, online marketing, retailing, branding, and service design. It presents a narrow view of the scope of customer experience phenomena, because it tends to focus on particular sets of managerial stimuli. Contextual factors are often dismissed, or studies sometimes consider a small number of moderators of the relationship between customer experience and other variables. A positivist approach is favored for testing the relationship between customer experience and other variables.

The second research tradition, *customer experience as responses to consumption processes*, includes consumer research, S-D logic, and service design. It adopts a broader view of the determinants of customer experience that often includes multiple actors and contextual factors. This research tradition tends to adopt interpretive metatheoretical assumptions to capture how experience emerges in context.

4.1.3 Fundamental premises of customer experience

Article I also developed fundamental premises of customer experience that can be used to advance a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Table 10 presents the fundamental premises and the implications for research that are relevant for developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

As already discussed in section 2.1.2, Premise 1a defines customer experience as non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli, a view built in the most prevalent definition across the two research traditions. Premise 1b addresses the intensity of these responses, which can range from ordinary to extraordinary. This is in contrast with previous research that labels offerings as extraordinary or ordinary instead of a customer's responses and reactions to them.

Premise 2a states that "customer experience stimuli reside within and outside firm-controlled touchpoints and can be viewed from multiple levels of aggregation" (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 10). Different literature fields focus on specific sets of offering-related stimuli; thus, this premise organizes extant knowledge into a multilevel framework of the customer journey, which comprises four levels. First, "*cues* refer to anything that can be perceived or sensed by the customer" (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 10), such as a logo design, an employee's smile, or a website feature. Second, *touchpoints* refer to a customer's direct or indirect interactions or contacts with an offering, such as a service encounter. Third, the *customer journey* refers to the process customers go through before, during, and after the service or purchase, comprising a series of touchpoints. Fourth, the *consumer journey* refers to the process customers undergo to achieve their goals, involving multiple actors. Premise 2b states that these stimuli and their interconnections affect customer experience dynamically.

Premise 3 states that "customer experience is subjective and context-specific, because responses to offering-related stimuli and their evaluative outcomes depend on customer, situational, and sociocultural contingencies" (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 11). Customer contingencies refer to a customer's characteristics (e.g., values, resources, and fit of the offering with a customer's context). Situational contingencies refer to the immediate context (e.g., type of store, other customers, and other firms). Sociocultural contingencies refer to the broader system in which the customer is inserted (e.g., practices, cultural aspects, and societal norms and rules). This premise highlights the contextual nature of customer experience, giving strong emphasis to the fit of an offering with a customer's processes and goals. Therefore, whether an experience is evaluated as good or bad depends on a customer's context and lifeworld, including their goals.

Table 10. Fundamental premises of customer experience (adapted from Article I)

Premises	Implications for a customer-centric perspective of customer experience
P1a: Customer experience comprises customers' non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli along the customer journey.	The operationalization of customer experience should focus on a customer's spontaneous responses and reactions to stimuli. Customer experience should be distinguished from stimuli (e.g., the offering) and from evaluative outcomes (e.g., satisfaction).
P1b: Customer experience ranges from ordinary to extraordinary representing the intensity of customer responses to stimuli.	Timing of investigating customer experience is relevant to capture the spontaneous responses and reactions. Ordinary and extraordinary customer experiences are a representation of customers' responses and reactions rather than the context; research should focus on the intensity of customer's responses to stimuli.
P2a: Customer experience stimuli reside within and outside firm-controlled touchpoints and can be viewed from multiple levels of aggregation. P2b: Customer experience stimuli and their interconnections affect customer experience in a dynamic manner.	The emergence of customer experience can be analyzed at different levels of aggregation: (1) cues, (2) touchpoints, (3) the customer journey, and (4) the consumer journey. Researchers should consider interactions between stimuli within and across levels of the customer journey. Suggestion of longitudinal designs to create insights into the evolving formation of customer experience. Suggestion of more research into the touchpoints beyond the firm's control (e.g., that reside in the consumer journey).
P3: Customer experience is subjective and context-specific, because responses to offering-related stimuli and their evaluative outcomes depend on customer, situational, and sociocultural contingencies.	A particular customer experience should not be considered "universally good" or "universally bad" but the dependency of this evaluation on the context should be acknowledged. Suggestion of more research on relevant contextual factors, drawing especially from the interpretive research tradition.
P4: Firms cannot create the customer experience, but they can monitor, design, and manage a range of stimuli that affect such experiences.	Researchers should acknowledge that the focus of customer experience management is stimuli along the customer journey to trigger intended responses. Stimuli vary in the degree to which firms can control them, requiring different management approaches. Suggestion of more research on stimuli and touchpoints firms cannot control. Suggestion of more research on the fit between managerial stimuli and a customer's context.

Finally, Premise 4 state that firms cannot create the customer experience per se, because customer experience is defined as a customer's spontaneous responses and reactions to some stimuli. However, firms can monitor, design, and manage a range of stimuli to which customers respond. The first research tradition gives guidelines on how to manage stimuli that firms can control, whereas the interpretive tradition suggests that managing stimuli the firms cannot control involves mapping the stimuli in a holistic manner to monitor and react to them (e.g., by partnering with external actors that influence the customer experience).

4.2 Summary of Article II's findings

Article II first identifies two trends in the customer experience literature: (1) from dyads to ecosystems and (2) from provider- to consumer-centric perspectives on the journey. This article takes the consumer-journey level of the customer journey into account as the process that consumers undergo when pursuing goals in their lifeworlds (Becker 2018a). The study argues that the methods usually used to study customer experience have been useful in identifying managerial stimuli that affect the customer experience; however, they exclude determinants in a customer's broader context that are not related to a single firm (e.g., social actors and customer's activities). Studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective involves some methodological requirements (4.2.1). Taking these requirements into account, the study presents guidelines for three underused methods in the customer experience literature: (1) phenomenological interviews, (2) event-based approaches, and (3) diary method (4.2.2).

4.2.1 Methodological requirements for a customer-centric perspective of customer experience

The first requirement for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective is the *first-hand description of experience*. A customer-centric perspective of customer experience posits that the customer experience emerges in a customer's lifeworld; therefore, the method should allow the experience to be described in context, such as in phenomenological research. A first-hand description of the experience allows customers to describe the several elements that are part of the consumer journey from a customer's viewpoint, such as events, activities, and interactions with multiple actors.

The second requirement for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective is the *description of relevant actors and institutions in a customer's ecosystem*. The ecosystem perspective does not distinguish between producer and consumer; thus, any actor can be relevant, because any actor can provide resources that help a customer's goal pursuit. Furthermore, the method should allow the description of institutions and institutional arrangements to emerge, because they coordinate interactions between actors and can affect the customer experience (e.g., Akaka & Vargo 2015).

The third requirement for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective is *capturing the processual nature of the journey*. This requirement entails some assumptions: studying change in the context, understanding the chronology of events and their interconnections, and understanding that the customer journey and experience are shaped by contextual factors, but they also affect the context over time (e.g., Pettigrew 1990). Researchers have been suggesting longitudinal methods for the study of customer experience (e.g., Jaakkola et al. 2015), yet the most important aspect here is capturing the sequence of events over time. This can be done with retrospective and/or real-time data collection methods.

4.2.2 Data collection methods

Based on the systematic literature review, Article II argues that most of the current methods used in the customer experience literature fail to meet the methodological requirements to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. The article then provides guidelines for three data collection methods that are underused in the customer experience literature and that have the potential to meet the methodological requirements.

The *phenomenological interview* is defined as an unstructured, open-ended, and dialogical interview that follows phenomenological philosophical assumptions. The phenomenological interview results in a first-hand narrative; therefore, it can be seen as a process that highlights a customer's relationship with other actors and, thus, that satisfies the methodological requirements previously identified. Following general commitments within the phenomenological tradition, Article II offers guidelines regarding (1) the selection of participants, (2) the primacy of subjective experience, and (3) capturing contextual factors.

First, the goal of the phenomenological interview is to capture the first-hand description of experience, so it follows that the participants must have experienced or be experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. Second, primacy of subjective experience over theoretical assumptions means either setting aside previous understandings or being reflexive and making them explicit. It follows that the structure of the interview should be open and conversational, with the researcher open to emerging themes during data collection and analysis. Third, the phenomenological interview assumes that experiences occur in a context that co-constitutes reality. Therefore, the researcher must try to understand what the experience means in a customer's context by encouraging detailed descriptions.

Event-based approaches refer to "methods that focus on events or incidents as a means of understanding" customer experience (Becker 2018a, 474). This is an inductive approach to generating data that focuses on a sequence of events over time in context, so it satisfies the methodological requirements proposed here. Article II offers guidelines regarding (1) the delimitation of events, (2) temporal aspects, and (3) elicitation of events in the interview.

First, the researcher must define the process to be researched in order to delimit the events. Customer experience studies have used some event-based approaches (e.g., critical incident technique), but the events were delimited to interactions with a single firm or an aspect of it within the firm's boundaries. Article II suggests that researchers study the consumer journey as the central process, focusing on events that relate to the goal pursuit in a customer's lifeworld. Second, temporal aspects refer to recruiting participants who have lived the process recently or who are currently living it. This is important for participants to recall the events and detail them richly. Researchers then can use a combination of real-time and retrospective data. Third, contextual factors refer to eliciting rich descriptions of events in their context, allowing the description of relevant actors and responses to the events.

Diary method refers to the participants' self-report of experiences, including a sequence of events, thoughts, and observations that constitutes a narrative. Phenomenological in nature, it allows the description of first-hand experiences and multi-actor processes, satisfying the methodological requirements. Article II focused on diaries solicited for research purposes, providing guidelines regarding (1) the diary design, (2) the means of reporting, (3) instructions, and (4) maintaining participants' motivation.

First, the diary design can be of three types: (1) interval-contingent, asking participants to report their experiences at specific intervals; (2) signal-contingent, emitting a signal for participants to report their experiences; and (3) event-contingent, asking participants to report their experiences after a specific event happens. Second, diaries can be reported through text, audio, or video. It is recommended that participants use a convenient and familiar means of reporting their experiences. Third, it is important to give clear but not too restrictive instructions for participants. Fourth, to maintain participants' motivation, it is also recommended that researchers provide feedback about the diary, inform participants about the diary's benefits (e.g., self-knowledge), and use a means of reporting familiar to participants.

4.3 Summary of Article III's findings

Article III's findings are presented in three stages. First, the findings from the hermeneutic-phenomenological study are presented, in which the processes of the recovering alcoholics' journey toward a sober life are described along with their associated experiences. Second, these findings are then interpreted using the self-regulation model of behavior. Third, a goal-oriented view of customer journeys is developed.

4.3.1 Recovering alcoholics' journey toward a sober life

Through the recovering alcoholics' stories, it was possible to identify three processes that describe their recovery journey: (1) recognizing the problem and setting the goals, (2) changing habits and behaviors, and (3) overcoming obstacles and temptations. *Recognizing the problem and setting the goal* are ongoing and dynamic processes in the recovering alcoholic's journey toward a sober life. The findings indicate that the goal evolves throughout the journey. Usually, alcoholics expect to reduce consumption when they are still drinking, but these attempts often fail. The goal evolves to stopping drinking usually after reaching rock bottom and having a spiritual awakening. Rock bottom means different things for different participants: a spouse leaving, a friend dying in a car accident caused by alcohol consumption, or a big fight in the family. These events cause them extremely negative experiences, such as fear, shame, and guilt. At this point, recovering alcoholics seek external help to stop drinking, such at detoxification clinics or A.A.

