

MILK, MOON & MONEY.

**A qualitative exploration of value-co-creation
in the UK's milk home delivery business.**

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Abstract

This exploratory research is a practical attempt to contribute to ongoing discussions in the domain of Service-Dominant-logic (S-D-logic) first presented by Vargo and Lusch in the article 'Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing' in the Journal of Marketing (2004). It considers the value-co-creation of the actors involved in an asynchronous, repetitive interaction process.

Aim/Research objective: The purpose of this research is to understand the interaction process within the service context of UK milkmen, a traditional, regular milk home delivery service to Britain's doorsteps at night. The research contributes to the current understanding and interpretation of value-co-creation methodologically and theoretically. The methodological contribution results from the use of an ethnographic approach to researching value-co-creation in a traditional home delivery service. Theoretically, the aspects of time, place, and asynchronous interactions are linked with the existing knowledge on value-co-creation.

Methodology: The study is based on an inductive approach exploring the subjective meaning of the research context. Based on an interpretivist perspective, this thesis uses ethnographic fieldwork consisting of my observations of service providers (= milkmen) and semi-structured interviews with service users (= customers). Furthermore, customers' online feedback is used to reflect on their perceptions of the value proposition offered by the milkmen. These various data sets are analysed by applying Kuckartz's (2014) qualitative text analysis approach.

Results: This thesis applies Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework of S-D-logic to the milk home delivery service. Through this, it becomes transparent that (reliable) rhythms, (contextual) romanticisation and (interactive) relationships are implicit coordination mechanisms to the value proposition that is offered by the milkmen and subjectively perceived by their customers. The impact of those elements on value-co-creation becomes even more relevant if they are based on

mutual projections, reflections, and individual understandings of the commonly shared place of customers' doorsteps, at the specific time of interaction.

Contribution: This research offers methodological and conceptual contributions to the ongoing discussion in services marketing. The methodological contribution arises chiefly from the ethnographical approach of accessing the field and gathering data. Conceptually, the asynchronous process of interactions between milkmen and their customers on Britain's doorsteps by night presents, on a micro-level, insightful knowledge on the relevance of place and time in value-co-creation. Additionally, other relevant phenomena impacting the subjective value conceptualisations of the parties involved becomes transparent. Hence, this thesis does reveals the underlying mechanisms, by which value is co-created in an iconic business.

Keywords: Milkman, home delivery, S-D-logic, value-co-creation, ethnographic fieldwork, joint sphere, rhythms, romanticisation, relationships.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

January 2021,

Christian Hoerger

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The thesis: MILK, MOON & MONEY

Table of contents

Abstract	I
Author's declaration	III
Acknowledgement	IV
The thesis: MILK, MOON & MONEY	VI
Table of contents	VII
List of figures	XI
List of tables	XI
List of abbreviations	XII
My glossary of relevant and used terms of the situational context	XIII
Chapter 0 Introduction	1
1. Title of my research	2
2. Structure of my research.....	3
PART 1 (Contextual) framework of MILK, MOON & MONEY	7
Chapter 1 Situational contextualisation.....	9
1. Introduction	10
2. Exemplary aspects of the work routines of the individuals central to my study	10
2.1 Start of my research journey	10
2.2 Milkman's work routines.....	13
3. The business of the milkmen.....	14
3.1 Initial rise of the milkmen (~ 1600)	14
3.2 Stable milk supply during WW I and WW II (~ 1914-1945).....	16
3.3 Second rise of the business of the milkmen after WW II (~ 1946-1985).....	18
3.4 Decline of the business of the milkmen (~ 1985-2017).....	19
3.5 Third rise of the business of the milkmen: Milk & More (~ 2018)	20
3.5.1 Milkmen's proposition: Milk.....	21
3.5.2 Milkmen's proposition: & More	22
4. Situational research questions.....	24
5. Chapter summary.....	27
Chapter 2 Theoretical contextualisation	29
1. Introduction	30
2. Self-reflection of my literature review	30
3. Narrative literature review of services marketing	32
3.1 Discourses on services marketing	33

3.1.1 Rise of the discourse on the definition of ‘services’ (~ 360 BC).....	33
3.1.2 Adam Smith’s understanding of ‘services’ (~ 1800).....	34
3.1.3 Initial controversial academic discourses on ‘services’ (~ 1800-1900)	35
3.1.4 Increased controversial academic discourses on ‘services’ (~ 1900-1970)	36
3.1.5 Rise of ‘services marketing’ as a separate discipline in academia (~ 1970)	37
3.1.6 Rise of a different conceptual framework (2004).....	38
3.2 Goods-Dominant-logic (G-D-logic).....	39
3.3 Service-Dominant-logic (S-D-logic).....	40
3.3.1 General description and most relevant terms	41
3.3.2 Relevance of ‘place’	47
3.3.3 Relevance of ‘coordination mechanisms’	52
3.3.4 Focused foundational premises and axioms.....	54
4. Contextual problem statements and research objectives.....	60
4.1 Contextual problem statements.....	60
4.2 Research objectives	62
5. Chapter summary.....	63
Chapter 3 Research design	65
1. Introduction	66
2. Research philosophy.....	66
2.1 Ontology	67
2.2 Epistemology	68
2.2.1 Positivism.....	69
2.2.2 Interpretivism.....	71
2.3 Methodology	73
3. My research approach.....	75
3.1 Underlying research philosophy	76
3.2 Methods used to observe phenomena	82
3.2.1 Ethnographic fieldwork	82
3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews.....	94
3.2.3 Customers’ online feedback.....	105
3.3 Qualitative text analysis	108
4. Limitations and research ethics	113
5. Chapter summary.....	117

PART 2 Narrative analysis story of MILK, MOON & MONEY	119
1. Structure of my narrative analysis story	120
2. Recap of the milkmen's proposition	122
Chapter 4 Presentation of the actors.....	123
1. Introduction	124
2. Supplying company	124
3. Chapter summary.....	135
Chapter 5 (Reliable) rhythms of MILK.....	139
1. Introduction	140
2. Rhythms.....	140
2.1 Milkmen's rhythms	141
2.2 Customers' rhythms.....	146
3. Reliability	149
4. Chapter summary.....	156
Chapter 6 (Contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows	159
1. Introduction	160
2. Personification	160
3. Place and time	170
3.1 'Invisibly visible'	170
3.2 'Unknown known'	175
4. Nostalgia.....	183
5. Chapter summary.....	190
Chapter 7 (Interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY	195
1. Introduction	196
2. Interactions.....	196
3. Relationships	205
3.1 Observable phenomena creating relationships.....	206
3.2 Fiction in creating 'real' relationships.....	209
3.2 Trustful information creating relationships	212
4. Chapter summary.....	214
Chapter 8 Concluding Reflections	217
1. Introduction	218
2. Conclusions on my 'bottled' knowledge.....	218
2.1 Conclusions on the service user and service provider spheres	221

2.1.1 Milkmen`s proposition	221
2.1.2 Incorporated coordination mechanisms	223
2.2 Conclusions on the joint sphere	224
2.2.1 Conclusions on (reliable) rhythms of MILK.....	224
2.2.2 Conclusions on (contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows	227
2.2.3 Conclusions on (interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY. 233	
3. Conclusions on ‘THE MILKMAN’	237
4. Conclusions on services marketing.....	238
5. Areas for future research	243
Chapter 9 End.....	247
APPENDIX Appendices and references.....	XV
Appendix A: Development of the foundational premises and axioms in Service-Dominant-logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016)	XVI
Appendix B: Interviewing guideline	XVIII
Appendix C: Word cloud of customers’ online feedback.....	XX
Appendix D: Codebook: Initial coding (January 2019)	XXI
Appendix E: Codebook: Final coding (January 2021)	XXIX
Appendix F: Impressions of being a milkman	XXXII
References	XXXIII

List of figures

Figure 1 Summative depiction of milkmen’s proposition	25
Figure 2 Summative depiction of milkmen’s proposition	122
Figure 3 Summative depiction of chapter 4.....	138
Figure 4 Summative depiction of chapter 5.....	158
Figure 5 Summative depiction of chapter 6.....	193
Figure 6 Summative depiction of chapter 7.....	216
Figure 7 Summative depiction of the phenomena observed	220
Figure 8 Depiction of the services offered by Christian, the milkman	250

List of tables

Table 1 Structure of my research.....	5
Table 2 Focused foundational premises and axioms	55
Table 3 Initial adaption of the focused foundational premises and axioms.....	59
Table 4 Research objectives	62
Table 5 Fundamental questions on research philosophy.....	67
Table 6 Paradigmatic views on methodology and methods	74
Table 7 My answers to the fundamental questions on research philosophy	78
Table 8 Deductive and inductive reasoning	80
Table 9 Descriptive statistics: Ethnographic fieldwork.....	90
Table 10 Descriptive statistics: Semi-structured interviews.....	99
Table 11 Descriptive statistics: Customers’ online feedback.....	107
Table 12 Quality standards within quantitative and qualitative research.....	115
Table 13 Structure and descriptive statistics of my narrative analysis story	121
Table 14 Summative table of chapter 4	138
Table 15 Summative table of chapter 5	158
Table 16 Summative table of chapter 6	193
Table 17 Summative table of chapter 7	216
Table 18 Focused foundational premises and axioms	242

List of abbreviations

Term	Description
e.g.	Lat.: <i>exempli gratia</i> ; engl.: for example
engl.	In English
et al.	Lat.: <i>et alii</i> ; engl.: and others
etc.	Lat.: <i>et cetera</i> ; engl.: and so on
FP	Foundational premise
G-D-logic	Goods-Dominant-logic
I	Interview
i.e.	In other words
lat.	In Latin
O	Observation
p./pp.	Page/pages
S-D-logic	Service-Dominant-logic
T	Trustpilot
WW	World War
#	Number

My glossary of relevant and used terms of the situational context

Term	Understanding and interpretation of that term in my research project
Churns	'Churns' name containers used for milk transportation.
Crate(s)	'Crate(s)' are special plastic containers to transport reusable glass bottles.
Empty/empties	'Empty/empties' are the term used for empty milk bottles.
Haulage	'Haulage' names the logistics of transporting goods.
Milk	Milk is the central physical product sold by the milkmen. Customers use that term often to reflect on the overall value proposition of the milkmen.
Milk float/float	'Milk float'/'float' is the official term of the milkmen`s vehicle to distribute the milk from the depots to the households. Nowadays, many of them are electric vehicles, which are also called StreetScooters.
Milkman	In here, 'milkman' (denoting female as well as male) is the accepted name of a person who delivers milk directly to households on a professional, often daily, basis (= milk home delivery). Most milkmen are dedicated to a certain area and to certain rounds (= 'regular milkman'). If the 'regular milkman' cannot make it the round is served by a 'relief'. In the milieu, there also exist different terms such as 'milk lady' or 'milky'.
Milk round	'Milk round' names the delivery tour of a milkman, which commonly starts and ends at the depot.
Semi/semi-skimmed	'Semi'/'semi-skimmed' names the semi-skimmed milk glass bottles (1 Pint) with the red foil on the top. It is the most common product delivered to residential customers in the business of the milkmen (of Milk & More).
Standing orders	'Standing orders' name regularly established customer orders, which are delivered in a regular frequency. There are also other terms like 'recurring orders' used as well.

Term	Understanding and interpretation of that term in my research project
Sub	'Sub' names a product that is given instead of the ordered product as a substitute. Most likely, it is similar in regards of assumed customer' usage.
Trippage	'Trippage' names the number of journeys made by a glass bottle.

Chapter 0 | Introduction

1. Title of my research

MILK, MOON & MONEY

...are three familiar words used in various contexts and, often singularly. I am quite sure, that these three terms rarely come together in any conversation, and that it is difficult to create a contextual understanding, in which those terms might be used together. One of the reasons for this might be that, as individuals, we create our own understanding of those terms based on subjective experiences. Another might be that the meanings of those terms are heavily influenced by the specific context, in which they are used. Such a context can be any kind of day-to-day routine, but also an academic context such as services marketing in general or Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework of Service-Dominant-logic as this research will unfold.

Without considering my research, the first word 'milk' identifies for me, most of the time a standardised product of daily food-consumption. The second, 'moon', describes a heavenly body that is linked to darkness and incorporates an element of romanticisation in many societal tales. And the third, 'money', is a central term in, and concern of, contemporary business and a widely used concept to denote value, whatever that means more specifically. Of course, there exist many other and more detailed interpretations of those terms from different perspectives that could be depicted, explained, and elaborated. But it is not an easy task to find a simple definition that aggregates all possible views and subjective interpretations for each of those words. That endeavour becomes even more complex if I try to link those terms in one phrase, as I did above. And even if I link those terms in a specific contextual situation to create what is to me a reasonable phrase, there is still the challenge that others might not understand the intended meaning as others are not aware of the phenomena I experienced and observed or my specific reasoning and how I have sought to create contextual understanding and, by that, knowledge.

Hence, it might be difficult for a reader interacting with those first lines of my thesis and its overarching title **MILK, MOON & MONEY**, to (fore-)see the various phenomena and connections I have in mind when I think of my research, subtitled:

A qualitative exploration of value-co-creation in the UK's milk home delivery business.

That subtitle might offer a more precisely articulated understanding of the setting and structure of my research, such as its situational context (= the UK's milk home delivery business), the theoretical framework of Service-Dominant-logic (= value-co-creation) and my specific research approach (= qualitative exploration). Nevertheless, it misses all those subjectively experienced and observed phenomena that made me title my thesis **MILK, MOON & MONEY**.

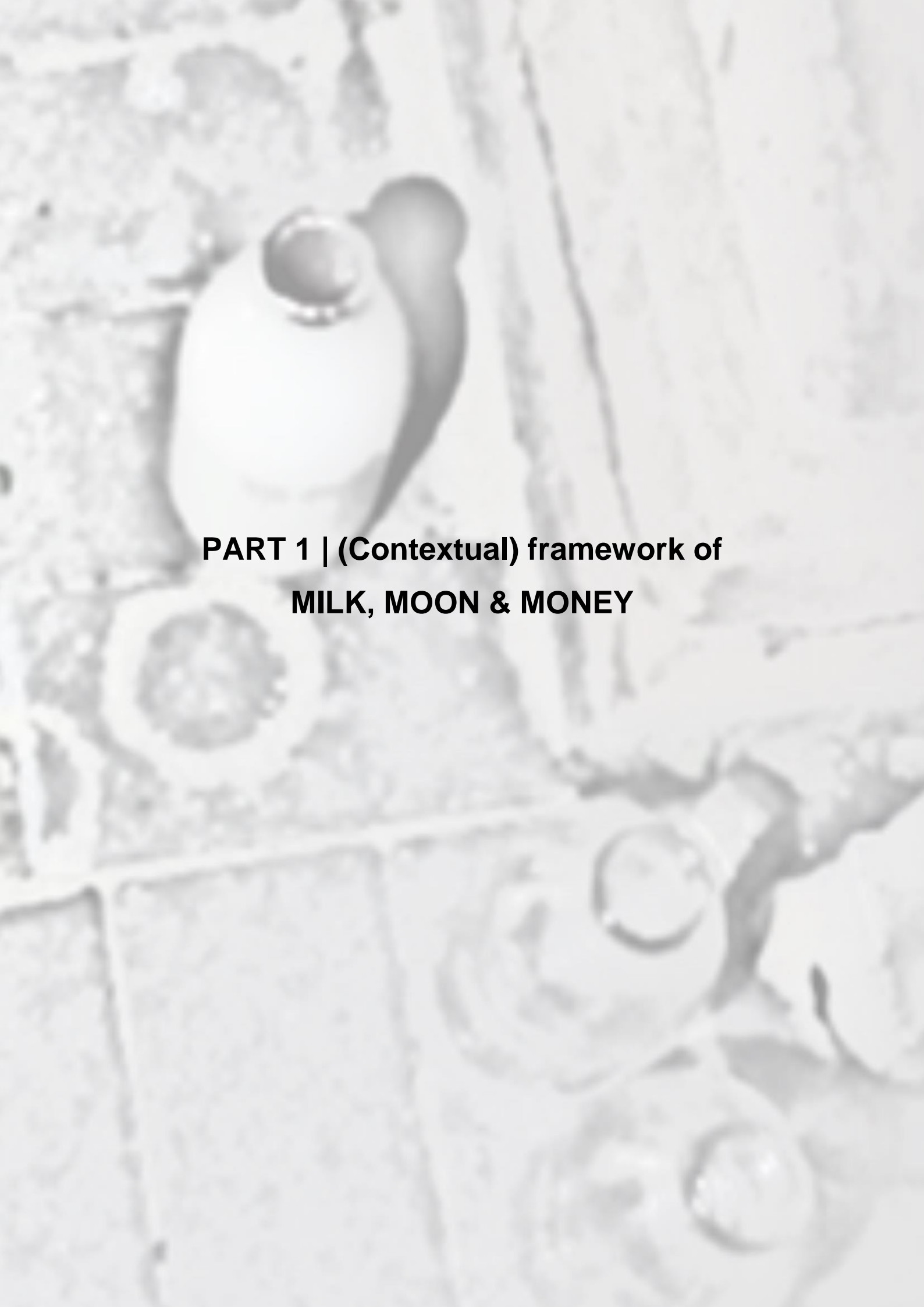
2. Structure of my research

But what those are and why that title was coined and used should hopefully become more transparent through the various chapters of my thesis, which are structured as the following table presents:

Chapter	Content	Objective
PART 1: (Contextual) framework of MILK, MOON & MONEY		
1	Situational contextualisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the relevant phenomena of the situational context, in which the research is undertaken and highlights exemplary aspects of the work routines of the individuals who are central to my study. • Presents the business of the milkmen with its remarkable history and reflects on its contemporary status. • Formulates the situational research questions.
2	Theoretical contextualisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews the manifold literature on services marketing to identify relevant research issues and presents these insights as a narrative literature review. • Reflects on the relevance of places in the context of interaction from different academic perspectives. • Presents the contextual problem statements and the research objectives.
3	Research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the research philosophy. • Presents my specific research approach and positions my study in the wider area of social sciences. • Reflects on the limitations of the research and the fundamental aspects of research ethics.

Chapter	Content	Objective
PART 2: Narrative analysis story of MILK, MOON & MONEY		
4	Presentation of the actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tells my narrative analysis story with the observed and experienced phenomena. • Presents the identified codes and categories in line with the underlying theoretical framework. • Focuses predominantly on the aspects linked to the joint sphere.
5	(Reliable) rhythms of MILK	
6	(Contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows	
7	(Interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY	
8	Concluding reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presents the wider, contextual understanding gained throughout the research. • Concludes on the outcomes of the analysis and discussion on MILK, MOON & MONEY
9	End	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarises relevant phenomena and highlights exemplary aspects of the work routines of the individuals who are central to my study.

Table 1 Structure of my research



**PART 1 | (Contextual) framework of
MILK, MOON & MONEY**

Chapter 1 | Situational contextualisation

1. Introduction

This chapter describes the relevant phenomena of the situational context. In addition to that, the business of the milkmen with its remarkable history is presented. Based on that, the relevant situational research questions are formulated, which are used for the more specific theory-based research question presented at the end of chapter 2.

In line with that, the second section of this chapter describes relevant characteristics of the situational context, in which the research is undertaken and highlights exemplary aspects of the work routines of the individuals who are central to my study. Here, I also present my first overall impressions of the business of the milkmen and the challenges I had to face when exploring the situation. The third section of the chapter presents the business of the milkmen with its remarkable history and reflects on its contemporary status. Within that section, indications already begin to emerge about what is special to that business and the interaction processes between the milkmen and their customers. The fourth section formulates the situational research questions, before section five finally summarises that chapter.

2. Exemplary aspects of the work routines of the individuals central to my study

But before detailing the situational and theoretical context of this research, I would like to access the field of interest personally and present the first contextual insights gained when I started to explore value-co-creation in the UK's milk home delivery business.

2.1 Start of my research journey

Therefore, I would like to invite you into my research journey, which is presented in a narrative analysis story, by presenting one of my first fieldnotes taken in 2018:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 5

“I get up at around midnight. I feel tired, but I know that he (and all the other guys I will meet in the depot) will accept me better if I do not complain. I also would like to show these guys that I am one of them.”

The alarm clock is the first thing I saw. It showed 0:07A.M. So, ‘time to hurry up’. And even though the event happened to me a long time ago now – I think it was a cold, but not frosty, Monday in February 2018 – I still remember most things of that specific day - or should I say of that memorable night. I had been working all day long in our office in Aldershot, an old military town between Farnborough and Guildford, some 30 miles south of London. My Finance colleagues and I had performed the same numbing routines of our weekly reporting: review of different cost elements (such as energy, fuel, and wages) comparing Prior Month, Budget and Actuals and pulling together our standardised reports. We had to push hard as we were already a day late on our internal management reporting and the board was about to go over the business performance on Wednesday morning. There was a keen audience waiting for us. But after some struggles and on top of that, some unexpected requests from my internal customers (Nota bene: I do remember receiving an e-mail from one of the board members with several questions on the volume development), we made it right on time. Finally, I left the office at around 6P.M. – almost as usual. But unlike my normal after-work routine of doing sports and having dinner, I headed directly back home, ate quite a quick meal, and went straight to bed for a nap to ensure that I was prepared. I knew that this night would be different to others and that it would impact my life significantly – as I was just about to become one of them: One of Britain’s early morning ‘icons’.

Until that night, I did not feel very British at all. I was one of thousands of expats working in the UK, flying in on Mondays and leaving the country every other weekend to get a little time at home with their families. But there is more about me that you should know. So, let me briefly introduce myself: My name is Christian Hoerger. I am 38 years old. I am married to a lovely wife. Our home base is Kirchberg, but we have arranged our lives to accommodate me working

somewhere abroad. We have gotten used to it, as I have worked in Luxembourg and before that, in Osnabruck. Before even that, I had spent time in both the Netherlands and New York – which is quite unlike me: I love to be at home in Kirchberg with my family and close to the Alps. But on that day in 2018, I was far away from anything that felt like ‘home’ to me. Officially, I was in charge of a European yoghurts and milk business in the UK. My job description: Finance Director of a Business Unit that sells milk and other products directly to residential customers. My great colleagues and I are a small, but nonetheless highly experienced, team who track the Key Performance Indicators of that Business Unit, day by day, week by week. We generate several specific reports on different parts of the business, create beautiful (if I may say myself) trend charts and do all the financial stuff like budgeting and forecasting that you might expect in that area of work. My role in that team and in that company is based on a common career path: I studied Business and Administration and Corporate and Business Law at various European Universities and gained about ten years of relevant experience in the wider area of ‘number-crunching’. And: I love to work in a team like mine all day long, but the life of a finance guy consists also of: Spending hours on complex data sets and on Excel spreadsheet formulas completely on your own. My partner in crime throughout those lonely hours is sturdy, reliable, but not great company: A calculator. The object of interest: Most likely Balance sheets, P&L’s or Cashflow items and sometimes, Contribution schemes. And the scene of the crime is not restricted to the office area itself. My work continues quite often at home after dinner and lasts until midnight.

But on the night in question, everything was different. I had left the office on time. I had not a single number in mind and had no calculator or laptop to take home. My excuse was that specific appointment with a different reality at around 0:45A.M. in Wimbledon – a reality that had been described to me as being physically exhausting because of the heavy weights that have to be carried and the tough British weather, although there was no snow or rain expected that night. Furthermore, there was that feeling of being involved in something iconic, perhaps even with a whiff of lawlessness. All its activities happen quietly, under cover of night, on different doorsteps across the UK and without any witnesses – save for attracting the occasional interest of roaming foxes and badgers.

Nonetheless, I had decided to join my colleagues in the field to gain some understanding of the overall context of my numbers and figures right after starting with the Business Unit. And that is where I am, when I open my eyes that midnight and suddenly realise just how tired I am:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 5

"I have two espressos to get me started. After those, I am kind of hurrying to the depot."

2.2 Milkman's work routines

Almost at the same time, somewhere else in the wider area of London: "The alarm clock goes off at 11P.M." (The Grocer Dairymen, 2018, p.6). Ian Bardwell gets up and dressed for work. Then, he drives about half an hour from his place to the centre in Wimbledon – the place I was supposed to be that night as well. Once there, he takes his vehicle and loads the daily orders onto it. As is usual, he then double-checks his load and does his final check out at around 1A.M. That is what he has always done throughout more than 25 years of duty. And Ian's duty from a numbers point of view is to deliver "around 3,500 glass pints of milk to over 600 customers every week, alongside a range of around 200 essentials" (The Grocer Dairymen, 2018, p.6). The customers are served every other day, which means he delivers on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to the one half of his customers and on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to the other half. So, every night, he is doing a round, except for Sundays, which he always has off. Consequently, he is supposed to do deliveries to about 300 customers that night through to 7A.M. (The Grocer Dairymen, 2018). But as it was not him that I was told to meet at the backdoor of the badly-lit depot at around 0:45A.M., I guess, retrospectively, that Ian Bardwell could well have been anyone of those quietly working colleagues I saw when arriving and approaching the scene:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 7

"Around 15 vehicles are standing under a big loading dock and some people are carrying stuff around those, grabbed from several trolleys filled with products."

That was the moment I realised that I was about to become one of the people 'carrying stuff' throughout the dark, one of Britain's icons: A milkman.

3. The business of the milkmen

Herein this research, 'milkman' (denoting female as well as male) is the accepted name of a person who delivers milk directly to households on a professional, often daily, basis (= milk home delivery). Alongside the delivery of milk, milkmen sell other agricultural, fresh products such as cheese, eggs, and juice drinks. Hence, in effect milkmen run a kind of 'farm shop on wheels' that comes direct to the customers' doorsteps on a regular basis – like other retailers and professions (even today, e.g., the postmen and the ice-cream men; and historically, e.g., the 'rag and bone man', the 'pop man' and the 'veg man'). But different to most of the others, milkmen have become part of the fabric of the neighbourhoods and communities they serve. Under the popular designation 'my milkman', this profession has even become an icon of British history throughout its remarkable tradition in the UK (Phelps, 2010).

3.1 Initial rise of the milkmen (~ 1600)

As the name already implies, the roots of the profession are in the milk and related dairy produce business, which "did not [really] develop until the mid-seventeenth century, when the need for mass-produced milk grew as towns expanded" (Phelps, 2010, p.5). Nevertheless, the concept of 'shops on wheels' was not new to the people of the 17th century. There had been 'shops on wheels' such as handcarts selling spice, silk or salt before. But most of the daily food supply was based on a self-supply concept at that time. Around 1600, however, most people had their own cattle to generate milk, cheese, and butter by themselves

(Phelps, 2010). But the progression of urbanisation supported the rise of the business of the milkmen, which was officially mentioned in an ordinance of Lord of Mayor, Isaac Pennington, in 1643. In there, the Lord of Mayor restricted “the call for sale of milk before 8 o’clock in the morning on Mondays to Saturdays, and on Sundays before 9 o’clock” (Phelps, 2010, p.5).

The exact wording of the ordinance offers some insights into the daily delivery routines of the milkmen in the 17th century: Daily deliveries to the residents (current and possible customers) right after sunrise, from Monday until Sunday, so, seven days a week. But it also hypothesises that the milkmen were quite loud when distributing their milk to the residents of London, which was obviously not well received by everyone. There is no indication given if it is just the noise that milkmen made, which was not appreciated by some people or if it was their value proposition overall. The proposition was mainly based on the home delivery of qualitatively ‘good’ food. But it was quite hard to research and prove the quality of that ‘white water’ (= milk) in the 17th century. How should the consistency be measured when the fundamental elements (next to approx. 90% water), such as fat or protein, were not even known? Therefore, it was mainly the individual taste and the subjective impression of the salesperson(s) that made people believe that they were getting pure or diluted milk. Inevitably, people started to tell tales and started to create rumours about “these unscrupulous people [who] would add as much water as they could to the milk” (Phelps, 2010, p.5). Hence, you could call it quite a poor start to the career that would become a British icon for reliability, responsibility, and community care, given it was initially viewed as a ‘dubious character’.

Nonetheless, people’s daily need for milk and other products, plus the continuing growth of urbanisation, kept the profession growing till the twentieth century. Within these 150 years, milkmen improved their approach to serving their customers significantly. ‘Yoke and pail’ were replaced by a form of ‘pram’ (= handcart) that carried the ‘churns’ of milk. These prams were pushed by the milkmen themselves in the beginning, and later, they were hauled by horses. In addition to these processual improvements that made the daily routines less hard to carry out and some of their processes more efficient, there were also constant

adjustments in the services offered, such as widening the product range (e.g., they started to distribute fruits and vegetables) or deliver on customer-specific orders (Phelps, 2010). But next to that, there were also other services that might have set the grounding for the profession to become an essential part of Britain's communities. For instance, they took on the role of delivering messages, newspapers, and parcels in certain areas of the country. Another example are the Co-Op tokens that were introduced in the beginning of the 20th century by some bigger dairies. These chips could be bought in dedicated stores or were given by some employers to their employees to support the individuals in their daily milk supply (Phelps, 2010). The customers could leave those tokens on their doorsteps to pay for the fresh milk. In this way, some risks of handling money (e.g., being physically assaulted and robbed) were restricted – because the tokens only had value when used for milk home delivery.

Retrospectively, those kinds of initiatives might have deepened the interactions and the interrelations with the people of the community. The way they lived together and how they interacted with each other became increasingly relevant to the business of the milkmen. Milkmen started to build relationships with their customers externally. Internally, milkmen on-boarded these new services and adjusted their propositions constantly. But for some of their daily work routines, they stuck to similar patterns as in the beginning of their profession: “A typical working day would begin at 4A.M. After breakfast he would start with the first round, serving about one hundred customers. He would return to have something to eat, take on another churn, then serve the same customers for the so-called ‘pudding’ round in the middle of the day. After returning to base again, he would go out to serve his customers for the third time. At the end of the day churns, carts and utensils were thoroughly cleaned and sterilised, and polish was applied to the brass churn lids and the rails of the barrow. Perhaps the milkman would finish at 7P.M.” (Phelps, 2010, p.12; see also: Ward, 2016).

3.2 Stable milk supply during WW I and WW II (~ 1914-1945)

These routines outlived World War I (1914-1918) when many men served in the armed forces: “Women, boys straight out from school and older men in their

sixties and even seventies [...stepped in and ensured...] that Britain's milk was delivered" (Phelps, 2010, p.19). Dairies supplying the business of the milkmen decided actively to become part of the fabric of Britain's society based on milkmen's growing personal relationships and social interactions in the communities, milkmen had started to build. One method was that they became heavily involved in supporting charities, generating considerable money by fundraising. One of the best-known stories on that social contribution regards the fundraising for the Red Cross in 1918 by Higgs Dairy: "[T]he lids of quart cans were soldered shut and a slot was cut in each for coins to be donated. Posters announcing, 'Look out for November 7th' and cans were circulated to all dairies throughout London; the response was astounding. Each district had a centre where the huge collections were taken, the police guarded some premises overnight to protect the money before it was deposited in banks the following day" (Phelps, 2010, p.19). Through such actions, the once-dubious characters of the 17th century made themselves a respectable 'pillar of society'. Not only did they assume the task of social responsibility, but the milkmen also delivered that essential product (= milk), constantly and reliably to their communities. Particularly in unstable times of war, the stability of their calming delivery pattern might have been much appreciated. And the milkmen could also underline that comforting reliability by using their key proposition to be present in every area of Britain, as well as known and trusted by the members of those communities.

Many milkmen continued embedding these tasks in their profession during peacetime. The profession thus became known for its reliability and engagement within the community. Even during the General Strike in London (1926), the consistent daily supply of milk was guaranteed, although the rest of Britain was completely paralysed (Ward, 2016; Phelps, 2010). And by the late 1930s many "milkmen enrolled in such activities as first aid and firefighting" (Phelps, 2010, p.31) and took over various other roles in society, such as taking care of the elderly or watching children. This impacted the social status of the profession even further.

For World War II (1939-1945), milkmen were once more recruited to the war effort, and their daily deliveries went down to just one delivery a day

(Ward, 2016). But the daily routine of doorstep service again continued by women, school boys, and older men (Ward, 2016; Phelps, 2010). As in World War I, the regular delivery pattern was highly appreciated. It was finally no less than Sir Winston Churchill who further elevated the milkmen's social status even higher at that time, saying: "Democracy means that when there's a knock at 3A.M., it's probably the milkman" (Internet Link, 11.12.2018). The business of the milkmen was at the first peak of its recognition and became a question of national concern. So, the government itself intervened and structured the competition between milkmen at that time by zoning Britain's milk supply. By that, all milkmen knew exactly which zone they had to serve. Consequentially, the consumption of gallons of petrol by the milk floats were also significantly reduced (Ward, 2016).

3.3 Second rise of the business of the milkmen after WW II (~ 1946-1985)

This recognised cost impact on the pricing of each pint of milk might have been why even after World War II some zoning was kept in place voluntarily. The lower costs of refuelling and the optimised trunking costs fed into cheaper product cost quotations, which is the basis for any price setting facing customers (Ward, 2016). From a business perspective, these are the rules, on which most of the price-building in free markets occurs. Such pricing models struggle with changes in volumes, or dramatic changes in other variables. And both did by the end of the 1980s, after almost 20 years of an all-time high on the back of a nation that was about to recover from war, economically and demographically. "[I]n the late sixties and early seventies, between 40,000 and 45,000 milkmen delivered to over eighteen million UK homes (about 99 per cent of households)" (Ward, 2016, p.X). In social recognition, the status and the relevance of the milkmen could hardly be higher than in those days: Charles Dickens even mentions a milkman in his best seller 'David Copperfield' (1850). Clark Gable became a milkman in 'The Easiest Way' (1931) and Geoffrey Brightman represents a milkman in the TV series 'Coronation Street' (1961). And it became public knowledge that some famous actors, like Robert Redford and Sean Connery, grew up in the context of the business of the milkmen.

But just one decade after the 'golden age' (= gold top 80s), the business of the milkmen faced a tougher fight than ever in its two centuries of evolution. At the beginning of that decade, Baroness Fisher of Rednal underscored the great contribution provided by milkmen to society in a speech to the House of Lords in November 1983. There, she elaborated on the heavy snow and severe weather situations that had challenged the nation the year before and highlighted the reliability of the milkmen's deliveries. Furthermore, she stated that milkmen were frequently the ones who reached and cared for people that were completely cut off during that time (Ward, 2016). And in 1984, the Earl of Kinnoull defined the milkmen's role in society: "Milkmen [...] give a service to our communities. They offer a vital service. They are inevitably cheerful, helpful people, who work very unsocial hours, and they are often very kind to the elderly. Along with postmen, they have a very special place in our society [...]" (Ward, 2016, p.252).

3.4 Decline of the business of the milkmen (~ 1985-2017)

By the mid-1980s, market forces had already begun to diminish the business of the milkmen in the UK. By the end of the 1980s, it became "cheaper to buy milk in the supermarket than from milkmen" (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.4) and the prolonged shelf-life of milk, and the enormous improvement in the quality of milk, impacted people's shopping and consumption behaviour significantly. Supermarkets, with their even wider product range and cheaper prices, had entered the consumer market. And by the improvements in shelf life and quality, "[t]he competition between supermarkets and milk home delivery became even more one-sided" (Ward, 2016, p.244). At the same time, the daily routines in the lives of the milkmen's customers changed fundamentally: "The working housewife wanted prepared foods that took less time to cook, and items such as eggs, cheese, milk and cream became less popular" (Phelps, 2010, p.47).