Usually guided by the 12-steps, which direct recovering alcoholics' lives toward sobriety, the goal further evolves into something more than abstinence: changing of life and becoming a new person. Participants often described that, if they continue behaving in the same way as they used to when they were drinking, relapse becomes a real threat. This can involve painful changes, because recovering alcoholics must recognize and admit their defects of character in order to change them. Finally, after some time in the recovery journey, the goal evolves from changing habits and behaviors to maintaining recovery: recovering alcoholics continue going to A.A. meetings to "stay convinced" that they are alcoholics and keep the compulsion levels low or non-existent.

Recovering alcoholics must *change habits and behaviors* to achieve their goals. These changes refer not only to abstinence but also to changing the person they are (i.e., becoming a new person), their defects of character (i.e., becoming responsible), and everyday concrete behaviors (i.e., paying the bills). Recovering alcoholics need to abandon many habits, behaviors, and people on this journey, which is often associated with negative experiences (e.g., painful effects of detoxification). Recovering alcoholics usually abandon habits and behaviors that might "poke the monster" (e.g., using vinegar and aftershave lotion, staying at bars).

The recovery journey also involves adopting new habits and behaviors. Going to meetings and seeing other A.A. members are considered a daily maintenance and a medicine for alcoholism. These new habits and behaviors usually cause positive experiences that keep recovering alcoholics motivated to stay on their path toward sobriety, such as when they feel relieved after sharing a story or when they feel a good anxiety before meeting other members. Adoption of seemingly unrelated behaviors is also part of the recovery journey as the goal evolves to becoming a new person. These behaviors help recovering alcoholics to fulfill idle time, which is a poison for them.

Even though recovering alcoholics change their habits and behaviors to avoid “awakening the monster,” sometimes “the monster awakens” anyway. Therefore, recovering alcoholics need to apply tactics and strategies to *overcome obstacles and temptations*. Many things can provoke temptations: smelling alcohol, seeing an ad with a cold beer, or dreaming of alcohol. Beyond temptations directly related to drinking, negative experiences can also represent a danger for alcoholics, such as when they feel resentment or anger. Recovering alcoholics then apply some tactics to overcome these temptations. When they feel a desire to drink, they can eat candy, have cold juice, or drink coffee. They can go to the meetings or call another member. If nothing works, they remember the A.A. motto: “Avoid the first sip every 24 hours.” They also described that they learned how to deal with their problems in A.A. When they experience something negative, they can do the serenity prayer, go to meetings or talk to other members, distract themselves, or just have patience and reframe their problems. Comparing their current lives and the positive experiences that follow from sobriety with the time when they were drinking gives them additional motivation to stay in their path.

4.3.2 Interpreting the journey toward a sober life with the self-regulation model of behavior

When interpreting these phenomenological findings with the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998), it is possible to understand how recovering alcoholics proceeded along the journey toward a sober life through the repeating processes of the self-regulation model of behavior. Figure 6 shows how the processes identified in the phenomenological findings fit into the self-regulation process. Based on the findings, Figure 6 also adapts the self-regulation model of behavior to the present context.

Recognizing the problem and setting the goals refers to identifying the higher-order and subordinate goals and revising them as customers proceed in their journey. The output of feedback loops operating at higher levels of the hierarchy provides the goals for feedback loops operating at lower levels; thus, pursuing the higher-order goal of a sober life provides subordinate, more concrete goals. This is a dynamic process, as customers reevaluate the subordinate goals throughout their journey, setting goals that are more effective in achieving the higher-order goal. Our findings also indicate that setting the goals is a process influenced by other actors (e.g., other recovering alcoholics, A.A.).

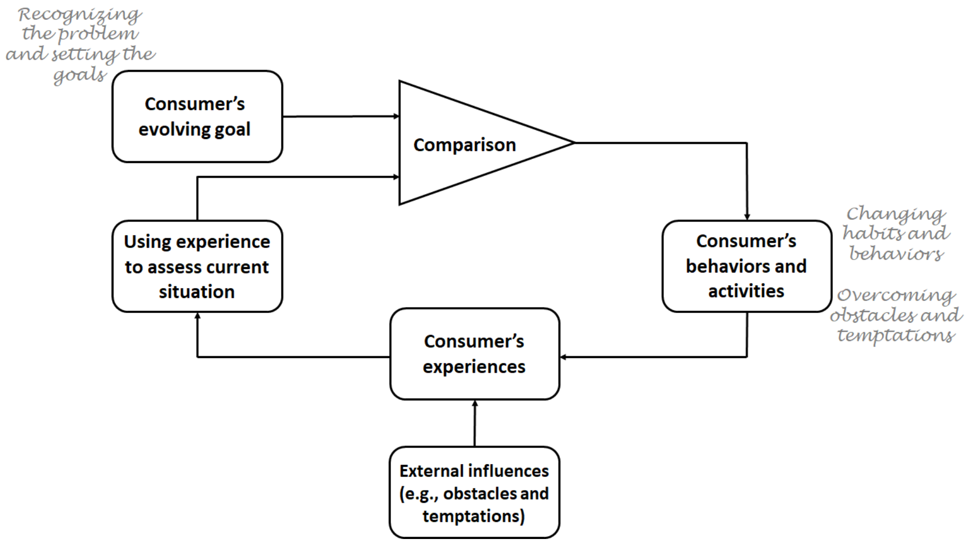

Figure 6. Understanding the processes of a consumer's journey toward higher-order goals through the self-regulation model of behavior (Article III)

The goals are then compared with customers' perceptions of their current situation. The findings show that recovering alcoholics use their experiences (e.g., emotional and sensorial experiences) to create the perception about their current situation. For them, the ideal current situation is to feel free from negative experiences and temptations that serve as relapse triggers. When customers perceive a discrepancy between their current situation and their goal, they behave to change their current situation and reduce the discrepancy. These behaviors appear often in the beginning of the recovery journey for recovering alcoholics, because they still feel a strong desire to drink. Therefore, they must *change habits and behaviors*, avoiding the ones that cause temptation and engaging in behaviors that support their recovery. Even though these behaviors directed at change are most common at the beginning of the journey, disturbances (e.g., dreaming about alcohol) can occur at any time, changing an individual's current situation (i.e., their experience). Therefore, recovering alcoholics engage in behaviors to *overcome obstacles and temptations*.

Once customers achieve a desired state in their journeys that is close to their goal (e.g., no desire to drink anymore), they stop perceiving a discrepancy between their current situation and their goals and continue behaving in a way that maintains their current situation. This is the case for those recovering alcoholics with many years of sobriety who no longer feel a desire to drink but nonetheless keep going to the meetings and avoiding temptations so they continue not experiencing these negative experiences. Notably, the behaviors individuals engage in on their journeys toward their goals often involve interactions with many actors who help them. For recovering alcoholics, these actors can be, for instance, health service providers, self-help groups, friends, and relatives.

4.3.3 A goal-oriented view of customer journeys

Interpreting the phenomenological findings with the self-regulation model of behavior can advance the understanding of customer journeys by helping to develop a goal-oriented view of customer journeys (Figure 7).

The framework depicts journeys as goal oriented. In other words, customers engage in customer journeys to achieve particular goals and, therefore, manifest the functions of the self-regulation model of behavior. The framework also considers the hierarchical organization of goals. In this way, it becomes visible that the goals that motivate customers to engage in customer journeys are subordinate to higher-order goals in the hierarchy. In the same spirit, the goals that motivate customers to engage in customer journeys have subordinate, more concrete goals in the hierarchy. It follows that the customer journey can also be depicted at multiple levels.

The framework proposes three key levels directed at goals with different abstraction levels: the consumer journey, the customer journey, and touchpoints. The *consumer journey* refers to the processes customers engage in when pursuing higher-order goals (e.g., the recovering alcoholic's journey toward a sober life). Customers then constantly try to reduce the discrepancy between their current situations, assessed through their experiences, and their higher-order goal. If there is a discrepancy, customers then behave to reduce it; if there is no discrepancy, customers maintain their behaviors.

Customers set goals subordinate to the higher-order goal. When customers do not have the necessary resources to approximate their current situations to their higher-order goal, they interact with other actors. Therefore, consumer journeys involve engaging in subordinate and embedded *customer journeys* directed at goals at lower levels in the goal hierarchy. For example, to live a sober life (higher-order goal), recovering alcoholics need to detox from the substance (subordinate goal). Hence, they engage in a customer journey with health-service providers when they cannot handle the effects of abstinence. A single customer journey is often insufficient to achieve the higher-order goal (although it can help a customer achieve multiple subordinate goals). Therefore, this framework highlights the complementarity of different customer journeys to achieve a customer's higher-order goal and how different customer journeys can affect each other. Interestingly, the consumer journey also involves disengaging from customer journeys that are detrimental to higher-order goal achievement.

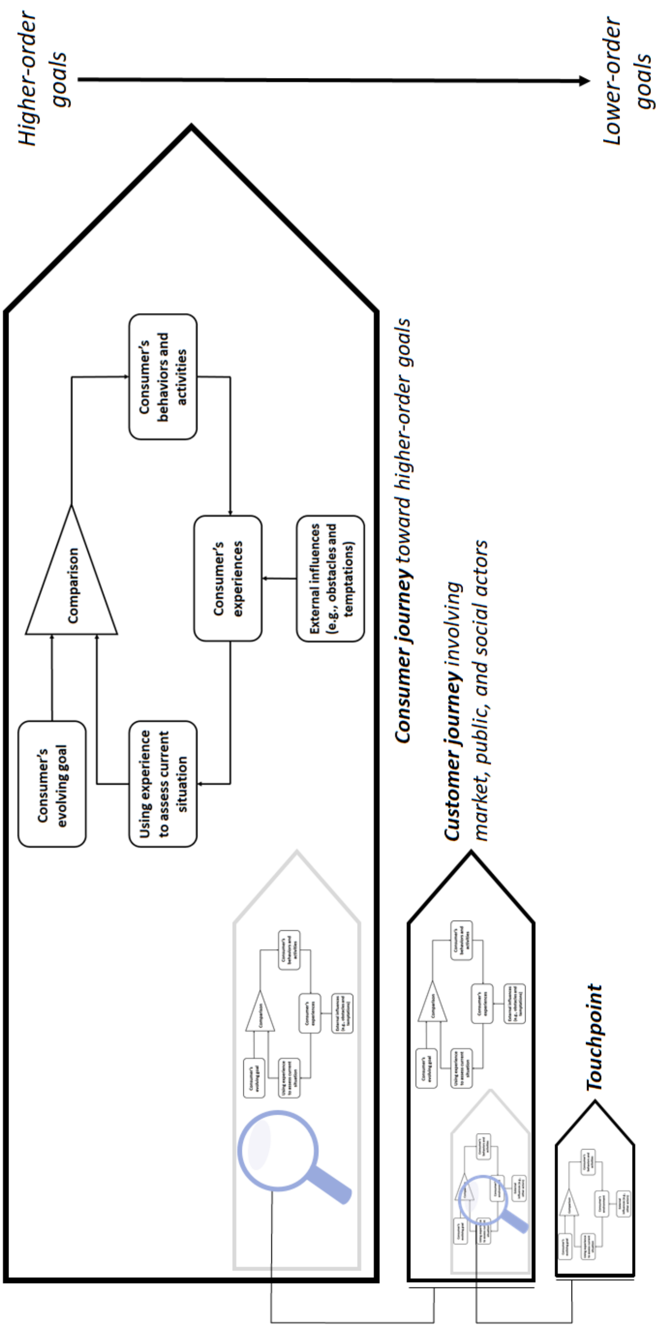

Figure 7. A goal-oriented view of the customer journey (Article III)

A customer journey, in its turn, consists of multiple *touchpoints* directed at even lower-order goals in the goal hierarchy. For example, when recovering alcoholics feel anger, they might go to a meeting (i.e., touchpoint) with the purpose of restoring calmness (subordinate goal). The embeddedness of the journeys indicates that these levels happen simultaneously, as the magnifying glasses in Figure 7 show. When customers are interacting with a touchpoint, they are simultaneously engaging in both the customer journey and the consumer journey.

The framework also posits that experiences direct behavior. This happens because customers use what they experience as one source of information about their current situation, which is then compared to their goals. The self-regulation model describes that creating the input through which individuals sense their current situation involves several sources of information. When customers compare their experiences with their goals, they can behave to change or maintain their current situation. It follows that negative experiences can play a positive role in the consumer journey when they direct customers' behaviors toward their higher-order goals. For example, recovering alcoholics' recognition of their defects of character can be painful and sad, but these experiences make them face their problems. At other times, however, there are negative experiences that do not contribute to the goal, but the stimuli that cause those experiences do. For example, the effects of abstinence are experiences that do not contribute to the goal, but stopping drinking is a necessary behavior in this journey.

Just as the journey is depicted at multiple levels, experiences can also be analyzed at multiple levels. More specifically, experiences can emerge as responses to specific stimuli residing at touchpoints, the combination of stimuli throughout a customer journey, and the progress toward a goal facilitated by the combination of stimuli in the consumer journey. As customers use experiences to assess their current situation, it follows that experiences that emerge at lower levels of the journey do not necessarily contribute cumulatively to experiences that emerge at higher levels, as negative experiences can contribute to the goal. The contribution of experiences across levels depends on how the experience contributes to the goal.

5 Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of findings that answers the research questions, the theoretical contributions of this dissertation to the customer experience literature, a research agenda, practical and societal implications, and an evaluation of the study.

5.1 Summary of findings

Customer experience, a central concept in the marketing literature, is now considered a top managerial and research priority. This dissertation argues that the current literature provides a limited understanding of customer experience due to the restricted focus on interactions with a single firm as its determinants. This restricted focus excludes multiple actors and contextual factors that also affect the customer experience in customers' journeys to achieve their goals. This dissertation further argues that a customer-centric perspective of customer experience can shed light on the elements beyond interactions with a single firm that affect the customer experience. Such a perspective departs from what customers want to achieve in their lifeworlds; thus, this perspective is able able to identify multiple actors and contextual factors that affect the customer experience, to understand how firms' offerings fit into a customer's overall context, and to understand how distinct customer journeys connect to each other. Therefore, *the purpose of this dissertation was to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience*. The next subsections summarize the answers to the three research questions that guided this dissertation. Section 5.2 presents a discussion of how these findings build on, extend, and contribute to the customer experience literature.

5.1.1 RQ1: Integrating the literature to form a customer-centric perspective of customer experience

Given the fragmentation of the customer experience literature (Chaney et al. 2018; Kranzbühler et al. 2018) and the lack of studies that aim to integrate it, the first research question this dissertation asked was, "*How can the current customer experience literature be integrated to form a customer-centric perspective of customer experience?*". To answer this question, a metatheoretical analysis was conducted on articles selected based on a systematic literature review of customer experience in the marketing literature. This enabled the integration of extant literature and the development of four fundamental premises that define what customer experience is (and is not), provide a multilevel view of the customer journey, identify the contingencies of customer experience, and identify the role of the firm in its management. These premises are applicable across research traditions regardless of the metatheoretical assumptions they adopt, yet it is possible to see an alignment with a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

Premise 1a defines customer experience as spontaneous and non-deliberate responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli. Some studies in customer experience literature tend to not clearly differentiate between customer experience and the service encounter (e.g., Grove & Fisk 1992) or the offering (e.g., Pine & Gilmore 1998). This premise moves the definitional focus from the (managerial) stimuli to a customer's responses and reactions. Table 1 reveals that the studies that adopt a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience often focus more on the stimuli of customer experience (e.g., expanding the stimuli domain to include multiple actors and contextual factors), not on deepening the discussion on how these stimuli affect customer experience as defined in Premise 1a. Premise 1b also changes the focus of the extraordinary vs. ordinary dichotomy from the offering and places it on the intensity of customer responses, transforming it into a continuum.

Premise 2a states that the stimuli to which customers respond can be viewed at multiple levels of aggregation or, more specifically, cues, touchpoints, customer journey, and consumer journey. By integrating the disparate stimuli that the distinct literature fields focus on, this premise highlights the embeddedness of cues, touchpoints, and customer journeys—connected to a firm-centric perspective of customer experience—into consumer journeys—connected to a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. The consumer journey level has traditionally been neglected in the customer experience literature (Hamilton & Price 2019). Understanding the consumer journey toward higher-order goals is a needed step to gaining a customer-centric perspective of customer experience, because customer experience is embedded into a customer's lifeworld (Akaka & Vargo 2015; Schembri 2009; Schouten et al. 2007). Such a broader outlook allows the identification of multiple actors and contextual factors that influence the customer experience through a customer's perspective.

Premise 2b highlights that these stimuli, within and outside the firm's control, influence the customer experience dynamically. Therefore, studies that focus solely on interactions with a single firm as determinants of the customer experience provide a limited understanding of the emergence of customer experience, because they tend to neglect stimuli in the broader consumer journey and how they interact with managerial stimuli.

A customer-centric perspective of customer experience sheds light on a customer's context. Premise 3 then organizes contingencies of customer experience into three groups: customer, situational, and sociocultural. This premise strongly highlights that the customer experience is embedded in context, and its evaluation (e.g., whether a customer experience will lead to satisfaction) depends on its fit within this broader context. Premise 3 offers, then, an organizing framework for contextual factors that might affect the customer experience.

A customer-centric perspective recognizes that firms cannot control all aspects that affect the customer experience, considering that multiple actors and contextual factors interact with managerial stimuli. Therefore, Premise 4 states that firms cannot create or manage the customer experience directly, but they can design and manage managerial stimuli while monitoring and responding to stimuli they cannot control. Premise 4 also highlights the importance of the fit between managerial stimuli and a customer's context.

Altogether, answering RQ1 involved integrating the extant literature into fundamental premises that can be used to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. It is noteworthy that these premises do not completely detach from or contradict the traditional, firm-centric literature; rather, these premises reconcile contradictions in the extant literature to broaden and develop it toward a more customer-centric perspective. This is important, considering that the customer experience literature is already fragmented. In other words, the integrative premises are not presented as yet another literature field (e.g., the customer-centric literature field of customer experience) but as a transcendent and customer-centric perspective that can be applied to any literature field or research tradition.

5.1.2 RQ2: Empirically studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective

Developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience also involves providing guideposts to its empirical study. A customer-centric perspective departs from what customers are doing in their lives and how offerings fit into this broader context. Studies have highlighted the inadequacy of current methods (Helkkula et al. 2012; Thompson et al. 1989) and suggested the need for new ones to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (Helkkula et al. 2012; Jaakkola et al. 2015; Lipkin 2016), taking into account contextual factors and the dynamic nature of customer experience (Halvorsrud et al. 2016; Thompson et al. 1989). Therefore, this dissertation asked, "*How can customer experience be empirically studied through a customer-centric perspective?*". Articles I and II give input into what elements need to be captured in the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective, as well as into the methodological requirements involved in capturing them. Article II then provides tailored guidelines for data collection methods that fulfill these methodological requirements, while Article III offers lessons for the application of these methods, given that it employed two of them.

The empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective involves capturing elements and stimuli that reside in the consumer-journey level of the customer journey. One can capture multiple actors (e.g., firms, customers, social actors) and contextual factors (e.g., customer-related contingencies, institutions and institutional arrangements) that influence the customer experience by departing from what customers are doing in their lives to achieve their goals. Furthermore, the dynamic interaction between these stimuli should be captured. Researchers should be aware that is not enough to capture the elements of a consumer journey; they should also explore customers' affective, cognitive, sensorial, social, and behavioral responses to these stimuli.

Methodological requirements follow from these elements. First, the first-hand, phenomenological description of experiences allows the description of these elements from a customer's perspective and in a contextualized form. This is important, because the contextual boundaries of customer experience should be defined by the customers themselves (Lipkin 2016). Not surprisingly, the research tradition that sees customer experience as responses to consumption processes, which presents a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience, often adopts interpretive methods that allow the first-hand description of experiences.

Second, as this dissertation has shown, methods traditionally employed in the current customer experience literature are often designed in a way that focus mainly on interactions with a single firm. Therefore, methods should be open and unstructured enough to let the description of multiple actors, institutions, and other contextual factors emerge. For that reason, qualitative methods seem most appropriate for empirically studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective.

Third, a processual perspective is important, because it can capture the sequence of a customer's interactions with varied stimuli over time, something essential if one wants to understand how these stimuli dynamically interact and influence the customer experience. A processual perspective can be captured with both retrospective data and real-time data collection (Bizzi & Langley 2012; Halinen et al. 2013), but a real-time data collection has the additional benefit of better capturing the customer experience, given its spontaneous and non-deliberate nature. In other words, considering the nature of the customer experience phenomenon, the data collection timing is relevant.

Also aiming to answer RQ2, this dissertation provides guidelines for three underused data collection methods in the customer experience literature that fulfill these methodological requirements: (1) phenomenological interviews, (2) event-based approaches, and (3) diary method. The general guideline is that the data collection method should focus on the consumer journey level and what customers are doing in their lives to achieve their goals. In this way, the elements of a customer-centric perspective of customer experience will emerge in the narrative and/or recollection of events.

Finally, two lessons were learned by employing two of these three data collection methods—phenomenological interviews and diary method—in the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. First, the methods uncover different facets of the phenomenon. Phenomenological interviews were useful to provide a big picture of the consumer journey, deepening the inquiry into the more relevant events, activities, and actors and capturing the essence of the phenomenon. The diary method was a very good complement: it was useful to deepen the view of everyday events that influence the customer experience and capture the customer experience as it happens.

Second, although the requirements suggest using unstructured and open data collection methods, the practical use of these methods showed that using a customer's higher-order goal as a departure point for data collection is a valuable way of obtaining relevant data. It was possible to identify subordinate goals, multiple actors who are part of the consumer journey, customer activities and behaviors, and relevant events, by departing from a customer's higher-order goal.

5.1.3 RQ3: Conceptualizing the customer journey to generate a customer-centric perspective of customer experience

Considering that the concept of the customer journey is essential to understand the customer experience (Følstad & Kvale 2018) but that it has traditionally been used in a dyadic and firm-centric manner, developing a renewed conceptualization of the customer journey that supports the generation of a customer-centric perspective of customer experience is needed to fulfill this dissertation's purpose. Therefore, this dissertation asked, "*How can the customer journey be conceptualized to generate a customer-centric perspective of customer experience?*". Articles I and III contribute to answering this question. Article I, through Premises 2a and 2b, provides the initial structure of a multilevel customer journey. Article III argues that understanding a customer's higher-order goals can help to develop such a customer-centric conceptualization. The study then interprets the findings of a phenomenological study of a journey toward a sober life with the self-regulation model of behavior to develop a goal-oriented view of the customer journey.