Consequently, the milkmen had to start fighting for their niche market – both in the old, offline world and in the newly created online market. Some milkmen embraced the emerging trends of the 1990s and used innovative technology to manage their internal processes and to improve their internal efficiency (e.g., via handhelds and electronic round books). Furthermore, milkmen started to address

their customers via websites and mailings with their product range and emphasising milkmen's role in their communities (e.g., reliability of deliveries, local supply) (Phelps, 2010). They had foreseen that the progression of the internet would open different opportunities and present different, more varied information to the customers that would finally change shoppers' behaviour tremendously (e.g., Canavan et al., 2007; Hengst, 2001).

Despite these initiatives started in the years between 1990 and 2010, milkmen seemingly could not stop the clear decline in milk consumption. The consumed milk volume per head had decreased significantly over years and so, as a knock-on effect, the number of dairy farmers did too. "In 1950 the UK had about 196,000 dairy farmers, but the numbers dropped to around 35,000 (in 1995) and 13,000 (2014)" (Ward, 2016, p.245). As a consequence of this, the strong bond built between the milkmen and the public during the two world wars began to weaken (Phelps, 2010), which becomes even clearer, given some of the industry figures: The number of milk rounds dropped dramatically from "over 40,000 (in the late sixties) to just under 20,000 (1994) and just over 11,000 (2000)" (Ward, 2016, p.240). The number of milkmen in the UK followed the same trend. In 2014, there were roughly "4,000 milkmen serving about 2.5 million homes" (Ward, 2016, p.X), which equals about 10% of all households in the UK. That trend forced the milkmen to cooperate more strongly with each other and with their suppliers: The dairies. Hence, most milkmen currently are no longer the independent entrepreneurs they were in the 17th century. Today, they are commonly organised in companies that professionally arrange raw milk inbounding, the dairy business, and the outbound deliveries to depots, where the milkmen pick up the products and complete the 'last mile' delivering to households.

3.5 Third rise of the business of the milkmen: Milk & More (~ 2018)

One of these companies in the UK is Milk & More. This is the company I worked for when this research was undertaken. It delivers a wider product range to the doorsteps of approximately 500,000 residential customers in the UK. As milk products represent approximately 85% of its revenues, it is still a milk delivery

business even if there are, dependent of the time of year, up to 200 other products offered. By reviewing its contemporary product range more specifically, it becomes obvious that most of those products are, or can be, linked to any occasion of 'milk usage' or, in a wider interpretation, 'breakfast' (e.g., orange juice, cornflakes, bacon, eggs). Next to that, there is even 'more' offered as the following sections display.

3.5.1 Milkmen's proposition: Milk

The product category 'milk' contains a huge variety of milk of different origins (e.g., Scottish milk, goats milk), of different fat levels (e.g., skimmed milk, semi-skimmed milk), or of different levels of pasteurisation (e.g., fresh milk, UHT milk). Furthermore, it includes distinct kinds of packaging (e.g., glass, plastic). The packaging itself is rarely branded, neither in Milk & More nor in any other business of the milkmen in the UK. The plastic bottles are an almost blank industrial standard bottle with little information such as content and Best-Before-Date. And so are the glass bottles. They are even less branded or individualised today than in the past. In the 1960s-70s glass bottles either had the dairy's name embossed into them during the moulding process, or later, advertising and branding colourfully printed into the glass. In the days before semi-skimmed and skimmed, milk tops were tinfoil and coloured as standard milk (usually 'red top' or 'silver top') and 'gold top', which was the recognised name for cream-enriched milk. So, all relevant business information was embedded and symbolised by tinfoil and coloured lids. At those times, there was obviously no need for further information. These differently coloured lids, displaying the various kinds of milk, remain in place, and there is still no additional indication or information given on the bottle. The coloured plastic lids still carry the imprinted Best Before Date and declare the specific kind of milk, which seems to be enough contextual symbolism for the milkmen and their customers.

3.5.2 Milkmen's proposition: & More

But, as mentioned before, it is not only the product category 'milk' that defines the milkmen's proposition of today. There is 'more', which can be split into 'product' range and 'service' range.

'Product' range (= product-related services)

There are those other goods proposed by the milkmen. This product range is, like in any other business, constantly reviewed, and adjusted to fit (contemporary) customer needs (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011) as a review of milkmen's propositions of the last centuries shows. The author Andrew Ward described the milkmen's offered product range (just) of the last fifty years like so: "Over the years, milkmen have sold lots of goods other than milk. In 1968, they delivered tea, coffee, and sugar as well as traditional dairy products; in 1973, a Unigate milkman described himself as a travelling grocery store because he stocked butter, chickens, potatoes, vegetables, canned fruit, and biscuits. Bakery products were additional options when the number of bread-roundsmen fell dramatically. In 1984, a Co-Op milkman stocked bread, eggs, sugar, tea, fruit yoghurts and long-life milk" (2016, p.16). In the 1990s, the milkmen even delivered messages, collected shopping, or carried laundry (Ward, 2016, p.120). And those are only a few examples of the wide product range offered by generations of milkmen, predominantly defined by the milkmen being independent doorstep salespeople.

Nowadays, the product and service ranges of all milkmen in the UK are, as mentioned before, commonly defined, or at least strongly influenced, by companies such as Milk & More. Consequently, the milkmen's product range refers often to a 'dairy background' (e.g., cheese, butter) or the 'occasion breakfast' (e.g., bread, orange juice). Few articles are meant to be available for occasional top-up shopping (e.g., tissues) or serve consumption in everyday life (e.g., Coke). Few products are supposed to serve certain seasonal occasions (e.g., Christmas). All such products carry contextual elements and represent, by that, also an element of 'service' in the everyday understanding.

‘Service’ range (= delivery services and ‘individualised’ services)

But there are several service elements, which are exclusively offered by the milkmen. Milk home delivery might be one of them, even if it is not really exclusively offered by the milkmen today as home delivery can be provided by almost anybody. Several supermarket chains, such as Sainsbury’s and Tesco, offer a home delivery, similar to the business of the milkmen, as well. And their standard product range in the stores (at least more than 3,000 products on average) and the available product range for the home delivery service are commonly much wider than the current product range of the milkmen, and in regards of pricing, due to the economies of scale, even more competitive than offered by the milkmen. Such an understanding indicates that there exist various perceptions, which can not only be rationally driven or fact-based when it comes to valuing the milkmen’s proposition. Next to that, there are, as my research unveils, also other individual expectations on some more qualitative criteria to meet. One of those services might be the quality checks expected by the customers for ‘natural’ or ‘fresh’ products such as milk and orange juice and done by the milkmen under the light of a torch, or in the dim early-morning light.

Next to that, there is also a (growing) request to the business of the milkmen for ‘locally sourced’ and ‘regional products’. This ‘feeds’ societal trends, but carries, from my understanding, a wider interpretation: On the one hand, such hallmarks suggest to customers a ‘proofed’ level of quality and exclusivity. Furthermore, they ‘guarantee’ for some customers a certain level of product quality. On the other hand, these hallmarks might be perceived as a certain level of ‘local commitment’ given by the milkmen. And an even more ‘individualised’ commitment is just given by the milkmen when they serve individual, situational needs of customers by ‘giving a hand’ to them (e.g., by lifting and carrying heavy items to the doorsteps), which is even today not an unusual service offered by some milkmen. That might be one of the fundamental reasons why milkmen still offer heavy gardening products to be delivered to the doorstep, even though gardening products do not really suit the rest of the occasion-driven product range assortment. By all that, milkmen’s home delivery is widely recognised as being

supportive, charitable, and 'individualised', and by that, different to any home delivery offered by supermarket chains.

Hence, it could be summarised that today's milkmen usually offer a wide variety of physical goods and services. Furthermore, it is already indicated that the milkmen are different to other 'home delivery drivers' as they still carry a wider set of roles, such as "driver and deliverer, birdwatcher and bookkeeper, garden advisor and house protector, money collector and converser, social worker, and nurse" (Ward, 2016, p.123). In line with that, Milk & More's milkmen also propose deliveries on short notice to almost every postcode in the UK before 7A.M. the next day, offer a wide variety of payment methods and take orders via a UK-based call centre. This degree of possible individuality and the variety of products and services offered might explain why The Grocer Dairyman (2018) believes that companies like Milk & More are "hauling the traditional milk delivery model into the 21st century" (p.6).

4. Situational research questions

And at the front end of that 'haulage', there are people like Ian and me on that specific night in February 2018 delivering predominantly milk in glass bottles, which contains many other aspects of the business of the milkmen. Thus, today's milkmen's proposition could be depicted in a more abstract way as follows:



Figure 1 Summative depiction of milkmen's proposition

But it is doubtful that Ian or me I thought about those aspects of the business of the milkmen or the loaded history of our profession on that specific night, however. We did not reflect on the centuries of customers who constantly received their orders despite the challenges of the weather. We did not think about the speeches given in front of the House of Lords on our central role to society in peace and war time. At least my thoughts were just about the specific round I was heading to, the customers I was supposed to serve that night and the challenges (e.g., it is cold and dark along the round) that I had to overcome.

This might help me to stay focused and to deliver appropriate service, but it did not answer one of the fundamental strategic questions I asked myself when I joined the Business Unit in November 2017:

Milkmen, where is your business headed?

I often raised that strategic question internally during reviews of our long-term trends of certain Key Performance Indicators, such as sold milk volume or customer numbers. Although there were some positive trends identified in the 2018 figures, my sceptical finance background and the knowledge of the developments since the mid-eighties pushed me back several times. So, I tried to understand the business with all its mechanics, with all its underlying logic in the 'learnt manner'. I reviewed the seasonality of certain products and customers' shopping trends. I investigated the different basket spends of defined customer groups in various areas across the UK. I reviewed the product range intensively and I double-checked the impact of certain promotions, such as the financial impact of leaflets. All that analysis was based on my common toolset of figures and a fundamental assumption of an underlying rational logic in the business.

Nonetheless, I could not answer the simple question I had right at the beginning when joining the business in the UK on its value, and which is the base of the more strategic question mentioned above:

“Why should I, as a rational customer, buy products with a milkman when most of their products cost me more than if I was to go out and buy them from somewhere else?” (Ward, 2016, p.242)

This is an observation a resident in West Yorkshire described more precisely: “[F]our pints of milk cost £1 at Lidl, £2 at Tesco and £2.34 by doorstep delivery” (Ward, 2016, p.242). And, although this statement was proven several times, and the underlying question has not been answered by any (business or theory driven) research so far, the business persists and keeps on adapting to modern times. Hence, there must be some more relevant aspects and considerations of a business that has lasted (and reinvented itself) for around 300 years. As depicted before, milkmen had embedded certain aspects that seemed to be relevant to the customers (at that times), such as the concept of 'shops on wheels'

or the daily home delivery of qualitatively ‘good’ food to residential customers. Next to that, there were obviously other service elements, which might be associated with the milkmen such as reliability, responsibility, and community care. Those ‘foreshadowed’ themes seemed to be linked to the history of the profession itself and its role for and its interrelation with the societal development in the UK. Furthermore, it became transparent that individual’s activities and interactions impact the milkmen’s value proposition. All that pushed me to look for a suitable, different theoretical approach, which helped me to gain a better contextual understanding and which offered me also some more specific theory-based research questions. They are displayed in the next chapter.

5. Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the situational context, in which the research has been undertaken, and to familiarise the reader with the narrative style of presenting the knowledge created throughout my research. Through this, my research journey overall and some of its specific phenomena have already been outlined. Here, the intent was to explain the nature of this research and to help to frame why this study was eventually entitled **MILK, MOON & MONEY**.

A first indication of the reasons for this was provided by presenting my subjective impressions of the atmospheric surrounding of the business, my ‘usual’ work routines, and those of Ian, the milkman. In part the aim was to juxtapose the two in order to illustrate the diverse perspectives present in the business and its operation – and highlight that whilst a member of that company, by joining the milkmen I was entering a substantively different realm.

The third section sought to create a more objective understanding of the business of the milkmen by presenting its (historic) evolution. Of course, that evolution was neither one-directional nor as straight-forward as presented. And it was, on a micro-level from the perspective of each individual milkman of the last three centuries, not as uniform as suggested. Nevertheless, the section presented various phenomena that had become a central characteristic of the widely-shared understanding of ‘the milkman’. Consequently, those phenomena need to be

addressed in my research project as well. Thus, I have already highlighted explicitly certain aspects (such as reliability and community care) and termed them 'foreshadowed' themes as they become central to my research study. Those themes are explored more specifically in the narrative analysis story presented in chapters 4-9.

Additionally, it must be mentioned that all these phenomena derived from my first impressions (section 2) and the evolutionary review (section 3). That supported me in formulating the most relevant situational research questions (section 4). Furthermore, it guided me in identifying a suitable theoretical framework and formulating the theoretical research questions, as presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 | Theoretical contextualisation

1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the theoretical contextualisation of my study. Consequentially, its purpose is to present the review of the manifold literature on services marketing. It also seeks to identify relevant research issues and theoretical insights through a narrative literature review format. Furthermore, it reflects on the relevance of 'place' in the context of interaction from different academic perspectives and uses this to formulate contextual problem statements and the research objectives addressed in this research. Given this content, the chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the literature review process I have chosen to identify a suitable theoretical framework for this research. In section 3, the relevant literature in my study's area of interest is presented next to the existing "body of knowledge" (Tranfield et al., 2003, p.208). This is done in a narrative literature review format. Herein, the most relevant terms and aspects of the theoretical framework used, such as 'services', 'service provider/service user', '(subjective) value-in-use' and 'spheres' are presented. Furtherly, the relevance of 'place' for interaction is considered more specifically before the focused foundational premises and axioms of the underlying theoretical framework are displayed. Through this, the fundamental contextual problem statements and underanalysed and undertheorised research questions, presumably in services marketing, are identified and presented in section 4 of this chapter. These problem statements are essential for my research journey and guided me through the entire research project.

2. Self-reflection of my literature review

But first, I had to awaken to the broad questions of doing research such as 'what is a literature review in general about' and 'how can such a literature review contribute to my specific research context'.

The term 'literature review' names a structured, academic process of reviewing relevant literature by accessing, retrieving, and judging the quality and relevance of theories and studies in the research area (e.g., Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003; Hart, 1998). At the same time, it is a key research objective (Tranfield et al., 2003) and an important scientific activity to create "a firm

foundation for advancing knowledge” (Webster & Watson, 2002, p.13). Consequentially, it provides a comprehensive topic-based overview of the relevant theoretical context and the current state of knowledge. Additionally, this structured academic process is intended to synthesise previously unconnected ideas (Hart, 2001) to assist in refining the research questions and to avoid the repetition of research that has already been done. Alongside these insights into relevant theories, the process provides the opportunity to become familiar with methodological and methodical approaches used in comparable contexts (Saunders et al., 2009). Through this, the perception of the researcher (e.g., Fink, 1998; Hart, 1998) and the overall character of the study are affected (Fisher, 2007). This must be kept in mind, when applying a theory to a specific research context as I do in the analysis and discussion part of this thesis.

Based on that understanding, it seems important to me to be self-reflective on my process of conducting the literature review to identify suitable theoretical models. Thus, in preparation for my literature review, relevant literature has been read and appraised. In considering structure, suggestions given by other researchers on their approaches to research and their mechanisms to identify relevant literature have been considered (e.g., Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). So, my search started at various libraries in Germany and in the UK and with an automated online search (English and German) using different search engines and various relevant terms. That approach provided a broad spread of existing literature and a good overview of publications and articles that are available in any specific online libraries. But the variety of available articles and literature is immense, however, and requires a tightening of focus when it comes to reading the abstracts and table of contents. By that, the reviewed literature was roughly evaluated in regard to its possible ‘fitness for purpose’. That means, the abstracts and table of contents were compared to the ‘foreshadowed’ themes, which were predominantly derived from the situational context and which might become relevant to my research project before relevant articles and other literature were read in full. These documents often referred to other authors and additional key words of theoretical concepts. Consequently, the iterative process of becoming familiar with those theories had to start again.

All that demonstrates that a literature review is indeed “a continuous process, requiring writing and refocusing throughout the research process” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, p.52). Despite that, there is little chance of acquiring all the relevant knowledge that might be of interest for me theorising. There is much knowledge in existence that is not currently available through libraries and online databases as it is research in progress. As Maxwell (2013) has stated: The ‘real knowledge’ lies “in unpublished papers, dissertations in progress [...] and in the head of researchers working in the field” (p.40). That is why some form of interactive communication with the social science community became relevant to me as well (e.g., via conferences or online platforms such as ResearchGate). Thus, I tried to connect to other researchers in the field of interest and joined the Marketing Conference 2019, organised by the Academy of Marketing at Regent’s University in London.

Nevertheless, I have to admit that, even by doing all of that with all possible conscientiousness, willingness, and engagement, I am not able to gather all relevant knowledge in my area of interest and link it to the situational context, to which I am applying it. Furthermore, I must confess that there are relevant findings in other areas of research that I have not even considered reviewing in my literature review or throughout my research project. However, it became transparent that there exist suitable theoretical frameworks in social sciences (e.g., focussing on the business of the milkmen or the interactions between actors) or more specifically in the area of services marketing (e.g., focussing on the value of products and services) that can support me in creating context-related knowledge derived from the exploration of a specific service context. Those theoretical frameworks and their ‘fitness for purpose’ (= creating knowledge and contributing to theory) are presented in the following sections in a narrative format.

3. Narrative literature review of services marketing

Services marketing gathers research conducted in marketing that focuses services. The roots of the term ‘services’ stem back to Latin language basis: ‘Service’ (lat.) = ‘to serve’ (engl.), which has different common meanings in day-

to-day life (Ng et al., 2019). One of them is: “The action of helping or doing work for someone” (English Oxford Dictionary, 2018). That definition indicates the participation of several parties, wherein one party actively serves the other. It also indicates support that is given to someone else who needs assistance. Here, the service recipient is seen as a passive participant in the service transaction. This aspect is furtherly emphasised in another phrase that tries to define the term differently. Service is “[a]ssistance or advice given to customers and after the sale of goods” (English Oxford Dictionary, 2018). That statement deals with a business context by naming the receiving parties ‘customers’ and showing the term ‘service’ in relation to goods. So-defined, the (perhaps irritating and insufficient) indication is given that ‘service’ is always an intangible asset that can support the customer with the use of purchased tangible assets.

3.1 Discourses on services marketing

And there are many other general definitions of the term ‘services’ in place, but the two statements presented have already demonstrated significant definitional challenges. For instance, they do not give any indication of the quality of the relationship between parties and the characteristics of the (somehow linked) terms ‘goods’ and ‘service’ – spurring a discussion within the academic community that has been ongoing for centuries. This discourse is presented in the upcoming sections and is supposed to be slightly impacted by my research.

3.1.1 Rise of the discourse on the definition of ‘services’ (~ 360 BC)

The first documented origins of a debate concerning ‘services’ can be found in the works of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato (Ng & Smith, 2012). Plato reflected in ‘The Republic’ (360 BC) on society and the roles/responsibilities of civil citizens within any society. There, he also touches on the required split of labour (, which is, or at least contains, a service element) and the assistance one can give to others for everyone’s best benefit. Plato does not use the term ‘service’ in his work but, having the definitional statements above in mind, his lines of reasoning appear to be a circumlocution of service. Here, service is linked

to an *exchange process of tangible and intangible assets that is favourable to all involved participants*. Later authors suggest the roots of a ‘value-in-use’ concept (Ng & Smith, 2012), which is a different concept of valuing service than the one that has been in place for centuries. But until that concept was formulated at the beginning of 2000, the focus of economists was predominantly on (physical) goods and their value, which is derived from an exchange-value measured in monetary units. That exchange perspective offered an easy-to-understand logic and a uniform measurement of wealth (Lusch & Vargo, 2014).

3.1.2 Adam Smith’s understanding of ‘services’ (~ 1800)

Within his research on society and national wealth, it was ‘the father of economics’, Adam Smith (1776/1904), who gathered and formulated the common (and still widely-shared) understanding of value. By that, he established the relevance of service to society. He called value, which is predominantly based on the *exchange of goods*, ‘real value’, an approach that reflects the paradigmatic position of most researchers during the time of Industrial Revolution and Newtonian Mechanisms. So, from Smith’s perspective, value is (always) a comparable, measurable figure. The ‘producer’ produces goods ‘for consumption’ by a ‘consumer’ who often equals the ‘customer’. The act of producing tangible goods embeds value (fundamentally the costs of manufacturing and distribution) and is the only way of being ‘productive’ (Vargo, 2011a; Smith, 1776/1904). All other activities of human nature are, from Smith’s perspective, ‘unproductive’ (Vargo & Morgan, 2005). These unproductive activities concern mainly those intangible aspects of service, which seemed to be difficult to define at the beginning of this section. Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that Smith did not question the essential necessity of those for the wellbeing of societies.

Furthermore, within his theoretical model, he identified some of the challenges in relation to valuing intangible human contributions, means: those services. From his perspective, ‘service’ is the *application of mental and physical skills*, “*which provides [...] the foundation for exchange [...]*” (Smith, 1776/1904, p.22). Thus, in his definition, service is part of a social fundament, on which economic value-exchange can occur. It is measured by, and settled in, money

(e.g., Akaka et al., 2014; Vargo, 2011b; Vargo & Morgan, 2005). But at this point, it should be kept in mind that the ‘father of economics’ might have had a production context in mind when he formulated his definition (Akaka et al., 2014) as the production context was clearly a relevant field to research in the 19th century, the time of Industrial Revolution and Newtonian Mechanism. There were many (new) abstract phenomena such as mass, energy and power that could be researched from a Positivist’s position in different scientific disciplines. That moved the overall approach of research from philosophy (e.g., Aristotle and Plato) to science and supported Smith’s concept of value-in-exchange measured in monetary units, derived from manufacturing and distribution costs (Spohrer et al., 2007).

3.1.3 Initial controversial academic discourses on ‘services’ (~ 1800-1900)

Nevertheless, there had already been researchers at its time who questioned Smith’s view on value definition and the primacy of tangible goods. Economists such as Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) widened the presented definition of ‘being productive’ or ‘being part of the value’ (Ng & Smith, 2012). They highlighted the *relevance of certain service elements in societal coexistence and by that, their necessity, and their value adding character*. Another contemporary economic scientist argued for the relevance of and for a different understanding of ‘services’ even more strongly: “The great economic law is this: Services are exchanged for services [...]. It is trivial, very commonplace; it is, nonetheless, the beginning, the middle, and the end of economic science” (Bastiat, 1848/1964, p.161). Frédéric Bastiat’s view was, for instance, assisted by Marie-Esprit-Léon Walras (1894/1954) who also formalised the idea that services have a direct, or an indirect, utility as well. And other neoclassical economic scientists of the 19th and 20th century agreed. From their perspective, *services are exchangeable with and without goods and for goods and services*. This logic widened Smith’s fundamental, but predominantly goods-focused approach.

3.1.4 Increased controversial academic discourses on ‘services’ (~ 1900-1970)

That became even more relevant as the number of intangible assets grew significantly by the end of the 19th century. That made contemporary scientists such as Jean-Claude Delaunay and Jean Gadrey call society at that time a “*society of exchange of services*” (1992, pp.64-65), and with this, the service focus moved the customer into the centre of economic research. Commercial business and the customer became closer, also to social sciences. Peter Drucker (1974) stated: “It is the customer who determines what a business is” (p.61). Thus, he reversed the academic viewpoint, which had previously rested on the producer’s capabilities, to an argument that comes from a customer’s perspective: “Business starts out with the needs, the realities, the values of the customer. It demands that business defines its goal as the satisfaction of customer needs” (1974, p.64).

But despite the ‘early’ increased focus on the commercial relevance of intangibles (e.g., Bastiat) and the leading role of the customers (e.g., Drucker), value was at that time widely seen as derived from the costs arising in the producer’s arena. And the customers, or the receivers, of any service were still expected to remain (more or less) passive in that interaction process. But, differently to the time before, they were now more often asked for their specific requirements (Heinonen et al., 2010). Consequently, Drucker (1974) stated on the definition of value: “What the customer buys and considers value is never a product. It is always utility, that is, what a product or service does for him” (p.61). Here, the focus is not only moved from the produced good to the customer, but also moved further to the context a customer uses it and to *the individual perception of the added value* delivered. So, this statement disentangles finally the established concept of exchange-value derived from Adam Smith’s understanding, which has been the leading principle throughout the years, to a form of *value-in-use perspective*. This perspective was finally caught again at the beginning of 2000.

3.1.5 Rise of 'services marketing' as a separate discipline in academia (~ 1970)

But before the value-in-use concept was officially formulated, some researchers went more specifically into the area of 'what happens between the producer and the customer' and 'how can the customer be influenced' (in that area) (Delaunay & Gadrey, 1992). This is how service became a field of particular and specific interest for marketing research in the 1980s (Baron et al., 2009). It was finally Lynn Shostack's article in the *Journal of Marketing* (1977) that established services marketing separately in the research community next to the mainstream, more goods-focused marketing stream that tied back to Adam Smith.

This rise was strongly supported by two schools of marketing research in Europe (Berry & Parasuraman, 1993). Both schools, represented, for example, by Grönroos and Gummesson (Nordic school) and Eglie and Langeard (French school), requested in concert a new marketing perspective (Grönroos, 2006), which was obviously required (Sheth & Sisodia, 2006). So, both schools pushed for a stand-alone, marketing-driven research perspective that was no longer a part of the overall business administration research community. Their rationale was predominantly determined by the insights they had gained on customers' preferences and the interactions identified between the actors involved. Research of those schools linked ideas of social sciences, philosophy, anthropology, and many other academic disciplines to get a better understanding of human/customer behaviour and by that, of the relevance and understanding of 'services'. They realised, for instance, that customers do *behave differently in different contexts* and that they *take over various roles in different interactional processes*. Consequentially, the customers, as incorporation of all those elements, influence the understanding of services and the context of services being exchanged was stronger than assumed before 1970. By that, customers also became active participants in shaping the service processes (e.g., Grönroos, 2006, 1982, 1978). As a representative of the Nordic school, Grönroos (2006) summarised the role of the customers in relation to the service interaction process as follows: "Customers were also found to be a 'resource' participating as co-producers in the service production process" (p.318). Next to that, the term 'services' and 'goods' were understood in more depth and

delineated in the second half of the 20th century in more detail (e.g., Fisk et al., 1993; Judd, 1964).

So, in sum, the last two centuries have seen substantial shift in relation to understandings of service and the actors involved who serve others or who are served by others. The customer's role changed from a primarily passive recipient of service (as a subordinated part of goods) to an active role as consumer. Furthermore, the participants were designated a wider set of roles. They were still recipients but became partially relevant to the producers in regards of 'what should be produced to fulfil the customers' needs' (= influence on the production process), which becomes central to the new conceptual framework built on a different understanding of the relationship between producers and customers on 'eye level'.

3.1.6 Rise of a different conceptual framework (2004)

In the early 2000s, management and marketing researchers moved finally their focus to the creation of value, as evolved from Smith to Bastiat and Drucker, and the locus of value for customers (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). That was the time when a different approach was proposed based on the work of various, (partially) described research traditions (e.g., Normann, 2001; Gummesson, 1993) and on an alternative paradigmatic position (e.g., Vargo, 2011b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). The article 'Evolving to service-dominant logic for marketing' (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a) in the *Journal of Marketing* opened a still continuing discussion around services marketing research to a wider audience. Here, the authors did not present a final theory. It was more an initial conceptual proposition that was intended to be researched, used, and adjusted by themselves and by other researchers. As mentioned before, Vargo and Lusch's theory, called Service-Dominant-logic (S-D-logic), is based on a fundamentally different paradigmatic view and clusters the various approaches of understanding 'services' also from a paradigmatic perspective. It is opposed to Goods-Dominant-logic (G-D-logic). As S-D-logic deals with some of the weaknesses of G-D-logic, G-D-logic needs to be presented first in the upcoming section before relevant aspects of S-D-logic are displayed.

3.2 Goods-Dominant-logic (G-D-logic)

As the name implies, in G-D-logic 'goods' are the dominant concept. But there is not one concept depicted in the literature. There are several perspectives and theories that centre on 'goods', although their authors used different terms such as tangibles or products (e.g., Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002; Normann, 2001; Hunt & Lambe, 2000). These concepts had become the traditional way of conceptualising economic transactions from a goods perspective since its rise in the times of Industrial Revolution and Newtonian Mechanisms (e.g., Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002; Smith, 1776/1904). But as Vargo and Lusch (2008a) could not identify huge shifts in those approaches and perspectives before 2004, they determined such propositions and theories to be goods-centred theories and hence displaying G-D-logic.

In this summative theoretical conception, 'services' are denominated as intangible goods. They are less value-generating and seen more as supportive elements that highlight the value of the goods (for instance by making them accessible or by delivering them) (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). Here, the 'quantifiable and measurable goods' are the real value drivers as described by Smith. Such goods have an embedded value derived from the manufacturing and distribution process and are the archetypical units of exchange. Thus, a primarily quantitative approach is in G-D-logic evident. That is the reason why some researchers call this a '*value-in-exchange perspective*' (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

People do not define and interrelate (= de-coupling producer and consumer) in the objective-based G-D-logic and its value-in-exchange definition. Due to that methodological definition of value, intangibles such as service(s) have been traditionally defined residually (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2004b; Rathmell, 1966). But that view caused problems for marketers in terms of describing and understanding of commercial interaction and its participants (Zeithaml et al., 1985). Furthermore, that view did not reflect current research. So, for instance, the role of the customer (passive to active) and the perception of the interactions between the actors involved ('producer push' to 'mutual, relational interactions') became central for the research community throughout

the last 40-50 years. Thus, a different approach based on a different paradigmatic position was requested: Service-Dominant-logic (S-D-logic).

3.3 Service-Dominant-logic (S-D-logic)

Even if S-D-logic is still a relatively 'new' theoretical framework from a social science' perspective, there is considerable literature available (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2016, 2008a, 2004b; Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Many studies have addressed the development of S-D-logic's foundational premises and axioms, which frame most of the research conducted in that area. This development has been summarised by Vargo and Lusch themselves several times (for the last time in 2016) even though they did not feel like the owners of S-D-logic. The authors have stated several times that they neither invented the approach, nor own it (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2008a, 2004b). They only aggregated existing ideas and, in 2004, formulated the eight foundational premises of that alternative view on 'how value is created' from a service perspective (e.g., Akaka & Vargo, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Since then, those eight foundational premises have been modified, amended, and consolidated into four axioms and expanded into eleven foundational premises (*Appendix A*). But even though their conceptualisation has taken a series of theoretical turns over the last fifteen years, the overall proposition is still the same: *Value is co-created by an iterative interaction between actors (= service provider and service user) based on the exchange of services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). The value (of those exchanged services) is defined by each beneficiary and derived from the obtained use of these services (= value-in-use). 'Service' is, in that context, "the application of specialised competences (i.e., operant resources such as knowledge, skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity, or the entity itself"* (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b, p.26). And this definition varies significantly from the ones presented before. Consequentially, it can be stated that the theoretical framework of Vargo and Lusch strongly impacted the academic understanding of 'services' overall and established a different understanding of certain terms,

which are relevant for their framework. Those terms are displayed in the upcoming sections.

3.3.1 General description and most relevant terms

As outlined so far, S-D-logic offers an alternative view for modern marketing theory based on a fundamental paradigmatic shift. Its roots stem from weaknesses identified in the different theories that have been gathered and termed Goods-Dominant-logic. That is why both concepts cannot be understood in isolation. The founders of the theory are Vargo and Lusch, who built their concept on these perceived weaknesses and on the ideas from previous researchers' work on 'service', such as that of the French philosopher Bastiat (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014) and others presented before. Furthermore, they also integrated research around 'value-co-creation' by others (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Starting from this, Vargo and Lusch created a new theoretical framework that conceptualises business exchanges from a service-based perspective (Karpen et al., 2012). Its four main characteristics are from my perspective:

Firstly, the nucleus of their theoretical concept is 'services', which is, as presented before, a term that can hardly be defined in simple words. It consists of many dimensions and carries various views. Thus, it is important to note that there is a fundamental change in the meaning of the terms 'goods' and 'services' (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). In S-D-logic, goods are a *service-delivery mechanism* for exchange processes (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). That means, goods are relevant for attracting and serving customers. That is why 'goods' are also termed *service platforms* that *indirectly* render the offered services. A *direct* way of rendering is for instance any kind of service offered via Internet websites or traditional services (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; Gummesson, 1993). Consequentially, all goods lose, within S-D-logic, their physicality and become part of the abstract term 'services', which names all kinds of physical and non-physical goods as well as abstract services. In Vargo and Lusch's understanding this pluralistic term represents the (quantifiable) units of output, as does the term

'goods' in G-D-logic (Kryvinska et al., 2013). Hence, it can be summarised that services are a combination of aspects that can be provided to customers including the variety of the product range, the way to make contact between parties (e.g., call centre, sales force), the meaning of the brand in a social context (e.g., premium, sports) and so forth. That is why S-D-logic assumes that there is not a defined, separate 'good' or 'service' aspect offered. There are, instead, bundles of different elements provided that are pluralistically called 'services'.

Secondly, there are mainly two groups of human actors involved in such exchange processes, which are relevant for the creation and definition of value. On the one hand, there are the firms and suppliers. In S-D-logic, they are called *service providers* (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011) that interact with their customers to deliver better services and valued experiences to them (Karpen et al., 2012). From a theoretical perspective, service providers do not deliver value, but value propositions (e.g., Ng et al., 2019; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). And as there is a continuous change in 'what customers do value' firms must review and refine their service offerings constantly. By that, firms assure their role as 'value facilitator' for the respective customers (Grönroos, 2011) to stay relevant. So, as any other organisation, firms must constantly pay attention and interpret what they can find in their operational context (Sinkula, 1994). That includes new challenges such as globalisation or the growing e-commerce sector (Flint & Mentzer, 2006). From a strategic perspective, Vargo and Lusch have argued regarding those challenges that a firm must be able to learn, to change and to adapt their value propositions constantly to be and stay competitive (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). And those examples illustrate that firms have now a wider set of roles than in G-D-logic (e.g., Karpen et al., 2012; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011).

On the other hand, there is the group of customers. They are called *service users* within S-D-logic and they carry a various set of roles, too: They are now 'consumers', 'users', 'participants' and 'co-creators' (Bolton et al., 2014). They are even called the 'arbiters of value' in regards of the offered value propositions strategically (e.g., via feedback in consumer tests, buying/non-buying) by some researchers (Tronvoll, 2012, p.288). I do not apply that term for the group of

customers, as it seems to me to downgrade the active role customers have in S-D-logic and does not emphasise the relevance of their role in the creation of value properly. But nevertheless, it becomes obvious that the customers are no longer perceived as merely buying goods or services (Gummesson, 1995) and they are also no longer viewed as a ‘passive audience’ (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Customers are now viewed as active participants who interact with the service providers and integrate resources for creating value (Payne et al., 2008). Their contribution is not limited to their own area of competence. Vargo and Lusch (2008b) have argued that the customer is “endogenous to both [...their] own value creation and that of the firm” (p.35). For instance, a customer helps the firm to adjust its value proposition by giving feedback on the offered proposition. Hence, the aspect of being a *co-creator* is more highly emphasised (than other roles) in S-D-logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b), even if there is still conceptual elaboration needed on the meaning and the implications to the actors involved (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). That means more specifically, that research in services marketing, and here, particularly in the context of S-D-logic, is required.