Three levels of the customer journey are directed at different levels of goal abstraction: (1) consumer journey, (2) customer journey, and (3) touchpoints. The *consumer journey* refers to the process that customers undergo to achieve a higher-order goal in their lifeworlds. Consumer journeys, then, are part of the multilevel customer journey, because they represent journeys superordinate to the customer journey. The *customer journey* is the process customers undergo before, during, and after a service encounter or purchase, encompassing diverse touchpoints. Finally, *touchpoints* represent the moments the customer interacts directly or indirectly with a firm to achieve a specific, concrete goal (i.e., a task).

These three levels of the customer journey are goal oriented and organized hierarchically. Behavior in all levels of the customer journey, then, is guided by the higher-order goal in a customer's lifeworld. Customers manifest the functions of the self-regulation model of behavior in each of these levels, maintaining or adjusting their behavior to approximate their current situations, sensed through experiences, to their goals. Therefore, even though the customer-journey level concept is defined as in previous studies (e.g., Lemon & Verhoef 2016), this conceptualization differs in that it conceptualizes multiple levels of the journey. The consumer-journey level is especially important, because it has only recently been introduced in the literature without a developed conceptualization (Hamilton & Price 2019). The consumer journey differs from related concepts such as the customer's value constellation (Patrício et al. 2011), the service delivery network (Tax et al. 2013), and the experience domain (Baron & Harris 2010), because these concepts tend to focus on the network of actors who contribute to an overall and connected service (Tax et al. 2013) or activity, such as entertainment (Patrício et al. 2011). The consumer journey focuses on a customer's processes toward a higher-order goal and likely involves several distinct services and activities.

This goal-oriented and hierarchical conceptualization of the customer journey highlights the embeddedness of touchpoints and customer journeys into the consumer journey. This is important if firms and organizations are going to avoid a myopic view that focuses only on a customer's immediate goals when engaging in a customer journey and specific touchpoints. Firms that consider how their offerings fit into this broader context can offer better value propositions to their customers (Epp & Price 2011), facilitate value creation by supporting a customer's processes (Hamilton & Price 2019; Heinonen et al. 2010), and identify innovation opportunities (Patrício et al. 2011).

The customer-centric conceptualization of the customer journey also highlights the interrelationships between distinct customer journeys, which can be sequential (e.g., hospital and A.A.), complementary (e.g., A.A. and psychologist), or detrimental to one another (e.g., bars and A.A.). It is possible to identify the actors who support or hinder goal achievement by obtaining a holistic and customer-centric picture of the customer journey at all its levels. Again, this provides firms with opportunities to partner with or offer service to other actors who are part of the consumer journey.

So far, this dissertation has discussed three levels of the customer journey: consumer journey, customer journey, and touchpoints. Article I also present *cues* as a potential level of the customer journey, here defined as anything that the customer can sense or perceive and that affects the customer experience (e.g., an employee's smile or a website-specific feature). When considering the goal, it becomes clear that cues represent the stimuli to which customers respond, not the process the customer undergoes to achieve a goal. Customers then respond affectively, cognitively, sensorially, socially, and behaviorally not only to individual stimuli but also to combinations of stimuli in touchpoints, the customer journey, and the consumer journey.

Article I states that the effects of these stimuli on the customer experience are dynamic (e.g., some stimuli have larger effects than others). Article III shows that the customer experience contribution that emerges in response to stimuli at lower levels of the customer journey (e.g., touchpoints) to the customer experience that emerges in response to combinations of stimuli at higher levels of the customer journey (e.g., customer or consumer journey) depends on its contribution to the goal. For example, sadness felt at a specific therapy (i.e., a negative experience at a touchpoint) will not necessarily detract from the positive experience emerging at a customer journey with that health service provider, as this negative experience contributes to goal achievement. This happens because customer experience directs behavior on the customer journey. The customer experience literature usually portrays the customer experience as responses to stimuli, giving less consideration to how the experience can influence the customer journey.

Table 11 shows how each article contributed to answering the research questions.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This dissertation contributes to the customer experience literature by developing a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Overall, a customer-centric perspective was missing that integrates and connects with previous customer experience literature, offers guidelines for its empirical study, conceptualizes the multilevel customer journey, and addresses the role of customer experience in the journey. Such a perspective presents several contributions to the literature that add to the studies that have been moving toward a more customer-centric perspective of customer experience (e.g., Hamilton & Price 2019; Heinonen et al. 2010; Patrício et al. 2011; Tax et al. 2013; Teixeira et al. 2012).

Table 11. Contribution of articles to answering the research questions

	Article I	Article II	Article III
RQ1	• Article I integrates the customer experience literature to develop fundamental premises. • The premises delineate the conceptual domain of customer experience, defining what it is, the stimuli that affect it, key contingencies, and the role of the firm in managing it.	• N/A	• N/A
RQ2	• Article I identifies elements that need to be considered and some methodological requirements for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (e.g., identification of key contingencies; timing of data collection).	• Article II identifies elements that need to be considered and methodological requirements for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (e.g., capturing first-hand description of the experience). • It offers tailored guidelines for three methods that fulfill these requirements: phenomenological interviews, event-based approaches, and diary method.	• By employing the data collection methods offered in Article II, Article III shows their value for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. • It shows how different methods complement each other by offering different facets of the same phenomena. • It shows that departing from a customer's higher-order goal is a valuable way to obtain relevant data.
RQ3	• The fundamental premises offer a multilevel view of the customer journey, encompassing (1) cues, (2) touchpoints, (3) customer journey, and (4) consumer journey.	• N/A	• The article develops a conceptualization of the customer journey that focuses on a customer's higher-order goals. • It depicts the customer journey at multiple levels, including a superordinate level: the consumer journey. • It highlights the embeddedness of touchpoints and customer journeys into this broader context. • It describes the role and emergence of customer experience in the customer journey.

First, this dissertation integrates extant customer experience literature through presenting fundamental premises of customer experience that solve and/or transcend conflicts in the extant literature (cf. MacInnis 2011). Previous reviews of the customer experience literature did not aim to integrate the literature; rather, they described the current state of the literature, often highlighting the differences between characterizations (Helkkula 2011), contextual lenses (Lipkin 2016), and theoretical perspectives (Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Lipkin 2016). This dissertation is unique in that it seeks to transcend these differences to offer an integrative and customer-centric view of customer experience. Such an integration is a contribution to advance the science (Palmatier et al. 2018), since the fragmentation of this literature has hampered conceptual advancement in the customer experience literature (Chaney et al. 2018). These premises form the basis for a customer-centric perspective of customer experience, because they actively integrate multiple actors and contextual factors in the customer experience conceptual domain.

Second, this dissertation delineates the customer experience conceptual domain through a customer-centric perspective, because it describes “an entity and identif[ies] things that should be considered in its study” (MacInnis 2011, 144). The fundamental premises describe the customer experience concept by clearly defining it, describing how it emerges in response to varied stimuli, identifying its key contingencies, and describing the role of firms in its management. This dissertation also clearly identifies the elements that should be studied when considering a customer-centric perspective of customer experience. Even though some previous studies have provided hints on what to study when considering a customer-centric perspective of customer experience (e.g., Baron & Harris 2010; Patrício et al. 2011; Tax et al. 2013; Teixeira et al. 2012), this is one of the only studies to clearly delineate the customer experience field in such a systematic way and provide general guidelines on what needs to be considered when studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective.

Third, this dissertation provides methodological contributions to the conceptual domain of customer experience by (1) identifying the methodological requirements involved in empirically studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective and (2) providing tailored guidelines for three underused data collection methods that fulfill those requirements. Previous research offers some appropriate guidelines that can be used to empirically study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective (e.g., Thompson et al. 1989), but this dissertation differs by clearly identifying the methodological requirements involved in such a study. In this way, researchers do not need to restrict themselves to a specific data collection method but can, instead, adapt the preferred methods according to these requirements. Additionally, although the data collection methods proposed in this dissertation are not new (e.g., Thompson et al. (1989) provide some guidelines for phenomenological interviews), the guidelines offered here were tailored for the empirical study of customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. This dissertation further supports these data collection methods by showing how two of them have successfully provided relevant data to understand customer experience through a customer-centric perspective.

Fourth, this dissertation contributes to the literature by offering a customer-centric conceptualization of the customer journey that supports the customer-centric perspective of customer experience. By presenting journeys as goal-oriented and hierarchical, this dissertation extends the ideas proposed by Hamilton and Price (2019) and highlights the embeddedness of touchpoints and customer journeys in the consumer journey, keeping in sight a customer's higher-order goals and offering a truly customer-centric approach that has been advocated in marketing (e.g., Christensen et al. 2005; Heinonen et al. 2010; Levitt 1960; Vargo & Lusch 2004; 2008). Few previous studies have depicted customer journeys as goal oriented (e.g., Halvorsrud et al. 2016), but they have typically focused on the immediate goals of the customer journey, ignoring that these goals are subordinate to a higher-order goal.

Fifth, the customer-centric depiction of the multilevel and hierarchical customer journey consisting of three levels—consumer journey, customer journey, and touchpoints—also adds to the customer experience literature that has called for exploration of the multilevel nature of customer journeys (Hamilton & Price 2019; Patrício et al. 2011). A few previous studies have portrayed the customer journey as a multilevel structure (Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Patrício et al. 2011; Teixeira et al. 2012). While cues, touchpoints, and the customer journey—linked to a firm-centric perspective—have been explored in the customer experience literature (e.g., Bolton et al. 2014; Brakus et al. 2009; Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Patrício et al. 2011; Teixeira et al. 2012), the consumer journey level—linked to a customer-centric perspective—had not been properly conceptualized yet. So far, the customer experience literature, with very few exceptions (e.g., Hamilton & Price 2019), has ignored the fact that customer journeys are subordinate to consumer journeys. Helped by a phenomenological study with recovering alcoholics and the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998), this dissertation defines the consumer journey and describes *how* customers behave in pursuit of their goals through manifestation of the processes of the self-regulation model of behavior. Previous studies have investigated higher levels than the customer journey (e.g., Patrício et al. 2011; Teixeira et al. 2012), but the consumer journey differs from other conceptualizations that focus on the network of actors that contribute to an overall service or activity (e.g., Patrício et al. 2011; Tax et al. 2013) by focusing on the journeys customers undergo to achieve their higher-order goals, thus contributing to a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

Sixth, by focusing on the consumer journey toward higher-order goals, the customer-centric perspective of customer experience facilitates the identification touchpoints beyond the firm-owned ones (cf. Lemon & Verhoef 2016), adding to the literature that has been investigating both the multiple actors (e.g., Patrício et al. 2011; Tax et al. 2013) and the contextual factors that influence the customer experience (e.g., Akaka & Vargo 2015; Teixeira et al. 2012). This dissertation looks beyond interactions with a single firm by departing from a customer's higher-order goal and includes interactions with market, public, and social actors as determinants of the customer experience, attending calls for studies that explore the role of multiple actors in the customer experience (e.g., Jaakkola et al. 2015; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2015b).

Seventh, a customer-centric conceptualization of the customer journey offered new theoretical insights about the emergence of customer experience in three aspects. First, this dissertation shows that customers use their experiences as a source of information about their current situation, which drives their behaviors toward their goals. So far, previous customer experience literature has recognized that past experiences influence current and future ones (e.g., Lemon & Verhoef 2016); however, the role of customer experience on the customer journey had not been investigated yet. Second, previous customer experience literature recognizes that customer experience that emerges at touchpoints combine to contribute to an overall customer experience that emerges during the customer journey (e.g., Kranzbühler et al. 2018), but how this contribution occurs was unclear. This dissertation suggests that whether or not an individual experience at a lower level of the customer journey (e.g., touchpoint) contributes to an experience at a higher level of the customer journey (e.g., customer journey) depends on its contribution to the goal, contradicting studies that state this is a cumulative relationship (e.g., Sandström et al. 2008). Third, it follows that negative experiences at lower levels of the customer journey do not necessarily subtract from the positive experiences at higher levels of the customer journey if they are contributing to a customer's goal pursuit. This is a potential contribution for the literature, considering that, in general, negative experiences are expected to have negative implications.

5.3 Research agenda

This dissertation offers a research agenda divided into three themes to continue the development of the customer-centric perspective of the customer experience: (1) understanding the holistic consumer journey, (2) emergence of customer experience in the multilevel journey, and (3) customer experience management (Table 12).

Table 12. Research agenda

Theme	Research question
Understanding the holistic consumer journey	• How to develop self-adaptive measurement instruments that capture the elements of the consumer journey? • How do customer journeys affect each other within a consumer journey? • How do a customer's activities and events during the consumer journey relate to a particular customer journey within the consumer journey? • How do sociocultural contingencies affect the consumer journey?
Emergence of customer experience in the multilevel journey	• What is the appropriate label for experience that emerges from the combination of stimuli during the consumer journey? • How do customers respond to interactions between stimuli at multiple levels of the customer journey? • What is the relationship between customer experience, customer goals, and value-in-use?
Customer experience management	• How can firms and organizations identify a customer's higher-order goals? • How can firms and organizations map a customer's hierarchy of goals? • How can firms and organizations influence elements of the consumer journey outside their control?

This dissertation has provided suitable qualitative data collection methods to empirically study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective, but researchers who hold metatheoretical assumptions close to positivism might want to investigate the same phenomenon with quantitative methods. This will likely be challenging, as it might be difficult to identify and measure all elements that influence the customer experience when considering the consumer-journey level. One possible solution is the development of self-adaptive scales in which customers themselves select the stimuli that are more relevant to their journeys. Guidelines for such measurement instruments are available (e.g., Calinescu et al. 2013), although they have not been used in the customer experience literature.

Many elements beyond interactions with a single firm become visible when considering the holistic consumer journey. For instance, as a single customer journey is often insufficient to achieve a higher-order goal, a consumer journey likely consists of many complementary customer journeys. The literature on customer experience is not clear on how different customer journeys affect each other, even though it is clear that they do. For example, a journey toward a sober life involves complementary or sequential customer journeys with health-service providers and self-help organizations. It is important to understand how these journeys affect each other, giving firms and organizations better opportunities to partner with other firms and organizations and/or facilitate the transition from one customer journey to another. A customer journey with a particular firm or organization can also be detrimental to a customer's goal achievement (e.g., when a recovering alcoholic still goes to a bar). This dissertation's findings can provide a starting point to study more deeply the interrelationships between distinct customer journeys.

It is also important to understand how a customer's activities and events during the consumer journey affect a particular customer journey. Recent literature states that the customer journey involves more than touchpoints with a single firm (Lemon & Verhoef 2016), yet little is known about how other elements of the consumer journey affect a particular customer journey. The role of sociocultural contingencies (e.g., norms, rules, culture) during the consumer journey is another aspect that needs further research (e.g., Akaka & Vargo 2015), because they affect not only a customer's attention to particular stimuli but also a customer's goals (Thornton et al. 2012).

Previous studies state that experiences emerge in service ecosystems (Akaka & Vargo 2015) and are embedded in a customer's lifeworld (Heinonen et al. 2010), causing the boundaries of the concept of customer experience to become blurred. This dissertation defines customer experience as responses and reactions to offering-related stimuli. Future research could conceptualize customer experience at different levels of the multilevel customer journey, offering a more appropriate label for the experience that emerges throughout the consumer journey as a result of the combination of stimuli from multiple sources and the progress toward the higher-order goal. This is important in order to avoid conceptual confusion in an already-fragmented literature domain (Chaney et al. 2018; Kranzbühler et al. 2018).

It is important to understand how customers respond to interactions of stimuli as customer experience emerges as responses to stimuli and their dynamic combinations at multiple levels of the customer journey. For example, a customer journey consists of many touchpoints that, in their turn, consist of a number of cues (i.e., stimuli). How do customers then respond to these stimuli in the customer-journey level? Our results show that this is not a cumulative process, meaning that customers do not sum the experiences they have as responses to individual stimuli to form an overall score or average. Our results indicate that the contribution of experiences at lower levels to higher ones depends on their contribution to the goal, but more research is needed to better understand the emergence of customer experience.

Another finding that warrants further research is the positive role of negative experiences, at least in the case of transformative journeys. Customers use their experiences as motivation for behavior toward the goal. It is possible, however, that customers reframe their negative experiences as motivators when talking about their journeys. Therefore, further research is encouraged. Value-in-use has been defined as perceived consequences of goal achievement (Macdonald et al. 2016), so it is also important to understand the relationship between customer experience and value-in-use. Current literature posits a positive relationship between them (e.g., Sandström et al. 2008); however, if negative experiences do contribute to goal achievement, as this dissertation indicates, this relationship might be more complex.

Regarding customer experience management, the customer-centric perspective presents new challenges for firms and organizations. It becomes imperative to develop methods for firms to identify their customer's higher-order goals and map the goal hierarchy when the higher-order goal is the starting point for mapping the consumer journey. Additionally, the literature on customer experience management is deficient in providing guidelines on how to affect stimuli that are outside a firm's or organization's control (Becker & Jaakkola 2020). Elements that are part of the consumer journey may potentially affect the customer journey; thus, this dissertation suggests that these studies advance understanding of how firms and organizations can best use them to improve the customer experience and help customers achieve their goals.

5.4 Practical and societal implications

Managerial implications for firms and organizations are provided, based on this dissertation's findings. They are divided into three groups: (1) understanding the consumer journey, (2) defining the intended customer experience, and (3) influencing the stimuli that affect customer experience (Figure 8).

Firms and organizations need to understand the consumer journey their customers take to achieve their goals before they undertake any managerial action. They can use the data collection methods presented in this dissertation as they fulfill the methodological requirements for studying customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. Specific guidelines are provided so not only can researchers empirically investigate this phenomenon, but also firms and organizations can collect more customer-centric data about their customers as well.

Using this data, firms and organizations can map the customer journey at multiple levels, including the consumer journey toward higher-order goals. Mapping the consumer journey is different from mapping touchpoints in a customer journey, as it requires that one identify the multiple actors that are part of the journey (e.g., other firms, social actors), a customer's activities and processes, and events that might interfere in a customer's processes toward the goal.

The next step is to identify how these elements interact with a focal firm's or organization's customer journey. The findings show that customer journeys can be sequential, complementary, or detrimental to one another. Therefore, understanding how the other customer journeys that customers engage in and the factors in customers' contexts interact with a focal customer journey provides a better picture of the role of customer journeys in helping customer achieve their goals.

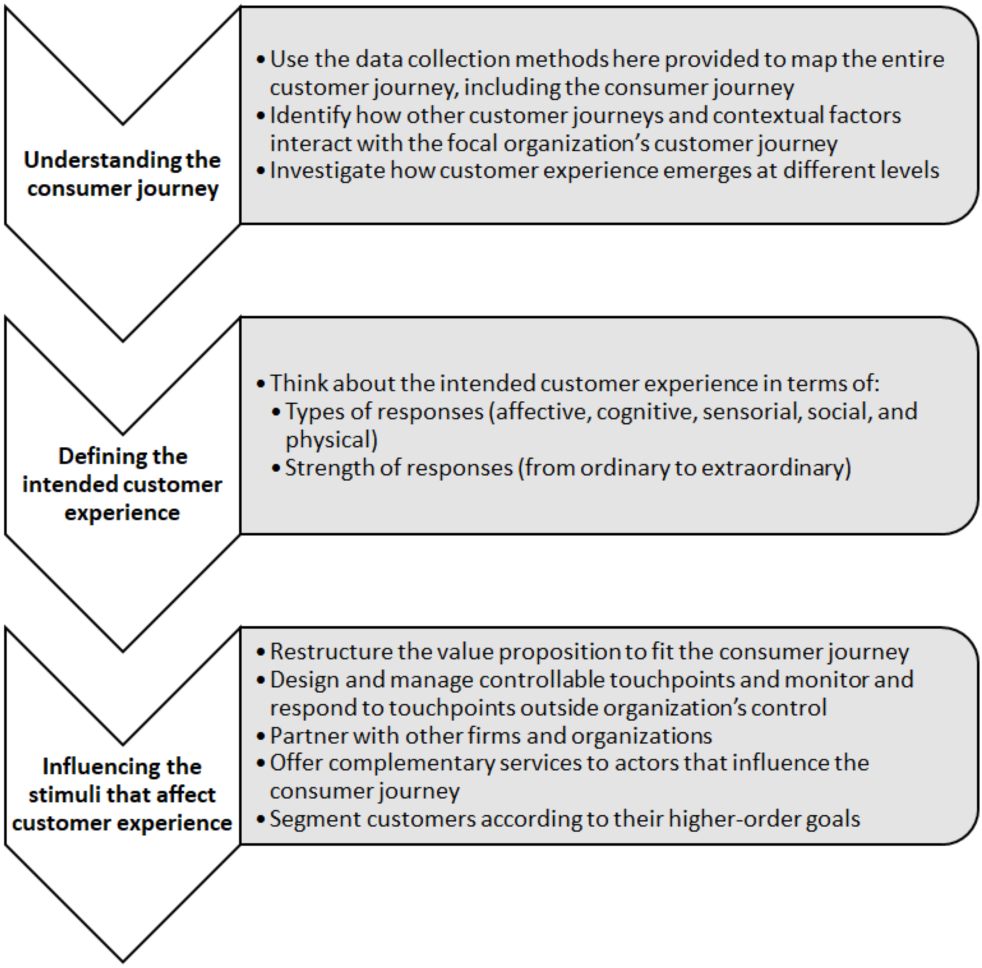

Figure 8. Practical implications

In addition to striving to understand the elements of the consumer journey, firms and organizations should seek to understand how customer experience emerges at different levels and what factors influence it, because it is known that multiple factors and actors beyond a customer's journey with a single firm or organization affect a customer's responses and reactions.

Having this holistic picture, firms and organizations then should define the intended customer experience. This dissertation presents a more nuanced definition of customer experience, emphasizing different types of responses—affective, cognitive, sensorial, social, and physical experiences—and their intensity—from ordinary to extraordinary. In this way, a customer experience should be defined not as “good” or “bad” but as taking these finer nuances into account.

Firms and organizations can take action to trigger the intended customer experience after they define it. As learned in this dissertation, firms cannot control the customer experience, but they can influence the stimuli to which customers respond. Firms and organizations can restructure their value proposition in a way that better fits into a customer’s processes toward their goals by mapping the consumer journey. Firms and organizations can also design and manage the elements they can control by understanding the elements that are part of the consumer journey, while monitoring and responding to elements outside their control and adopting a facilitator role. Firms and organizations can partner with the other actors who offer complementary resources and/or facilitate the transition between sequential customer journeys. When customers are having difficulties in reducing the discrepancy between their current situations and their higher-order goals, firms and organizations can innovate and offer new, necessary resources that will help their customers. Firms and organizations can also identify opportunities to provide service to social actors who influence the consumer journey toward higher-order goals, such as when A.A. offers their service to family members who want to facilitate the consumer journey toward a sober life. Finally, firms and organizations can segment customers considering their higher-order goals, because customers likely have different higher-order goals for engaging in a particular customer journey. It is very likely that the map of the customer journey at multiple levels would look different for journeys toward different higher-order goals.