Thirdly, while service users influence service providers and their value propositions strategically, they more importantly *influence the services offered through a process of interactions* with service providers. The term ‘interaction’ has not explicitly been defined by Vargo and Lusch in early conceptions of S-D-logic. In 2011, however, Grönroos and Ravald defined ‘interaction’ in the context of S-D-logic as “*a mutual or reciprocal action where two or more parties influence one another*” (p.11). Such actions are various and recognisable, but scarcely measurable, as the value is created in concert *with*, rather than *for*, customers within each, and every, relational context (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Simply by observing some of those mutual or reciprocal actions, a large variety of connections and cooperation appears: The customers’ perceptions occur as the customers’ influences on the providers do (e.g., ‘individually’ by the customer ‘individually’ configured products); some influence in a less obvious and recognisable way (e.g., water, banking) than others, that show almost partner-like reciprocal interactions (Ramirez, 1999) in various contexts (Yazdanparast et al., 2010). Furthermore, Grönroos and Ravald highlighted in

2011 that interaction has an inherent element of connectivity. Connectivity, or at least the subjective impression of connectivity, can be a central element in the iterative interaction process between service providers and service users (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006), by which the other party is influenced (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). An example for such a mutual influence is feedback that is given by a customer (= service user) to a producer (= service provider) that is taken into consideration when offering an updated version of the services to customers. But customers can also deny an offered value proposition by the service providers by not buying that, for example. This is also seen as a recognisable form of influence from an S-D-logic perspective. Many more examples of mutual influence (e.g., via products, promotions) are broadly elaborated in the marketing literature. Hence, they are not depicted any further in here. However, today's research community accepts that there is a process of mutual influence, which was characterised by Grönroos and Voima in 2013 as follows: "The core of interaction is a physical, virtual, or mental contact, such that the provider creates opportunities to engage with its customers' experiences and practices and thereby influences their flow and outcomes" (p.140).

But interaction is not only a one-time-activity between the service providers and service users. Most of the time, it is an *interactive, iterative cycle* (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). That means that service providers offer value propositions, on which service users regularly give feedback. Consequently, the service providers reflect on the feedback given and decide to change or adjust their propositions (or not), which are then offered again. And the service users (re-)act on that updated value proposition again. This repetitive mode of interactions is fundamental to the value-co-creation process in S-D-logic. Without these *dialogical exchanges* the roles of the actors involved would be limited to the role of a facilitator (= service provider) and the role of a 'creator' (= service user) of value, which is close to the understanding derived from a G-D-logic perspective (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2010).

Here it must also be mentioned that even in such an interactive cycle, there are many activities of both parties, which are not aligned with the other one and which

become not part of the value. Furthermore, the (sub-)processes of value facilitation (= service provider) and individual value-creation (= service user) are commonly not fully aligned. Nevertheless, these cycles and their dialogical exchange processes (plus the unaligned activities) finally create value and beyond that, relationships between service providers and service users (e.g., Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2011), which contain the subjective experiences with the other parties and the offered services, including the other's contribution to the value-co-creation process itself. By that, these interactive cycles finally support the creation of value in each and every beneficiary's area. Hence, this value is also called *subjective value-in-use* (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a).

That leads finally to the fourth central element of Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework established in 2004: *Value*. The term 'value' itself has not clearly been defined in services marketing literature so far, even if it has been requested in literature for decades (e.g., Zeithaml et al., 1985). That is, why Grönroos and Voima (2013) state that value is "perhaps the most ill-defined and elusive concept in [...] management" (p.134). This statement becomes particularly relevant in S-D-logic, as there has always been a collective understanding of 'value' within the theories gathered and named G-D-logic. Here, value is a property or utility that is part of a manufacturing process, which finally results in a *value-in-exchange* concept (Lusch et al., 2006). That has already been described above. In contrast, S-D-logic assumes that value is co-created in the specific context of usage. That is the reason why the theoretical framework uses the term (*subjective*) *value-in-use*. But, also in that respect, there does not exist only one definition of value-in-use as any situation of usage is different to others. Later authors widened the concept to include the entire (social) context, in which usage happens. Hence, terms such as *value-in-context* or *value-in-social context* can also be found in literature (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). These terms are mainly the outcome of research that focused on the social interaction between people and their societal contexts of interaction. This contextual influence has been widely underestimated in G-D-logic and characterises S-D-logic, as Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework focuses the one-to-one-relationships and the views of the participating actors, including their individual background and experiences. Within this research project, I

predominantly use the term 'value-in-use' as it reflects my research context best and covers the mentioned, subordinated concepts.

So, the overall intention of the concept of 'value-in-use' is exactly to capture and express the contextual nature of value as it is, accordingly to S-D-logic, always created in unique contexts. Furthermore, it is always contextually and individually perceived and determined by the beneficiary, as stated above (e.g., Grönroos, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). Consequently, beneficiaries must also contribute to value. Hence, it is finally co-created in an exchange process of 'service for service' (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). S-D-logic calls that process *value-co-creation*. This is a process that is based on the created relationships, and a collaborative and interactive process, between the actors involved (e.g., Yazdanparast et al., 2010; Vargo, 2009). Based on that, the theoretical framework of S-D-logic assumes that there is a *subjective value-in-use* for each single beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a), which needs to be taken into consideration by the service provider when offering services via any kind of direct or indirect service platform. That means, that the service provider (e.g., a producer of physical products) reacts to the service users' needs, and indeed, so do the service users in relation to the proposition offered and its perceived value. It is important to mention that the contextual term 'value-in-use' does not rely merely on 'physical' use. Vargo and Lusch assume that this value definition also contains any result of a purely mental interaction. That includes also any projective and fictive interpretation by the actors involved. Value is thus actualised *within the customers' own context*, through the process of integrating and interacting with what is provided, as well as by applying their own resources (Grönroos, 2008). Such a view is more sensitive to the specifics of the individuals involved in the exchange. Consequentially, it is also less standardised. Nevertheless, this possibility means that when applied and multiplied, the outcomes can be considered. This, whilst enabling sensitivity to context, also means 'easy' situation-to-situation comparison becomes complex.

All that finally becomes part of the tasks of my research, as I seek to contribute to the existing understanding and the development of the theoretical framework of S-D-logic. This additional knowledge is built predominantly on my specific

situational context, which offers certain contextual elements that differ from previous research performed in services marketing before. That distinctiveness can be described as follows: Within my research, the relevant actors are the milkmen (= service providers) and the customers (= service users). There are clear one-to-one-relationships between them, but also wider groups of service providers and service users behaving similarly. Thus, they can (partially) be compared with each other. This is not a huge distinction from other research around S-D-logic. But different to many other research contexts, the milkmen and the respective customers do rarely meet in person at the customers' doorsteps (= place of asynchronous interactions). This lack of interaction impacts the way and the manner of interaction. Furthermore, the interaction happens in an almost private domain (= at the customers' doorsteps) at night. This specific place is loaded with memories, experiences, and tales within social sciences. And so is 'the night'. Consequentially, such aspects need to be addressed in my thesis focussing the theoretical research question:

How do contextual phenomena (e.g., temporal, and local) affect value-co-creation?

That research question has not been fully answered by the academic community, but first steps have been taken as the following section displays in regards of the relevance of 'place' in social sciences.

3.3.2 Relevance of 'place'

'Place' names commonly a physical domain that can be located and described clearly across many dimensions (e.g., location, weather).

'Places' and 'spheres' from a services marketing perspective

In services marketing, 'place' and its impact on the actors involved has also been central to research for decades. For instance, Philip Kotler has researched the atmospheric influence on consumer decision-making processes (1973). In his perception, the store atmosphere (including background music etc.) is among the

fundamental factors influencing consumers' perception and behaviour. His view was supported by many other researchers, including as Robert Donovan and John R. Rossiter (1982) or Dale M. Lewison (1994) in the late 1990s.

In the more specific context of S-D-logic, means after 2004, 'place' became part of the so-called *spheres of interaction*. As the underlying dialogical exchange process, as assumed in Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework, is not limited to any specific place (for instance: in shops or at customers' homes). Interaction and by that, value-co-creation can happen theoretically everywhere. That is why the more concrete term 'place' is commonly not used in research conducted in services marketing. Here, the researched location of interaction is more often termed the *servicescape*. It refers to the entire contextual landscape for services, in which the service provider and the service user interact (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). Furthermore, it contains various elements that build the environment that become part of the services exchanged and that influence value co-creation (Baron et al., 2009). Alongside "ambient conditions, those elements are, [...] special and functional features, [...] signs, symbols, and artefacts" (p.136). The term 'servicescape' was not coined by Vargo and Lusch. It is a theoretical concept that was originally developed by Booms and Bitner (1981) to emphasise the relevance of (physical) places for any kind of (human) interaction processes. S-D-logic on-boarded this concept and developed it through research predominantly conducted by members of the Nordic school. Finally, Grönroos and Voima (2013) divided 'servicescape' into three spheres of interaction, which were considered and described in more detail by them. Consequently, each of those three spheres has its own characteristics and can be linked to the interactive cycle of value-co-creation. Those three spheres are named 'the service provider sphere', 'the joint sphere' and 'the service user sphere'.

In the service provider sphere, the service offerings are generally generated by the value facilitator (Grönroos 2011). Here, service providers prepare the fundamentals for the value-co-creation process by incorporating their own resources, which is called *value proposition*. As described above, service providers commonly also adjust their value proposition constantly, based on the

customers' (interactive) (re-)action (e.g., feedback, purchase behaviours). In the joint sphere, the service provider, and the service user meet regularly and in person. Here, a dialogical process between the actors is enacted, as described before (e.g., Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). The actors can act/react, can influence the other party positively as well as negatively in this sphere, which leads to value-co-creation or value-deconstruction (e.g., Prior & Marcos-Cuevas, 2016; Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Within this interactive cycle, many service users' needs, and practices such as their individual routines and preferences become obvious (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). But sometimes, there is also no impact at all recognisable. Thus, there is a vast variety of phenomena observable that seem to be relevant in this cycle of interactions. Consequentially, it can be stated that interaction needs, from an academic perspective, a better understanding and further research in regards of the activities in the joint sphere (e.g., Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014; Grönroos, 2011) as it sets the frame for the value that is finally co-created in the service user sphere during usage (e.g., Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; Normann, 2001). This split of spheres is supportive for the understanding of the interactions observed and by that, for the understanding of value-co-creation as each of these spheres has its own background and embedded symbolism (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). So, a certain behaviour might be required in a specific business context where a value proposition is built, for instance. In contrary, the self-same behaviour might be too offensive or otherwise unappreciated at all in a consumer dominated area, like the almost private domain of the service user sphere. Hence, it can be summarised that the depicted concept of abstract spheres also includes certain dimensions, which concern contextual as well as local phenomena (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014) and which necessitate further research from a services marketing perspective.

'Space' and 'place' from an anthropological perspective

But areal aspects and the space of interaction have also gained relevance in other academic disciplines, such as anthropology, within the last thirty years

(Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). Here, the academic discussion on the general term 'space' was initially strongly impacted by various conceptions derived from geographical and physical research (Hall, 2003). In addition to that, the common understanding of space had become even more complex, as there were many other approaches and meanings added, "from different angles and at different levels - philosophical, scientific, and social"(Kuper, 2003, p.247). But all of that has led to a fragmented field of meanings. So finally, there still does not exist only one meaning of space (e.g., Hall, 2003; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003), which suggests that there is further experience and in-depth understanding required also from an anthropological perspective (Maasey, 2019).

The missing of a clear definition becomes even wider and more challenging and complex when the individuals' views on and interpretations of 'space' are considered thoroughly. By that, the anonymous term 'space' is replaced by the more specific term 'place' as an (anonymous) location is loaded with individuals' views and social structure (e.g., Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Lefebvre, 1991). Individuals' views are, for instance, subjective experiences, which are influenced by the experiences gained throughout childhood or individual's education. And social structure names here societally defined meanings. An example for such a societally defined meaning of a certain space is any kind of institutional space that impacts the living together in a society (e.g., legislative elements in a democracy such as a court). That is why these spaces are also called 'social spaces' within the academic community. They incorporate various societal pre-defined values and views, which are society-wide accepted, but subjectively interpreted and complemented (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). If for instance an action is brought against someone, the subjective interpretation of 'the court' is different to someone's interpretation who has not personally been at 'a court' before. In addition to that, the more concrete meaning of 'place' is also heavily influenced by the aspects of routine, time, and relationships as anthropological research, predominantly in ethnography, unfolded:

First, there exists manifold research, which suggests the importance of repetitive activities and everyday life's routines when it comes to the creation of a specific meaning of 'place' (e.g., Maasey, 2019; Lefebvre, 2004). For instance, if

someone commutes daily to work by train, the individual meaning of 'train' (as a specific place) varies from the interpretation of someone who catches a train for travelling for vacation purposes annually.

That example already touches on the second aspect of relevance: Time and temporality. In that respect, there are several dimensions, which must be considered in regards of temporality. On the one hand, there is the frequency and the rhythm of a certain action, which is linked to the mentioned aspects of repetition and routine. On the other, there are different tenses, such as the past, the present, and the future, which are linked to each other. So, there are relevant interrelations recognisable and observable between actors' activities in the past, present and future. Both mentioned dimensions of time were previously connected to the theoretical framework used within this research and both dimensions refer to the "temporal nature of value cocreation" (Razmdoost et al., 2019, p.277).

Thirdly, the meaning of places is obviously influenced by existing relationships. There are anthropological studies that suggest that "people construct meaningful relationships with their surroundings" (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003, p.18). These meanings become even more important as they are first embedded in the individuals' interpretation of a specific place, and secondly part of their narratives and praxis (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). If for instance, someone is told that it is dangerous to be outside in the darkness, the 'dark outside' becomes a place with a negative connotation, whereas 'the beach' is commonly linked to 'vacation'. Such connotations finally end in narratives told from one to the other (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). And, if these narratives are widely-shared, they become part of the societal meaning of 'place'.

All of that finally creates the subjective meaning of 'place' and fills the anonymous and abstract understanding of 'space' (Hilliar & Hanson, 1984) with experiences and contextual interpretations. Hence, it can also be summarised: "[M]aking space into place is [finally also] a fundamentally cultural and social activity" (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015, p.65; see also: Rodman, 2003; Emmison & Smith, 2000). Thus, the meaning of 'place' is, similarly to the meaning of 'value' in Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework of S-D-logic,

created by everyone individually. Consequentially, it seems to be reasonable to take such a reasoning (even if it is anthropologically founded) also into consideration when it comes to the contribution to 'social sciences', or more specifically, to Service-Dominant-logic. Lusch et al., for instance, have already requested in 2007 further research on the value-creation process in regards of its temporal and local aspects. Particularly, these phenomena carry a very subjective understanding. Hence, an individual and contextual research approach is requested. That is one of the reasons why Grönroos and Voima asked in 2013 in that respect: "When and where does this co-creation take place?" (p.139). Here, it should also be mentioned that I have decided intentionally to use the term 'place' as a leading concept throughout my research project (instead of the S-D-logic term 'servicescape') as my ethnographic fieldwork approach and the underlying anthropological reasoning are equally fundamental for my theory, as the second part of this thesis demonstrates.

3.3.3 Relevance of 'coordination mechanisms'

But I am interested not only in the place and the temporal aspect of the interaction process in regards of value-co-creation. I am equally focussing on the 'how'. So, my more precise theory-based research question is as follows:

How do the actors see 'places' and how do their understandings influence their perceptions of value?

Consequentially, it is finally also necessary from a research perspective, to get a better understanding of the 'mechanisms' of human interaction in the context of value-co-creation. And my specific field of research offers the opportunity to gain such insights into the interactive process of value-co-creation in the UK's milk home delivery business. Here, the doorstep is local dimension of the researched 'place' where the main part of the (asynchronous) interaction between the service providers (= milkmen) and service users (= customers) is supposed to happen. So, the most relevant elements of interaction can, therefore, be physically located to and observed at that specific place. These individual interaction processes are supposed to be different, as the participants are distinct from one another.

Nevertheless, there are similarities in regards of the societal and cultural meanings attached to certain contextual elements, the conception of time or the perception of the nightly atmosphere. Furtherly, other aspects in human lives, such as the presented work routines, also impact human behaviours, perceptions, and contextual understandings. Such phenomena are called *coordination mechanisms* in Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework. They can be *implicit or explicit* (Akaka et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2011; Löbler, 2010).

Implicit coordination mechanisms are, for instance, institutions, which influence the actors involved such as the company that supplies the milkmen with products (= Milk & More). Such institutions are relevant for the value-co-creation process and the interaction between the actors involved (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka & Vargo, 2013; Korkman et al., 2010). It is, among other things, responsible for the ordering process and for cash management, which significantly influences the value proposition offered by the milkmen and the service perception of the customers.

Conversely, explicit coordination mechanisms are fundamentally embedded in the actor's life (Löbler, 2011). That means that these mechanisms are part of human lives and learnt through education and socialisation. Hence, the argument here is not solely services marketing research related. It is based in anthropology and philosophy. In line with that, it is the research conducted by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas that helps to specify the understanding of explicit coordination mechanisms. He defined them as part of 'lifeworld's background' (Habermas, 1985a, 1985b). That includes, for instance, the overall value system of a society or a collective understanding based on rituals and traditions such as 'Christmas' or 'having a milkman'. Both become relevant when it comes to theorising on S-D-logic in the second part of this thesis.

As all these implicit and explicit coordination mechanisms are context specific, they "are [commonly] re-interpreted based on new contexts, and new meanings emerge" (Akaka & Vargo, 2013, p.466). A good example might be the act of nodding in distinct cultural or business contexts. Or, as in my research context of the business of the milkmen, a certain number of 'empties' (= empty bottles) at a specific place on the doorstep or a specific term, such as 'semi' (= semi-skimmed

milk). The exact place the empty bottles are located would indicate 'new order, same number of bottles and same kind of milk' or just 'please recycle the empties'. Interestingly, there is commonly no further information offered to the milkmen even though the simple number of bottles does not give any information on the kind of milk requested. The customers expect it to be known. Similarly, the milkmen would expect their customers to know the contextual meaning of term 'semi', which would be interpreted differently without the contextual knowledge on milk home deliveries in the UK.

Consequentially, such aspects must also be recognised contextually to understand the specific meaning and the information sent to a specific addressee who speaks and understands the same 'contextual language'. Such an understanding is also required from any researcher doing research on micro-level, means also from me. Without such an in-depth understanding of the 'contextual language' used on the doorsteps, it becomes difficult for a researcher to contribute to the understanding of the interactions of the actors involved in the specific context. And it becomes even more difficult to abstract the individual observations and transfer those to the wider theoretical context of interactions in services marketing, particularly as I seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion of 'how value-co-creation works' (e.g., Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Payne et al. 2008).

3.3.4 Focused foundational premises and axioms

Some of these 'coordination mechanisms' have already been researched and aggregated in Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework. This theoretical framework has been developed since 2004 and consists of several foundational premises and axioms that summarise the different viewpoints developed by the research community on an abstract, meta-level (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2008b, 2004a; Grönroos, 2006; Gummesson, 1995) (*Appendix A*). That means, the authors Vargo and Lusch combined several fundamental ideas and aspects on an abstract level for creating a theoretical framework, which has been supposed to be further developed from its beginning. That offers the opportunity to other researchers to use those fundamental

theoretical aspects, structurally combined within Vargo and Lusch's framework, for a more specific context (= micro-level) on the one hand and to contribute to the theoretical framework by adding specific knowledge created on micro-level on the other hand (e.g., Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Payne et al., 2008). And there is still research missing on that level. As the basis for my theory of value-co-creation in the context of milk home delivery in the UK, I used the most current presentations of the theoretical framework, which summarises the manifold research in that area. This aggregation was introduced by Vargo and Lusch in 2016 (*Appendix A*). Additionally, I took a deeper look into the services marketing literature and the ongoing discussion in the research community that has been presented in 2017-2020. That research added knowledge to certain aspects of the theoretical framework and is presented within second part of my thesis. Nevertheless, there has been no meaningful change in the literature since Vargo and Lusch summarised it in 2016 (Nota bene: In regards of my research), and so, I used their overview of the foundational premises and axioms as a starting point. Its foundational premises ground the theoretical framework that is based on considerable research conducted in the academic field of services marketing over the past fifteen years. To elaborate on all those developments might be quite difficult. Consequentially, I have decided to depict only the ones that impact my research project the most. They are presented in the following table:

#	Foundational premises and axioms
FP 6 (axiom 3)	Value is co-created by multiple actors always including the service beneficiary.
FP 7	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.
FP 10 (axiom 4)	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.
FP 11 (axiom 5)	Value-co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.

Table 2 Focused foundational premises and axioms

Foundational premise 6 is at the same time axiom 3 and becomes more specific in that respect, as it has pulled service users (= customers) up to 'eye level' with the service providers in regards of their role definition since 2004. In the beginning, Vargo and Lusch's framework (2004a) stated that "the customer is always a co-producer" (p.3). This statement emphasises, from my perspective, the productions aspect, as it is a wording that is commonly linked to the manufacturing process of goods led by the internal processes of the service providers (= producers). That is why the authors of the theoretical framework revised the wording recently (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, 2008a), even though co-production is still seen as a component of the co-creation process. An example of co-production is the IKEA concept, in which the customer becomes a co-producer when building the final, useable product at home. In here, the active participation of the service users becomes obvious, and contrary to the view of G-D-logic. So, according to this axiom there are some aspects of relevance that have not so far been mentioned: It states that there are multiple actors who are involved in the interactive process of value-co-creation. That does not have to be only one service provider and one service user who contribute to the needs of a single beneficiary. Value-co-creation can become collaborative in nature with more actors involved (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Further to this, that axiom and its perspective open the opportunity to examine any research context on a micro-level (Vargo & Lusch, 2013). Vargo and Lusch demand of researchers, that "value must be understood in the context of the beneficiary's world" (2013, p.91). That includes the concrete place of interaction including its local and temporal dimensions. My presented situational context offers such insights into the specific value-co-creation process of milkmen and their customers.

Foundational premise 7 adds clarity to the understanding of the role of the service provider. As mentioned earlier, it is 'simply' a value proposition offered to service users. The providers define the offer based on their understanding of the users' needs and requests, which become part of the value-co-creation process in the service user sphere (based on further interactions of and between relevant actors). From a business perspective, this understanding requires insights into the actor's capabilities and needs that are built and hereby, kept over time. It is suggested that the value-in-exchange-focus is replaced by a collaboration-

/interaction-/strategic relationship view (Yazdanparast et al., 2010). Thus, interaction becomes the heart of value-co-creation, even if the concrete impact of the actors involved is still not explicitly described in the theoretical framework. But it is stated clearly that all actors can contribute to the value proposition (e.g., Karpen et al., 2012; Grönroos, 2006). So, foundational premise 7 supports the presented foundational premise 6 (axiom 3) in that. It states quite clearly: Value cannot be delivered by an actor, but an actor can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.

Foundational premise 10 (axiom 4) becomes most important to my research, as it reflects the experiential and phenomenological nature of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). This means that value exists uniquely in one relationship and deviates fundamentally among relationships, as the growth of the value happens through an experiential iterative process of interaction between actors (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). Thus, the value is uniquely bound to the customers' experience, interpretation; and their context (e.g., Akaka & Vargo, 2013; Yazdanparast et al., 2010).

Foundational premise 11 (axiom 5) is the last official extension in 2016 to S-D-logic. It deals with institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch 2016). In that context, institutions are “humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs that enable and constrain action, and make social life predictable and meaningful” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p.6). Institutional arrangements are “interdependent assemblages of institutions” (Vargo & Lusch 2016, p.11). This area has been researched in more detail as well (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2016; Vargo et al., 2015; Maglio & Spohrer, 2008). But still, there is a lack of knowledge and hence, further research is needed. And I try to contribute to the ongoing discussion in academia by conducting further research at the micro-level, particularly in the context of the UK's milk home delivery business in regards of those foundational premises and axioms as the next table elaborates:

Focused foundational premises and axioms		Adaption to the situational context of the UK's milk home delivery business
FP 6 (axiom 3)	Value is co-created by multiple actors always including the service beneficiary.	Co-creation happens primarily between the main actors (the milkmen and the customers). There are other supportive elements in the context that can be declared as proposed value (e.g., call centre) or can be seen as part of the institution 'Milk & More'. Nevertheless, the most relevant interaction is based on the doorstep milk delivery business of the milkmen to the customers' doorsteps, based on diverse forms of communication.
FP 7	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.	The milkmen propose value propositions consisting of a wide variety of services. Those are perceived by the customers and built in concert the fundament of the value-co-creation process in the milk home delivery business.
FP 10 (axiom 4)	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.	Milkmen have their own work routines and their own experiences in the field. And so, do the customers. They have their own routines in life. For instance, milkmen leave home at a specific time for work or prefer to do their shopping on specific days. Next to these 'individual routines' there is also the specific interaction processes between each milkman and 'their customers' that happen at a shared 'place' and stem from an individual's interpretation of observable and experienceable phenomena.

Focused foundational premises and axioms		Adaption to the situational context of the UK's milk home delivery business
FP 11 (axiom 5)	Value-co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.	Milk & More coordinates and supports its roughly 100 milkmen 'in the field' by arranging the supply chain and adding services to the milkmen's proposition. Its directives influence the actions of its milkmen in the field and by that the interaction process with the customers. A good example is the definition of the delivery window, which limits personal interaction between actors involved in the value-co-creation process significantly.

Table 3 Initial adaption of the focused foundational premises and axioms

These introductory elaborations on the focused foundational premises and axioms and the situational-related expressions presented in the table above, define the situational and theoretical context this research is undertaken in. That helps me to create knowledge on the open questions of “when and where does this co-creation take place?” (Grönroos & Voima, 2013, p.139) and ‘how does value-co-creation work’. All that refers, as presented before, to the wider area of social sciences and anthropologically founded interpretations of coordination mechanisms, which also lack in-depth research, as Rodman stated in 2003 in regards of the understanding of ‘place’: “[I]n anthropology, ‘place’ has received surprisingly little attention and virtually no critical reassessment. There is little recognition that place is more than locale, the setting for action, the stage, on which things happen” (p.207). Such (repetitive, social inter-) actions “are often taken for granted in much social theory, leaving it underanalysed and undertheorized” (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015, p.64).

4. Contextual problem statements and research objectives

Hence, this research seeks to contribute to theory in that respect and tries to answer partially the various questions asked with respect to ‘services’, ‘place’ or ‘coordination mechanisms’. Answers to those questions contribute to the understanding of S-D-logic and its foundational premises and axioms.

4.1 Contextual problem statements

More precisely and as a summary of the previous sections, the main contextual research statements are as follows:

First, there is the term ‘services’, which seems to be well-defined within S-D-logic. Next to the presented characteristics opposing the term ‘goods’, services are defined in academia by “four characteristics. Those are: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability” (Baron et al., 2009, p.39). But those attributes are still not holistically understood and request further research on a micro-level. For instance, it could be questioned if there are certain contexts,

which challenge the assumption that services are always inseparable (e.g., if there are more actors involved). Furthermore, it might be not be finally understood, what perishability means for services that are linked to mental or emotional exchanges between actors.

Secondly, as Baron et al. highlighted in 2009: “There is [...] a range of extra components of the services, which are still highly valued [by customers]” (p.7). This range of ‘extra components’ is also not fully understood, even though these components can influence a customer’s perception of the quality of the services received. Therefore, further research within academia is necessary to better understand those contextual factors (e.g., Becker & Jaakola, 2020; Heinonen et al., 2010). Additional knowledge in that respect might also enhance the understanding of innovation within a service context, where further research has recently also been requested (Patrício et al., 2018).

Thirdly, questions have been asked concerning contextual factors. These contextual factors have already been researched in more detail, as the literature presented on ‘servicescape’ indicates (e.g., Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2011; Baron et al., 2009; Bitner, 1992). Nevertheless, Chronis (2019) highlights that “little attention has been paid to instances of contestation of ‘servicescapes’ where different groups of customers assign competing meanings to commercial environments” (p.456). This leads to the presented gap within marketing services and anthropological research on the definition of ‘space’ and ‘place’ (Baron et al., 2009) and the fundamental question raised by Grönroos and Voima in 2013 “When and where does this co-creation take place?” (p.139). ‘Where’ supports the already mentioned request for further insights into the impact of place-related phenomena on value-co-creation. ‘When’ indicates the assumed temporal dimension of the interactions supporting value-co-creation. Lyons and Brennan (2019) in their research recently challenged the interdependencies of past-, present- and future- anticipated value. Dowson and Sykes (2019) called, along with other researchers, for additional research to create a different conceptualisation of time and temporality in management and organization studies. From an S-D-logic-perspective, those contextual phenomena represent institutional arrangements that coordinate

value-co-creation. But even those are still under-researched (e.g., Becker & Jaakola, 2020; Akaka & Vargo, 2015).

Consequentially, my research aims to create relevant knowledge in that area although previous research has highlighted “the difficulties of understanding the circumstances surrounding the customers’ value creation process” (Trischler et al., 2018, p.76). That is why this research also relies on a different methodological approach that focuses predominantly the joint sphere and the observable, but underresearched process of social interaction (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015).

4.2 Research objectives

All that leads finally to the following research objectives, which are addressed in my research:

#	Research objectives
1	To investigate how contextual phenomena (e.g., temporal, and local) affect value-co-creation (FP 7, FP 10).
2	To investigate value-co-creation by exploring how service providers and service users conceptualise value when contextually framed (FP 7, FP 10).
3	To investigate the impact of institutions and institutional arrangements on value-co-creation (FP 6, FP 11).

Table 4 Research objectives

These research objectives contribute predominantly to the ongoing discussions in services marketing, but also in anthropology.

5. Chapter summary

So, it can be stated for now, that the previous chapter focused on the theoretical context of my study. Here, I reflected on my approach of doing literature review first before I elaborated on services marketing in a narrative review style in more detail. By that, the various discourses became more transparent and the main aspects of the theoretical framework of Service-Dominant-logic, which is used for further theorising, were presented. Here, I referred to the theoretical understanding of Vargo and Lusch. Additionally, I decided to use the developed definitions and general understanding of certain terms to theorise in my area of interest as presented by Vargo and Lusch. Here, it became transparent that further research is still requested, from a service marketing and an anthropological perspective. That led me finally to the contextual problem statements and the research objectives that are derived from my situational research context, on the one hand, and from my theoretical research context, on the other. This impacted the research design, which is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 | Research design

1. Introduction

My research, named **MILK, MOON & MONEY**, is based on a specific research context (chapter 1) and an academic discussion lasting for centuries concerning the understanding of ‘services’ (chapter 2). Next to that, it is the researcher’s understanding of ‘how can knowledge be created’ that strongly impacts the chosen research design (e.g., Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Patton, 2002). Hence, it is important to me to describe the relevant aspects of research philosophy in general first before I develop secondly a suitable research approach for my thesis. Consequentially, the following chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 focuses the central elements of research philosophy in general. Here, the relevant terms of ‘ontology’, ‘epistemology’ and ‘methodology’ are depicted and fundamental epistemological positions such as ‘positivism’ and ‘interpretivism’ are described. Section 3 focuses more specifically my research approach. It displays the main characteristics of ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and the review of customers’ online feedback. Furthermore, the chosen approach of doing qualitative text analysis for theorising is described in more detail. Finally, section 4 describes the known limitations, restrictions and various aspects concerning research ethics in regards of my research approach before section 5 summarises that chapter.

2. Research philosophy

My research approach is, as the research approach of any other researcher and as mentioned before, strongly influenced by my subjective understanding of research philosophy overall (e.g., Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Patton, 2002). Research philosophy names in an academic context a “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p.17), which drives the understanding of a given context (Flick, 2009). By that, it also pre-defines the choice of relevant methods and the way of analysing and interpreting the observed phenomena (e.g., Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Crotty, 1998). Consequentially, my research approach is strongly linked to me (e.g., Neuman, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998). On the one hand, that is the reason I presented some details in chapter 1. On the other, I am,

as a researcher, part of the academic society and by that linked to a widely-shared understanding of doing research and creating knowledge.

In the literature, research philosophy is often split into three essential parts: Ontology, epistemology, and methodology. These parts can each be expressed by a fundamental question that needs to be answered, at least for the researchers themselves, in the context of academic research. These questions are adopted from Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.108):

Ontological question	Epistemological question	Methodical question
What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?	What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be-knower and what can be known?	How can the inquirer (would-be-knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

Table 5 Fundamental questions on research philosophy

2.1 Ontology

The ontological question above establishes the foundation of research philosophy, as it defines the way of seeing and understanding the world (= worldview). It deals with the very nature of the researched objects. Crotty (1998) defines ontology as the “study of being. It is concerned with the ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (p.10). This means that the answer to such questions states, from an individual researcher’s perspective, whether external reality exists with (subjectivism) or without (objectivism) the social actor’s perceptions and actions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Objectivists, for instance, believe that reality is the same for everyone and is a single truth that exists independently of anyone’s personal viewpoint. From their perspective, any kind of object has a definable and describable structure. These structures are tangible and independent of individuals (e.g., Hopper & Powell, 1985; Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Oppositely, the subjectivists' worldview assumes that reality is constructed only by the individuals' perception of it. Their social worlds consist of labels and concepts defined by every individual. That is why it is considered the subjective view. Both views have in common that the individuals' ontological position defines the observable phenomena and the way they are researched. Even more specifically, in regards of conducting research, the researcher's ontological position defines the way of asking specific research questions and interpreting the identified phenomena and performing investigations (Kuhn, 1962). Thus, objectivists do not argue from a subjective, individual perspective with soft data. They are more likely to describe the research object based on measurable data and unique details (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). That worldview is linked to an understanding of science based on a naturalistic, Newtonian point of view. Subjectivists conversely doubt that having one clearly defined answer to a question on the complexity of the social world they live in can adequately address it.

2.2 Epistemology

The second relevant question in regards of research philosophy is the epistemological question. Epistemology “deals with the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (Crotty, 1998, p.8). It provides the philosophical grounding, on which the researchers decide what kinds of knowledge are possible, acceptable, and legitimate (e.g., Crotty, 1998; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). By that, the answer to that question also indicates an appropriate way of generating knowledge in the specific area of interest (Saunders et al., 2012). Hence, it is a fundamental question all academic researchers should become familiar with before entering the field (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

Such epistemological questions are, in academic context, often asked together with the ontological question presented before. The answers to those two blocks of questions (ontological and epistemological questions) are often named in academic contexts the ‘underlying research paradigm’. A research paradigm consists of “worldviews, beliefs or values [...] not only in choices of method

but in ontological and epistemological fundamental ways” (Creswell, 2011, p.280). Hence, the underlying research paradigm represents the researcher’s worldview and the nature of (possible) relationships (Patton, 2002). The research paradigm also structures the researcher’s perceived reality and allocates the individuals with their philosophical beliefs in it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the underlying research paradigm answers the ontological question in regards of the fundamental theoretical perspective of the researcher and the epistemological question that outlines the “theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective” (Crotty, 1998, p.3).

Here, it must be mentioned that there is an immense variety of theories of knowledge, known, and accepted in the research community. And there is considerable complex and abstract literature on those available, which can hardly be summarised within a few pages. Nevertheless, I would like to present two fundamental positions, which become relevant to my research approach. The main reason for choosing those is the fact that the underlying theoretical framework of S-D-logic adapts a more interpretivist’s paradigmatic position and the opposite, aggregated theoretical position of Goods-Dominant-logic relies significantly on Adam Smith’s view and by that, on a positivist’s perspective. Hence, I decided consciously to describe in the following sections the two opponents: Interpretivism and positivism.