The dissertation also offers societal implications because of the empirical context: a transformative journey toward a sober life. In this context, the findings can be used by therapists, clinics, A.A., or any other service that customers use in their journey toward a sober life. For example, this dissertation urges clinics to facilitate the transition between detoxification and the 12-step program, not giving the idea that the recovering alcoholic is now “cured.” This can represent an ethical dilemma if the clinic does not believe in the disease model, but research has shown that A.A. is an appropriate after-care service for maintaining abstinence (Martin 2008b).

Clinics, which are often the first service provider recovering alcoholics interact with, can help recovering alcoholics identify the subordinate goals necessary to stay sober, something some participants felt was missing. Therefore, detoxification could be combined with a therapeutic approach that helps recovering alcoholics to identify what they need to do to continue in their journey toward a sober life, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (Soravia & Barth 2008).

Many participants also reported feeling prejudice and shame, something that often hampers their journey toward sobriety. Other actors who do not understand that alcoholism is a disease without a cure also often hamper the journey (e.g., when friends offer a drink, thinking they are cured). Therefore, government and organizations should organize campaigns that raise awareness about alcoholism as a disease and promote the idea that making fun of alcoholics is revolting. This could result in impacts for individuals, economies, and society at large.

5.5 Evaluation of the study

This dissertation's findings should be interpreted in light of some limitations. The systematic literature review used strict criteria to select and identify articles, therefore, not capturing studies outside of marketing literature or studies that addressed the same phenomenon with different labels. Even though the bibliography search helped identify important articles that the procedures might have missed, maybe a literature field outside marketing could also contribute to the development of the perspective proposed in this dissertation.

Second, the analysis of previous methods used in the customer experience literature (especially in Study 2) also presents limitations. The codebooks of the systematic literature review restricted the method and data analysis technique to a short description (e.g., survey; structural equation modeling). This prevented a more systematic analysis not only of the current methods used in the customer experience literature but also of how they fulfill the methodological requirements. Such an analysis could have led to a stronger justification of how the three proposed methods to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective are superior in fulfilling those requirements.

Third, the list of data collection methods offered in this dissertation is not exhaustive. The three suggested methods were chosen because they fulfill the methodological requirements to study customer experience through a customer-centric perspective. However, the choice of data collection methods ultimately depends on the goal and/or research question guiding a study. For example, a multi-actor perspective can be helpful if one wants to explore the multiple actors who are part of a consumer journey.

Fourth, the empirical findings were based on a specific case of a transformative journey: the journey toward a sober life. Therefore, the model derived from these findings might generalize better to other types of transformative journeys—such as smoking cessation and the adoption of a healthier lifestyle—in comparison to other contexts that do not share specific characteristics, such as a transformative higher-order goal, likely involvement of health-service providers, and support from social actors. A further complicating factor for generalization is that recovering alcoholics are addicted to a substance.

However, despite the specificities of the empirical context, it is expected that the perspective developed in this dissertation applies to other contexts as well. In other words, while it is expected that the phenomenological findings are specific to the empirical context, it is also expected that the customer-centric perspective of customer experience developed here can be useful in analyzing other types of goal-oriented journeys. The theoretical lens used to analyze the phenomenological findings helps in this aspect, given that the self-regulation model of behavior is supposed to apply to any type of goal-oriented behavior, including, for example, buying groceries (Carver & Scheier 1998). Therefore, while some of the findings might be more difficult to generalize to other contexts (e.g., regarding the role of negative experiences), it is expected that the developed model and its implications can be used to analyze other types of goal-oriented journeys, because these journeys also present a hierarchical structure in which customers manifest the functions of the self-regulation model of behavior. For instance, the journey to writing a doctoral dissertation involved engaging in customer journeys with many firms and organizations toward more concrete goals.

Fifth, participants were recruited in A.A. meetings. A.A has some distinct characteristics compared to other treatment approaches: (1) it is based on a belief that alcoholism is a disease and that complete abstinence is the only path to recovery; (2) it is based on the 12 steps that describe the recovery process; and (3) it has a spiritual dimension (Martin 2008b). Therefore, these characteristics might influence the key processes identified, for example, by overemphasizing the importance of the 12-step program. However, even though all participants recruited attended A.A., many participants also described their interactions with other actors, such as hospitals, clinics, treatment centers, psychologists, and other self-help groups in their journeys. The recruitment method meant that all participants were male as well, which might have biased the results.

Sixth, the choice of the self-regulation model of behavior (Carver & Scheier 1982; 1998) also affects the findings. Throughout the research processes, many theoretical lenses were suggested to interpret the empirical findings. Even though Article III presents a clear rationale for choosing this model, other theoretical lenses would, naturally, provide different results. Appendix 6 presents some of the alternative theoretical approaches suggested, with a short discussion of the findings and the reason why they were not used in the dissertation.

Seventh, by focusing on emerging themes in the empirical study, this dissertation did not address all elements that are potentially part of a customer journey toward higher-order goals. For example, some authors suggest studying the role of institutions in the customer experience (e.g., Akaka & Vargo 2015), which was not explicitly addressed in this dissertation. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this dissertation spurs future research that will further develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Frame of reference for codebook

Variable	Description	Coding procedure	Example
Year	Year of publication		2011
Authors	Last name of authors		Patrício, Fisk, Falcão e Cunha, Constantine
Journal	Title of journal		Journal of Service Research
Article	Title of the article		Multilevel Service Design: From Customer Value Constellation to Service Experience Blueprinting
Database	EBSCO, Science Direct or both		EBSCO
Literature field	Services marketing Consumer research Retailing Service-dominant logic Service design Online marketing Branding Experiential marketing	Articles were classified into one of these literature fields according to the criteria described in Table 3. Multiple choice.	Service design
Nomenclature	Service experience, customer experience, consumer experience, etc.	The preferred nomenclature the authors used in the article.	Customer experience
Definition	Conceptual definition of customer experience.	The definition stated or suggested by the author(s) in the article was copied and pasted or written.	Customer experiences can be viewed as internal and subjective responses to any contact with a company.
Type of definition (included later in the codebook)	Response: Experience is defined as a response to, reaction to, perception of, or mental state derived from a service, purchase, or consumption situation. Interactions: Experience is defined as the activities, events, and interactions a customer undergoes during a	Multiple choice.	Response

	purchasing or consumption situation. Assessment: Experience is defined as an assessment, evaluation or the outcome of a service or consumption situation. Service: Experience is defined as the service per se, including the service personnel, servicescape, and other customers. Offering: Experience is defined as a distinct type of offering that is staged to customers.		
Characterization	How do the authors characterize the concept of customer experience? What are the characteristics of customer experience? (e.g., temporal frame, aspects included, etc.).	When reading the articles, the characteristics of customer experience stated in the articles were written. These characteristics refer to definitions, temporal frame, actors involved, etc.	Three levels: value constellation experience (value constellation: network of actors and their relationships that jointly create an offering); service experience (firm's service system: integrated whole that enables customers to cocreate their service experiences according to the positioning of the service concept in the value constellation); and service encounter experience (service encounter / each touchpoint: the moments of interaction between the customer and the firm). […]
Elements / dimensions	What are the dimensions or the elements that are part of the customer experience? (e.g., service environment, courtesy, other customers, etc.).	Whenever the definition of customer experience was multidimensional, the dimensions (and scale items) were written in this space.	Not applicable.
Goal	What is the goal, research question, or aim of this article?	The article's goal was written in this space.	Its objective is to investigate how organizations actually go about designing and improving their customer experiences.
Empirical	Yes: the article contains at least an empirical study. No: the article is conceptual, theoretical, or a literature review.	Multiple choice.	Yes
Method	What method(s) was (were) used in the article?	The method stated in the article was written.	Case study: application of multilevel service design (qualitative and quantitative techniques)

Analysis	What analysis technique was used?	The analysis technique stated in the article was written.	Diverse
Epistemology	Positivist, interpretive, phenomenology, etc.? What is the basis of obtaining evidence?	The stated epistemology (e.g., interpretive, phenomenology) given in the text was written. When this was absent, the method was read first and all the text read again if necessary to interpret the basis of evidence.	Positivist
Context	To what context is the customer experience concept applied?	The context in which the knowledge is applied in the article (e.g., services, brands, etc.) was written.	Services
Context empirical data	What context was used in the empirical study?	The context used in the empirical study (e.g., bank) was written.	Bank and grocery retailer
Level of aggregation	What actors influence or are part of the customer experience? Dyadic: customer experience involves dyadic interactions between customers and the company. The focus is on customers' responses to a company. Other customers: customer experience also involves other customers. Systemic: customer experience involves interactions among multiple actors (e.g., other companies, social actors). The focus is larger than the dyad between company and customer.	Multiple choice	Systemic
Notes	Additional notes	Any additional remarks that seemed important when coding were written.	Not applicable.

Appendix 2. Interview script

Friendly beginning

- Introduce myself.
- Introduce research, how it can help other people, and so on.
- Give a general idea about the interview.

Contextualization

- Tell me a little bit about yourself (who are you, what do you do, age, occupation, family and so on).
- Can you tell me about your history with alcohol?

Apprehending the phenomenon

- Can you describe the moment you noticed you had a problem with alcohol? How did this happen? [further questioning: What did you feel? What did you think? How did you react? and so on]
- Can you describe the moment you decided to become sober? What motivated you or influenced you?
- How did you feel / what did you think when you decided? What were your thoughts?
- Let's talk about your initial attempts to become sober. What did you do in the beginning to achieve this goal? [it is hoped that the participant will elicit some activities]
- ACTIVITY 1 to ACTIVITY n: What did you feel / think / how did you react when…? What did you do next?
- What were the things you stopped doing? What specifically did you do to avoid …? Explore reactions.
- Who helped you in the process of becoming sober?
- ACTOR 1 to ACTOR n: How … helped you? How did you react to …?
- Is there any product or services that you sought to help you become sober?
- PRODUCT 1 to PRODUCT n: How … helped you? Explore reactions.
- What are the things that happened in this process of becoming sober? [events]
- EVENT 1 to EVENT n: Explore reactions.
- What facilitated the process of becoming sober?
- What hindered the achievement of the goal?

Appendix 3. Instructions for diaries

WHAT TO REPORT?

The diary is a very important part of my research. In this diary, you have to describe things related to your recovery process and the achievement of your sobriety goal. Here are some examples:

- **Activities:** These things can be related to things you do or things you avoid to do in order to achieve your goal (e.g., called your sponsor, did not go to a party to avoid triggers, bought a book, etc.).

- **Events:** These things are related to things that happened and that influenced your recovery process (e.g., had a fight with someone and you felt like drinking, there is an A.A. party, your child was born, etc.).

- **Interactions with other people, companies, organizations, etc.:** These things can be related to how other people (e.g., sponsor, relatives, friends, unknown people, etc.) help or refrain you from achieving your goal.

- **Interactions with products or objects:** These things are related to the use of products that help (or not) you to achieve your goal (e.g., reading a good book, taking a medicine, etc.) and your relationship with some objects that are meaningful in this process (e.g., gaining a chip from A.A.).

- **Responses and reactions:** To every element you describe that influence your journey, I would like you to describe your feelings, thoughts, physical reactions and general responses and reactions to that (e.g., feeling angry, feeling happy, feeling disappointed, being curious, being intrigued, physical reactions related to how your body reacts to the elements, behavioral reactions – what did you do next?, etc.).

You know what is related or not to your recovery process. I want to know that from you. The more descriptive experiences you describe, the more you will help my research.

WHEN TO REPORT?

I would like you to write in your journal every time you have something to tell. That means, report in the diary right after anything related to your recovery process happens. Feel free to write in the journal as much as you want.

HOW TO REPORT?

You have three options to report the process toward sobriety and your reactions:

1) **Electronic diary:** you will report your process toward sobriety in a Word document.
2) **Written diary:** you will report your process toward sobriety in a paper notebook.
3) **Audio diary:** you will report your process toward sobriety in audio on WhatsApp.

HOW TO RETURN THE DIARY?

1) **Electronic diary:** you can send me weekly diaries by e-mail (larissamarketing@hotmail.com).
2) **Written diary:** someone will be in contact with you to collect the diaries and give you a new notebook two weeks.
3) **Audio diary:** you will send the audios directly to my WhatsApp.

OTHER REMINDERS

I really do not care about grammar or style of writing. Please, do not try to edit your diary after you wrote in it. The most important thing for me is to understand how you felt or what you thought about something that influenced your recovery process, and this will be captured when you write/speak freely.

Appendix 4. Example of notes from a meeting

19.02.2017 – Vida Nova group

I went to this meeting on a Sunday. One guy arrived there 5 minutes before the meeting was supposed to start. I contacted him and asked if the meeting was there. We started talking and he was going to leave because he was not in good health, but then he decided to stay. Another member arrived a few minutes later. I had agreed to interview this other member in the third meeting. We waited for more than half an hour to check whether other members would arrive. The first member tried to call other "mates" but was unsuccessful. Then we three had a meeting. The beginning was formal just like every other meeting. Then this first member told me his history with alcohol. I could identify events, activities, interactions with other people, but will not provide details here because the content should be anonymous. I presented my research to him and invited him to participate. We agreed that I would interview him on Wednesday (22) and the other member on Tuesday (21) before another meeting. Again, the members seemed very appreciative of my presence. The first member coordinated the meeting and called people like me "the angels of A.A." because we help them. He also showed me before the meeting started the news on *O Nacional*. This meeting was somewhat more informal than the others with more members, but the initial and final procedures were the same.

Appendix 5. Example of thematic descriptions for individual participants

Joseph

1. How can transformative consumer journey be conceptualized?

The **journey does not have a clear and definite starting point**. Joseph passes through many interventions, detoxifications, etc., but he would not drink for a few months and relapse again, mainly driven by the mentality "I am cured." However, there is a point when Joseph experiences an **awakening**, when he realizes he is wrong and should do something. For him, this moment happens when his 8-year-old son questions him about his consumption. This is followed by **seeking help**. On the same day of the awakening, Joseph passes by an A.A. and later at night goes to the meeting. Because he met there some people he knew from work, listened to the stories and identified himself in them, and when facing the 10 questions about alcoholism he had done everything, he then readily **accepts** that he needs to keep going there. In this journey, **willpower and the desire to stop drinking** are fundamental, as he is the only one who can take the first sip. Despite that, compulsion is part of this journey and can be easily triggered by **traps**. These traps can be divided into two categories. First, there are things that make him remember alcohol, **things that are instantly associated with alcohol** in his mind. For example, when cooking fish, he instantly associates this with choosing wine. Second, there are **everyday events that cause him personality changes** (i.e., things that make him experience bad things, such as irritation, sadness, frustrations, worries). When these things happen, the desire is triggered (this can be seen in the way he expresses himself, e.g., "X happened, *but* I could avoid the first sip anyway"). Usually, to overcome these situations, Joseph **compares his current situation with his past life**, which he describes as hell. For example, when he thought his brother was entering a bad marriage, he got worried. But then he thought that before he was sober, no one would communicate these decisions to him, and this was a good thing that now they do so. He frequently **observes or compares himself with other alcoholics** as well, such as when there is a family lunch and everyone drinks and start laughing of things that are not even funny or when he passes by a drunk sleeping on the streets.

Obstacles are present in his journey as well. In the journey, there are many **interactions** with mates, sponsor, relatives, and friends, some of them supporting his journey, and others posing **obstacles** (e.g., when he got into a discussion with another mate who said bad things about his son, which made him to move away from A.A. and eventually relapse). From these interactions, he learns tricks to overcome the desire to drink, such as avoiding the first sip every 24 hours, eating candy, drinking coffee, thinking that desire is something temporary (it will go away), etc. Another way of avoiding compulsion was by **replacing activities and old friends**. For example, he does not go fishing with his old friends anymore because he knows they would insist that he drink. Now, he has **acquired new habits that prevent him from drinking**, such as taking care of his garden. Joseph says that every weed he removes from his garden represents a cup of alcohol that he will not drink. To summarize, it appears that he prevents traps and obstacles by **staying alert**, avoiding activities and friends, as well as spending time on new activities, but when obstacles or traps appear in his journey, he applies comparisons to his old life to recover his senses or tricks that he learnt in A.A.

2. *What is the role of other actors and artifacts in causing and overcoming obstacles along the transformative consumer journey?*

a) A.A.: A.A. is considered a lifeline, something that saved him and pulled him out from hell and completely changed his life. A.A. taught him the most important trick to stop drinking: avoid the first sip every 24 hours, one day at a time. A.A. also taught him to have patience when something happened. He attributes his success, compared to previous failures in attempting to stop drinking, to A.A. Only when he went to A.A. did he understand that he would never be cured; he understood that he has a disease. He also mentions that A.A. is a pharmacy without the medicine, it is a psychological medicine. A.A. provides the meetings where he can interact with his mates. He likes it so much that he compares going to the meetings as having a first girlfriend, when hours before the meeting you are already getting dressed, shaving, etc. During these meetings, sharing and listening to stories make him feel good. His **mates and sponsor** help him in many ways. First, they teach him tricks to overcome the desire to drink, such as eating candy, drinking coffee, etc. They teach these tricks by sharing stories, where he identified himself from the beginning (they lived the same things), giving advice, telling things that he should do and things he should avoid, by explaining the disease, etc. They do these things not only in the A.A. meetings, but also in informal meetings (for example when they meet at A.A. but not for a meeting, conversations through the phone and visits). This identification with his mates was very important in the beginning, when he went to A.A. for the first time and saw colleagues there, which made him think “my place is here.” Besides that, the welcoming environment was important in the beginning as well for him to stay. Joseph only feels safe/confident in A.A. His mates also give him attention and have social activities (e.g., barbecues, dinners, fishing, etc.), which replace those he used to do with old friends who drink. However, mates can also impose obstacles. Once, one mate, unknowingly, said bad things about his son. He instantly got angry and even thought about killing this mate. He then came to his senses, but ended up stopping going to the meetings, which led him to a relapse eventually.

b) Doctors and clinics: During his journey, Joseph was admitted to hospitals for detoxification and even psychiatric hospitals many times. They contributed to the journey by doing these services and advising him not to drink anymore. On the other hand, Joseph feels that they delivered the wrong message by saying “you are cured now.” This idea of cure would allow him to start drinking again slowly, thinking he could drink again.

[…]

3. *How does consumer experience emerge along the journey and is it connected with the transformative goal?*

This case made some things clear. First, it is evident that **everyday activities and events that someone would not think as related to the journey have a huge impact on it**. In other words, experiences not related to the journey impact on what he does to maintain his sobriety. There are many examples in his stories: health problems, family problems, a bird damaging his garden, etc. These events cause him bad experiences or what he calls personality changes. Whenever he feels irritated, angry, etc., it is a threat to him. He then must think and compare his current life, everything he achieved because he became sober, or think about the tricks he has been taught, such as that desire to drink comes and goes, it is temporary (a cognitive experience?). Although this is evident for negative experiences, it is not restricted to them, considering that positive experiences can be considered a threat as well (e.g., when his soccer team wins and he becomes happy). So being always alert to these situations is part of his journey. Second, **bad or negative experiences contribute to the transformative goal**. He passed through many detoxification treatments, during which he had hallucinations, pain, shaking, etc. This is something that he had to go through to achieve his goal. However, as time goes by, they tend to normalize. Also, he likes alcohol, he likes drinking, but he cannot do so. Therefore, not doing something he likes contributes to his transformative goal as well. Third, the **elements in the journey provoke many good experiences**, such as feeling good, refreshed, calm, anxious in a positive way, happy, etc. These experiences are usually temporary. Fourth, it seems that **stable experiences are usually cognitive**. So, he learns things in A.A. (such as tricks, alcoholism as a disease) that he takes for life and that stay with him. Of course, there are also temporary cognitive experiences, such as when he does comparisons with his previous life to neutralize negative experiences and when he reflects while writing in his diary, but his emotional and sensorial experiences seem to be more temporary, while the cognitive and behavioral experiences seem to be more stable over time. Fifth, it seems that he also **actively produces cognitive experiences whenever he needs to neutralize bad ones** by comparing his current life with the previous one and remembering what other mates have taught him.

Appendix 6. Alternative theoretical and conceptual approaches

Other theoretical approaches were considered before choosing the goal and self-regulation model of behavior to interpret Article III's findings, especially considering the context chosen that has been widely studied in other areas: the journey toward a sober life. Appendix 6 briefly reviews five theoretical approaches that can assist the reader when discussing the findings (cf. Pratt et al. 2006): (1) transtheoretical model of change; (2) specific theoretical approaches in the areas of addiction, recovery, and relapse; (3) transformative journeys in consumer research; (4) literature on habits; and (5) transformative consumer research (TCR).

Transtheoretical model of change

Several theories inform models of change, and the transtheoretical model of change (TTM) (Prochaska & DiClemente 1982; 1983; Prochaska et al. 1992) is one of the most widely used (West 2005). This model presents five sequential stages of change. In the *precontemplation stage*, individuals have no intention to change in the near future, although people surrounding these individuals are aware that they have a problem. In the *contemplation stage*, individuals become aware of their problem and start thinking about change, although they make no commitment to take action. In the *preparation stage*, individuals intend to take action in the very near future (e.g., next month) and may have started changing some behaviors (e.g., reducing problematic behavior). The *action stage* is the one where individuals modify their behaviors and environment to solve their problems, investing time and energy into it. An individual can be classified in the action stage when they have modified their behavior with success for a period between one day and six months. Finally, the *maintenance stage* is the one where individuals work to not return to the problematic behaviors and can extend from six months to a lifetime (Prochaska et al. 1992).

The stages of change indicate *when* change occurs; the processes of change, defined as the activities that individuals engage in when trying to modify their problematic behaviors (Prochaska et al. 1983), indicate *how* the change occurs. The model proposes 10 processes of change, some of which are experiential and some of which are behavioral (Lipschitz et al. 2015). Starting with the experiential processes of change, *consciousness raising* relates to obtaining information about oneself and the problem (e.g., searching for information related to alcoholism). *Dramatic relief* relates to experiencing and expressing negative emotions related to the problem and its solutions (e.g., fear of the consequences related to excessive alcohol consumption). *Environmental reevaluation* relates to the assessment or realization of how the problematic behavior impacts the physical environment and society (e.g., role of excessive alcohol consumption in healthcare costs). *Self-reevaluation* refers to how one feels about oneself in relation to the problem (e.g., thinking about the personal consequences related to reduction of alcohol consumption). *Social liberation* relates to increasing alternatives for non-problematic behaviors in society (e.g., advocating) (Prochaska et al. 1983; Lipschitz et al. 2015).