2.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is deemed as the traditional scientific paradigm (Kvale, 2008). The term ‘positivism’ stems etymologically from the Latin word ‘positum’. That equates to, translated into English, ‘to put, set, place or lay’. Here, all observed data are given facts that lay in front of the researchers (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). There is one, single objective reality, which is external to human beings and which can be observed (e.g., Bryman & Bell, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). More specifically, this position assumes that any phenomenon exists based on scientific laws, as shown in natural science (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These hard facts are based on researchable, observable, and measurable natural objects,

and less reliant upon individuals' impressions or emotions (e.g., Bryman & Bell, 2011; Kvale, 2008; Crotty, 1998).

And so is the result: It is quantifiable (Kvale, 2008) and leads to absolute and objective knowledge. Subjective views and opinions are not relevant to the interpretation of the data as the paradigm relies solely on an objective reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). That requires that all research must be conducted in an objective way (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Consequentially, research must be free of any values (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Hence, any research performed from a positivist view is repeatable (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). That is why the positivist paradigm is also called the scientific paradigm (Crotty, 1998), which was first mentioned in academia in the 19th century.

The term 'positivism' itself was first used by Auguste Comte in the 19th century to name his theory. He was a French philosopher seen as the founder of positivism (Crotty, 1998). He believed that all facets of reality can be observed. Consequently, he adapted the methods of "natural sciences to the practice of the social sciences" (Crotty, 1998, p.24). Similar to the development of services marketing and the worldview of Adam Smith presented before, natural sciences and their laws heavily influenced the science community and the understanding of knowledge. That paradigm was the leading, and most of the time the only accepted, concept of doing research throughout the 19th and 20th century in social sciences (e.g., Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Hunt, 1991). Its results stand for themselves. The scientists stand apart and do not interfere with the outcome (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There are no individuals' values presented, and no subjective judgements are offered.

Based on those characteristics, it becomes obvious that researchers conducting research from a positivist perspective prefer quantifiable observations, statistical analysis, and any other kind of hypothesis testing methodology (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, these researchers like to adapt quantitative methods, which are hypothesis-driven and deliver generalisable results that can be used to make accurate predictions (De Villiers, 2005). Therefore, there are very often copious quantities of numeric data gathered and analysed statistically, and experiments done with changing (dependent/independent) input variables and (pre-/ post-)

comparisons to prove or disprove hypotheses. Additionally, there are also structured interviews and questionnaires in common, which are similar in nature. So, it can be summarised that the paradigm emphasises all kinds of research methods, while isolating the researchers themselves from the researched phenomenon. In this way, the objective truth is assumed to be uncovered.

But this positivist view has caused some controversial discussions in the science community since the mid-20th century known as ‘Positivismusstreit’ (= the positivist dispute) (e.g., Savin-Baden & Major, 2010; Adorno et al., 1976). Back then, the understanding of the value of people’s subjective meanings became essential and relevant to research. Within this perspective, several researchers pointed out their critical view on the positivist outlook and its way of developing knowledge within the scientific community (Nota bene: for a summary of these developments, see Savin-Baden & Major, 2010). They doubted the leading concept of the universal ‘truth’ that has been relevant to positivists and requested further knowledge creation based on a different understanding of knowledge. One of the best-known researchers of that time was Max Weber (1949) who pushed strongly for ‘Verstehen’ (= in-depth understanding). He emphasised a separate way of gaining knowledge and was well supported by other scientists (e.g., Schutz, 1970; Silverman, 1970). Through this, different approaches arose and were used in different contexts by numerous researchers.

2.2.2 Interpretivism

But, as mentioned before, not all approaches are described in this research. Solely, the underlying research paradigm, which opposes positivism and impacts the understanding of the theoretical framework used, is depicted in more granularity. This is interpretivism. That paradigm is sometimes also differently discussed in the social sciences, such as by the terms ‘(social) constructivism’ or ‘constructivism’. These are slightly deviating paradigms to interpretivism, but they are nearby located in the world of paradigms (e.g., Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Cavana et al., 2001). All of them focus mainly on the actors’ views and their way of creating meanings. That is why Crotty (1998) stated on interpretivism that it “emerged in contradistinction to positivism in attempts to understand and explain

human and social reality” (p.66). It tries to identify new interpretations and to uncover underlying meanings in certain contexts (such as time, space, and culture) (Crotty, 1998). By that, human beings themselves (including their (inter-)relations) and the reasons for, and the meanings of, their interactions are core to research based on that research paradigm.

Consequently, all researchers construct their own social reality by themselves within the interpretivist paradigm, which includes themselves and their relationships. These relationships are created within their social reality every day. Hence, the previously outlined aspects of temporality and place are here relevant as well. But as there is, from their paradigmatic perspective, no external reality, the researchers’ own role changes (in comparison to a positivist view). Researchers are not seen as objective observers. They are human beings and participate in their constructed, contextual truth. By that, the contextual ‘soft facts’, such as values and feelings, gain importance. Furthermore, the different actors involved and their different contextually defined roles become relevant for the creation of meaning and understanding. So, in here, a human being can have several roles at the same time, such as researcher, friend, or participating observer, for instance. Similarly, there exist various meanings of the roles of others in specific contexts, such as friend or interviewee. Consequentially, there are many interconnections and interdependencies that create meaning and by that, knowledge from an interpretivist perspective.

As that knowledge is constructed by the researchers themselves in a specific research context (e.g., Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009), the methodology and methods must be adjusted to the specific research context and the underlying research paradigm. As described before, the natural reality that is researched from a positivist point of view, is different to the social reality that is influenced by human nature and the interactions between the actors involved in interpretivism. Hence, the expected outcome of interpretivist research is less likely a kind of ‘law’, which is deducted from a set of data (= nomothetic). The expected insights are in the context and the individuals (= ideographic) (Gray, 2009). That is why Crotty (1998) summarises the research approaches from an interpretivist perspective like so: “Different ways of viewing the world

shape different ways of researching the world” (p.66). By that, the truths held by individuals and inherent to the multiplicity of social reality are supposed to be uncovered (e.g., Gravetter & Forzano, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2010; Robson, 2004). Consequentially, these qualitative approaches based on non-numerical narratives of individuals’ views have become one of the leading methods in interpretivism. But there are many other methods that consider the subjectivity of creating knowledge, like any kind of fieldwork and milieu studies. In that respect, the so-called ‘Chicago School’ was among the leaders in the emerging field of interpretivist research in the late 1950s. Its research methodologies, particularly the chosen ethnographic fieldwork approach, are displayed in more detail when it comes to my research approach.

2.3 Methodology

Before that, I intend to touch on the last question presented in the beginning of this chapter: The methodological question. This question addresses on the methodology and the specific methods people use to research a phenomenon from their ontological and epistemological perspective (Nota bene: This means that the research is done from a specific ‘underlying research paradigm’). In that context, methodology is more precisely the theory of how research should be undertaken, based on the theoretical and philosophical positions used (King & Horrocks, 2010) and the way of effectively adopting different possible methods for a desired outcome (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). That is why Crotty (1998) defines methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p.3). In line with that statement, methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis” (p.3).

More generally, it can be said that the research methods used should be consistent to the respective paradigmatic position the research is undertaken from. Hence, the methods are commonly more (= positivism) or less (= interpretivism) data based. The views of the actors involved are usually less (= positivism) or more (= interpretivism) relevant to the research. And finally, the

individual position and understanding of gaining knowledge is not at all (= positivism) or fully relevant (= interpretivism) for the research approach. Further characteristics of such epistemological-grounded aspects, which influence the methodology used, are portrayed in the following table, which is adapted from Carson et al. (2001):

Category	Positivism	Interpretivism
Focus of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description and explanation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and interpretation.
Researcher's Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detached, external observer. • Clear distinction between reason and feeling. • Aim to discover external reality. • Strive to use rational, consistent, verbal, logical approach. • Seek to maintain clear distinction between facts and value judgement. • Distinction between science and personal experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers want to experience the way they experience and understand context. • Allow feelings and reason to govern actions. • Understand the meaning of the phenomena within a specific context. • Use of pre-understanding is important. • Distinction between facts and value judgements are less clear. • Accept influence from both science and personal experience.
Methods used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalised statistical and mathematical methods predominate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily non-quantitative.

Table 6 Paradigmatic views on methodology and methods

Linked to that, there is a persistent and wide-ranging debate in academia that refers to a broadly-shared categorisation of research methods. There exists a fundamental distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods -even if that classification and terminology must be questioned (e.g., Bryman & Bell, 2011; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In line with that abstract categorisation, there are different sets of data identified. Information and data used in quantitative research are commonly measurable, valid, reliable, and derived from a large population (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Results are mainly based on numbers and charts (Neuman, 2011). Consequentially, the most relevant quantitative methods are mathematical models and experiments. Conversely, qualitative research targets an in-depth understanding of a context based on a limited number of participants. It is grounded in pictures, objects, and words (Neuman, 2011). Unstructured interviews and observations are the most common methods of interpretivist research.

But I doubt such a fundamental distinction of methods and support Carson et al.'s understanding (2001): Positivists do not only use quantitative methods and interpretivists do not only use qualitative methods. Nevertheless, I agree that there exist obviously certain methods that are 'predominantly' or 'primarily' used under certain paradigms.

3. My research approach

Bearing in mind the general propositions presented above, I tried to create an appropriate research approach that addresses the presented research objectives and my underlying situational and theoretical research questions. I therefore elaborate on my underlying research paradigm in the next section first before describing my approach to theorising on the phenomena observed and experienced. By that, I also try to create and present my context-related knowledge and understanding, which seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussions in academia on value-co-creation. This is generated from the common understanding held by research participants, which acts as the foundation for possible generalisation and transferability of the knowledge created. Therefore, a common contextual understanding is necessary. This

demands a widely-shared and generally accepted interpretation of certain phenomena, which is a challenge on its own, as this depends strongly on the actors involved (Williams, 2000). That becomes even more relevant under the lights of my research paradigm, as the following section details.

3.1 Underlying research philosophy

My research is conducted from an interpretivist view. My own situation influences my way of creating meanings and my way of theorising. That is the reason, why I would like to briefly reflect on relevant aspects of my situation first.

When I started the research project, I worked with Milk & More in the UK, where I was responsible for the finance department as elaborated in the introduction section. Later in the research, I moved back to Germany, to work in a similar role in a different company producing bread. In addition, I am (and have been since the beginning) a researcher in the milk home delivery business conducting research in cooperation with the University of Gloucestershire. Thus, I have had at least two roles to fulfil that are partially in the same social context. I knew that these roles impact each other and my overall mind-set. For instance, any daily working routine, such as analysing customer profitability or reviewing the product range, or the delivery service I performed during the evening I became a British icon, created knowledge in the relevant field of my research. Most of these data supported a positivist view, as they were figure- and fact-based. But from a researcher's position, I am strongly convinced that other relevant knowledge about social reality is differently constructed. Hence, I asked myself the situationally and theoretically driven research questions. These questions seek primary explanations for the 'why' (Williams, 2000). So, I ask within the situational contextualisation:

“Why should I, as a rational customer, buy products with a milkman when most of their products cost me more than if I was to go out and buy them from somewhere else?” (Ward, 2016, p.242)

To understand the ‘why’, it is often necessary to understand the ‘how’ and the underlying rational of the actors involved. Hence, I also raised the following questions:

How do contextual phenomena (e.g., temporal, and local) affect value-co-creation?

And:

How do the actors see ‘places’ and how do their understandings influence their perceptions of value?

Finally, that leads to the more strategically driven question on the people and institutions involved:

Milkmen, where is your business headed?

To answer those questions, it is important to understand people’s behaviour and their interactions. Consequently, interactions between human beings are the core of my research. My field of interest is exactly the area of collaboration and interaction that can only be researched by understanding different views of various actors on a given research object. In my beliefs, various facets of social reality become transparent through manifold activities and various situations every day. Of course, I do not know how others react and know less about the mechanisms of interactions that are at work. But I am aware that there is a relation to other’s behaviour in the field. There are humans who are supposed to react on the one hand to my behaviour. On the other hand, they have, for instance, their own experiences, feelings, understanding of certain situations that impact upon their situational interpretations. So, it is the individual, as a member of a particular group, I am interested in and, by that, my research is conducted at the micro-level. That micro-level offers to me “a small part of a society [and] is used to paint a picture of that wider society” (Williams, 2000, p.211). However, it needs to be mentioned that there is an “inherent indeterminateness in the lifeworld” (Denzin, 1983, p.133), which leads to “too much variability to allow the possibility of [absolute] generalisation from a specific situation to others” (Williams, 2000, p.213). Nevertheless, my research tries to depict not only

context-related phenomena, but also to create an awareness of the general discussion within academia (e.g. Denzin, 1983; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 1982) about knowledge that is transferable and, partially, generalisable. All that is a fundamental part of my underlying research paradigm.

So, in my understanding, it is impossible to see ‘the truth’ and to judge objectively the nature of ‘the reality’. Consequently, my research approach is more likely ideographic. This understanding, and the given day-to-day connections to the field of interest, offered the chance to enter and understand the field more easily and be authentic as well. That might be on the one hand an opportunity to gain relevant contextual knowledge. But on the other, it might be a challenge that must be kept in mind, as researchers such as Corbin and Strauss (1998) demand that any researcher must “recognise that it is not possible to be completely free of bias” (p.97). “Prior knowledge is always a factor, as the researcher’s brain is never ‘empty’” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.10). Nevertheless, I tried to theorise as objectively as possible. Hence, I would summarise my underlying research philosophy explicitly as follows:

My ontological answer	My epistemological answer	My methodical answer
Reality is based on the individual’s understanding and interpretation. It is constructed by each individual, and thus, there exist different views of the self-same phenomenon. The researcher is part of that social reality. The results cannot be generalised.	Knowledge is gained through individual experiences and the reflection on various perspectives. Knowledge is linked to the context, which needs to be taken into consideration when it comes to the understanding and interpretation of phenomena.	Methods are contextually adjusted to understand reality and to gain knowledge. They are more likely qualitative and focus the interactions of the actors involved. They also consider feelings and emotions of them.

Table 7 My answers to the fundamental questions on research philosophy

I would like to highlight that it is quite uncommon to answer the fundamental questions on research philosophy explicitly and in written in business studies. I hope that already the presentation and elaboration of my research journey offers necessary insights into my researcher's mind-set. Nevertheless, the uncommon approach of using different sets of data and the specific way of theorising invited me to present my self-reflective answers openly and in written.

Based upon those self-reflective answers on my research philosophy, I defined and constructed my research approach, which was supposed to contribute theoretically and methodologically to the existing "body of knowledge" (Tranfield et al., 2003, p.208) by conducting research on a micro-level. My theoretical and situational context presupposed the observation of the interaction between the milkmen and their customers. By that, it was intended to gain contextual insights into the value-co-creation process on a micro-level. This was requested, as there is limited research on 'how service providers and service users are generally engaged at a basic level of interaction' (Neghina et al., 2015). This requested further insights into the actors' views.

The interaction processes between the relevant service providers and service users seemed, in the beginning, to be singularly in its specifics per round. But it was also assumed, however, that these interaction processes have some relevant aspects in common (e.g., home delivery, same product range). Consequentially, I had to access the joint sphere and participate in the services exchange processes. Furthermore, I assumed that other aspects of subjective views could be accessed by talking to the relevant actors individually. Such an approach would enable me to investigate, in detail, some of the 'foreshadowed' themes in the context they occur (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, I had the impression that there is much relevant information (online and offline) available that could be used in any form of ethnography.

As this design faces a considerable amount of complexity and in-depth data with many interrelations, proper planning and (self-reflective) monitoring were required throughout the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). So, I structured and described the conducted research process retrospectively in line with the step-by-step-approach of inductive theorising, as depicted by

Cavana et al. (2001), although the research itself has not always been as structured as displayed. There were many iterative loops and parallel streams that were finally clarified when it came to theorise.

Cavana et al. (2001) has described two common, antipathetical approaches of how theory and research are linked, and how theorising is finally done. These are inductive and deductive reasoning (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The two approaches can be split into four stages, as presented in the following table, which is adopted from Cavana et al. (2001):

Steps	Deductive reasoning	Inductive reasoning	
1	Develop theory	Observe phenomena	= chapter 3.2
2	Formulate hypotheses	Analyse patterns	= chapter 3.3
3	Collect and analyse data	Formulate relationships	
4	Accept/reject hypotheses	Develop theory	

Table 8 Deductive and inductive reasoning

Deductive reasoning starts from a general rule and asserts that this rule explains a single case, whereas inductive reasoning looks at individual cases and attempts to uncover more relevant aspects for theorising (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). By analysing individual cases, researchers often aim to unfold some kind of ‘general law’, which seems to be “rarely upheld in social sciences” (Williams, 2000, p.219) as the complexity of reality and the endless facets of human interaction are difficult to aggregate and generalise. That is the reason why authors, such as Denzin (1983) and Guba and Lincoln (1994, 1982) are “more explicitly in denial, claiming that generalisation is impossible” (Williams, 2000, p.210). Conversely, others claim that “generalisation is inevitable, desirable and possible” (Williams, 2000, p.209), as in “each study the researcher attempts to interpret what is going on according to the subjective frame of reference of those observed, to capture the nuances and the singular

characteristics of the social environment“ (Williams, 2000, p.212) to use it for the wider understanding of society. Consequently, every social studies researcher is generalising in some form when creating relevant knowledge. Hence, I concur with Williams (2000) who has stated that some kind of “moderatum generalisations in their simplest form are the basis of inductive reasoning” (p.215). That means more specifically in my research context: There are people who are willing to do doorstep deliveries by night. These people become part of the group of milkmen by being trained by the operations and regional managers in the depot and in the field under the guidance of ‘more experienced milkmen’. Here, the new joiners are taught the characteristics of the business of the milkman and the relevant characteristics of ‘Britain’s doorsteps’. Furthermore, the new joiners are supported by standardised equipment, such as the milk float and the handheld, and through connections to other milkmen and, rarely, with their customers. Consequently, they start to on-board some of the behaviour embedded in the business of the milkmen and to behave like ‘the milkman’. And even if they keep some of their individual behaviours, they start to behave in a more ‘harmonised’ and ‘standardised’ fashion through a continuous process of business socialisation. Hence, the joiners’ behaviour is, to a certain degree, no longer ‘individualised’. Some elements of their individuality and the respective complexity of ‘reality’ (N.B.: as each individual could create and act within an ‘own reality’) are softened and partially overwritten by the structures and generalised concepts offered by the relevant society. In my research context, this is, predominantly, the concept of ‘the milkman’ and the institutional arrangements incorporated. So, it can be summarised that, from my understanding, inductive reasoning is in a moderate way possible and, consequently, used for theorising throughout this research.

A researcher who uses deductive reasoning represents more likely a positivist position and is more likely to test existing theories and hypotheses by using quantitative methodologies with statistical analyses, whereas a researcher using inductive reasoning creates new hypotheses and theories based on fieldwork. This kind of researcher more likely observes the context and tries to understand and interpret reality (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Consequently, and in line with

my underlying research paradigm, my research approach is based on inductive reasoning. This is presented in the next sections.

3.2 Methods used to observe phenomena

The first step of theorising is, as presented by Cavana et al. (2001), about observing phenomena and creating in-depth, rich data. There exist a wide range of methods, which could be used for gathering such relevant data. For instance, there was the opportunity to do questionnaires, or online surveys on specific research aspects. I could also have used internal figures and hard data (like customer basket sizes or customer spend analyses) to create relevant knowledge. Nevertheless, I decided, in line with my underlying research paradigm, that the observed phenomena and the field data that research should be based on need to be “constructed from talk and action” (van Maanen, 2010, p.95).

3.2.1 Ethnographic fieldwork

That is why I acted in the field and joined milkmen delivering milk to Britain’s doorsteps at night (= ethnographic fieldwork).

General description

Ethnographic fieldwork or, somewhat more general, ethnography is one of those methodologies that is widely linked to interpretivism and to qualitative research (Crotty, 1998). According to Brewer (2000) “*ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings [...]* by means of methods, which capture their social meanings” (p.10). It names a common approach used in social research today although it is used very differently in regards of the specific research objectives and the research questions. And, as ethnography is often linked to an interpretivist worldview, it is not surprising that the methodology used is generally also not standardised. It must be adjusted and adapted to the specific research context. Examples of methods widely used and adapted in ethnography are

'qualitative inquiry', 'fieldworks', 'interpretive method', and 'case study' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The ones that are most in common in ethnography are observational and interview-based methods, by which it is possible to see "interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them, and so on, as central" (Mason 2002, p.85).

Its origins stem from the beginning of the 19th century (van Maanen, 2010), when anthropology used this term for the descriptive account of a community or culture overall. It came along with the progress of the ethnological research performed on cultures and people external from the 'old world' (= Europe). Almost at the same time, sociologists in the United States started to study human life by accessing the area of human behaviour and interaction in groups. So, researchers of the previously mentioned Chicago school, for instance, conducted considerable fieldwork at that time (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Atkinson, 2017). Fieldwork in that respect "means living with and living like those who are studied" (van Maanen, 2010, p.2). It is suggested that ethnographers join people's everyday lives in the field of interest for an extended period of time and take notes on what is said and done by the actors involved (e.g., van Maanen, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Furthermore, ethnographic researchers usually ask specific, context-related questions, often through informal interviews, and they reflect on various types of contextual documents (e.g., pictures, mails) that might be of interest (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnographers thus often gather considerable amounts of unstructured data, combining diverse sources and using different methods for gaining knowledge in multiple ways. And as the ethnographers participate during their fieldwork in the day-to-day activities, the fieldwork is often done as "everyday life is ordered and enacted" (Atkinson, 2017, p.11). Thus, there arise several challenges in regards of data gathering, taking fieldnotes and observing relevant phenomena.

The first challenge deals with the complexity of the data gathering process. The cases that are chosen in the beginning are in ethnographic fieldwork commonly kept small as the depth of the data usually grows significantly over the duration of the research. That means that there is already a first challenge, which must be

considered when it comes to data gathering via ethnographic fieldwork: The pure volume of data and (sometimes) a relevant lack of structure. This challenge grows as research seeks “theoretical saturation” (Bryman, 2004, p.334) and might be expanded adequately throughout the data gathering process. But the challenge of the data gathering is finally not in regards of the number of cases observed. It is more about the in-depth insights, which can be gained and which can contribute to theory. So, it is predominantly about the “trade-off between breadth of focus and detail” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.142), which must be made by any researcher.

Another challenge are humans’ limitations in regards of contextual observations. Observation is an activity, which is based on all senses that can deceive and mislead. Thus, even if there are words and stories in everyday life, they are “rarely analysed as narratives and accounts” (Atkinson, 2017, p.11), although they are commonly embedded in a wider context. Hence, it is important to understand the specific context of those words and stories by uncovering their contextual meaning. Such a context is, as already implied in the situational contextualisation, defined by human behaviours, routines, rituals, and certain institutions that affect people. Here, it is relevant to note that it is not just about the observable phenomena that need to be seen within the wider context. It is, to stick to the example of words, also about the used ‘contextual language’ and words. They “have complex layers of order. They have texture. They have timetables and spatial arrangements. They have their rituals and ceremonials” (Atkinson, 2017, p.12). An illustrative example of that might be the terminology used in the criminal milieu. Someone who is not part of that milieu would not get the real meaning of the contextual terminology used. Oppositely, someone who is part of that milieu or at least observes it (such as a police officer) understands the real meaning. These meanings are created by iterative interactions and negotiations by compromises of all parties “to render manageable everyday life and work” (Atkinson, 2017, p.52), or, on the presented example, to arrange the interactivities of various criminals.

That leads to a temporal challenge given to the researcher. Here, ‘everyday’ names the time aspect of the underlying routines that are significant to

ethnography as they help to make practical sense of typical interactions in our world day-to-day (Atkinson, 2017). Particularly, as all “social life is structured temporally” (Atkinson, 2017, p.147). There is a temporal rhythm in any kind of group, organisation or business that is recognisable in, for example, the daily or weekly timetables society works to or shift-models in businesses. So, there is a kind of temporal, societal framework given to people to act in (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Consequently, many people have a similar understanding and interpretation of specific times (Lefebvre, 2004). Dawn is for instance a time that “has [for many people] a miraculous charm” (Lefebvre, 2004, p.73). But it is not only the point in time-dimension that is relevant to ethnography. There exist also other relevant dimensions of time as highlighted within the theoretical contextualisation. Those are the observable pattern of repetition, the distinctive tempo of different activities in life (e.g., Atkinson, 2017; Lefebvre, 2004) or the duration and frequency of certain routines (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Hence, it must be noted that time is an important aspect for ethnographers, particularly as it seems to be a “social product” (Lefebvre, 2004, p.73) in itself. They are part of my understanding of ‘place’ (see chapter 2).

Next to temporality, the location of human’s interactions becomes obviously central to ethnography, and by that, challenging. Some fundamentals on the relevance of that have already been presented in chapter 2. In addition to its relevance for the researched value-co-creation process, there is also an interaction process, from an ethnographic fieldwork perspective, when data is gathered. Thus, there is a challenge given to understand and deal with the various situations in the field and with the observed people (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) to distinguish finally the distinct levels of interaction.

Finally, further challenges arise with other institutional arrangements, so-called coordination mechanisms in S-D-logic. These mechanisms have already been presented. So, in consequence, ‘collective memory’ is built, which is usually defined culturally and includes socially shared values and understandings, such as ‘tradition’, ‘heritage’ or ‘legacy’ (Atkinson, 2017). Even those are not fixed and

independent to the specific context, as they are sometimes contextually (re-)interpreted (Akaka & Vargo, 2013). To gain an understanding of those 'facts' is also quite complex, as material artefacts are normally created, used, and moved around within any collective social activity, such as money or certain objects that are themselves fraught with values and interpretations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Thus, it can be summarised that there were some general challenges connected to the ethnographic fieldwork identified that I had to keep in mind when I started the planning process for my ethnographic fieldwork.

Ethnographic fieldwork in my research approach

As I had read literature on 'doing ethnographic fieldwork' upfront, I felt at least sensitised to certain challenges and tried to deal with them by an appropriate preparation process.

Thus, I tried to become familiar with the situational context first. As a Finance Manager in Milk & More, I had already been familiar with the general procedures and mechanisms of the business. It had also been a part of my introduction to the business in 2017 to hear and read several stories about the milk home delivery business in the UK and its remarkable history, which were presented in some excerpts in the introduction part of this thesis. Additionally, I did some finance related analyses on the current business operations such as customer numbers per region and average spend per customer and 'basket sizes' (= shopping volume in monetary units per customer per shopping trip). But all these approaches offered, from a researcher's perspective, 'unsatisfactory' knowledge to me. Furthermore, that kind of data offered little detail on the interaction process itself and the 'real' situations milkmen face on the doorsteps at night.

Hence, I decided to access their field personally to get 'real' and 'rich' data to theorise on. So, I decided to join selected milkmen on their milk rounds at night. The selection was based on a purposive sampling procedure to meet the needs of my study (Barbour, 2008). That means that I selected several milkmen serving

different areas of the UK, as I thought that a different understanding of ‘value added’ might be identified in rural areas than it might for cities such as London. It could be that the public transportation restricts in certain areas the opportunity for elderly people to travel to bigger supermarket chains, which might support the business model of home delivery. For those people, the aspect of ‘getting the daily food supply’ delivered might be a relevant element of defining value.

Hence, during my research, I participated in seven milk rounds across the UK in 2018. By that, I intended to gain rich and insightful data directly and unfiltered from one group of people that is strongly involved in the interaction process of value-co-creation: the service providers. Through this approach, I aimed to obtain a relevant “slice from the lifeworld” (Denzin, 1983, p.134) where human interaction, which influences the process of value-co-creation, is supposed to happen. Additionally, I had the opportunity to gain more insights into the milkmen’s daily work routines as Finance Manager of Milk & More when I met milkmen in the depots and spoke to Depot Manager or Regional Managers. All these experiences and insights influenced my individual understanding of the phenomena observed ‘in the field’. But most relevant is the data, which relies on the transcribed fieldnotes of the seven milk rounds I joined during 2018. The table below describes them:

O	Date	Area	Milkman tenure	Gender	Comments
01	20 th February 2018	London (Wimbledon)	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined was engaged in the community as manager of a football league. • He discussed almost all aspects of the business (from back-office to front-end) and was test driver for the new StreetScooters. • He cared a good deal about noise. • He made me a participant.
02	20 th April 2018	Gloucester	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined knew the round inside out and foresaw exactly the time needed for each step on the round. • He cared a good deal about light. • He made me an observer.
03	9 th August 2018	London (Erith)	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined loved the loneliness and the quietness of working at night. • His main value proposed to his customers was the 'reliability no matter what weather'. • He made me an observer.

O	Date	Area	Milkman tenure	Gender	Comments
04	15 th August 2018	Oxford	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined highlighted the importance of the product milk. • He told several stories of 'how he has built his individual relationships to his customers'. • He made me an observer.
05	4 th October 2018	Camberley	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined was surprised that customers did not tell him personally before leaving the business. • He ran marathons and collected money for disabled children (= community care). • He made me a participant.
06	9 th October 2018	Southampton	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined was awarded 'Milkman of the Year' by Milk & More. • He had no criticism of the headquarters' activities. • He made me a participant.

O	Date	Area	Milkman tenure	Gender	Comments
07	30 th October 2018	Yardley	>10 years	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milkman I joined drove a new StreetScooter. • He believed that the new times must combine the best of the past and the present. • His routines were different from those of most of his friends as he works during the night.

Table 9 Descriptive statistics: Ethnographic fieldwork

All these rounds began at around midnight and lasted until dawn. The longest round was about nine hours, while the shortest round was finished in about four hours, including the round preparation in the depot beforehand and the unloading and cleaning session after 'returning to base' (= depot).

The main reasons for the different length of the milk rounds were the location of the depot and the 'round-specific' customer set-up. If a milkman delivered to a more urban area, it could be that the 250-300 customers, that are delivered on average to within one round, live nearer to each other. Therefore, the driving time between each doorstep is shorter and so the time taken to complete the round is shorter as well. But due to the decrease of customer numbers over the last decades (and thereby a lower density of customers on average), the neighbourhoods served can nowadays be anything up to 60 miles away from some of the depots. Consequently, a round consisting of about 350-400 gallons of milk, which equals the average volume of a milk round for Milk & More, could be delivered in about six hours on average. Other contributing factors governing the time needed referred to the level of experience and the customers' shopping behaviours. On the one hand, the work routines of the milkmen made the daily deliveries more efficient and less time consuming, shortening the length of the round. On the other, there were customers who mainly placed 'standing orders' with the milkmen. That means that the bi-daily orders were identical to each other.

Across all rounds I joined, and within my business experience, it became noticeable that it was now predominantly online customers who had no specific pattern or were prone to change their shopping routines more often. But even though Milk & More gained many new, online customers, most customers regularly ordered a similar 'basket' of products. Milkmen knew these 'baskets' and their customers' routines. This knowledge became transparent throughout the course of the fieldwork, as all of them were led by their 'regular milkman'. This expression might need some contextual elaboration: Each milkman is dedicated to a certain area and to certain rounds, and, by that, to certain customers (of Milk & More). From the milkmen's perspectives, they serve these, means 'their customers', six days a week. Only on Sundays, milkmen 'rest', and they make no deliveries to any of their customers. If a dedicated milkman becomes sick or goes

on vacation, the dairy sends out a ‘relief’ to do the deliveries instead of the dedicated milkman. Some customers’ statements available to me at the time of planning my fieldwork indicated that customers realise when they are served by a ‘relief’ instead of their ‘regular milkman’. So, there were some characteristics expected to signify that the milkman delivering is or is not the ‘regular milkman’. Those became clearer to me throughout my research, particularly when joining and observing the milkmen in the field, as well.

But joining a round did not necessarily mean participating, as my role was completely different on each of the seven rounds. Some milkmen gave me a role that was meant to participate. Others made me an observer. I noted once in my fieldnotes:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 13

“[The milkman] tells me that tonight I will be ‘an observer’”

On that round, I did not deliver orders to any customer at all. I just sat in the milk float, talked to him throughout the round, and sometimes, managed the handheld. He was very keen on serving ‘his customers’ and seemed to be afraid of me ruining ‘his relationships’. He taught me (theoretically) the way of being a milkman and expounded his personal view on the business of the milkmen in the UK and the roles of all parties in that business. But he kept me strictly away from ‘his doorsteps’. That was, on the one hand, supportive as I could focus on the interview. On the other hand, I had few opportunities to access the joint sphere to undertake all the observations I wanted to make.

But there were also other, more active roles for me on some rounds. One milkman enriched that non-participant role by making me responsible for some of the paperwork, inputting data into the handheld (e.g., confirming and adjusting customer orders) and managing the money paid. Others were more trusting, asking me to deliver to ‘customers on their behalf’. But even those more trusting milkmen gave me clear directions on how to behave on the doorsteps, where to

leave the pints and what to take care of – as they know their ‘hood’, as the following fieldnote displays:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 17

“And, as he told me around the corner, two empty bottles are sat there, where he said they would be, and waiting for me. Not in a box, not in a sack, just standing there, a bit wet and with some milk left in them. I pick them up and, exactly at the same point, as quietly as I can, I put my order of one semi down.”

Such rounds were more interactive and offered more in-depth data, as I could experience the area of interaction in more detail (e.g., feel, look, smell). But no matter, which milkmen I joined, though, all of them took cautious, detailed care of ‘their rounds’, ‘their customers’, and the more difficult (as in more differentiated) product orders. But most of the time, further insights into the individual relationships milkmen had were kept strictly confidential. If there was any information voluntarily and directly given, it was mostly dedicated to showing their strong connections and influence they have on the services exchange processes. That is partially linked to the significant length of service milkmen have (> ten years on average). By that, the milkmen might no longer consciously reflect on their daily routines, such as their behaviour in certain contexts. They follow their established work routines. And it is part of human behaviour to create such routines and to act on them, as life would become quite complex if every situation faced is rationally reflected on, all aspects constantly taken into consideration and a unique decision-making process laid out for each. So, it could be that some of the routines were built on the back of subjective experiences, individual situations they had faced or others, which they may have been told about. Certainly, it would be of interest from a sociological point of view to research the development of the contextual understanding of the milkmen throughout their entire lives, as any aspect could influence a certain behaviour or routine later. But my research focuses predominantly the specific, contextual phenomena that affect the

process of value-co-creation. Hence, I did not start to conduct a societal research on the milkmen I joined.

Despite that, I can state self-reflectively and in retrospection that my understanding of value-co-creation grew dramatically during the ethnographic fieldwork and observations done. I had had no previous contact with the business of the milkmen in the UK, and I had not done any research such as that before. But the longer I spent in the area of interest, the more I became familiar with relevant contextual elements such as dairy products, doorsteps, and darkness. And by that, I gained decisive insights into the diametrical process of interactions. Those insights also supported me to meet the expectations of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), who said: “[It is] one of the tasks in the early stages of data collection, [...to turn...] the ‘foreshadowed’ problems into a set of questions, to which an answer could be given, whether this is a narrative description of a sequence of events, a generalised account of the perspectives and practices of a particular group of people, or a more abstract theoretical formulation” (p.24). So, the understanding I developed of the observed phenomena was finally the backbone of the analytical work performed, which is presented in the next chapters. But before that, I have to state that the ethnographic fieldwork comes automatically along with other research methods as there are certain business figures (such as the basked sizes- or round-specific customer numbers), contextual impressions (such as weather or first impression when accessing individuals’ doorsteps) or insights gained in the depots that are taken into consideration when collecting field data by “talk and action” (van Maanen, 2010, p.95).

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

In line with that fundamental understanding of creating knowledge, I also decided to gather depth and rich data next to ethnographic fieldwork data from a distinct perspective - that of a customer. In that respect, I followed Fernandez (2003) who stated: “It is not enough to watch activity in space [...]. It is also important by means of direct inquiry with participants to determine qualitative changes in state,

the emergent qualities that result from activity in that space” (p.199). That is why I also tried to talk to customers.