Following with the behavioral processes of change, *counterconditioning* relates to replacing problematic behaviors with alternatives (e.g., exercising instead of napping). *Helping relationships* refer to being open about one's problems with supportive people (e.g., friends who encourage healthy behaviors). *Reinforcement management* refers to self- or external rewards for making changes (e.g., recognition for changing behaviors). *Self-liberation* refers to the commitment and ability to change (e.g., self-encouragement). Finally, *stimulus control* relates to avoiding or countering stimuli that triggers problematic behaviors (e.g., removing alcohol from the house) (Prochaska et al. 1983; Lipschitz et al. 2015).

Article III focuses mainly on this model's action and maintenance stages. Concerning the processes of the consumer journey, many results overlap with the processes of change. For recovering alcoholics, committing to change happens after the spiritual awakening (self-liberation). Changing habits and behaviors involves learning how to become sober (consciousness raising), replacing habits, behaviors, and people with those supportive of recovery (counterconditioning) to avoid obstacles and temptations (stimulus control), and helping others (some overlap with social liberation). Furthermore, when A.A. members share their stories or talk to other members, they feel relieved (dramatic relief and helping relationships). Overcoming obstacles and temptations would also fall under the category of stimulus control. Reinforcement management, environmental reevaluation, and self-reevaluation were not apparent in the findings, possibly because the TTM's processes of change were developed based on therapy systems.

TTM has been criticized (e.g., West 2005), despite its wide use. Two observations will be highlighted for the purposes of this dissertation. First, the original model was developed in the 80s based on 18 therapy systems (Prochaska & DiClemente 1982). Since then, researchers have been using quantitative methods to determine which processes of change are more prevalent in each stage (e.g., Prochaska & DiClemente 1983) and applying the model to different types of changes, such as alcohol and dietary changes (e.g., Lipschitz et al. 2015). Therefore, these studies do not offer space for new processes of change to emerge or to understand the processes that happen during action and maintenance stages, which are the scope of the journey toward a sober life, in more depth.

Second, it seems that the processes of change are not all in the same level of analysis. Some seem to fit the definition proposed (i.e., activities individuals engage in to modify their behaviors), such as stimulus control and counterconditioning. Others seem to be experiences. For instance, dramatic relief is "experiencing" and "expressing" negative emotions and feelings. In this dissertation, the customer journey in all its levels presents two parallel processes (the journey itself and the emerging experience), and TTM does not differentiate between these two levels. This model is not used as a theoretical framework or lense in this dissertation for these reasons.

Specific theoretical approaches in the areas of addiction, recovery, and relapse

Many theories and studies exist about addiction, recovery, and relapse in these specific research domains. Here, an overview is presented of the studies that can aid in the discussion of the empirical findings of this dissertation. Recognizing the problem is seen as a process, when addicts "hit bottom" before really accepting that they need to stop drinking (Hänninen & Koski-Jännes 1999; Hansen et al. 2008; Humphreys 1999). Laudet et al. (2002), for instance, claim that hitting bottom was the turning point when addicts began their recovery. Orford et al. (2006) propose the catalyst system as a set of factors (e.g., negative events and pressure from others) that motivate addicts to reduce or stop drinking. Furthermore, the recovering alcoholic's or addict's goal is more than abstinence: the goal is related to recovery and sobriety, terms that encompass, but are not limited to, abstinence (Hansen et al. 2008; Humphreys 2000; Laudet 2007; Marlatt & George 1984).

These studies also support the process of changing habits and behaviors to achieve the goal. Attending meetings (Humphreys 2000; Laudet et al. 2002; Miller et al. 1996; Scott et al. 2005), replacing "drinking buddies" with supportive relationships (Hansen et al. 2008; Humphreys 2000; Orford et al. 2006), helping others (Hansen et al. 2008), replacing problem behaviors with new and healthy ones, and using self-control tactics to avoid high-risk situations (Hansen et al. 2008; Larimer et al. 1999; Marlatt & George 1984; Orford et al. 2006) are some examples that represent this process.

The third identified process is overcoming obstacles and temptations. In line with the results, the relapse prevention model (Larimer et al. 1999; Marlatt & George 1984) suggests that the recovery journey involves challenges characterized by a high-risk of relapse. Their model's focus is on developing coping skills for when the addict faces these obstacles and temptations. Their model focuses on coping skills that avoid obstacles and temptations, but there are also coping skills to overcome them. Among these are positive self-talk, avoidance behaviors, and relying on social support.

These studies largely overlap with Article III's descriptive findings concerning the processes of the journey toward a sober life, which involve interactions with other actors, such as family and friends (e.g., Hänninen & Koski-Jännes 1999;

Hansen et al. 2008). This dissertation, however, did not use these theoretical approaches to interpret the phenomenological findings in Article III because they are limited to the empirical context: recovering addicts. This dissertation's goal is to create knowledge for the marketing domain and provide a new way of understanding the customer journey and experience.

Transformative journeys in consumer research

Consumer research offers mainly studies that can highlight particular and isolated aspects of a transformative journey. For instance, there are studies about fresh start (e.g., Price et al. 2018), compulsive or addictive consumption (e.g., Hirschman 1992a), and weight loss (e.g., Wansink & Chandon 2014). Only a few studies provide a more holistic view of the transformative journey, as intended in this dissertation (e.g., Schouten 1991).

Schouten (1991) was one of the first authors to study transformative consumer journeys. He investigated plastic surgery, focusing on the motives to undergo such a transformation. The author identified eight themes related to this phenomenon by using the self-concept theory: poor body image, improving performance in key social roles (i.e., impression management), symbolic self-completion during role transition, approaching positive or avoiding negative selves, role transitions, sexual selves and romantic fantasies, taking control over one's own body, and identity play. Based on these themes, Schouten (1991) construed a model of identity reconstruction. His model strongly emphasizes the motivation for the transformation (e.g., why do people undergo plastic surgery), while this dissertation aims at describing the processes of a transformative journey (e.g., plastic surgery as one element in the journey toward a self-transformative goal).

Hirschman (1992b) provided a phenomenological account of the journey of recovery from drug addiction through Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.). That account differs from the present dissertation because N.A. and its elements are the focal point of the journey, while the dissertation takes a more holistic approach. Nonetheless, many of the themes relate to the findings in Article III. First, recognizing the problem can be seen in the N.A. group's practices, such as in the serenity prayer, where recovering drug addicts admit they cannot control all the events, and in their self-identification as an addict when they give testimonials. Second, the idea of clean versus dirty disseminated in N.A. meetings is compatible with the prevention of obstacles and temptations (i.e., changing habits and behaviors). The author highlights body boundaries, when recovering drug addicts avoid specific products that remind them of or contain alcohol (e.g., mouthwash), and mind boundaries, when they try to control their thinking (e.g., the idea that they can control consumption of substances). Article III's empirical data had similar accounts of these boundaries, also explained through the theme of changing habits and behaviors. Third, concerning other actors, the author focused on two categories beyond the self-help group itself: N.A. members and Higher Power. Just as in the data, N.A. members contribute to the transformative journey by offering support, friendship, guidance, and support. N.A. members identify with each other and provide a non-judgmental environment for recovering drug addicts. The Higher Power also works as a spiritual outlet in which the recovering alcoholic does not feel rejected. Finally, social pressure to drink was mentioned in the study, when the accounts provide a differentiation between "normal people" (i.e., those who can drink, called "normies") and those in recovery. This pressure represents temptations to recovering drug addicts by making them feel socially awkward and anxious.

Still in the context of self-help groups are the studies about the journey of losing weight. Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010) investigated the means through which Weight Watchers, a self-help group that helps people who see eating as an addiction, influences customers' well-being. The authors identified the therapeutic-spiritual model as the one Weight Watchers uses. One of this model's practices implies some overlaps with the process of recognizing the problem: therapeutic confession. Weight Watchers' members confess their pathology, meaning that they accept their lack of control when overeating as a disease, such as alcoholism in A.A. Interestingly, one of the practices the authors identified concerns the role of other actors, particularly other self-help group members: therapeutic oversight. In this practice, members of Weight Watchers see other members as monitoring their progress and sometimes exerting a parental figure. This surveillance works by making members feel obliged to continue their journey toward the goal. Huang et al. (2015) also investigated how other Weight Watchers members use the other members as a form of self-regulation of their behavior. The authors identified that in the early stages of the journey, members identify with others as friends "in the same boat" and use them to gain support and advice and to buffer the uncertainty of their progress and goal achievement. In later stages of the journey, when members are close to achieving their goal, this uncertainty reduces (i.e., they know they can achieve the goal and they know how to do so); therefore, they tend to become distant from other members and, in counterpart, also give less advice. This particular type of interaction was not observed in Article III's data.

James et al. (2011) investigated magical thinking (invoking mystical or supernatural forces) as a coping mechanism in the weight loss transformative journey. The accounts show a transformative journey composed of sacrifices, deprivation, and effort. Nevertheless, the individuals see these negative experiences as instrumental to their goal achievement. This is consistent with the finding that negative experiences are not necessarily negative when considering the holistic consumer journey. When consistent with the goal, negative experiences can actually contribute to the journey, in line with a hierarchical organization of goals (e.g., Carver & Scheier 1982). The authors show examples in which, given the choice, individuals preferred strict programs over flexible ones because they facilitate goal achievement, even though the experience is worse. Furthermore, individuals experience negative experiences hoping that they will be rewarded in the future, again providing support for the idea that negative experiences can lead to stable, positive experiences in the future.

Still in the context of weight loss, Wansink and Chandon (2014) proposed the idea of "slim by design," which overlaps with changing habits and behaviors. The authors mean by this expression that, in order to lose weight, consumers should change the environment they are inserted in because it is easier than constantly self-monitoring. While these studies show some overlap with Article III's findings, they do not represent a unified theoretical approach that can be used as theoretical or even conceptual lenses to contribute to the customer experience literature.

Habits

Literature on habits (e.g., Wood & Neal 2007; Wood & Tam 2005) is interesting for the findings regarding the process of changing habits and behaviors. Habits can be defined as "learned dispositions to repeat past responses" (Wood & Neal 2007, 843). Habits are triggered by contexts in which past behaviors happened repeatedly (Wood & Neal 2007; Wood et al. 2002; Wood & Tam 2005). In other words, individuals automatically reproduce habitual behaviors when the context activates them. Either a stimulus or an environmental control is indicated for individuals who want to disrupt habits that conflict with a goal. Changing the context, here including other people who may be triggers for the habitual behavior, is an effective regulatory mechanism (Verplanklen & Wood 2006; Wood & Neal 2007; Wood & Tam 2005). Environmental control (i.e., replacing people, places, and environment) was found in the results, but Article III's findings indicate other processes that support the journey toward a sober life, such as overcoming obstacles and temptations and recognizing the problem, which this literature does not address.

Transformative consumer research

Transformative consumer research (TCR) is a movement toward research that addresses problems that are relevant for consumers, aiming at their well-being and enhancing their lives (e.g., Crockett et al. 2013; Davis & Pechmann 2013; Mick 2006). Relevant topics included in TCR are alcohol consumption and addiction (Mick 2006). The goal to enhance consumers' well-being is what seems to unite studies in TCR. Therefore, TCR was not used as a theoretical or conceptual tool in this dissertation. However, it can be said that this dissertation contributes to TCR by revealing insights that can help recovering alcoholics in their journey toward sobriety. For instance, the phenomenological results of Article III were published in the *Revista Vivência*, a magazine that is distributed in A.A. in Brazil (Becker 2018b). Inclusive research dissemination for relevant consumers is a characteristic of TCR (Crockett et al. 2013). However, given that this dissertation explicitly aims to develop a customer-centric perspective of customer experience to contribute to the customer experience literature, it does not frame its contributions based on TCR.

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