General description

So, I talked within my research directly with customers. More precisely, I conducted semi-structured interviews with customers to enhance my understanding and interpretation of the observed phenomena and to get their contextually influenced perceptions of ‘value’. In my understanding and in my research, an interview is “a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee” (Kvale, 2008, p.XVII). This research method seeks value rich descriptions and is concerned with details (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The adjective ‘semi-structured’ emphasises that the interview is neither fully unstructured nor fully structured. Hence, it is not a structured questionnaire of ‘closed’ questions. A semi-structured interview contains relevant themes identified in the area of interest and the interviewing guideline simply directs the interviews. Such an approach offered me flexibility as I could vary the question order (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), for instance. Additionally, I was able to spontaneously adapt my questions to the context of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2009). However, that approach enabled me to address similar aspects in all interviews and be interviewee-specific at the same time. By that, I could gather extensive empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews in my research approach: Interviewees

The customers interviewed were selected mainly for their willingness to participate by the salesforce of Milk & More. Here, it must be mentioned that I am incredibly grateful that Milk & More offered me the opportunity to talk to its customers directly. Nevertheless, such a process influenced my research quite strongly, as Milk & More also did not want me to confront too many of their customers with questions concerning individuals’ interpretations of ‘value’, which is often linked to an understanding derived from monetary units and derived from

a comparison of products and prices. That might implicit the understanding of 'being too expensive in comparison to' or might lead people to start reflecting on the concrete value add derived from the business of the milkmen. So, I conducted finally nine semi-structured interviews, as summarised in the following table:

I	Date of interview	Place of interview	Recorded length of interview	Place of interaction	Length of 'having a milkman'	Age cluster	Gender	Further comment
01	24 th July 2018	Aldershot	58:27 min	Rural, North of London	>20 years	45-60	Male	Head of the Controlling department and customer of Milk & More who critically reflected upon various elements of the business.
02	28 th September 2018	London (Hanworth)	13:17 min	Rural, South of London	>10 years	30-45	Female	The customer stopped ordering with the business three weeks after conducting the interview due to 'pure service'.
03	28 th September 2018	London (Hanworth)	29:45 min	Urban, London	>20 years	45-60	Female	The customer was satisfied and appreciated the small gestures, such as closing gates.

I	Date of interview	Place of interview	Recorded length of interview	Place of interaction	Length of 'having a milkman'	Age cluster	Gender	Further comment
04	2 nd October 2018	Aldershot	28:57 min	Rural, South of London	>20 years	>60	Male	The customer had ordered with various milkmen for decades and was happy about any new product offered.
05	5 th October 2018	London (Hanworth)	23:04 min	Rural, North of London	>10 years	45-60	Male	The customer loved the 'breakfast routine' on weekends with the family.
06	5 th October 2018	London (Hanworth)	22:32 min	Urban, London	>10 years	30-45	Female	The customer also used other home delivery services but loved the 'surprising' element of the milkmen's deliveries.
07 (1/2)	5 th October 2018	London (Hanworth)	26:29 min	Rural, South of London	>5 years	30-45	Male	The customer was mainly focused on the home

I	Date of interview	Place of interview	Recorded length of interview	Place of interaction	Length of 'having a milkman'	Age cluster	Gender	Further comment
07 (2/2)								delivery service and less interested in any nostalgic or traditional elements of the business of the milkmen.
08	18 th October 2018	Aldershot	25:57 min	Urban, London	>20 years	45-60	Male	The customer was in the beginning of his career working as a milkman and respected the physicality of the job, consequentially.
09	19 th December 2018	Aldershot	25:20 min	Rural, South of London	>20 years	>60	Male	The customer was with the business of the milkmen for quite a while and loved the concept of 'standing orders.'

Table 10 Descriptive statistics: Semi-structured interviews

So, the process of gathering insights into customers' general understanding of the business of the milkmen via interviews happened partially in parallel to the ethnographic fieldwork presented before. Nevertheless, I tried to be 'as neutral as possible' by asking general questions first and inviting the interviewees to explain to me the 'business of the milkmen'. My intention was to get early feedback and customers' opinions on the business as well as on the phenomena experienced and observed by me. The preparation of the interviews had already been quite time-consuming, as the interview situation had to be arranged (e.g., room, coffee, and invitations) and as the interviewees had to be briefed. The interviews themselves were planned to last between 45 and 75 minutes, of which at least 20 and 45 minutes were planned to be recorded. The interviews were undertaken at various places.

I conducted these nine interviews with existing customers of Milk & More. The first interview, in July 2018, was based mainly on the first two observational rounds and the insights gained from the literature review on S-D-logic. It had already been based on the *interviewing guideline (Appendix B)* that focused the subjective view of the business of the milkmen in the UK, the individual contextual understanding, which addressed certain ethnographic aspects such as specific time and location, and the perceived value and usage of services. Accordingly, the first interview took longer than others and touched also on many different aspects of the business. The customer and I spent almost two hours on different aspects of the business of the milkmen overall, the phenomena observed, and the contextual elements of doorstep deliveries in the UK. The open dialogue and the honest customer feedback, as it becomes transparent in the upcoming section, helped me to become more specific in the following interviews. Here, it must be mentioned, that it was not an easy task to develop such an interviewing guideline in the first place as it had to address the research objectives as well as the research context. Hence, it took me quite a while and had several loops of reflection with my colleagues from Milk & More and other researchers in the field of interest. By that, I structured various relevant questions in a way that finally worked for me to conduct (proper) interviews with customers of Milk & More. And as mentioned before, the first session had already been conducted in line with

my interviewing guideline, which was mainly derived from the theoretical context. The other interviews followed the general structure of the interviewing guideline as proposed. It was structurally split into three parts (introduction, main part, end), whereof the main part was supposed to address my research objectives.

Semi-structured interviews in my research approach: My interviewing guideline

Within the various interview sessions, it became transparent that some questions were appropriate; but others had to be adjusted slightly throughout the interviewing sessions as the questions were not specific enough in regards of the individuals. It was difficult in most of the interview sessions to get to the subjective understanding of the business of the milkmen (= 'What does 'milkman' mean for you?'), as most customers had, understandably, their contemporary home delivery pattern and their regular food supply in mind when I asked them. But they were often much more comfortable with questions concerning their background (e.g., 'Have you/your family always 'had a milkman'?'). Oppositely, there were also questions asked that were more disruptive, such as the question concerning milkmen's work routines (e.g., 'What do you think he/she does?'). Without an additional remark or comparison to my own work routines, there were few customers who could tell me anything specific of their milkman's habits and routines. Consequently, such questions had to be adjusted to better suit the individual interview session and to bridge the subjective understanding and the overall research aim. Nevertheless, the various elements of the interview structure, as presented in *Appendix B*, remained constant throughout all nine interview sessions. And even though I had never done interviews for research purposes before, the interviews felt 'rich' to me in regards of contextual knowledge and insights. I gained the impression as the customers presented me many insights that prior to speaking to them I was not, or just partially, aware of. For instance, I could not imagine that customers do not care too much about the person who is 'their milkman', as, from their perspective, 'the milkman', is an incorporation of manifold institutional arrangements, that walks up their doorsteps and enters the private domain of hundreds of customers by night. But customers

elaborated their view quite illustratively to me and highlighted the embedded trust in the business that becomes relevant when it comes to the specific phenomena supporting the value-co-creation. Such insights from customers also result out of the interview atmosphere, which was generally supportive to the research.

Semi-structured interviews in my research approach: An exemplary interview session

More precisely, an exemplary interview looked like so: After an official introduction session, the overall research design was described, and then the customers' views were focused on. A typical question, which was adjusted accordingly to the individual interview's sessions, asked at the beginning of each interview could have been like the following question used in interview 04:

<i>Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 5</i>

<i>“How did you become a customer and what's your impression of the milkman?”</i>

My intention was to understand the specific context and the relationship between the questioned customer and associated milkman in more detail as these are the actors that exchange services at the micro-level in my research context (Neghina et al., 2015). These aspects were further addressed in the next phase of the semi-structured interviews. Here, customers were invited to talk about their relationship with their milkman in more detail and to describe the almost 'traditional' need to 'have a milkman'. Consequently, we stepped back in time and talked about memories of customers' experiences during their childhood and the times since then. Here, some of the phenomena observed on the joint milk rounds were mirrored by the customers. Additionally, the interviewees presented further phenomena, which had not yet been considered. All this led to the impression that the actors involved know each other inside out.

One of those phenomena, which were highlighted in the interview sessions most of the time, without me pushing, were the already mentioned aspects of time and location. Hence, those phenomena of interactions became central to my interview sessions, as well. Consequentially, I asked the following:

Interview 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 27

“Do you feel fine that he goes into that area, but still you would be surprised if someone else, not the milkman would be in that area at around two o'clock in the morning?”

Similar questions were asked in each of the interview sessions, as it touches the ‘place’ of interaction with all its characteristics and restrictions. Such a statement confronted the interviewed customers directly with the question on the reasons ‘why they permit such a behaviour even though most of them would not appreciate a complete, or at least partial, stranger having access to their property at night’. This aspect of the situation provoked the customers interviewed to reflect more critically on their individual interaction process with their milkman and on the concept of the ‘milkman’ overall. Most of the time, these questions triggered a good discussion on some elements of the services offered that I had observed in the ethnographic fieldwork, as well.

Next to that, the customers presented further phenomena that were relevant to them and that explained the ‘uniqueness’ of the milkmen’s services to them. Those were ‘concrete’ service elements such as the milk home delivery or the presented on-top services. Most of the time, the customers presented a combination of some measurable, hard data and many soft service elements in this part of the interview. From my perspective, it felt quite often like those phenomena unfolded throughout the interview sessions for each customer, and from one interview to the other interview to me. Whenever the discussions appeared to slow down, I presented some of my subjective impressions and experiences I gained in the fieldwork, and from the other semi-structured interviews. By that, the discussion mostly kept on running and supported the

customers' self-reflection processes as they sought to explain the business of the milkmen in the UK to me. Herein, I got the impression that some of the customers projected some of their own views into my described situations. This was aimed as my subjective insights did, of course, miss the customers' specific doorstep-milkman-context, but indicated some aspects of the business, which were enriched by customers' experiences and observations. Some of those aspects, such as the embedded element of trust, seemed to be worth following in the analysis and discussion phase of the study. Finally, I tried to obtain a summary from the customers on their individual contextual understanding of their milkmen delivering regularly to their doorsteps at night. For instance:

Interview 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 75

“What are the, in general, if you would summarise, the advantages or the disadvantages of having a milkman?”

This question commonly signaled the last exchange in the interview. It pushed the customers to conclude on their views and thoughts, which had already partially been unfolded throughout the interview sessions. But it was supportive as the interviewees themselves summarised the advantages and disadvantages of 'having a milkman' in the interview sessions. This question was supposed to push the customers to aggregate their views on their milkman and summarise the overall value proposition offered. In here, it was less about the individual milkman than about the entire value proposition offered. The answers I received in that respect supported the view that the business itself relies on the people doing the home delivery, but does, at the same time, not. As the second part of this thesis shows, it is more about the profession loaded with values, experiences, and observations, but also on projections and contextual interpretations derived from few 'facts' and many indications. And, as already mentioned, the questions on the 'Pros and Cons' pushed customers in that direction.

After that, I regularly closed the interviews and described the next steps of my research. One of those steps was the formal transcription of the recorded

interviews and the alignment process of the transcripts in the aftermath. All transcripts of the nine semi-structured interview sessions reflected finally more than five hours of audio material. But differently to my initial plans for the interview sessions, each interview lasted finally approximately 1.5 hours, of which 25-35 minutes were commonly recorded. That was mainly because all conducted interviews had a pre- and a post-session, which were not recorded and not transcribed. These pre- and post-sessions were mainly used for administrative issues such as getting to know each other, explaining the overall context, offering coffee, and aligning the next steps. Quite often, we also talked about my German background and my view on current developments in British society.

Just one interview, on 5th October 2018, was not recorded in full. The equipment used failed for some reason and ceased recording the approx. 60 minutes session after some 13 minutes. My impression regarding that interview was that I could do the session again, but the feedback into the business might have been less supportive for the research project overall. Therefore, I decided to use only the recorded minutes and not to ask for a second session. In addition to that, I took notes throughout each interview session and used those to support the subsequent analysis.

3.2.3 Customers' online feedback

Additionally, I took the decision to include further written customer statements to augment the ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews. I decided to 'go online' and consider customers' perceptions as captured through their reviews of the company on Trustpilot (= online customer review platform).

Hence, I used a second set of customer data - the online feedback that was taken from Trustpilot (<https://uk.trustpilot.com>). The intention was to provide further insights on customers understanding and interpretation of the business of the milkmen. More specifically, I seek to gain a better understanding of the interaction processes (including 'what can go wrong') and the actors' perceptions transcribed by the customers themselves. But, as mentioned before, the main reason for using this form of additional feedback was the insights given by the interviewed

customers, which were 'rich' in regards of data but did not offer a 'critical voice'. But a 'critical voice' was relevant to me as well, as any "Interpretivist research needs a sample that will reflect the relevant characteristics of the wider group [...] to generalise" (Williams, 2000, p.216). In the interview sessions, most of the customers presented many reasons to me for 'having a milkman' and the advantages, which define value to them. But few described situations where customers were unsatisfied with the proposed value. As such counterinterviews seemed potentially relevant to the contextual understanding of such a service and the process of value-co-creation. I decided to use written customer statements. Milk & More regularly tracks, checks, and answers all online statements, particularly if those statements are stated on Trustpilot. Undertaking this research project within my daily business context, offered me the opportunity to review all such feedback and answers concerning the business in 2018. At that point, I asked myself what the appropriate quantity of feedback to consider might be that would gain "theoretical saturation" (Bryman, 2004, p.334). I initially downloaded all the 2018 comments. I however came to realise that there were several months that were not typical for customers' fundamental understanding of the value proposition of the milkmen:

At the beginning of the year, a considerable amount of communication was proactively sent out by Milk & More to its customers on the launch of the new website. That website should have been launched in February 2018. Finally, it was launched, in several steps, between mid-February and April 2018. That was strongly reflected in most of the written feedback from those periods. At that time, there were also several written notes left at the doorsteps for the milkmen on the website (issues), which commonly referred to the difficulties of the website. So, most of the feedback from that time concerned IT topics, from downtimes to simple handling issues of the website. In June 2018, further internal IT applications of Milk & More were changed. These changes impacted the reliability of the online ordering once again as those applications manage the fundamental customer data. Consequently, the feedback of that time dealt predominantly with those IT topics. After that, the online customers' statements talked also about the move of the call centre. Milk & More had had a call centre in Manila (the Philippines) that supported customers in ordering and paying their

deliveries, which was moved to Bristol (UK) in June 2018. That was perceived and reflected by many customers from June to July 2018.

Next to all these internally driven issues, there were also external aspects that influenced the customers' online feedback in 2018, which impacted my reasoning significantly when it came to the analysis and discussion. Nevertheless, I did not use them for structured analysing for various reasons: In January and February 2018, Sir David Attenborough launched his Blue Planet documentary series on BBC, which had the knock-on effect of swiftly starting a discussion on sustainability and plastics in British society. Although some dairies use the HDPE plastic containers commonly found in retail stores, milkmen are the only service providers in the UK delivering milk in traditional glass bottles to Britain's doorsteps. At the end of March 2018, much of the UK faced a heavy, prolonged snowstorm. That challenged the milkmen and the reliability of their services, as it did all other home delivery services. Customers asked for their deliveries and complimented the service quality if the milkmen made it through the snows to their doorsteps. So, most of the statements at the end of March 2018 and at the beginning of April 2018 were related to weather. Conversely, August of 2018 was the hottest month for a decade and brought a different challenge. Milkmen were asked to ensure the freshness of the products left at the doorsteps without additional cooling. Consequently, there were more customer complaints in August 2018 regarding product quality, focusing on the fresh (or less than fresh) taste of their milk. Finally, the December 2018 feedback stood out. It is usually the busiest time of the year for the milkmen. Milkmen's services seem to be appreciated the most, and monetary tips are left for the milkmen around Christmas. All of that finally brought me to the decision to review and use all of the October 2018 feedback (that means: 95 statements):

T	Review date	Comment
Trustpilot	December 2018 and January 2019	95 customers stated feedback/comments on the online platform during October 2018.

Table 11 Descriptive statistics: Customers' online feedback

My intention was to link that feedback to the insights I gained through the ethnographic fieldwork on the service providers and the nine semi-structured interviews conducted.

3.3 Qualitative text analysis

Consequentially, my relevant data sets gathered consisted finally of three different sets: Fieldnotes on observations, verbatims of semi-structured interviews and written online statements. Starting from those, I performed the next steps of theorising. So, I started the processes of analysing patterns (step 2), formulating relationships (step 3) and developing theory (step 4) as described by Cavana et al. (2001).

These steps are presented in the upcoming sections in a more linear and structured manner, as it must, self-reflectively and retrospectively, be stated that some of the analytical work had already been done unconsciously in the field or throughout the iterative process of gathering data. “[I]n qualitative research, there is not a very strict distinction between the phase of data acquisition and that of data analysis like there is in the classical model of quantitative research” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.51). Some parts of the analytical work were performed in parallel, completely without any interrelation or even sometimes controversially to my research. Nevertheless, most of it was based on a qualitative text analysis approach, as presented in the upcoming section.

General description

As highlighted, the relevant field data were transcribed. The verbatim transcripts of the recorded semi-structured interviews and the online feedback were also textual. That offered the opportunity to theorise on a comprehensive set of structurally comparable data. I therefore decided to use qualitative data analysis software, namely MAXQDA. Operationally, I uploaded the verbatim transcripts to MAXQDA before I started the more formulised and documented part of theorising, which is documented in MAXQDA.

Theorising itself was predominantly done via *inductive reasoning* (Cavana et al., 2001) and followed for data analysing-purposes a *qualitative text analysis approach* as described by Kuckartz (2014). As this approach refers directly to the analysis of verbatims generated by qualitative research, such as ethnographic fieldwork, I intentionally selected Kuckartz's model out of a wide range of analysis approaches (e.g., Kuckartz, 2014; Lamnek, 2005) in the beginning.

Kuckartz (2014) suggests in his analysis approach that the first step in analysing qualitative data "should always be hermeneutical or interpretive in nature and involves reading the text carefully and trying to understand it" (p.50). So, I tried to understand and interpret my gathered and transcribed data first, whilst bearing in mind that any interpretative or hermeneutical approach carries a "sort of preconception about the object or subject at hand" (Kuckartz, 2014, p.20). Consequently, I still cannot "claim final authority on the utility of coding or the 'best' way to analyse qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2016, p.3), but I can claim authenticity in regards of me theorising.

A part of that authenticity is the awareness of my own experiences as a customer in different shopping contexts and my subjective perception of my shopping behaviour, for instance. Next to that, I had also business contact to the area of interest, where I had been working as Finance Manager. Consequentially, I had already unconsciously gained relevant insights into the business of the milkmen by speaking to colleagues and doing (financial) analyses during my daily work routines. Furthermore, I had read various customer feedback throughout my business role: Handwritten notes, mail or online feedback that is not cited and directly used in the course of that research, even though it obviously influenced my own contextual perceptions and interpretations (e.g., I had read more than 4,000 customer statements stated on Trustpilot, many notes given to the milkmen). But I consciously decided not to use those data as most of those were very round- and person-specific, and often meant to positively highlight milkmen's behaviour. Furthermore, I also read two autobiographies of milkmen to become familiar with my research context from a distinct perspective. Those were highly descriptive and insightful and helped me to reflect on my own perspective and

(analytical) understanding critically. That was a significant step of analysing my data (Kuckartz, 2014).

In a second step, I coded all available textual data. Coding in a research context is not a synonym for analysing, although it is a “crucial aspect of analysis” (Basit, 2003, p.145). Coding is the “‘critical link’ between data collection and their explanation of meaning” (Saldaña, 2016, p.4). It is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a proportion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016, p.4). Such codes are built through iterative cycles of analysing and built the basis for “an in-depth analysis within or across topics” (MacQueen, et al., 2008, p.125). Within academia, there are often various groups of codes used. Those groups are named by Kuckartz (2014) like so: Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. All those were used to generate categories used for theorising.

Categories commonly name a result of some sort of classification (Kuckartz, 2014, p.38) developed through an (iterative) process of coding. Kuckartz (2014) suggests that such categories are descriptively named to represent certain dimension and characteristics of a category. Categories are commonly “‘rich’, ‘meaningful’, ‘distinguishable’ or ‘disjunctive’” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.39) in its termination and have “properties, dimensions and subcategories” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.23). An example of such a category in my research is ‘nostalgia’. Equally, it needs to be mentioned here that this kind of categorising the phenomena observed requires some kind of ‘moderatum generalisation’ as described by Williams (2000). Without this underlying approach, there would be little success in creating categories transparently. But in addition to these challenges of generalising under the lenses of interpretivism, there is also still “little information [...] given about how exactly categories are built” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.54) in academic literature. Nevertheless, there exists a ‘common sense’ on some aspects, which characterise categories. Those are

- the reliance on existing theory and previous knowledge (Kuckartz, 2014),
- the importance of patterns and repetitions (e.g., Saldaña, 2016; Stenner, 2014) and

- the contextual factors (Saldaña, 2016).

On that basis, Kuckartz (2014) suggests four groups of categories in theory. There are factual, thematic, evaluative, and formal categories (p.41). Factual categories “refer to certain or seemingly objective occurrences, such as to classify different occupations [...] or to refer to a specific place” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.41). Examples of these categories in my research are ‘the doorstep’ or ‘in the depot’. Thematic categories refer “to a specific content, such as a topic, a specific argument, a person etc.” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.41), such as ‘the milkman’, ‘the customer’ or ‘night’. Evaluative categories are built on numbers of “characteristics and levels that are used to assess the information in the text” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.41). This category is for instance used to count the number of interviewee’s statements in my research. Finally, there are the formal categories. “This type of category refers to dates and information about the analysis unit itself. For an interview, for example, this would be the length of the interview in minutes, the date of the interview, the name of the interviewer and the length of the transcription in bytes” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.41). That knowledge of coding and categorising finally supported me in constructing a *narrative analysis story* (Kuckartz, 2014), which is presented in the second part of this thesis.

Qualitative text analysis in my research approach

But before that is told, my specific way of coding and categorising needs to be illustratively displayed. So, I developed my codes and categories throughout an iterative process of reading, summarising, paraphrasing, and comparing. Therefore, I started to reflect on my observations in the field first (e.g., ‘what happens exactly on the doorsteps?’) and on some of the identified theoretical aspects (e.g., ‘which value is proposed?’). By doing so, I identified some patterns such as the daily delivery routines of milkmen and customers’ routine-like ordering processes. Secondly, I reflected on the different interview sessions and tried to identify relevant phenomena. Additionally, I reviewed the available online feedback and challenged myself by visualising the available online data (*Appendix C*). That helped to identify the most relevant terms used within the

online feedback for further theorising. Iteratively, I also reviewed, revised, and adjusted the developed codes and categories until “theoretical saturation” appeared to have occurred (Bryman, 2004, p.334). That means I felt that “additional analysis no longer contributes to discovering anything new about a category” (Strauss, 1987, p.21). During this analytical work on various categories and areas of coding, the results were constantly reviewed and adjusted.

But it was more complex to identify the relevant links between the three sets of data than expected in the beginning. The data sets were generated differently and concerned different situational contexts of interactions between milkmen and customers. Consequentially, I reviewed and analysed the various data sets separately before I linked them. But also, the data released from similar sources (such as semi-structured interviews) did not equal each other due to their subjectivity. Hence, it was challenging to identify the relevant set of codes and categories. By reviewing my own initial coding retrospectively (*Appendix D*), it became transparent that I was guided in the beginning strongly by the structure and terms of my theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of S-D-logic contains, as presented in chapter 2, several terms, such as ‘services’, ‘exchange’, ‘value’ and ‘human actors’ that had built obviously my initial structure for theorising. So, I had obviously checked the data sets for statements and insights that ‘proofed’ to me the ‘applicability of the chosen theory to my situational context’. Later, I realised that there are more relevant aspects to focus on. Those aspects consider the conceptualisation of value and the role and importance of institutional arrangements. Hence, I adjusted the coding and (re-)arranged the coding and developed new categories (*Appendix E*).

Finally, I coded more than 2,500 text blocks overall and linked them to more than 50 categories in the first place (*Appendix D*). I used phrases such as ‘milk as in milk-man’, ‘needed like a hole in the head’, or ‘lonesome wolves’ to express my subjective understanding and interpretation of a certain phenomenon identified. Sometimes, those phrases included several statements from actors, sometimes, they represented solely single statements of customers, milkmen, or my own view. Nevertheless, these phrases were, as mentioned before, strongly impacted by my sensitising theoretical concept of S-D-logic (e.g., services, institution, and

values) which was not surprising as I had read several articles in that area of my research before. But next to that, I developed even more categories till the end of theorising that did not match terms and statements linked to the existing, well-known, and described services marketing theories. So, many of those codes were derived from the anthropological understanding of 'place' and my ethnographical research approach (e.g., night, doorstep, and breakfast-routine). Finally, there were also some codes identified that could retrospectively not be linked to any a-priori developed or theory-based concept (e.g., nostalgia, and reliability). Those were embedded in my theory by the sphere-arrangement of the categories and the explicit and implicit coordination mechanisms, which are foreseen in my theoretical framework to guide actions.

Hence, the entire part of creating categories could be called '*from theory sensitised data grounded coding based on inductive reasoning*'. It was based on numerous repetitions of coding and re-phrasing, re-coding, and re-working. Within that iterative process of analysing the data sets and identifying patterns, the categories became more expressive (e.g., 'if you mess it up the first time...') than the more technical categories identified in the beginning (e.g., milk delivery, or product range). By that, the phrases used to name the categories became, as requested, more colourful, descriptive, and embodied interpretative themes. These themes are presented in the analysis and discussion part of that thesis in *my narrative analysis story*.

4. Limitations and research ethics

But before that, there also exist some general critiques of the theoretical framework used that should be mentioned that S-D logic is perceived by some researchers as seeking to displace other marketing theories and attempting to become an all-encompassing paradigm (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Other scholars have criticised that the framework operates primarily at an abstract level (= macro-level) and misses some of the micro-level phenomena (Karpen et al., 2012). Furtherly, there are also some tendencies identified that try to move the theoretical framework to a more general theory of markets than of services marketing

(Lusch & Vargo, 2014), which is difficult to achieve by any research that highly relies on specific research contexts with situational limitations.

Furthermore, there exists more specific critiques of the contextual approach. So, even if there is always the intention to observe and understand all (or at least most of the) contextual phenomena, there is a defined timeframe given to any researcher that restricts the opportunities to gain all relevant insights. But there are few researchers who are able to capture and understand the immense variety and complexity of human interactions in any observed social reality. This becomes even more challenging as it is difficult to “extricate oneself from the setting” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.94; see also: Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By that, any observations carry an element of subjective interpretation.

Next to that, there are some phenomena in social reality that cannot be realised and accurately described from a human perspective or by using human vocabulary (Gutjahr, 1985). This argument is also linked to the missing exactitude in measurement as my observations are also based on interpretations, and “interpretations can be judged in different ways and different interpretations can lead to [different] predictions“ (Williams, 2000, p.213). This might become more transparent when reading the narrative analysis story, where I present my contextually loaded understanding of some terms, such as ‘milk’, ‘moon’ and ‘money’ in more detail.

Finally, I would like to mention a general restriction that is linked to research ethics overall. Research ethics are “norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about the behaviour and our relationships with others” (Cooper & Schindler, 2008, p.34). In line with those norms, I tried to deal with all participants in an appropriate, open, and honest manner that is morally defensible to them and me throughout my research. Furthermore, I attempted to follow existing research standards as they are described in different social science books and so-called research ethics handbooks. I also considered the research ethics handbook from the University of Gloucestershire (University of Gloucestershire, 2008) in the beginning, which faced me with relevant quality standards in the context of academic research. Quality standards are more often described precisely in the context of quantitative research and

commonly address the aspects of objectivity, reliability, and validity (internal and external). They are described in more detail “in almost every textbook of social methods” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.11). Consequently, they are not presented in here.

But researchers, such as Kuckartz (2014) display also relevant quality standards for qualitative research, which were developed in academia. They are depicted in the right column of the following table, which is adopted from Kuckartz (2014, p.152), opposing the mentioned quality standards widely used in quantitative research:

Quality standards within quantitative research	Quality standards within qualitative research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectivity • Reliability • (Internal and external) validity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conformability • Reliability, dependability, and auditability • Credibility and authenticity • Transferability and adjustability

Table 12 Quality standards within quantitative and qualitative research

Here, there are some terms mentioned that need further elaboration and contextualisation. First, there is conformability. This term mirrors the idea of objectivity and requests the opportunity to understand and validate the presented research approach. It relies on a structured and logical reasoning that can be comprehended and understood by other researchers (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I reflected on my research approach and the observed phenomena constantly with my supervisors and friends. Furthermore, I tried to elaborate in detail on the different steps of theorising within my thesis.

Secondly, Kuckartz (2014) mentions a group of quality standards called reliability, dependability, and auditability. This group represents the claim of any qualitative research to enable the readers of the research to replicate the research and determine whether the findings are reliable to them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, I described my research approach, the methodology used and the

various steps of analysing and theorising on the data gathered in detail (Bryman & Bell, 2011). That might still not be sufficient for other researchers to theorise exactly the way I did. But I am confident that other researchers can comprehend and understand my reasoning.

The third group of quality standards includes credibility and authenticity. It refers, from my perspective, to fundamental characteristics of the researchers (e.g., my individual way of interpreting observed phenomena). Therefore, I have explained my background and my underlying research paradigm in previous chapters. In addition to that, I would like to present some other aspects on authenticity, which are linked to my ethnographic fieldwork and the conducted semi-structured interviews. Thus, it requires, for instance, a good understanding of the language and the concepts, the rules, and beliefs that are shared within the researched area (van Maanen, 2010). That was the reason that I elaborated also on my business role in the relevant field of interest. Furthermore, it must be highlighted that I am not a native English speaker and I am loaded with a different cultural background and, by that, with a different 'collective memory', which is evident in my understanding and interpretation of any context observed (Akaka & Vargo, 2013).

Finally, there is the fourth group called transferability and adjustability. This standard concerns the extent, to which the results of my research are applicable in other contexts. This standard mirrors the term external validity when using quantitative approaches. I tried to create my theory on various individual situations to increase the transferability and generalisability of my findings. But due to Kuckartz (2014), "[i]t is not necessarily easy to transfer or generalize the results" (p.154). However, it is requested "that the results of the analysis are meaningful beyond the scope of [my] study" (p.154). Nevertheless, it must be mentioned once more that it is difficult to generalise and transfer from an interpretivist's perspective without considering the concept of 'moderatum generalisations', as presented by Williams (2000). This is requested as, from William's and my point of view, absolute "[g]eneralisations are impossible since phenomena are neither time- nor context-free" (Williams, 2000, p.213). So, I also tried to keep that in mind, when I analysed the data gathered and reflected on the

various phenomena observed. The transferability of my analysis is contemplated later during my narrative analysis story


5. Chapter summary

Thus, the previous chapter linked the specific research context (chapter 1) to the academic discussion on 'services' (chapter 2) by evaluating the underlying research paradigm, relevant to the theoretical framework and the researcher's mind-set. Based on that, the developed research approach was elaborated on in more detail. I have also considered the research limitations and research ethics.

More specifically, I focused on the different methods used to collect data. In line with the underlying paradigmatic position of interpretivism, ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews were presented as the fundamental data sets for the service providers' and service users' perspectives. Additionally, available online feedback was taken into consideration as the service users' insights seemed to be one-sided and offered insufficient insights for theorisation. Finally, it was described how these three sets of data were used for analysing. In that respect, my theoretical framework offered a first approach for creating relevant codes and categories, which were adopted to the transcripts of all data gathered within a qualitative text analysis performed over several steps. Those steps were critically reflected, and the decisions taken were displayed openly. That accords with the approach to research ethics applied, which is presented next to the key limitations set by the selected research approach that can be summarised as follows:

My theory applies an interpretivist worldview. It adopts an interpretative approach, an exploratory and inductive methodology and a qualitative research design to investigate my research questions and my research objectives. The relevant data sets were predominantly gained via ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and the review of customers' online feedback. So, my theory is predominately derived from the qualitative field data gathered (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and strongly influenced by the underlying theoretical framework of S-D-logic and the gained insights of anthropology. So, it can be

stated that my research design relies on the “main research techniques used in [...] ethnography (Ballis, 1995). That leads finally to my theory, which is presented in the second part of this thesis in my narrative analysis story called MILK, MOON & MONEY.



**PART 2 | Narrative analysis story of
MILK, MOON & MONEY**

1. Structure of my narrative analysis story

The upcoming chapters seek to present my creation of relevant knowledge by presenting the identified codes and categories that can be linked to the underlying theoretical framework of S-D-logic. Here, the focus is predominantly on those phenomena that can be connected to the joint sphere and the place of asynchronous interaction between the service providers and service users. And, as mentioned before, those various phenomena observed and experienced are presented and elaborated in a narrative format.

Therefore, I have created the phrase **MILK, MOON & MONEY**, which consists, as depicted at the beginning of this research, of three familiar words used in various contexts and, often singularly. And, as mentioned before, I am quite sure, that these three terms rarely come together in any conversation, and that it is difficult to create a contextual understanding, in which those terms might be used together. Hence, I have presented a subtitle at the very beginning of my research that offers a more precisely articulated understanding of the setting and structure of my research, such as its situational context (chapter 1: the UK's milk home delivery business), the theoretical framework (chapter 2: value-co-creation) and my specific research approach (chapter 3: qualitative exploration). Nevertheless, even that subtitle misses the variety of phenomena experienced and observed by me that made me title my thesis **MILK, MOON & MONEY**.

But what those are and why that title was coined and used should have become somewhat more transparent at this point, but should equally be enriched in the following narrative analysis story, which is structured in line with my analysis documented in MAXQDA:

Chapter	Content	Coded
4	Service user and service provider spheres	
	4.2 Incorporated coordination mechanisms	155
5	(Reliable) rhythms of MILK	
	5.2 Rhythms	124
	5.3 Reliability	88
6	(Contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows	
	6.2 Personification	103
	6.3 Place and time	196
	6.4 Nostalgia	65
7	(Interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY	
	7.2 Interactions	106
	7.3 Relationships	135
8	Concluding reflections	
9	End	

Table 13 Structure and descriptive statistics of my narrative analysis story

But my narrative analysis story does not begin with those 1.000 coded text elements 'ish'. It has already begun with the start of my research journey, with me seeing an alarm clock showing 0:07A.M. on that specific night in February 2018 and one of my first fieldnotes:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 5

"I get up at around midnight. I feel tired, but I know that he (and all the other guys I will meet in the depot) will accept me better if I do not complain. I also would like to show these guys that I am one of them."

By becoming one of them, I experienced and became aware of various phenomena and connections I now have in mind when I think of my research journey, and its triumvirate. As most of those phenomena are based on my or

others subjective experiences and perceptions, the story focusses on those contextual phenomena first, before a more specific link to the theoretical framework of S-D-logic is presented. Within each section of my narrative analysis story, the relevant phenomena are highlighted by grey shadows and collected at the end of each chapter, used for a theory-based discussion in chapter 8. That is supposed to mirror conceptually the presented work routines of milkmen (chapter 1.2): Milkmen distribute and collect milk bottles on UK's doorsteps, and are 'seen' as '(grey) shadows of the night'.

2. Recap of the milkmen's proposition

And those milk bottles carry, as presented previously, a wider contextual understanding, as the depiction of the milkmen's proposition has already shown (chapter 1.3):



Figure 2 Summative depiction of milkmen's proposition

Chapter 4 | Presentation of the actors

1. Introduction

But there are even more phenomena that are carried by the milk glass bottles as the next chapters and sections demonstrate. And, here, the narrative analysis story continues.

2. Supplying company

As described before, today's milkmen are no longer independent entrepreneurs. There are now companies, businesses and institutions that arrange and manage the milk and product supply and define most of the operational processes. From a theoretical perspective, institutions "enable actors to accomplish an ever-increasing level of service exchange and value cocreation under time and cognitive constraints. [...]. Thus, institutions play a leading role in value cocreation and service exchange" (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p.11). Those institutions and institutional arrangements are, from a theory perspective, so-called implicit or explicit coordination mechanisms (see chapter 2.3). Within my research context, these coordination mechanisms are aggregated and incorporated within the supplying company Milk & More.

Operationally, such an institution (as an incorporation of various institutional arrangements) decides on the product range, and the equipment used, like the handhelds or the milk floats. That indicates already that the operational role of such an institution is today quite strong and relevant to the business overall. And by that, the set of milkmen's roles is impacted as well. Milkmen define their role in this wider business context and commonly behave in line with the directives given by the supplying company. But there is also the impression that many milkmen try to act on behalf of and in line with all other milkmen. That might be surprising as my observation taught me that there are few real-life interactions or communications between the milkmen, neither in the depot nor on the phone throughout the night. All obvious communications to, and between, the milkmen seemed, to be influenced and directed by the over-arching institution. So, my first view was that the institution manages the **internal communication and alignment processes** between all its milkmen and all supporting departments in the internal

day-to-day interactions. That view is evident also in some customers' expectations of the entire business:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 9

"I thought there would have been some communication crossover between the online account team and the actual milkman, but obviously not."

A customer statement such as that clearly presents the expectation that a business should speak with one voice. From a customers' perspective, anyone working for the business of the milkmen supports the business and finally, must serve the requested needs of its customers. This suits one of the previously presented statements: "It is the customer who determines what a business is" (Drucker, 1974, p.61). That widely-shared understanding might be one of the reasons why a proper system of crossover communication is often expected by today's customers as well. But it is also comprehensible from employees' perspectives. Within their business socialisation processes, employees had learned to behave and communicate in line with the institutional guidelines, directives, and expectations. And those embedded standardised, cross-functional, and cross-people work guidelines had managed a company such as Milk & More, which links more than 1,100 milkmen. Such a common speech and standardised behaviour might be, on the one hand, one of the main advantages in creating today's version of the socially institutionalised concept of 'the milkman' on the backs of several thousands and generations of milkmen. On the other, it misses the individuality that was highlighted and appreciated by certain customers.

But the role of the institution in the service provider's sphere is not just limited to the internal communication or standardisation of processes. It also serves to **external communication and alignment processes** with milkmen's customers. It forwards any specific information offered by the customers, like 'I am on holiday

- no milk' or 'please leave the pints in the milk minder at the doorstep', and assures the right products, at the right place and at the right time.

All that is supported by the handhelds given to every milkman. These handhelds carry all relevant data and information from a supplying company perspective. The handheld also communicates constantly all information gathered and recorded in the field back to the institution (e.g., new orders, changes in the orders or payments). This information is later needed from a business perspective to generate the right invoices and ensure the right product supply for the next days. But most of the time, there is, at least on the rounds I joined, no real need for the information carried by the handhelds, as some of my observations suggested:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 17	Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 13	Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 11
<i>“But in front of the customer’s door we are not using that handheld anymore. He just knows. We jump out of the milk float and he tells me exactly what to pick (‘One ‘semi’. The red lid to the door over there. Put the milk around the corner and pick up the two empty bottles. You will see’).”</i>	<i>“He has known all his customers for a long time as he has been serving that area for more than 35 years, which is why he could do the entire round without the help of his handheld.”</i>	<i>“I am sure that he actually knows quite a lot, as he knows the whole round and all ‘standing orders’ right off the top of his head; he does not look at the details on the handheld even once.”</i>

All these observations indicate that there is not a single issue to worry about from an operational perspective. There is a regularity, a routine, a certain rhythm in place that is fundamentally taken on-board by the milkmen. Nevertheless, milkmen know that they must complete the order confirmations on the handheld before returning to the depots as it is required by the institutional directives. And all milkmen do report via the handheld 'before returning to base'. Retrospectively, that might have been one reason why one of the milkmen gave the handheld over to me and asked me to do that (important) part of his job. At that moment in time, such a behaviour confused me:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 13

"That is why I am even more surprised when he offers the handheld over and asks me to deal with it on our round. This happens after about the fifth or sixth customer he serves. It feels a little like he was looking for a proper job to keep me active and involved...but not too involved."

Later, I realised that this behaviour also concerned my role as participating or non-participating observer as he wanted me to 'be involved without being involved'. So, I had to manage the handheld, which seems for the observer to be fundamental to the job, but in the field, this tool is just some kind of 'safety net' that is not needed for any operations. Another misunderstanding on the role of the 'institution' I had in mind when joining the rounds was related to my contextual understanding overall. I thought that all processes follow exactly those mentioned institutional directives and guidelines. But in the field, people behave differently. More in a manner, that suits their work routines and rhythms best while pleasing the business needs and fulfilling institutional directives (as far as 'reasonable'). I noticed in that respect:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 14

“He knows that it is part of the game, that it hinders him to be entrepreneurial and to sell anything else. But it is more important that everybody can gain a bit – and sometimes it is the institution behind.”

In this understanding, it is finally the supplying company that takes also over some entrepreneurial tasks. And there were other milkmen who supported that view. They asked the supplying company to become an **entrepreneur by itself**, which guides the other milkmen through group-wide directives on how to serve all customers best:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 10

“‘Good service’ from his point of view is measured by the yardstick of those topics defined by the company Milk & More. He is fully in line with the 7A.M. target set by the company, although (unlike some of his contemporaries that I’ve previously shared a round with) he claims to have no impression of the customers he is serving or their work routines.”

This expectation offers the opportunity to deliver the self-same service to all customers of Milk & More, in all regions and on all rounds. The underlying understanding of such a demand is, once more, the ‘one-size-fits-all’ concept that neglects (most of or even) any subjective, personal notes, which might be embedded in that business and which made it last for centuries. And in my understanding, the business needs such a personal element. Hence, I stated on one round:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 15

“[T]here is something personal – something individual missing for me that night. There are no funny stories about the customers, no typical blaming

of the back-office and the guys who have never been out in the field working hard before taking silly decisions.”

But ‘silly decisions’ are sometimes not only made by representatives of a supplying company or the service providers themselves. There might be also situations service users decide irrationally or institutionally (mis-)guided. Such an institutional impact might be given by other people engaged in the interaction process who support the business activities of the milkmen in their day-to-day operations. For instance, there are the people ensuring the product supply in the dairy and the network or the people working in the call centre. They take the customers’ order and manage the process of invoicing and payments. These functions and other institutional services seem to be perceived and valued differently by customers. Some are recognised and accepted as part of a more active and direct communicative role that influences the customers directly. Others are also a (hidden) supporter of the milkmen between the customers and their milkmen. From a theoretical perspective, those mechanisms are examples of the mentioned explicit and implicit coordination mechanisms, which guide value-co-creation. Here, many implicit and explicit coordination mechanisms are incorporated and represented by the supplying company, whereas the joint sphere unfolds predominantly further implicit institutional arrangements, as the next chapter displays.

One outstanding coordination mechanism handled by the supplying company was the arrangement of payments, which seemed to be a relevant aspect for some customers. As the responses and comments were most likely to be negative, whenever it concerned aspects of money:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 7

“After over 20 years with Milk and More we have finally cancelled our orders. Everything worked fine when we paid monthly in arrears.”

To understand the context of such a statement, it must be explained that the offered payment methods were adjusted to suit the most common online business models while launching the new website for some categories of customers. Consequentially, all online customers using the new website launched in spring 2018 had to use their debit or credit card details to pay from there on in advance. That was different for all offline customers at that time, who still were able to pay in cheques or by leaving coins on the doorsteps. From a business perspective, that change was consistent with widely preferred online payment methods and a societal trend of 'becoming cashless'. All customers who also ordered with other e-commerce businesses were most likely used to those terms and conditions.

Nevertheless, there were quite some online customers who complained when their routines of leaving money for the milkmen on the doorstep and paying in arrears was broken. The complaints referred from my perspective not only to the change in regards of cash-out with the customers. It was more linked to the underlying element of personal trust in that business, which is separately reviewed when it comes to the joint sphere. For now, it might be enough to link the recognisable element of trust to the business of the milkmen overall (chapter 1.3). So, in the past, milkmen delivered the ordered products and collected at the end of the month the specific amount of money (= pay in arrears). The customers of the milkmen appreciated and returned that trustful behaviour, particularly as it also provided an element of convenience to them. There was no need for them to handle money on an almost daily basis for the received and regularly consumed 'milk'. By that, the almost daily interaction between the specific milkmen and their customers was perceived less formalised and business-like as other businesses. Consequently, the individual, routine-like interaction process between two actors was significantly changed by that change in the established business routines, directed by the supplying company. But it was not only the individual situation that had changed for them. It also affected the existing value proposition of the 'well-known and trusted milkman' overall.

The presented value proposition of the social institution of 'the milkman' is based on many aspects, which are unfolded throughout this research. Some of them have already been presented. But there are also some depicted later, which refer

to the long tradition of milkmen in the UK. For now, it can already be said that today's milkmen built their businesses obviously also on the reputation of the profession and the activities offered by the supplying company. So, 'having and being a milkman' also carries various phenomena, which are incorporated by the supplying company and which can be called **incorporation of institutional arrangements**. These institutional arrangements also include an element of trust in the profession, and by that, in the social institution of 'the milkman' overall. That means that customers trust in the person delivering to their doorsteps, no matter of the individual's background.

Furthermore, this change also impacted customers' fundamental understanding of the supplying company. The specific value proposition offered by the company via the milkmen before the change in payment terms was also partially built on mutual trust. The customers knew that any information given to the company (e.g., via the call centre) is managed appropriately and forwarded to the right milkmen who is responsible for a certain area. So, customers also trusted in the operational process within the wider business context, such as the cash-collection process done by the milkmen and the invoicing process done by the supplying company. Consequentially, there is also an element of trust between the customers and the supplying company. That means that the entire business is strongly trust-based to the individual delivery person, the profession of the milkmen and the supporting business overall. The combination of those different layers builds finally the fundament for the well-known social institution of 'the milkman'.

This fundamental trust to all these different layers seemed to be partially challenged by the change done in regards of the business payment model in early 2018. This is neither unexpected nor uncommon as people are, as presented in the statement before, often more critical, sceptical, and less trustful when it comes to money. Consequently, the feedback was quite harsh if the 'new' process of money handling appeared to those customers to be disrupted and less reliable and trustful than before. Here it could be repeated that there are obviously several layers, which finally built trust in the business of the milkmen. And if the

trust of one of those layers gets lost, all other levels are impacted as well as the next example illustrates:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 270

“It just seems that, um, a little bit, a sort of chaotic, with regards to the volume of transactions that go through and managing those. And being in finance, when you see all of these transactions, and you're going, ‘What you know, um, I think it's somewhat confusing that you see, ‘Well, I've paid for that’ and then I've got to wait three days for the credit to come back through, but I've paid for the rest of the order, again, in advance [...]”

Here, it could be added that, differently to other institutional arrangements in the context of the business of the milkmen, money is an institution on its own. Money is based on trust into individuals, companies, and other institutions (such as governments, and banks) and represents, from an S-D-logic perspective, an institution.

In my research context, it is finally the supplying company that carries many of those institutional arrangements built on distinct levels of trust. There is the reliable individual traditional milk home delivery person, known and trusted by everyone. This milk home delivery person comprises, also the most relevant pillar of trust into the profession of all milkmen (second layer of trust). These two levels of trust are based on many situational and contextual phenomena. Furthermore, there is the supplying company, which builds trust as well (third layer of trust). But here it must also be mentioned that the supplying company takes over some of the negative connotations of the business as well, such as the handling of cash and the unreliability of deliveries next to fundamental basics of the business (e.g., product supply) – and lost trust, hereby. So, similarly to me, there are quite some customers who would rather blame the impersonal, faceless, and abstract system than the ‘milkman’ or any specific milkman in person for any issues in the milk home delivery. Thus, there is, generally spoken, a positive connection due to the personal link to the individual milkmen rather than to the impersonal

institution. This strong differentiation finally encourages some customers to present their varied perceptions of the different actors and to assist ‘their milkmen’:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 22

“Up until this point we have been extremely pleased with your service and we really like our milkman; he is extremely reliable, and we do not want to put him down in any way.”

As mentioned before, such customers neither blame the individual delivery person nor the entire profession for failing with their deliveries. The presented customer statement blames the supplying company for ‘being unreliable’. Another customer agreed:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 94

“Feel sorry for the delivery guy, the system is letting him and us down.”

Such feedback offers a further element that seems to be relevant for the understanding of value-co-creation in my research context: Some customers see the milkmen as part of ‘their team’. This team consists of human beings who understand each other (partially and contextually) and respect each other. And the supplying company is not part of that team. Hence, it is that system to blame as it let ‘the team customer-milkman’ down. So, it must have been solely the company that failed in that specific situation the customer had in mind when stating the online feedback.

But the supplying company is not solely seen negatively. There are many customers that emphasised the advantages of the support given by that company. Some of them even turned around the presented argumentation given so far upside down: Their trust is predominantly built on the business behind the milkmen, an aggregation of various institutional arrangements, and less on the

profession or the individual delivery person. One customer stated in the semi-structured interview session:

Interview 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 54

“The business that sits behind him being a trusted, well known reputable business. Obviously, a brand that sits behind the milkman is really important.”

Interestingly, the term ‘brand’ is mentioned in here separately. There were milkmen who saw the ‘traditional milkman’ itself as the leading brand, which is supplied with milk, no matter what brand sits behind the suppliers. But obviously, there are customers who interpret the whole situation oppositely than the milkmen and other customers cited before. Customers appreciate the interactive website; the call centre services and the product range that are centrally defined. All that defines the relevant brand to them. And it is the task of the brand to assure the proper people to represent the brand on UK’s doorsteps at night. So, there are customers who appreciate the personification of the operationally driven institutional arrangements represented by the supplying company. By that, a similar, almost intimate interrelation seems to be created between those two actors, as it was for other customers between them and their individual milkman (or the profession of the milkmen). Consequentially, there are customers who trust the brand and, by extension, in the people representing the brand. They recognise the milkmen by their uniforms and assume a standard level of trustworthy people working for the company they place their trust in. It might be that they expect, based on their general understanding of businesses, an appropriate selection and constant review process based on KPI’s and customer feedback. But foremost, these customers appreciate the service of getting home deliveries in time, in full and of the appropriate quality. This is arranged by the supplying company and delivered by the milkmen.

3. Chapter summary

So, Jim's and all other milkmen's value propositions serve customers various expectations and, by that, value-co-creation (e.g., Hibbert et al., 2012; Vargo, 2008). Their businesses fit obviously Drucker's fundamental requests (1974). He stated that "it is the customer who defines what a business is" (p.61). And he also highlighted on value: "What the customer buys and considers value is never a product. It is always utility, that is, what a product or service does for him." (p.61). In line with that, customers' value cannot just be described in monetary units. Consequentially, I have chosen the following customer statement to present this different understanding of 'value':

<i>Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 263</i>
<i>"And that really put a smile on my face."</i>

Such customer feedback expresses the complexity of the milkmen's value propositions as it is linked to an emotionally loaded, contextual understanding and to subjective interpretations of the business of the milkmen. Those contain several aspects.

The product milk is one of the most relevant products carried on a milk float. It names the profession overall and represents the 'core' of the business of the milkmen. But it represents even more. Throughout my research it became transparent that milk has as an even wider meaning for the involved service providers and services users. Such a depth of its meaning is already indicated by the pure variety of milk products carried on a milk float.

But in the business of the milkmen, it is finally not about the variety of offered goods. It is about other, more complex phenomena, which have already been unfolded in chapter 1.2 and chapter 4: Milk feeds customers' routines of consumption as it is seen as a one of the basic elements of day-to-day consumption. And the milkmen's value proposition mirrors that need as there is an automatism of ordering (= service users' automatism) and delivering

(= service providers' automatism) embedded in the interaction process. By that, both actors do see some elements of their interaction for granted.

Interestingly, the self-same actors do value the complexity of the business or at least of the product. Generally, the 'white stuff' does not really offer a vast variety of physically observable differences next to the coloured top. But there were many subjective phenomena perceived throughout this research that are obviously incorporated and represented by the product milk such as subjective preferences or the subjective impression of taste. Taste itself is a subjective feeling that tries to use measurable data to judge on freshness and quality. But finally, it is more about the individuals' preferences and contextual perceptions. Those identified phenomena might be difficult to measure on the one hand but offer on the other hand some space for interpretation. Such interpretations take the individuals' background and situation into account and offer, by that, individualisation, and subjectivity in a widely standardised business. Thus, it could be said that the typical milk glass bottle looks the same from outside to all customers but contains an individual mix of perceived and valued services from the inside.

The milk glass bottle symbolises, in my contextual understanding, also the wide product and service range offered by generations of milkmen. Milkmen of all times were doorstep salespeople who constantly tried to understand the service needs of their customers and, consequently, have adjusted their product range on their own initiative. By that, today's product range also carries simple commodities for everyday life. But the milkmen do not only support the shopping routines of their customers, but they also serve certain occasions such as breakfast. By that, the milkmen's services contain the element of convenient food home delivery. And such aspects become even more important to the business of the milkmen as the service users are nowadays used to compare the perceived value proposition with other relevant business propositions to a certain degree.

The business proposition, as it is offered to the customers today, is, even though it relies significantly on the personal interaction between the milkmen and the customers, impacted by the supporting company, which finally assures the product supply. It arranges the product supply throughout the network of suppliers

and depots and assures that the right products are at the right place at the right time. The supplying company is also strongly involved in the interaction and communication process with the customers. It manages the internal alignment process between the departments and forwards the specific information from and to the customer via its call centre or via marketing activities. Hence, it can be stated that the supporting institution incorporates many institutional arrangements. By that, the supplying company becomes more entrepreneurial than in former days and becomes a service provider by itself to the customers of the milkmen. And this additional value proposition is appreciated by the customers, but also by the milkmen to a certain extent. Some customers even see the concept of 'the brand' led by the supplying company. So, from their perspective, it is the brand they rely on in regards of selecting the right people to serve the brand's promises on customers' doorsteps.

Such a 'brand promise' is built partially on the communication process and the current value proposition, but it also includes many other phenomena such as the subjective quality expectation of service users, as assured by the milkmen. Throughout the research, I even got the impression that the service users see the milkmen as part of 'their team'. As the milkmen take over some of customers' routines and share, in customers' perception, similar values. But at the same time, they also incorporate the fundamental daily supply of food and the support of people who need assistance.

This view mirrors the current understanding of S-D-logic: The offered goods, such as milk and other products, are indirect services, which become part of value-co-creation for each beneficiary (= customer), as do the direct services, such as the milk home delivery. Customers value those additional services and are willing to spend (more) money on those services as they would commonly do. But they also receive 'more' than milk as the following summative graphic and table depicts:



Figure 3 Summative depiction of chapter 4

Milk
Product-related services
Delivery services
'Individualised' services
Supplying company
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Internal and external) communication and alignment processes. • Entrepreneur by itself. • (Hidden) supporter of the milkmen. • Incorporation of institutional arrangements.

Table 14 Summative table of chapter 4

Chapter 5 | (Reliable) rhythms of MILK

1. Introduction

As highlighted at the beginning of my narrative analysis story, the contextual understanding of the business of the milkmen helped to create a different understanding of the terms 'milk', 'moon' and 'money'. Before that research, the first word 'milk' identified, most of the time, a standardised product of daily food-consumption to me. But now, it also carries other phenomena, such as the presented services or the set of roles carried by the supplying company. But next to that, it also represents elements of rhythms and reliability as the following chapter demonstrates. Here, the focus is on the shared 'place', Britain's doorsteps at night, or, from a theoretical perspective, the joint sphere. Here, the customers' needs, and practices become most obvious (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) as the relevant day-to-day activities of the actors involved in regards of value-co-creation are supposed to occur there.

2. Rhythms

One of the greatest influences on day-to-day living for many human beings are the (almost) daily work routines service providers and service users follow. The structures of work life dictate and fundamentally structure (most) day-to-day activities and influence a lot of other private activities as well. The importance of those activities becomes transparent by examining the absolute time those activities consume on average: Out of the 24 hours (less the standard eight hours of sleep) in a day, most adults spend more than half of the remaining time on things related to their jobs. And it is quite common that people spend years or even decades in one job or with one company. Throughout that time, people assimilate their business duties, their contextual behaviours, and their private needs (= socialisation). Some of them are fundamental needs, like earning money; some are more to enrich their lives and the lives of others. But it is finally not only about work routines. There exist a lot of private routines, which impact the rhythms in life, too (e.g., children, hobbies). It is difficult and not aimed to research all of them within this study. I predominantly focus on those, which obviously impact the relevant actors: The customers and their milkmen.

2.1 Milkmen's rhythms

The milkmen overall and each milkman individually have created work routines as a lot of other professions do by repetition over time. In the introduction and within the situational contextualisation of my thesis some of those routines have already been described, such as the early start (approx. 11P.M.) in the depots, the lonely rounds throughout the night (till approx. 7A.M.) and the 'return to base' by 8A.M. at the latest. All that is impacted by the coordination mechanisms (chapter 4). And within that institutional framework, all milkmen create their own, individual routines and start to act according to their own rhythms.

"Routine was the key thing" (Ward, 2016, p.48), is a statement that could also be accepted as an appropriate summary for all my observed milk rounds. In most of my observations, the milkmen I accompanied had served their rounds and their customers for a decade or so on average, and by doing so, they had established individual rhythms of work routines they were used to throughout the night. Those became transparent when loading the float, when driving during the night or when handling the various challenges of the night (such as loneliness). Additionally, it unfolded that their individual routines and their knowledge were also built on their customers' behaviours and routines. So, they had not only adjusted the way they drive and walk at night for their customers, but they were also able to repeat the anticipated customer orders off the top of their heads without checking the handhelds and might even be able to predict the specific time needed on a specific night. For me, it was surprising that the milkmen parked their milk floats exactly at the same space every other night and walked the same paths to their customers every other day. The milkmen I accompanied were even able to describe the dark surroundings quite specifically to me referencing obstacles, trees, or stones for orientation. On some of those rounds I got a hint of the sheer variety of words, which can be used for describing distinct characteristics of a typical night and the dark neighbourhoods served. Such a contextual knowledge had been built over a substantial number of repetitions and quite some time. Milkmen consistently deliver the same volumes at the same speed and with the same load to the same customers, as the business is, as presented before, still significantly based on 'standing orders'. And to fulfil these regular requests,

milkmen are joined by the same partner-in-crime (= the milk float) and they typically finish their round at the exact same time they always do.

But sometimes, it can be that there are relevant changes in the context that impact the milkmen's routines such as the presented customers' behaviours (e.g., different shopping behaviour), the institutional set-up (e.g., new website) or the surroundings (e.g., new traffic lights). These impulses can affect the established routines of the milkmen and support the creation of new or different temporary behaviours. Some of these external impulses were mentioned and described in the situational context, such as the governmentally driven territorial split of the areas, which led to the model of dedicated milkmen for dedicated rounds. Now, such a model could be questioned from a pure cost perspective, as it is sometimes more expensive to have dedicated staff for certain areas without considering the daily, weekly, or seasonal peaks in volumes and workload. Nevertheless, the milkmen and the supporting institutions have always pushed the idea of defined rounds. By that, milkmen have **responsibility for defined areas** and start to gather relevant insights on the customers they serve. As a benefit to themselves, they can arrange their working patterns accordingly and create their own work routines within that framework. And ultimately, they embed some of those routines into their daily course of work and life. For instance, some milkmen return to some customers later through the day for having a cup of tea and for delivering missing items.

But such routines are not transparent for external observers as the work done seems to be rationally structured and generally well directed by the supplying company. And sometimes, it might have been the pure necessity that made the observed activities reasonable to me. But by observing several milkmen and their individualised routines of loading vehicles and serving 'their customers' it became transparent that some of the observed milkmen had already foreseen the upcoming round and the customers' doorsteps they were going to serve. Consequently, they prepared the products in line with the expected trip. In the fieldnotes, I once noted in that respect:

“And ‘do’ is the right word for him. All his actions in the upcoming 45 minutes look like perfect routine. There is not a word wasted (not even to the other milkmen showing up). There is his vehicle (he is one of the selected milkmen with an electric vehicle) and the products (milk and normal goods), which he picks from the fridge and storage based on printed customer order overviews. All that looks more like my normal Finance work than the work of a milkman: Very structured, following a strict order. As I can see how focused he is on the job at hand I am just staying next to him, giving him assistance whenever it looks acceptable and letting him do his thing. Finally, when all products are placed next to his vehicle, he calls the supervisor, takes a cup of tea and drinks with a relaxed air (he knows that everything is right). The supervisor agrees and signs off the documents – a process I have not seen in either one of the other depots I have attended.”

Those observations were taken in one of the depots as that specific milkman set out with a perfectly prepared ‘milk float’. Alternatively, I observed other milkmen who preferred to spend more time in the field to do the customer-specific arrangements right before the doorsteps and, consequentially, do less upfront preparation in the depot. But all of them had in common that they had developed a mind-set of **responsibility for their own businesses** under the umbrella of one profession. They had also defined their own routines in the institutionally set frame of working hours. So, milkmen get up at a (round-) specific time and start their round at the time that best suits them and their deliveries. Not all of them turn up every evening by 11P.M. and return by 8A.M. at the latest. Consequently, not all of them get up every night at the time Ian, the milkman mentioned in the introduction, does. Consequentially, there is an obvious impact of the work routines that are partially determined by other elements, such as the supplying company, the customers, or the routines in their personal life, and vice versa. But before focusing on the social impact of ‘being a milkman’ in that thesis too much, there are further aspects of the work routines in milkmen’s lives that should be focused as they were unfolded by my ethnographic fieldwork approach. So, in my

view, the presence of an obviously participating observer had already been supportive to identify some of those patterns and routines. Although it was not my intention to disrupt any established work routines or hinder any embedded business activity throughout my research approach, the mere presence of someone else throughout the night changed the overall setting and challenged some of the embedded routines for those nightly deliveries. That became clear to me for the first time when one of the milkmen had to share the limited, 'private' space in the milk float with me:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 7

“He opens his door and performs some routine tasks like adjusting the seat belt (between his back and the seat) and placing all his private stuff in dedicated places. Everything in here has exactly one place it should be, and I am like the alien presence disturbing that exacting model.”

Such a note showed that the physical presence of a second person can be disruptive to certain routines, which helped to reveal further elements of those established patterns.

Against that, it was more challenging to identify any individualised work routines on the milk round. That challenge does not mean that there were no elements of individualisation and differentiation. These individualised work routines were just less obvious to people who do not regularly participate. And, even when participating regularly, these routines often look quite reasonably structured, from the outside, and so they do not directly stand out. On one of the rounds I realised, for instance, that the milkman joined always shut the door of the vehicle as quietly as possible. That means he closed the door of the vehicle at least 200 times without creating any noise, whereas my door closes were significantly louder every time, even with me trying my best. But despite such observable phenomena, there were few to mention from a 'milkman on training' perspective. So, I intentionally changed my perspective to a customer's point of view during our deliveries. In this way, I tried to identify some more individualised habits and

routines per milkman and per doorstep that characterise the milkmen's work routines:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 19

“But even by watching most carefully, I do not see the huge difference a customer might encounter when opening the door in the morning and taking in the glass bottles. All bottles are exactly left at the place the empty ones are picked up. If there is a milk minder or a plastic box, he or I have left our package right at that place [...].”

Such observations were unsatisfying as the context assumed a special or at least different service concept that should be recognisable and valued by each individual customer. How can it be that the value proposed to different customers on that specific round look so standardised and undifferentiated to a careful observer like me? And: It is not only standardised in regards of the individual deliveries to all the different customers' doorsteps, but it also misses certain elements of differentiation that distinguish the business of the milkmen from any other home delivery service offered, respectively any other value facilitator, such as supermarket chains (Grönroos, 2011). Therefore, there were, of course, certain small gestures of taking care of the neighbourhood and of customers' property that seemed to be on-boarded on the daily work routines of the milkmen:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 17

“[H]e walks dedicated routes to each doorstep and does not cross grass – even if it would make his journey shorter.”

But next to such phenomena, which could also be rooted merely in social norms, there were few other observations that stack out. So, many of the observed activities were fully in line with common expectations on proper home delivery services. Hence, it was the break or the change of the normal rhythms that offered

further insights. Therefore, it was necessary to get a better understanding of milkmen's routines by doing ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and reviewing customers' online feedback.

2.2 Customers' rhythms

Hence, it was necessary for me to understand the customers, even though there is little direct contact between milkmen and customers during the night. Sometimes, there were some sleepless, or early-bird customers. But, at least in my observations, there were few direct communication and interaction opportunities for the milkmen with 'their customers'. Hence, I tried to gain a better understanding of the customers, particularly of their (shopping) routines. The semi-structured interviews conducted and the written online statements, offered some insightful views on those routines. One of them is the relevance of routines in customers' lives in general, which also impacts the business of the milkmen. Milkmen serve customers' repetitive, routine-like shopping activities by offering 'standing orders'. Thus, a customer can order with and rely on the milkmen's receptiveness and the frequency of deliveries without any additional effort such as sending an e-mail or calling the call centre. Self-reflectively, certain customers confirmed that view when they considered their own shopping routines:

Interview 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 52

"We're fairly structured in what we have. Our order is very similar each week."

That outcome was expected from a business perspective because the proportion of 'standing orders' was relatively high, and the initial analysis performed on the shopping baskets did not indicate relevant drops and peaks per customers over time. Consequentially, I expected most of the customers to place similar orders with their milkmen regularly, and by that, the existence of certain shopping routines that include the way of ordering. But it also concerns the moment of receiving the orders as the next example illustrates:

Interview 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 10

“If it arrives any later and the milk or any other product is not on the doorstep, it's not going to be very nice by the time I get home at about five, six o'clock, or whatever. It has to be there so that I can take it in.”

Such a statement highlights some of the ‘hard, measurable’ data of the business (e.g., delivery before 7A.M.). But it is not only about the right timings of deliveries that this customer statement refers to. It also indicates certain other routines in customers’ lives, such as breakfast time. One customer stated:

Interview 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 6

“I enjoy the idea of being able to wake up on a Saturday morning go downstairs to find a delivery of fresh milk, eggs, bacon, bread that kind of thing. It starts the weekend on a nice, relaxed note.”

This occasion of usage (= breakfast) is for most people something that happens almost every day. Nevertheless, there are several customers whose feedback showed that they love to have a special breakfast experience on the weekends. And the milkmen are supposed to serve those special moments, too. So, there are several customers’ statements elaborating on such a specific weekend situation linking it back to their interaction with the business of the milkmen. But these are, from my understanding, also customers that link milkmen’s value proposition to the emotionally-loaded context of ‘being at home’ as the next example displays:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 44

“Fantastic service – we ordered our breakfast goods the night before whilst waiting in an Italian airport, knowing that we wouldn't be home until 3A.M. The thought of then having to stop off to get provisions did not appeal, so we thought we would try Milk and More. Hey presto- first thing

in the morning, fresh milk in glass, a complementary bottle of juice and lovely bread is waiting on the doorstep!"

Such an online statement describes the treatment these customers wanted to enjoy when returning from abroad: Nothing other than normal. And so, it can be said that the business of the milkmen incorporates the 'normal rhythm' at home for certain customers. For those customers, the milkmen's delivery is the 'native/normal' way of being served at home and having an 'enjoyable breakfast experience'. 'Normality' represents in that context everyday life, which can also be negatively impacted by the milkmen as the following example, stated on the online platform, outlines:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 95

"It was okay for me as the delivery was only a top-up to my normal shopping but many families with young children were left without milk for breakfast before school."

Here, the fundamental human need for food is mentioned and linked to the business model. That seems to be even more critical with the example used: Children going to school. The statement itself sounds as if there is no other way of getting a 'proper' breakfast for children next to the milkmen's deliveries, although most people stock some food at home or use other opportunities in the local area for getting breakfast. So, the statement on the failed delivery might be over-dramatised. Conversely, it elevates the milkmen's services to me. The milkmen assure a proper, healthy, and adequate breakfast and regular food supply as no other service provider. Thus, this statement and the conducted interviews overall highlight that the milkmen's services must fit into the wider set-up of the individuals' routines including their methods of having breakfast and shopping. And, as most customers also use supermarket chains and local stores, they often know exactly where, when and what to buy. One interviewee described it as follows:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 14

“So, I am a creature of habit. I will go weekly shopping on weekend -on a Sunday usually- and gearing myself up for the requirements for myself for that week. Monday to Saturday and from a milk kind of position again, I have a ‘standing order’ [...].”

Considering that customers’ shopping routines are obviously often well settled and structured. People might not consciously reflect on those, but there are certain habits and routines in place, which are commonly the ‘leading concept’. Bulk products, for instance, are often connected to supermarket chains and a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly shopping frequency, whereas high-quality beef is often bought as, and when required from the local butchers. In line with that understanding, there was not a single customer who stated in the interview sessions that all food buying was done exclusively with the milkmen.

3. Reliability

One of the reasons is, that customers often chose intentionally the one that fits their needs and routines best, although the ‘one-serves-all’-concept could be more convenient. This is supported by the subjective impression of the reliability of those (shopping) routines. Customers believe to know where and when they get what they are looking for. Consequentially, the already mentioned reliability of milkmen’s deliveries must be addressed more specifically in my research.

Milkmen`s reliability has already been underscored by Baroness Fisher of Rednal in a speech to the House of Lords in 1983 (Phelps 2010). For many of the customers, the desired reliability is a fundamental, embedded characteristic of the social institution of ‘the milkman’. From their view, it is predominantly built on the **frequency and regularity of the deliveries**. As mentioned earlier, routines name, in my context, certain behaviours that are (mostly) unconsciously enacted. They are embedded in life by repetitive, equal activities performed by an individual in a standardised pace. This means, routines are characterised by their temporal dimensions. And due to my research, milkmen’s services (including

these temporal dimensions) seem to be well-known by the customers. Many customers appreciate the reliability of those doorstep deliveries. But there are not only external, environmental challenges to overcome, there are also internal targets to meet, such as the 7A.M. target no matter what circumstances. This was highlighted by one customer:

Interview 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 56

“[The main reason is] the fact that I get a Saturday delivery and I can place that order by nine o'clock and know that the guy's going to have it delivered by seven o'clock the next morning.”

The presented opportunity of placing orders on short notice was mentioned by several customers. It is obviously an appreciated service offered by the milkmen. But even in such a short notice-shopping context, customers do obviously expect a certain level of ‘reliability’. That means that there are few customers who accept a late delivery just because of their late order placement. In all the interview sessions and throughout the review of the online feedback, there were few comprehensions in that respect.

So, 7A.M. seems to be a critical point in time within my research context. In line with that, all Milk & More deliveries to Britain’s doorsteps are supposed to be done by that time. In the beginning, that target was formulated only within the business as it had become clear throughout the gathered experiences of generations of milkmen and several customer interviews that one of today’s business advantages is the idea of serving freshness to the customers’ breakfast occasion that was supposed to happen regularly at around 7A.M. Thus, the underlying idea of a delivery before 7A.M. was, that the offered value proposition of delivering fresh products before breakfast fits the subjective routines and rhythms of most customers. From a customer’s perspective, 7A.M. is part of a brand promise that is communicated via media and leaflets. Consequentially, customers measure the real time of arrival against that. But it is quite uncommon to state simply that the delivery was late as the next example illustrates:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 79

“Again today, in which case the milk is now going to have to wait outside until we get back from work in the evening.”

From a product quality perspective, the statement above seems to be absolutely clear and reasonable although it must be mentioned that the home delivered products are packaged differently than in supermarkets. And that concept of packaging is thought to be proper for that service. Additionally, there are milk minders that help to keep the products fresh and protected from environmental influences such as animals and weather. From a rational point of view, the presented comment could be questioned. But such an objective, fact-based answer would not even been given by the company itself, as it aims for a ‘home delivery experience’ that is based on on-time distribution to its customers.

However, milkmen do not always agree to the communicated 7A.M. business time target and its importance to all customers, as they are, from their perspective, the ones who ‘know’ their customers’ daily routines based on years of experiences and years of service. I noted the following in that respect:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 24

“So even if one says, ‘I want him to deliver at 7A.M.’, while some other customers do not want to be delivered to before 8A.M., he knows this and takes it into account when he does his round!”

My observation was that this milkman referred to insights gathered by him on the customers of that specific area. And this information sits finally solely with him and not with the company that had formulated the brand promise. So, in my understanding, this milkman is some form of ‘arbiter’ - judging the institutionally set target on behalf of ‘his customers’ and on the back of his work routines. Here, it is clearly the specific milkman who defines the value proposition that is offered to the customers.

Additionally, there stood out another dimension that seems to be important for the customers: The perception of the quality of the services received (generally measured as: in full and in right product quality). It could be noticed that the customers commonly 'rate' the quality of services. My overarching impression of the various statements on this is that most of the customers obviously accept mis-deliveries if they are not too frequent and if they are supported by appropriate communication. But if it happens several times in an abbreviated period and if the communication is insufficient from the customer's perspective, the feedback can be as follows, stated on the online platform:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 52

"In the last few months, I have had the wrong order delivered on three occasions. Today, no delivery at all and it is down as 'pending' on the website."

Here, it is the website that is used in the first place to gain further information or supportive communication on the outstanding deliveries, as there was no direct communication given by the dedicated milkman, which elaborates on the services (not) delivered. Thus, a central aspect of the interactive business relationship is the (here: missing/failed) communication. So, the communication seems to be a relevant part of the services, which are expected by the customers of the milkmen. But, as the following, chapter displays, the communication in that business is different to other home delivery businesses. One of the reasons for that might be the context of the deliveries. As the deliveries are commonly undertaken at night, customers do not regularly blame their milkman for the failed, immediate communication. From their perspective, the communication process on any issues within the supply chain to the doorstep is predominantly owned by the supplying company:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 85

“It was initially extremely frustrating to deal with this company, as orders kept going missing without explanation and the only way to contact the company is by phone.”

This customer apparently expected some communication from the supplying company. As it did not happen, the entire business model failed. There also exist counterexamples. But those are commonly tied to ‘the real people’, the milkmen, themselves. In consequence, milkmen are somehow seen as the ‘guardians of reliability’ for their customers. But reliability is difficult to be guaranteed in day-to-day-activities for all deliveries as there exist more than 50 depots across the UK that serve approximately 500,000 customers on a regular basis. In almost every depot, there is the same product range stocked to serve all customers in the UK - in a similar manner. That means, that there is typically stock available in all depots for about 300-400 products. But not all products of the entire range can be stocked for extended periods of time. Hence, it is quite a challenge for the supplying company to ensure the requested volumes to all areas on time. That challenge grows as the customers are proactively invited to place their individual orders right up until 9P.M. the preceding night. Logically, sometimes not all products can be in stock on that specific day. Consequently, there are days when the ordered volumes are not in stock and cannot be delivered to the doorsteps. Nevertheless, from a Finance Manager’s perspective, the ‘ratio of full deliveries’ was constantly greater than 98 % on average, which was a promising relative result and an acceptable absolute number of non-deliveries. But, individually, each mis-delivery is counted and not appreciated by affected customers. But although there are, in relative and abstract numbers, only a few customers affected, the overall perceived proportion of feedback on the service quality is relatively high. This became even more obvious when reviewing the available online feedback on Trustpilot, which is more critical than the feedback I received in the semi-structured interview sessions. That was a bit surprising to me as the delivered products are not for any urgent or medical reasons. Other, alternative, opportunities of getting fresh milk and other products exist in most areas in the UK. So, the harsh feedback given on Trustpilot appeared exaggerated and

inappropriate, unless those mis-deliveries are an offence to the embedded, fundamental trust into the reliability of the milkmen. And the milkmen know quite well the importance of delivering reliably. I noted on one of the observed rounds where the milkman joined had to deal with some challenges and obstacles that had to be overcome:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 22

“But he made it! In full, as always, and just as the customers like.”

There are, of course, those internal obstacles that must be overcome, such as the missing item issue presented before. And there are those external challenges such as the environment or the weather. Weather is, without doubt, a worth mentioning topic in this context. It is, on the one hand, a common topic in British society, but on the other a real and discernible factor that slows traffic and endangers people. By that, any business is challenged as people cannot drive to work or necessary product supply cannot be distributed within the country. These regular, but unforeseeable challenges are for most people observable. Hence, they appreciate the effort of any service provider who still tries to make it against the weather challenges. So, from customers’ perspective, milkmen **fight the almost overpowering natural forces**. And milkmen’s (unofficial) value proposition (derived from the past and the individual’s engagement to be embedded as a societal expectation on ‘the milkman’) takes that on-board as a central element of their definition of reliability:

Observation 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 15

“As I try to get some more details around ‘what is the special value you deliver to the customer’, he emphasises the ‘reliability of service, no matter the weather and the situation’.”

This response displays the self-perception of many milkmen in regards of: What does it mean to serve reliably? And that contextual understanding of reliability is mirrored by many customers. Within my research, there were several customers that highlighted the service they receive, particularly in snowy or rainy times of the year. And they appreciate ‘being regularly served’ without significant interruptions:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 12

“5-star service’ from our milky, never let us down, never missed no matter how much snow we get, the milks always there for us.”

At this point, it could be questioned if a delivery of milk or any other product can be of such importance that the delivery is, also from a health- and safety-perspective, reasonable in any weather. But that is more an objective, rational element that misses the contextual, subjective view of the business and its reliability. Such a contextually and mutually developed definition of certain services, which deviates significantly to other contexts, defines the business of the milkmen. As mentioned above, no customer would rationally expect a milk home delivery to happen if there is no-one else out there, all roads are closed, and even police officers and firefighters cannot make it. But these are exactly the kinds of situations, in which the milkmen stand out and ‘over-perform’ in comparison to other professions that are valued highly within society. So, it could be stated that the recognisable natural challenges support the perception and conception of ‘the milkman’. Some customers highly value, and point out, these services as a part of ‘milkman’s’ value proposition:

<i>Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 35</i>	<i>Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 48</i>
<i>“I don’t have any complaints about the service at all, very reliable even in bad weather.”</i>	<i>“I know that milk is going to be reliable and delivered for me that morning. I guess, whilst on</i>

	<p><i>occasions in the UK, we do get some bad weather in the wintertime. The country comes to a standstill. Trains stop running. You can't get out. Postmen don't deliver. The milkman is still there. He's there despite whatever weather it is, that guy is there. That is why I personally, I would never ever, ever stop having a milk delivery because it's just reliable."</i></p>
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4. Chapter summary

As these statements outline, there is no doubt about the rhythm and reliability of milk doorstep deliveries served by the milkmen, which can be summarised like so:

All milkmen have their business routines, which also suit their private needs. So, many milkmen have served their customers for decades and have assimilated their lives to the almost daily night shifts and the challenges linked to the profession of 'being a milkman'. Some of the fundamentals of the profession are the invisibility and quietness of deliveries as milkmen serve the community as well as their customers. Throughout the years of repetitive deliveries, the milkmen have gained many individual experiences and have established certain preferences on the way of serving their customers. This is supported by the inherited concept of serving communities, which means: Every milkman is responsible for a certain area and by that, certain parts of the community. Finally, most of the milkmen still claim 'ownership of the relationship to the customers' for themselves, which leads to a stronger identification and dedication to the customers served. Consequentially, many milkmen have gathered relevant insights on 'their customers' to deliver the best service to 'their community'. All that happens constantly, night-to-night and round-by-round. Hence, I have called those phenomena milkmen's rhythms.

Next to the milkmen, there are customers who influence the milkmen's rhythm significantly. But their orders with the milkmen are only a small piece of their own rhythm. For most of them, there is the fundamental need to earn money and by that, the customers' work routines dictate most of their daily rhythms. Furthermore, there are other repetitive routine-like activities such as the shopping behaviour, which are also impacted by individuals' experiences and preferences and, consequentially, their interactions with the milkmen. This becomes particularly relevant as there are fundamental needs of regular food supply, which need to be covered. Thus, most of the customers foresee already the moment of usage when they buy food. Such a moment can be loaded with the simple need of getting food. But it can also be a bigger occasion, which is served the milkmen. And sometimes, it is 'just' a symbol for the 'normal rhythm' of the customers activities and by that, a synonym for 'feeling at home'. All that became visible when analysing the various data sets on hand. As most of them were recognised in the service user sphere and most of them could be linked to the customers' perception, I called those customers' rhythms.

Customers' rhythms and milkmen's rhythms finally just fit together if they are aligned in regards of some aspects such as temporal and local elements. Both elements define the 'place' of regular interaction. And regularity leads to reliability. Next to normal reliability in business context, there stood out one theme that needs to be highlighted separately: The weather. This is quite a British topic, but in regards of the understanding of the business of the milkmen, it is a fundamental aspect as milkmen of all times have fought bad weather and delivered constantly their customers against all adverse circumstances. This is even more relevant to mention as milkmen 'over-perform' in that respect in comparison to other valued professions, such as the postal workers or the police. Interestingly, there might not be too many occasions the milkmen can 'over-perform' in that respect. But due to well-known history of the milkmen and stories told within society, the customers create an own interpretations of the reliability of 'the milkman' and link it to their understanding of the social institution of 'the milkman'.

All that defined the category (reliable) rhythms, which can also be depicted in a graphic and a table like so:


	Milkmen's rhythms
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual rhythms of work routines. • Responsibility for defined areas. • Responsibility for their own businesses.
	Customers' rhythms
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive, routine-like shopping activities. • 'Normal rhythm' at home.
	Reliability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency and regularity of the deliveries. • Fight the almost overpowering natural forces.

Figure 4 Summative depiction of chapter 5 Table 15 Summative table of chapter 5

Chapter 6 | (Contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows

1. Introduction

So, for me, the first word ‘milk’ has now gained a wider contextual meaning: It is not only a standardised product of daily food-consumption. It also represents elements of rhythms embedded in human lives and reliability embedded in the business of the milkmen. That leads to the second term used for the overarching theme of my research: ‘Moon’. It often names, without this research in mind, a heavenly body that is linked to darkness and incorporates an element of romanticisation in many societal tales. In line with that understanding, one of the relevant phenomena observed is called ‘personification’.

2. Personification

As for the latest cited customers, the milkmen incorporate characteristics such as reliability. Such an incorporation is predominantly built on the **individualised activities of real people** (= service providers) who are willing to even fight rain and snow repetitively, on a day-to-day-basis, to deliver against a certain service expectation (of service users). That is why such activities must be central for an in-depth understanding of the embedded value-co-creation process of the business of the milkmen. But it was hard to realise any specific characteristics of the relevant activities, when joining the field. I noted once:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 11

“While talking with me, he is continuing with his service to the customers and I cannot identify anything specific he is doing.”

Even when comparing the various rounds, it was difficult to identify any specific activity or any individual service element that could make a difference to the customers when accessing their doorsteps in the morning. Retrospectively, I realised that it was ‘service’ as in G-D-logic I was looking for. I obviously tried to identify anything ‘on top’ to the delivered services, which might support the perception of the physical products. Examples would have been a special

treatment, any specific arrangements, or some doorstep specific delivery pattern. On the contrary:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 11

“[H]e does not prepare any paper bags with the products at the vehicle, he does not place any products in a specific, individual manner at the doorsteps (just the customers’ milk minders) and he is also not leaving any notes.”

This fieldnote was taken on one of the later rounds. At this moment, I had already seen several milkmen serving their customers in different urban and rural areas. All of them served their customers in particular ways, but none of them really convinced me as an observer of a fundamental, additional, and recognisable value. And it remains difficult for me to understand in retrospect the difference from a customer’s perspective if the products are arranged in a specific order, and why any customer should be willing to pay additional money for these deliveries. But that is exactly why S-D-logic offers an appropriate theoretical framework to me. It focuses on each beneficiary who might be willing to value (even in terms of spending additional money) those small behavioural elements (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a) or anything else, which is perceived as milkmen’s contribution to value. And those small gestures are difficult to observe and understand as most of the milkmen prefer to do deliveries on their own, with little guidance and without a helping hand. Throughout hundreds of doorstep deliveries, they have developed their individual ‘signature move’ on how to handle and place the products at customers’ doorsteps. This special behaviour is not always the most cost- and time-effective way of doing things though, as the following example illustrates:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 29

“At the doorstep, he carries out his ‘service’: Inspecting the area, he looks for a sign telling him where to place them perfectly. He tells me that they

have ordered for the second time and he places the products exactly where he left them on the first delivery. They must be happy with that, as there is no milk minder, or a note under a stone, or any other indication that we are not allowed to put any products down somewhere. He shows me quite clearly that he is arranging the delivery, and I can hold the products and observe/learn: In [his] placement, the milk goes in the middle, the bread closer to the door (in a plastic bag) and the bottled water around the milk. He stares at the artificial arrangement of products to give it a final check and then we return to the vehicle.”

The length of the fieldnote taken already indicates the importance it had to me on that specific night. The routine-like activity to place and check the deliveries in a specific order seemed fundamentally embedded in the behaviour of that milkman. Of course, there were also other milkmen who spent much time on double-checking the deliveries or the doorstep overall, but there was no one else who focused on the arrangement of the various products in the way described in the note above. Somehow, it must have been an implied message to the customer saying that ‘there was someone at your doorstep who took care of everything out here and who took the time needed to arrange the breakfast (and not just the milk home delivery) for you’. And messages like that are inferred by, and appreciated by, customers. They do expect and recognise a certain level of service quality as one customer stated:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 68

“So, it's important that he provides the service for the customer including myself in there when they want it and how they want it.”

Here, the described aspects of time and locality of delivery are the most pronounced. Both are somehow defined by the overall business model, which offers milk home delivery at night. Nevertheless, both dimensions, represented in my research by the ‘place’, still leave enough space for individual

(re-)interpretations. But those interpretations do not rely only on people's imagination. There are many obvious examples of real activities that can be recognised by customers such as opening and closing gates. Such a 'simple' activity can already cause a positive connotations for customers. One customer, for instance, emphasised the relevance of 'closing gates':

Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 81

"I have a dog. And for me, it is important- I get an awful lot of deliveries where people don't. And I live on a very busy road. So, if the dog happens to get out, God forbid, what 'would' happen. But every time he has come, he has closed the gate and that it is a small thing but it's very, very important and I'm very happy with that."

On some of my milk rounds, I observed similar behaviour. It might be surprising that there are apparently any home deliveries done without that fundamental element of 'civil' behaviour within someone's private domain. This is even more surprising as some milkmen deliver, for instance, directly into the porch or a specific location on the doorsteps, as 'their customers' told them to do. So, some deliveries had to be done 'around the corner of the house' or 'at the backdoor'. In one case, I had to place the milk bottles through an open window and directly into the kitchen. And there are also many milkmen who go still further, delivering directly into the very fridge of some of their customers. All these examples are obviously part of the wider value proposition offered to and appreciated by the customers. For such customers, 'the milkman' incorporates such services as well. And the milkmen themselves define their value proposition similarly and in regards of some aspects even wider than that. I gained this impression through one of the milkmen particularly, when I noted:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 16

"He will arrange everything for them."

One of the reasons might be that the milkmen are not only the presented personification of the (more or less) individualised services that are based on their own service definitions. They are also the **embodiment of some professional values** and the business beneath it. Those are obviously still shared within the wider community of milkmen. In line with that contextual understanding, I also expected some kind of (professional) team spirit among milkmen when I asked one of them about his self-perception of the business of the milkmen. I was surprised as the milkman joined did not tell me that ‘one milkman-business’, but a ‘business of one milkman’:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 13

“I am a company director but one that does not get the salary of a company director anymore.”

That statement displays an interesting (self-)definition of the businesses of the milkmen. Aside from the view of singular businesses under the umbrella of the social institution of ‘the milkman’, it also indicates some traditional elements of entrepreneurial businesses. So, I observed one night:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 13

“I feel the spirit of ‘self-made’ entrepreneurship and of a ‘Rockefeller’ (dishwasher to billionaire).”

But even if both presented statements might illustrate that it is not just about the money milkmen earn and have. From my perspective, it is also about the ‘ownership of their relationships to their customers’. Various milkmen have put that quite plainly to me. One milkman said:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 32

“These are my customers. Within the last five years almost all of them stayed with me. They know me’.”

Similar statements were told quite often to me. Those display a relevant aspect of the business and value proposition of the milkmen: There is the mentioned feeling of ‘owning the customer-relationship’. That expression might fit the context, but sounds strange, as a relationship is not a physical asset that can be owned or sold. But obviously, some milkmen are convinced that it is their (created) asset, which is (solely) based on their reliable service delivered. That is why, from their perspective, customers (should) know their milkmen in person.

So, it is quite interesting that the cited milkman connected the number of customers, which is a relevant internal Key Performance Indicator, to his personal effort and the individualised services provided. That is even more relevant, as there is still a relevant decrease of customer numbers overall. But surprisingly, I have never met a milkman who ‘lost’ any of his or her customers. Most of the milkmen see the presented (positive) connection between the customers and their service proposition. It could even be said that many of them see a strong causality in regards of their ‘good’ service leading to ‘stable’ customer numbers in their area.

But individuals’ perception is not only built on many individual experiences, but also on societal interpretations and common sets of values within the society and the community of milkmen. So, from my perspective, milkmen are also the **embodiment of some societal values**. That is something that became clear to me on several milk rounds I joined, even if these milkmen did not represent the all milkmen, universally. But their comparable behaviour indicated that there is an underlying collective understanding of certain (professional) values within the community of milkmen. It feels like there is a collective understanding in place, which embeds the expected services and the presumed contribution to the served community. As I was a participating observer, some of the milkmen also taught me those sets of values. One milkman explained:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 15

“Money is not the most important thing in life’ and ‘we cannot take money with us.”

Such a note offers relevant insights into the business of the milkmen and displays my early-stage researcher’s view. I compared and analysed the financial benefits and the correlation of working times to workload. I also considered (indirectly) the physical needs of the job and reflected (negatively) on the repetitive element of the work. At that point, I did not see many reasons that might be worth working for. It was, in the beginning, purely a food home delivery service for me that was guided and directed by the supplying company. From my early understanding, it was Milk & More that defines the values relevant to the business and the people working in there. But the longer I participated and observed the context of the milkmen, the more I realised that there are certain aspects of those businesses that are different to many other businesses I had been working for. And these elements seem to be important to milkmen. One of the most important aspects is the feeling of being responsible for the community served. In that respect I had one impressive meeting with a milkman. The milkmen I joined ran faster through the darkness of the streets than others. Hence, I asked him the reason for the speed, which reminded me of a professional runner. Through this dialogue, we also touched on his hobby: Running marathons. His elaborations were wider and socially enriched, but referred also to the business of the milkmen in some way:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 12

“He is not just running for himself or his health. He is also doing it to fundraise for an association supporting disabled children. By doing this, he not only supports the community, he contributes to society. I could feel the pride he had and – to be honest – it was very impressive to hear him talking about the lifetime project of supporting others and seeing the world as he sees it. Last time he raised more than £15k from his marathon, which was worth having at least two days of pain afterwards. He tells me

that the milk rounds right after the last event were really tough ones – but he made it.”

Here, it needs to be mentioned that it was not only private talk. He had asked mainly his customers for the fund-raising, which means on the one hand that the private and the business worlds blurred. On the other, he actively represents societal values to his community by talking to his business customers about such privately motivated marathon events. Fund-raising-activities on marathon events are common in the UK and so, it must not be overstated in that respect. It might also be that the story itself was mainly shared to teach me general values in life and the importance of caring for others. But the stories I heard about him in the team told me that he behaves as he said. He really asked his customers during money collection and by leaving notes for his fund-raising project. Throughout the research project I met several milkmen behaving similarly. But there exist, of course, other milkmen who do not do any private fund-raising or indeed, any activities within their own community. Nevertheless, the discussion and the way of mixing private and business values outlined its importance to that specific milkman and his customers.

And, as mentioned, other milkmen indicated a similar understanding of their societal role within the community, which fed into my understanding that it is a central part of the meaning of ‘being a milkman’. Oppositely, there are also many customers who see those elements of community care as a fundamental part of the milkmen’s value proposition today. Nevertheless, from my perspective, such a discussion on the value of the milkmen to their communities is a challenge as there exist other companies that undertake charitable activities on an even more professional basis (e.g., The Red Cross). And the milkmen’s role is predominantly not to support those organisations, as they are, primarily, part of a (profit generating) business. But that business has apparently built its own values on the back of approximately four centuries of human kindness and community care as my elaborations might have already demonstrated. Hence, it must be noted that **community care** is also still a perceived service of the milkmen.

Next to that, there are also other societal values met in my research context. Customers also appreciated the eco-friendly, sustainable set-up of the business, for instance. That appreciation can be linked to an actual discussion in Great Britain that was heavily promoted (or prompted) by the ‘Blue Planet’ movies by Sir David Attenborough. Based on that, a UK-wide discussion started in the beginning of 2018 and strengthened many individuals’ awareness. Consequently, some customers now reflect more contentiously on pollution and plastics in day-to-day life. Some of them intentionally seek a convenient solution for their lifestyle and their routines. One customer told me in an interview of the advantages of ‘having a milkman’:

Interview 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 20

“[!]t’s a good way to go especially cutting out plastic [...].”

Such a statement summarises challenges customers face in their lives when confronted with a society-wide discussion. Some products become more expensive if different packaging is used, others cannot be ordered without the protective plastic packaging at all. So, even if customers care strongly about sustainability and becoming plastic-free in their households, there are certain industrial and economic limits that cannot be overcome easily. Nevertheless, the analysis of the various data sets demonstrate customers’ expectation of a modern business to be environmentally friendly and sustainable. Many customers try, maybe also pushed by society’s ongoing discussion (= conformity to socially accepted norms), to improve their own ecological footprint by becoming ‘plastic-free’. And many customers know that this is just a small contribution to the global environment and that some of their effort is completely lost within the wider system. But by behaving like so, customers contribute or at least get the sense of contributing. That is supported by the business of the milkmen, as the milkmen distribute products representing those values.

In that respect, it might also be supportive to some people to have a visible sign for their sustainable thoughts. In my research context, this is the milk in glass

bottles which ‘fights’ the plastic bottles. The milk glass bottles, mainly used by the milkmen for several (although not all!) kinds of milk, fits into that presented core social value of sustainability and eco-friendliness. These bottles are ‘iconic’ for today’s business of the milkmen as they are part of milkmen’s traditions: “[T]he first glass bottles appeared around 1880, and aqua and coloured glass bottles came in about 1910” (Ward, 2016, p.206). Nowadays, glass is a more prominent aspect of differentiation of the milkmen’s proposition versus other food suppliers in the fast-moving consumer goods arena as supermarket chains do commonly not use them (chapter 1.3). But there is one more aspect that needs to be added: The trippage. One of the main claims of Milk & More’s milkmen refers to the trippage. The average re-usable life of the milk glass bottles is due to internal calculations more than 25 times (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.4).

That obviously supports the ongoing public discussion of sustainability, encourages many customers to reflect carefully on their current shopping routines and to consider the environmental impact of their behaviour. One customer stated online in that respect:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 17

“[It is] better to use recyclable bottles.”

This sounds like a summary of a constructive analytical process and indicates that the specific customer had contemplated on the different packaging options commonly used in food industry, particularly in regards of liquids. Other customers also reflected on the already established day-to-day processes, which are embedded in their daily routines. Consequentially, they remarked on the process and on society’s view, for example:

Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 24

“Obviously, the view is glass milking bottles are recyclable so, you just leave your empty bottle out for the milkman, and it is picked up next day.”

Such a statement indicates from a customer's perspective that there is an automatism, a routine of picking the 'empties' at the doorsteps. This represents the embedded and appreciated recycling process, which is apparently a relevant element of the value proposition offered by the milkmen. Such a process supports customers' idea of **environmental kindness and sustainability**. Consequentially, it might also be a good reason for the business of the milkmen that invites the customers to order with 'the milkman' that "[a]n empty milk bottle on a doorstep is one of the greatest symbols of recycling ever constructed" (Ward, 2016, p.208). And in absence of other actors, milkmen offer, as monopoly, the incorporation of 'being plastic-free' milk via their iconic symbol: The glass bottle.

3. Place and time

Next to these phenomena gathered and named 'personification', there were also other phenomena identified, which relate to the specific, anthropologically defined 'place', as an incorporation of local and temporal aspects. They are presented, next to other phenomena observed, in the upcoming sections in more detail.

3.1 'Invisibly visible'

So, the mentioned milk glass bottle is, from my understanding, not only a symbol for the sustainable focus of customers, but also an operational symbol used by customers during interaction with their milkmen. Hence, from an academic perspective, those bottles are also artefacts that represent the contextual symbolism and its values (Nilsson & Bellantyne, 2014). During the night, there are few people about to see that there are service providers driving around who deliver milk and other products to Britain's doorsteps. Not even customers see the real activity of milk being delivered. It is only the pick-up-process in the morning that makes them aware of various activities occurring on their doorsteps at night. But surprisingly to me, there are few customers who really want to get a better understanding of those activities. Some of them do not even want to meet their milkman in person as the next example depicts:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 66*“I don't need to see him- I don't need to see him.”*

Such a clear statement in an interview was strange to me as I expected people to be strongly interested in knowing the people who access their private domain at night. Consequently, I asked myself, and the customers in the semi-structured interviews, whether there are any other occasions, in which they meet their milkmen in person. But that was commonly negated by most of the customers interviewed, and there was no different indication given throughout any of my interview sessions. Thus, the value of the business of the milkmen seems to be heavily linked to factors other than ‘just’ the specific individuals’ behaviours and obvious services, as described so far. There are, of course, some milkmen serving the area they grew up and where they know everyone and everything. By that, there are some relationships that are based on further (private) background information. Due to their length of service, it might also be that some milkmen had the chance over time to meet some of their customers personally and get somehow emotionally connected to them. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to imagine that all milkmen regularly invest time during daylight, or their customers get up regularly at night to meet each other. So, the glass bottles of milk (and all the other products) on the doorstep are, finally, symbols for the entire value proposition of ‘the milkman’. Both groups of actors realise most of the time solely these symbols.

But differently to the customer’s statement presented before, it did not feel right for some people to know so little about people being that close to their privacy. Hence, as there is insightful information on the ‘real’ activities and people missing, some customers create a story on ‘real and fictive data’ by gathering the obvious impressions and linking them to their individual experiences and imaginations. People can see the (very well known) place, the ‘doorstep’, where everything happens, and they realise that there was some activity and elements of physical interaction happening at night. From their perception and retrospective interpretation, there was a (male) milkman, maybe between 40 and 50 years of age. He turned up by 2A.M., opened the gate, put milk glass bottles into the milk

minder, took the empty bottles away, and closed the gate again. In between he also checked the surroundings and left without disturbing anyone as the next sections demonstrate. For the customers, all that feels just like ‘magic’:

Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 12

“There was always something quite magical about opening the door in the morning and there was some kind of milk and a loaf of bread or something.”

Consequentially, customers link the services perceived to an ‘invisible force’ that manages the movements of physical goods to a specific space restricted in access. As the doorstep is commonly the entrance to people’s homes, one of the most secured places in people’s mind-set, where most people would only like to imagine very few others performing work on their behalf. If that statement is just slightly turned around, it cannot be a ‘normal human being’ that performs those invisible services. Thus, it is finally the imagination of the customers that elevates the person of the milkman, next to the social institution in its entirety, and by that, the services proposed to a different level. There were quite some customers who stated in that respect a version of the following:

Interview 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 92

“I’ve never met him, never seen him. He’s just a magician – milk turns up.”

Behind the scenes, that (almost daily) moment of magic requests quite some effort and offers some challenges to the milkmen. Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, I became aware of some of those, particularly, of the challenges of darkness. And the more rounds I joined, the more familiar I became with the night-time and various levels of darkness. As I wrote in my fieldnotes once:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 18

"[I]t is the darkest of all rounds I have been on so far."

In the day-to-day deliveries, milkmen use lights and torches to overcome some of the challenges of the night. But due to my observations, most milkmen use light very carefully as they do not want to wake their customers or disturb their community. The following note displays that observation:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 16

"Occasionally, but not very often, he turns on the light at the back of the vehicle where the products sit."

More specifically, I experienced milkmen's diligence not to disturb the community on one round, when a milkman tried to be completely 'invisible' to his customers:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 21

"So, he drove without lights and for the last 50 metres, he stopped the vehicle and did it by foot."

It might be difficult to imagine for someone who has not been in the field, but: The doorsteps of about 300-400 customers a night can look very much the same. It is a challenge to know all these places from memory, even when I was doing these rounds more often. I wrote once in my fieldnotes:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 22

"In dark surroundings where he orientates himself by only things like trees or stones, but not numbers or street signs. 'I would not recognise the place if I was here during daylight'."

That example summarises one of the fundamental physical challenges of the night: It is dark. Therefore, the milkmen commonly appreciate any light given to them to help brighten up the darkest nights. But it is not only light and the description of the surroundings that help to assure an adequate delivery service at night. It is also the customer who tries to lend support with different additional symbols and signs. Sometimes, there are special signs, such as milk clocks; sometimes, there are white milk minders to highlight the place where the milk bottles should be placed. Sometimes, there are stones that mark the right place or guide the milkmen in the right direction. Such signs told me in the field, that the milkmen and the customers share an understanding of the challenges, such as orientation at night. All that is, in my understanding, part of the ‘contextual understanding’ and ‘contextual language’ created mutually by the actors involved over time.

At the same time, the darkness of the night offers another dimension of a well-known surrounding for subjective interpretation and projections, too. So, a ‘place’ in the darkness of the night supports any kind of fiction and interpretation done by human beings. This is, for instance, similarly used in other contexts (e.g., Christmas). But it is difficult to ‘see’ those fictive and real phenomena. Hence, I appreciated any indication or support given by the milkmen I joint. And, by that, I started to see and realise those contextual elements as well. Once it was about a specific note waiting for me with a message they pre-empted; once it was coins left outside (including a fixed ‘tip’ amount) and once it was a special arrangement of the empties. All these small signs and symbols helped me to ‘see’ the darkness of the night from a different viewpoint. Sometimes, it seemed to me as if I were in a ‘parallel world’ I have not recognised or seen so far.

But it is difficult for anyone to recognise these services, which are delivered at night as the milkmen themselves try actively to be invisible. On several rounds, it was observable that the milkmen took specific care of the noise they create on the doorsteps, for instance, by the driving of the milk floats and the handling of the crates. So, some customers do not even recognise the deliveries:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 65

“The milkman is very quiet, and I very rarely hear him.”

Here, it becomes obvious that there is a behavioural service element that could impact the individually perceived value and, by that, the ‘price’ for the received services. But in my opinion, there are also services given to people who are not customers of the business. Thus, I got the impression that the milkmen I joined were serving not only their customers and the doorsteps they delivered to. These milkmen gave me the impression that they serve the entire community with their behaviour of ‘being quiet’.

But the aim of ‘being quiet’ is not only a challenge of today’s milkmen. It has always been one of the central elements of the milkmen’s value proposition as other authors have noted. In former times “one company experimented with rubber horseshoes to quiet the horses’ hooves, but they were abandoned as they caused lameness. Concerned about the noise of their early morning deliveries, dairies introduced pneumatic tyres to floats from 1932 and, although the drawn float was the main method of delivery, some electric milk floats were appearing by the early 1930s” (Phelps, 2010, p.28).

3.2 ‘Unknown known’

These behavioural aspects of the business of the milkmen might be unsurprising as some of them are part of the established understanding of ‘how to behave at night’, when most people stay in bed and sleep. What is surprising to me is that the milkmen represent a different role and a widely-shared contextual interpretation as well: The ‘shadows of the dark night cover danger and crime’. For many customers, the milkmen are the ‘good cops’ who check the surroundings and fight danger and crime (alongside police officers). That was expressed distinctly by one customer within the semi-structured interview session:

Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 29

“[I have a] warm feeling that there was also somebody else out there that would look out for you.”

It could be questioned if someone who does up to 300 deliveries to doorsteps per night in a wider area may not be exactly at the right moment at the right place to take care of anyone, particularly in the moment of danger or crime. And I assume that most customers know about the likelihood that their milkman is around to support if any danger arises at night (e.g., a burglary). It is also not reflected if the milkmen would even be capable to deal with situations like that as it might cause danger to them personally. Here, it could be mentioned that it was not uncommon in former times that there were robberies on milk floats to take the money collected from doorsteps. That risk might have been lowered with the introduction of new payment methods, like debit and credit card payments, but still: There is food and products of some value loaded on the milk float and the vehicle itself is also worth some money. But these objectively recognisable risks are forgotten by the customers by their own impressions and interpretations of the night and its risks to themselves. And those interpretations are commonly based on few first-hand experiences and considerable contextual projection that is derived from stories and rumours shared within the specific community or the society overall. One of the later interview sessions that displayed such a contextual interpretation quite well to me:

Interview 09 – MAXQDA paragraph 46

“You hear stories, don't you? Some of these stories get publicised, where the milkman has scared a burglar or found someone who's collapsed or something. From those sorts of experiences and knowledge or hearings that have gone on, yes, there's a service there that I'm quite pleased to have, not necessarily for my own protection but for my mother or someone like that that has the delivery. It's nice to know that the milkman knows that if her milk didn't go indoors that there might be a problem and would

be there to raise an alarm rather than rely on neighbours and things. Yes, there's a service that they provide there, I believe."

That elaboration summarises the view of many customers I met throughout my research project. Few people have ever faced any real risky situation at night, but most of them can imagine any number of dangerous situations. In consequence, they elevate anyone up who is regularly and voluntarily out there facing exactly those (most of the time created) challenges and risks. They show, from my understanding, respect to the night shift-street-force by spreading these vague stories and by concretising certain risks they could imagine occurring in their own surroundings. The colourful and lively description presented clearly illustrates, in a clear manner, the individual's projection and interpretation process, which finally leads to respect for 'the milkman'. And this respect can become part of the service perception and, by that, part of the value proposition of 'the milkman'. For such customers, the value proposition offered is enriched with an unspecific and mainly created service element that is strongly built on customers' own contextual understandings. Many milkmen know about that service expectation:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 14

"[H]e tells me that his customers love him to take care of the neighbourhoods by driving around at night."

Nevertheless, milkmen are afraid of the challenges of the night as well. So, I noted on one of the rounds observed:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 22

"[H]e has never experienced any robbery, but he does not feel too safe in the night."

Nevertheless, the milkman observed knew that it is, from the customers' perspective, 'the milkman' who detects, protects, and prevents. It is, in their understanding, part of their well-known and trusted institution. And although most of the customers know that there is little help given by a milkman who drives around all night long, most of them agree to the summary given by one customer of an emotionally driven interpretation of the business of the milkmen:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 149

"I think I've had my milk stolen on the doorstep. There are undesirables around, but there's an element of peace of mind that says three days a week Steve's gonna be driving around this thicket of woods, and whether that actually acts as, not only a first alarm, but also an element of prevention."

Such a statement was, in the beginning, quite strange to me, as I heard statements uttered that are usually linked to police officers: Police officers are expected to drive around and take care of the neighbourhoods at night. So, the role of the milkmen obviously, as indicated before, has on-boarded some elements of other professions and functions that have a positive connotation to people. Here, it is important to mention that the milkmen do not take over the role of police officers at night, but they become, from a customer's and their own contextual understanding, responsible for some parts of what is seen as the role of police officers. Therefore, it seems to be less important if the milkmen are legally obliged and enforced to act like that. Customers simply like the idea of 'someone trusted being around'. These impressions might tie back to the long tradition of the business of the milkmen, described in the situational context, which showed the on-boarded charity function on WW I and WW II as well as the overall change to a widely trusted person. And milkmen proactively 'sell' these services to their customers and to me:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 18

“I am out in the field for more time than the police’ and ‘I ‘would’ recognise if something goes wrong’.”

So, the milkmen themselves compare their services to the services provided by the police to their commonly shared community. Once more, it is more the community of milkmen than ‘just’ their specific customer. In regards of these wider services, I asked myself several questions throughout the research. These questions dealt mainly with the underlying idea of the business of the milkmen of being the ‘eyes and ears of the community’ such as ‘what could go wrong’ or ‘how should a milkman recognise if there is anything different?’ One customer had certain examples about this:

Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 50

“You hear about a milkman that will maybe see that milk hasn't gone in from an elderly person [...]. It's nice thinking that there's that extra pair of eyes that are just looking out for people.”

Thus, these invisible servers might still be indistinct and faceless in the mind of customers, but they are the ‘concrete’ eyes and ears of the community that take care of their surroundings. Based on such an interpretation of the offered services, some customers echoed the following statement:

Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 12

“[T]he milkman is a pillar of the community. He's eyes and ears. He sees exactly what goes on. He drives down the street at night-time. If something seems untoward, if something down that street that isn't normally there, it will raise an eyebrow to that milkman.”

And, from my experiences in the business role, it is also not uncommon that some milkmen see something that does not look normal to them. One board member presented some of those internally known examples to the press. “A couple of weeks ago there was a burglary’, says Mueller. ‘It wasn’t even a customer, but the milkman drove by, saw an open door, looked what was happening and found a very frightened mother and her three-year daughter in the front room. He called the police and went back three times to check the police had arrived” (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.8). Such stories are widely known across the UK, which suit and constantly build ‘the milkman’s’ reputation and socially shared understanding. And, as mentioned above, it has already become part of the value proposition to many customers as milkmen have saved many people’s lives in the past when, for instance, when houses were burning, such as in 1923 in Lambeth, in 1972 in Cambridge or in 2003 in Cumbria (see: Ward, 2016, pp.116). Those examples describe nicely the common sense of the milkmen’s value proposition as being the “dawn patrol” (Ward, 2016, p.118).

But there is also another phenomenon, which comes along with the business model and which I would like to focus in here, as it strongly impacts the self-perception of the milkmen: Loneliness. Milkmen drive through their neighbourhoods and distribute to their area like ‘lonesome wolves’. So, the aspect of being lonely is a relevant characteristic of the profession that needs to be considered when it comes to the unique value proposition. From my perspective, it becomes relevant as it is finally each milkman that creates the individual value proposition to customers by delivering, arranging or only by behaviour. There is commonly no ‘second pair of eyes’ taking care of the surrounding. ‘Being lonely’ or ‘on their own’ starts for the milkmen in the depots where all activity is focused and done in absolute silence and with little interaction to depot staff or other milkmen. I recognised on several of my joined rounds:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 5

“In common with all the other times, no one really spoke to me. All other milkmen I meet in the centre (I guess around five) are walking around and working alone. No one really talks more than required.”

Nevertheless, even if no one was interactively speaking, it felt retrospectively like a group of people sharing (wordlessly) a mutual understanding of the business and common values. That might be based on similar experiences they have gathered on the various, dark deliveries they do every night. Furthermore, they all see, recognise, and face similar obstacles and challenges that need to be overcome every night. Some are linked to the environment, others to the supplying company. But the overarching theme seems to be the loneliness they face when they are out there in the field. This is, from some depot managers I spoke to, the reason mentioned the most when new starters leave the business within the first two to three months. In the field, some milkmen do not even have radio on board to sweeten the trip. They are completely on their own: Alone (but not lost) in the dark. Hence, I assumed, they are happy about anyone, or any animal, they meet:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 14

“His friends in the field are the cats and the foxes we are greeting whenever we see one.”

This behaviour was not recognised only by me and only on that round, but is rather known and recognised. Andrew Ward (2016) cited one milkwoman who reflected on her time in the field: “I spoke to animals, such as cats, and looked at gardens. I looked around, watched the seasons change, saw front doors changing colour, what washing was hanging” (p.60). Such a behaviour was expected by me as the kind of work has an element of repetitive monotony that is most of the time only disrupted by these animals. In former days, there was also another animal that joined the round and accompanied the milkmen: ‘The horse’. Nowadays, it is ‘the friendly milk float’ that joins the milkmen, night-to-night, and no matter what weather. Consequently, the vehicle is an important topic to them when they discuss their work context:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 14

“The only complaints he appears to have concern the street scooter (I think it is his horse). The street scooter is female from his point of view and sometimes, he speaks to her.”

That automatically made connection of the milk float, and the delivering horse I created when listening to that milkman could have been an outcome of the background analysis, I had done at that time in regards of the milkmen’s history. Hence, I noted on a different round:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 18

“Grass’ might be the bridge to the ‘horse’ older milkmen used to have to deliver around the streets of their era. The horse would continue walking slowly down the street and the milkman could focus on delivering and did not have to come back to the vehicle all the time. That is at least the story he tells me when it comes to the diesel truck we are driving. And within that context it becomes obvious that a car means something special.”

This verbal elaboration given by a milkman illustrates how background information and existing knowledge influences a researcher’s perception and interpretation of any observed phenomena (Akaka & Vargo, 2013). But that interpretation came along with some other observations I did at that time. Consequentially, it felt to me as if some of the milkmen behave like lonesome ‘sheriffs of the night’.

Hence, it could be summarised that I saw the milkmen sometimes as ‘sheriffs’ protecting their communities, sometimes they were independent ‘shadows of the night’. So, it is not surprising that other authors state in that respect: “It’s every man for himself, it would make a marvellous film” (Ward, 2016, p.12).

4. Nostalgia

Marvellous films need actors that create relevant stories for the audience, such as my milkmen. In that context, there are many of such stories told, which refer to events in the present or the past, which are often 'romanticised' to become nostalgia. One customer said in the semi-structured interview session:

Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 20

"It's the heritage. The heritage goes back over 100 years since milk deliveries first started. Many, many years ago, you would have dare I say it, wheelbarrows with milk churns. The milkman will walk down the street, and they would shout out, 'Milk. Milk.' Customers would look out they windows, see the milkman and they would come out with their jugs. The old milkman, from his churn, would fill up those jugs with milk, and they would take it in. That just continued over all throughout the wartime. Then, if you go back to even as far back as the late 80s, early 90s, I think the figures would tell us there was about 93% of the customers in the UK were buying their milk from the milkman. It's something in Britain that we're extremely proud of because there isn't many other delivery services that you would get, dare I say, in the world that are launched just in the UK that would have the trust like they do in their milkman."

Such detailed and illustrative descriptions display the widely-shared understanding and the widely-shared interpretation of the business of the milkmen. This knowledge is built on various sources. Milkmen's customers have a degree of relevant knowledge on the business and its historic roots. They have gathered individual impressions when growing up at home. Hence, they have some personal, individual experiences with the services that they experienced with their parents or siblings. One customer reflected on those experiences in retrospection:

Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 6

“I suppose because my parents had a milkman, so it was probably that introduced me to it to an extent. Yes, I guess that I carried on from maybe my parents.”

So, ‘having a milkman’ has already become part of the tradition and the heritage of some customers in the UK that is and needs to be given to the next generation. In line with that, almost all customers interviewed described a specific, personal situation they thought of when talking about the business of the milkmen. It felt to me quite often as if there are childhood memories awoken. The next table summarises some exemplary statements related to that phenomenon:

Interview 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 16	Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 29	Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 12	Interview 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 6	Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 30
<p><i>“Yes, as a small child I always remember there were milk bottles on the doorstep, the classic images of the cream on top of the milk bottles, which is the classic image. I tried to stop the blue <i>tit</i> pecking the top of the bottles to steal the cream, which they always tried to do.”</i></p>	<p><i>“However, to me a milkman reminds me of my childhood, where we did have genuinely the milkman would come, he would leave the milk um, and you'd be waiting for it. And it's just got a very warm, family feel because at that time, you knew exactly who your milkman was, you know, you'd get extras, you'd cancel less but there was a really good</i></p>	<p><i>“We grew up with the milkman and little glass milk bottles or all that stuff. I guess part of the milkman was probably a lot more known in my childhood, in the '70s, and then I guess into the '80s because there's more adverts on TV. You tended to see more milkmen I guess.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Yes. We had a German shepherd dog that bit the milk lady. I remember that when I must have been around about six and I had a flask in that time, in the '80s. Kids had very plastic chunky flasks, very different to what they were now and mine has an ‘E’ on it. It was only when I started to work within the milk industry years ago for Express Dairies that I</i></p>	<p><i>“My mom would go mad because I would go in the fridge, I would pop the lid on the bottle of milk, and I will just drink the milk out of the bottle as it was, and she'll be saying, ‘Stephen, use the glass on the side. Put the milk in the glass. We've got to use that milk afterwards.’ It used to taste so fresh, and it still does now. If you were to drink milk out of a poly-bottle rather than</i></p>

Interview 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 16	Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 29	Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 12	Interview 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 6	Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 30
	<i>relationship between the customer and the milkman and it was just really nice, a warm feeling that there was also somebody else out there that would look out for you.”</i>		<i>realised that that was a milk flask back from the milkman. It was something that was given away by the milkman at that time.”</i>	<i>a glass bottle, you would tell the difference.”</i>

All these statements have in common that they connect positive, situational emotions with the milkmen who have delivered milk to their doorsteps. The delivery persons are not named in these descriptions and the exact services are not described in more detail. Not a single customer highlighted specific outstanding services they received at those times, which could be linked to a specific person rather than the entire profession. And none of the statements described any issues caused to the served community, such as noise caused by the milk deliveries throughout the night or any other negative issue that might have arisen when the milk did not turn up right in time, in full or in the right quality. This is interesting, as those aspects were highlighted most critically by customers in my research when it came to current supply. That is even more surprising as challenges in regards of milk supply are not solely an issue of the 21st century. There have been challenges in the 1980s and 1990s of the last century as well. But it appears that customers extract positive emotions, glorify the past and load these remembered situations with nostalgic elements. Such an interpretative approach might be confirmed by the iconic, traditional, self-same milk glass bottles, which are, as mentioned before, still a recognisable and relevant symbol for the business of the milkmen. Those nostalgic service elements received and perceived by today's customers were also mirrored and adopted by today's milkmen who have already taken over the business from the previous generation (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018). So finally, it is a mutually shared understanding of the context served that is heavily loaded with many individual memories, nostalgic elements, and individuals' heritage. The Grocer Dairyman (2018) summarised that like so: "[I]t brings back memories of how it was when they were young" (p.8). Those memories become finally part of the overall understanding and, by that, of the value proposition of the business of the milkmen, as one customer explained to me:

Interview 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 24

"[I]t's historically part of the British mentality."

And it is not just that customer who highlights the importance and relevance of 'being part of the British memory'. Another customer sees that strong connotation of the profession to British society, history, and culture as well and links the contextual understanding to various, previously presented, values in the following statement:

Interview 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 20

"It's just something that's always been there as a part of the British culture. I mean, yes, it's faded out for sort of our generation because many people haven't used it and found it more convenient to get to the shops but it's a good way to go especially cutting out plastic, which reduces plastic input."

So, there are apparently many customers who load their view of their milkmen with various aspects that are relevant to them, and which are commonly linked to positive, emotional situations. Here, it is the combination of the societally relevant values that request a specific behavioural service element of contextual romanticisation. Both have been described so far.

But many customers are also 'missing' the element of personal interaction nowadays that has obviously operationally been more relevant in the 'golden age'. From a business perspective, it must be recaptured briefly that formerly, there were not just several rounds a day, there was also 'canvassing' and 'cash collection' done by the milkmen themselves. Those services were a relevant, interactive part of the business and had to be done during daylight. Here, milkmen had more personal contact with their customers. Consequentially, it can be assumed, there had been more interaction on Britain's doorsteps in previous times compared to today's milk home delivery. Additionally, it must be stated that many more home delivery people rang the bell on Britain's doorsteps in former times. And nowadays, there are, from a customer's perspective, not many of them left. One customer explained this perspective to me:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 31

“I think he's important to the community for me, I think he is very important to the community, I think he is the last service provider of the old traditional England. In the old traditional England, you have the milkman, you have the veg man, you'd have the coal man, you would have the um, all of these- the gas man as in the kind of alternative fuel. He's the last one of those traditional English services.”

That statement assumes that all these home delivery services were relevant for Britain's communities, and that the concept of 'the milkman' is the last one who still represents their commonly shared values, such as 'being responsible for the served community'. This might be an advantage or a disadvantage. Negatively, it could be said that this is 'the last Mohican'. Positively, it could be assumed that 'the milkman' is, as the last of its kind, more loaded with all the positive elements of the positive experiences and connotations gathered by today's customers with all of their kind. Consequently, it could be said that the social institution of 'the milkman' carries many nostalgic elements of those other professions, as today's customers grew up with these diverse service providers on the doorsteps. And in consequence, the milkmen took over some of the positive pre-judgements other service providers had strongly to work for. That finally, could have supported the already mentioned element of 'trust', as one customer described in the interview session:

Interview 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 24

“We don't question a postman walking down the path, we don't generally question those sorts of people. [...] For some reason in the British mentality is the postman, the milkman, they are just the trusted professionals that we expect to deliver a service in the appropriate manner and that's just what it is, really”

That ties back to the elaborations before, which highlighted the embedded nature of ‘the milkman’ in British society’s mind-set. This is, from my perspective, a relevant element of the value proposition of today’s milkmen. Milkmen reflected on that development as well:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 10

“[He] believes that he is probably the ‘last who will serve these customers’. Some decades ago, there were eight milkmen required to service this area but as customers declined, one by one they all went...”

That statement not only deals with the phenomenon of the ‘last Mohican’, but there is also another element depicted that should be mentioned: The age of the customers. There was no analysis of customers’ average age available to me, but the customer descriptions I received on the various rounds indicated that a considerable proportion of customers who order with the milkmen are above the age of 50. Most of them might still remember the ‘golden age’ of the business of the milkmen (chapter 1.3), in which almost every household in the UK had milk delivered to the doorstep. Hence, it is no surprise that one customer stated:

Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 197

“It’s quite nostalgic for me having milk in a glass bottle.”

Thus, nostalgia is, from my perspective, one of the central elements today’s value proposition is built on.

5. Chapter summary

Further aspects in that respect dealt with the personification of various ‘soft elements’ or the specific time and place, at which the relevant interaction happens. I gathered and called them (contextual) romanticisation.

Any kind of romanticisation requires some data for a 'story'. In that respect, there are many phenomena that became obvious in the section concerning personification. Milkmen of all times have been real human beings who act and re-act to their surroundings and, even if they are not constantly seen, the results of their nightly activities become visible and are recognisable. On top to their own activities, today's professional successors inherited the positive and negative characteristics of prior milkmen. This is mainly due to two aspects: First, today's milkmen embody some professional values and behaviours, which support the impression of 'one milkman' serves all customers. Secondly, today's milkmen continue a tradition of milkmen's characteristics by serving similar products or in a comparable manner. This is combined with a fundamental element of 'civil' behaviour within someone's private domain and an embedded conformity to socially accepted norms. All that is finally actively supported by the milkmen themselves as the milkmen actively (re-)present relevant societal values to the wider community, such as sustainability and eco-friendliness. And as there is still enough space left for individual (re)interpretation, customers finally create their own imagines of the concept of 'the milkman', which are nevertheless in many ways consistent across all customers, as it is built on many similar elements.

These elements sometimes rely on individual meetings between the milkmen and their customers on doorsteps over the times of deliveries. Hence, the imaginations can be quite specific in some cases. But most of the time, these personal interactions are quite limited, as both actors involved are separated like day and night. Their activities occur at the same place but at various times of the day. So, the interaction process is most of the time asynchronous. Nevertheless, the results of the milkmen's activities become visible and are recognisable by the customers. Hence, it feels like an 'invisible force' manages the movements of physical goods to a space that is restricted in access. And there is some kind of (daily) 'moment of magic' happening to each customer.

But the 'magical' milkmen's deliveries are also loaded with further, emotionally driven aspects rooted mainly in the individuals' contextual interpretation. People often try to protect their property and set physical obstacles such as the gate to aggravate the access. Hence, they also appreciate if there is someone trusted

out there who protects their neighbourhood. That is, why some of them call the milkmen ‘the eyes and ears of the community’. By that, the milkmen adopt some elements of other professions and functions that have a positive connotation to people such as the police officers. And this is an element that does not only serve the customers ordering with the milkmen. It is a perceived service that the milkmen deliver to the entire community they deliver to. All that is finally a mix of missing observational impressions and subjective (re-)interpretations that finally make customers create stories on the business of the milkmen. Similar interpretations are made by the milkmen who deliver throughout the night and observe many changes in their neighbourhood, but rarely meet people. Consequentially, they also build stories based on (limited) perceived impressions and subjective (re-)interpretations on their customers.

The missing, or at least limited, element of personal interaction might be one of the central elements that finally built my category called ‘nostalgia’. Supportive in that respect might be the average age of the customers. They still know the ‘golden age’ of the business of the milkmen, and most of them know this kind of doorstep deliveries from their childhoods. So, it is not uncommon that customers extract the positive emotions and glorify the past and load these remembered situations with nostalgic elements. In addition to that, there are few other home delivery persons left. In former times, there were many more services delivered to and much more interaction happened on the customers’ doorsteps. These various doorstep salespeople shared many societal values in the past. Their professions were, retrospectively, also loaded by customers with nostalgic, transfigured interpretation that rubbed off to the ‘last Mohican’: ‘The milkman’. By that, the milkmen become living legends and a tradition that is inherited by the older generations.

And in combination with the other described phenomena, I recognised a (contextual) romanticisation in the research context that is offered by the business of the milkmen to the service users who appreciate quite often the remembrance to ‘the good old times’. All that could be depicted in a graphic and a table like so:



Figure 5 Summative depiction of chapter 6

Personification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualised activities of real people. • Embodiment of some professional values. • Embodiment of some societal values (e.g., community care and sustainability).
Place and time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers create a story on 'real and fictive data'. • 'Invisible force'. • 'Shadows of the dark night cover danger and crime'. • Respect to the night shift-street-force. • 'Someone trusted being around'. • 'Eyes and ears of the community'. • 'Lonesome wolves'. • 'Sheriffs of the night'.
Nostalgia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of relevant knowledge on the business and its historic roots. • Glorify the past and load these remembered situations with nostalgic elements. • 'Being part of the British memory'. • The 'last Mohican'.

Table 16 Summative table of chapter 6

Chapter 7 | (Interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY

1. Introduction

Based on my widened contextual understanding of the terms ‘milk’ and ‘moon’, the story is now about ‘money’, which is a central term in, and concern of, contemporary business and a concept widely used to denote value to me now, whatever that means more specifically. As depicted in the literature review (chapter 2), value names, from a theoretical perspective, a concept that is based on the beneficiary’s perception and the exchange of services. The process of exchanging services, and by that, of creating value, requests the interaction of humans, which can create the impression of ‘relationships’ as the next sections demonstrate.

2. Interactions

As the name implies, I hereby focus predominantly the phenomena related to the (observable) interactions between the actors involved. That includes all kinds of interaction happening on the doorsteps or done with the support of or based on the directions of the supplying company (e.g., call centre). Therefore, one of the most standardised media used in the business of the milkmen needs to be presented first.

There is still the ‘traditional’ sales leaflet in place. This is a standardised brochure that shows the product range alongside some contextual background information on suppliers or the brand overall. Such a way of business communication to its customers is part of any expected, common promotional procedures enacted by many businesses. Hence, many customers do not give too much interest to those, as the following example outlines:

Interview 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 50

“Um, to be quite honest. Most leaflets actually they come through my door, go straight in the recycling bin.”

But from a marketing and research perspective, it must be mentioned that those traditional sales leaflets are different to the ones other companies distribute. They focus primarily on the premium product range and the insights into some regional suppliers who produce sustainable, healthy food. Thus, it is not only a sales leaflet, but also a brand communication that highlights some of the presented services. Additionally, those traditional sales leaflets offer the opportunity for the customer to leave parts of the brochures on the doorstep to (re-)order products or to communicate other ‘facts’ to their milkman. That makes those leaflets special. So, milkmen’s sales leaflet is not only an order for me, but also a paper that carries (subjective and individualised) notes and messages of both parties via a standardised, mutually aligned process. That is why the milkmen’s traditional sales leaflets are more than just advertising. Especially, in times of online business, such an ordering and communication method looks quite old-fashioned, but represents at the same time traditional and nostalgic elements. But quite often, customers also state their subjective perception of the received services, their vacation periods (e.g., when they do not need any deliveries of ‘standing orders’) and some more personal feedback like saying ‘thank you’ on the leaflets. From my perspective, generations of milkmen have offered further communicative services such as those traditional sales leaflets, call centre services, or the website to bridge the gap of personal contact. And obviously, there are many customers who still use these opportunities and platforms for their regular communication with the business of the milkmen:

<i>Interview 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 221</i>	<i>Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 26</i>
<i>“I will use the website and I'm fine with using that. If I come across an issue, I would call the call centre, but I've not had to do that as yet.”</i>	<i>“You go on the website and you can see. They'll have some banner, then you think, ‘That looks interesting. What's that?’”</i>

These examples describe customers' views in regards of the necessity and purpose of having further opportunities to have a proper communication with their milkmen. Consequentially, their feedback is quite harsh if the website is down and their opinions and needs cannot be expressed online. Interestingly, some of the milkmen I accompanied not only shared that interpretative view of their 'teammate'. They also see one of the reasons for the decrease of customers in the reliability of such a communication (system):

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 7

“[T]he ‘online customers are leaving the business as the ‘website is crap’.”

When accessing the field, such a statement felt frustrating to me as it was one of the most important projects the headquarter had managed within the back-office to support the business in the field. The original intention was to motivate and engage new customers to order with Milk & More and to convince the existing customers to enlarge their basket sizes by ordering additional high-value, premium products. In consequence, the milkmen would have more volume to deliver on their milk floats and earn more if they exceed certain levels of customer numbers and net sales figures. These arguments were convincing to me and part of my initial business understanding.

But the longer I joined the rounds, the more I understood the context of such a statement. There are several milkmen who are used to communicating with and managing 'their' customers completely on their own, without any support from the supplying company. They are used to communicating directly throughout the decades of serving. But, as presented so far, there are limited personal, direct interactions between the milkmen and the customers nowadays. This 'gap' is now obviously filled with 'modern' communication tools (such as web-based communication or call centre services). Even though some milkmen value those services, most of the milkmen joined still prefer to 'own' the direct communication and interaction process with the customers. A few customers also shared that understanding:

<i>Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 83</i>	<i>Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 14</i>
<i>“Why can't we telephone our LOCAL depot????? The call centre is not able to advise on Milk products, they only know what is on the screen.”</i>	<i>“I called the company and asked for a later delivery. No chance. Despite 5 attempts to restart deliveries and promises up the ying yang nothing. I asked; Can I speak with a manager? NO. Can you get someone to call me? NO. Can you email me? NO-we don't use email. Can I speak with my local depot? NO.”</i>

These customer statements underline the expectation of well-experienced, regional, or at least a professional and qualitative support in regards of answering questions related to the account and the customer specific needs, like delivery windows. All these aspects were managed and handled in the past (Nota bene: At least a decade ago) by the milkmen dedicated to the respective areas. They could answer those fundamental questions most of the time directly and accordingly to the specific known customer's context. Finally, they were able to directly adjust the delivery service to the individual needs of each of their customers at that time. Now, most milkmen do not offer such an individualised (communication) service anymore. Nevertheless, some customers would still appreciate those 'lost' service elements. Those have already been central aspects of the milkmen's role definition in the times of Earl of Kinnoull who said: "Milkmen [...] give a service to our communities. They offer a vital service. They are inevitable cheerful, helpful people, who work very unsocial hours, and they are often very kind to the elderly. Along with postmen, they have a very special place in our society" (Ward, 2016, p.252). That was said in 1984. So, there is apparently an obvious nostalgic element that customers love about the business. That element does not only exist in old speeches, but it is also embedded in the traditional way of a dialogical communication between the actors involved:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 11

“[T]he good old days, leaving a note in one of the empties, had such an efficiency about them.”

Interestingly, the ‘good old days’ are linked not only to positive emotions in that statement, but they are also linked to operational excellence and efficiency, terms that might be challenged from today’s business perspective. By various investments and innovations (e.g., website, StreetScooter, call centre), the costs of the business have presumably significantly decreased over decades. The reliability of the order handling and the overall transparency of the processes on the same basis must have improved as well. That is the reason, why such a statement persistently surprised me in the beginning of this research. But throughout the research, I got the impression that such a statement referred more to the ‘efficiency of the communication’ part of the interactions of two parties that had worked together for a long time, than to the efficiency of the operational processes. After a while of cooperative interaction, there is no practical need to elaborate on the surrounding, on the individual’s preferences and the subjective dislikes. It is all known, and small signals and signs are enough to manage the necessary adjustments and the required alignments. The actors have built their own ‘contextual language’ represented by the ‘message in a bottle’. It seemed to me as if the customers and milkmen often prefer the ‘old fashioned’, but romantic style of direct correspondence. And even if the actors do not use that way of communication heavily, they commonly knew about the traditional model of (a more direct) interaction. I observed the following on one of the rounds:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 13

“During the round, we get at least 10 handwritten notes saying, ‘thank you’ or giving [the milkman] some nugget of news on themselves, such as: ‘I am off for some days as I must go to the hospital’ or saying, ‘hello to your daughter’. It really feels like there is a deep connection between him and his customers. One customer left him a bottle of red wine and a letter.”

Such examples indicate the various interactions that occur between the milkmen and their customers in the shadows of the night and within a contextually loaded 'place'. It might be difficult to imagine, but in terms of volume, there is considerable number of (written) notes that are exchanged between the involved parties. On that specific round, there were about 200-300 customers served. We gathered about five to ten notes that night. That equals 2-3 % of all served customers on that round. In line with that, there could be about 10,000 notes left for Milk & More's milkmen at Britain's doorsteps at night per week. Now, there were also milk rounds that had less written feedback, but such a very rough calculation already displays the pure amount of (written) notes exchanged. Most of them are, in relation to content, mainly used for new orders or order adjustments. But next to those operationally driven notes, there is also a relevant number of more personal, individualised messages. And those are the ones that are different to other (written) interactions in other home delivery businesses: They deal with the current weather situation, as well as even quite area- or customer-specific insights such as local fairs or families' vacation plans as the example showed. Some of those notes are even shared within the group of milkmen (*Appendix F*). I became aware of those for the first time on that specific night in February 2018, when I was about to 'become one of them':

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 4

"[I came into] a small meeting room with some pictures and positive customer letters to 'the milkman' saying 'thank you for delivering' (mostly in regard to the recent 'beast-from-the-east'-weather situation at that time). Some are even personalised."

But: No message I have ever seen officially in one of the depots highlighted milkmen specific negative news. All of them showed positive feedback milkmen received from their customers. There are paintings by children that show the act of home delivery as well as 'thank you'-cards for the deliveries made and the additional services offered (e.g., giving a lift, or serving despite the weather). Those kind of documents and customers' statements impact, of course, the self-

perception of the milkmen. So, even if they are not the ones who received that specific card, all of them see the positive perception of their services. They also recognise that ‘being a milkman’ includes the incorporation of certain values as they are described in these messages. Consequently, milkmen feel supported by such an individualised written feedback, as it can be shared within the community of the milkmen within one depot or one region. This supports the perception and conception of ‘the milkman’. Critically, it must be mentioned that this concept could also work like a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’, as milkmen recognise and share positive feedback from some customers more often and openly with the rest of their community than any negative feedback. But if it comes to any business aspects related to the supplying company, milkmen might also share that with the group of milkmen, as it finally strengthens the negative connotation of the supplying company and the positive self-perception of the milkmen, as well.

Bearing that in mind, it might be that some milkmen are indirectly pushing for such (written) feedback on the perceived services by communicating to the customers in the self-same manner. Through my observations, I met several milkmen who, for instance, regularly text their customers. One of the milkmen presented his approach of communicating to his customers:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 11

“As I am asking him about correspondence/communication with the customers, he tells me that he leaves every customer a handwritten note around Christmas to thank them for the year’s support for him and his business – he does not refer to the Milk & More name at all in those messages.”

Within that example it is less about the business routine of handing out Christmas cards than about the segregation of the milkmen from the business behind the profession. Milk & More is, at least in that example, not the first point of contact and hence, need not be mentioned, from that particular milkman’s perspective. The company solely supports this specific milkman who finally ‘owns’ the

relationship to the customers and who serves all customers' needs. And the longer the relationships lasts, the more individual elements are built together or shared between the actors involved (=‘contextual language’). That is why there are not only these (handwritten) notes. There are also several signs and symbols developed that are understood by the (dedicated) milkman and the (specific) customer. There are even more widely-shared symbols in place like the already mentioned milk clock showing the number of requested ‘pints’, the number of empty bottles left at the doorstep that have to be replaced by full milk bottles, or any other codes, such as the colour codes described by Andrew Ward (2016): “One house had blue wood for one order and orange wood for another and seeing the colours from a distance helped her to deliver correctly at the end of a long driveway” (p.162). Furthermore, there are also some individually developed signs in place, which communicate on behalf of each party. An example is the specific place the bottles must be located, which cannot be known by any ‘relief’ for instance. And those are the kind of service elements milkmen most often keep (intentionally) as a secret. It assures their ownership of the customer-relationship. That might also be why the presented intervention of the website and the call centre activity was heavily criticised by some of the milkmen. And it might also be why some milkmen made me an observer. Milkmen widely believe that they are the only ‘active link’ to the customers and that they manage the entire relationship, including all aspects of relevant communication. This understanding seems to be fundamentally embedded in milkmen’s self-perception. That is why one milkman was quite surprised about ‘his customers’ behaviour’:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 7

“Some customers, however, are just leaving ‘without any indication’ that they are going to do so. It feels a bit like he would expect customers to tell him that there are some issues and that he can solve them internally.”

And at times, milkmen try to assure that they can step in between and solve some of the arising problems, as the following example illustrates:

Observation 07 – MAXQDA paragraph 11

“[H]e makes sure all customers have his private cell phone number, and they do occasionally call him directly.”

Such a service was completely new and unexpected to me, as such services are not officially offered to Milk & More’s customers. Nevertheless, it was not the only round I observed such an additional, directly from the milkmen, proposed value. As stated previously, I was not aware of such a direct and almost private relationship between some milkmen and their customers in the beginning. Thus, once known, this was something I wondered about: ‘Why should someone give a private cell phone number to a business client if there is no relevant topic, such as prices or supply that can be influenced in that way?’ But obviously, the value proposition of some milkmen also includes further individualised, and personalised services such as ‘being available’ or ‘being a trouble-shooter’. And obviously, such services are highly appreciated by some customers:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 77

“He phoned us on Tuesday to ask what was going on and mentioned the note. I explained the situation, and all is now sorted out. Today we got our milk delivery!”

In that statement, it sounds like the personal intervention and support of that milkman helped to sort the situation that might have been caused some issues in the business processes. From a customer’s perspective, milkmen still can sort such issues, as they know both parties (customer and supplying company) and their (internal) processes best. Consequentially, it can be assumed that milkmen try to manage both parties adequately. Nevertheless, I gained the impression that milkmen often subvert the institutional system in favour of ‘their customers’. An example of such subversion might be that many milkmen (voluntarily) make a second trip in the morning to deliver missing items still on the same day. But, from a business perspective, there are limited options given to influence the established business routines and the embedded automatisms. Hence, it is still

surprising to me that the positive interpretation of the ‘trouble-shooting milkman’ is still a fundamental part of the self-perception of milkmen’s value proposition as the following example in my fieldnotes demonstrates:

Observation 02 – MAXQDA paragraph 10

“To show me that he (and not Milk & More) really knows what his customers like, he switches on his mobile phone and plays a recorded voice message: The lady tells him [...] that they are not happy with Milk & More (they do not really get the new website, etc.), but they will stay and support [him]. He does a great job, even if the company is communicating ‘weird stuff’ (like what they have to tell customers, when they have to deliver etc.). The entire voice message takes up about two minutes and it is mainly pro-[milkman] and con-Milk & More, ending up with an adjustment of the order: One extra pint on Saturday please.”

Statements like that indicate that some customers confirm my contextual understanding so far. Sometimes, milkmen are not seen as employees of Milk & More who simply act on behalf of the company. They are widely seen and appreciated as entrepreneurs on their own who build trust and relationships by repetitive, service-oriented, and individualised interaction.

3. Relationships

Hence, it seems to be worth having a closer look at those repetitive interactions that are supposed to provide the foundation of some kind of ‘relationships’ in more detail. Those relationships embed various elements that have already been (partially) described and gathered as (reliable) rhythms and (contextual) romanticisation. Next to that, there are, from my understanding, further phenomena that support the creation of ‘relationships’ in the research context. They are presented in the next sections.

3.1 Observable phenomena creating relationships

First, there is the **length of interaction**. Most of the feedback received on the length of participation in the interaction process with each customer in the business of the milkmen uncovered more than 20 years on average. I noted on one milkman:

Observation 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 13
<i>“He has known all his customers for a long time as he has been serving that area for more than 35 years [...].”</i>

Similar insightful feedback was given by the customers in the interview sessions and on the online platform:

Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 22	Interview 09 – MAXQDA paragraph 2
<i>“I am writing this review on behalf of my elderly grandparents who have been loyal to your company for the past fifty years.”</i>	<i>“That was back in 1984. 35 years on, I still have a milkman.”</i>

There are many more statements such as these in the various data sets. Most of them are linked to customers who are still with the business and who seem to be loyal to the business of the milkmen. Due to the length of being served and the various rounds of reorganisations enacted within the last decades, it is not commonly the self-same milkman who has always served those customers. Therefore, it is finally not (purely) the loyalty to one specific person that offers and delivers outstanding individualised services to these customers, **it is the idea of ‘the milkman’ customers are loyal to**. Conversely, there is no guarantee given to the milkmen that they can serve a specific area and specific customers for a long time. Nevertheless, it is quite unlikely that there are any changes done in one region if there are not relevant alterations in regards of volume delivered or overall

customer numbers. Hence, loyal customers and milkmen can ‘stick together’ for quite a while and create the presented ‘contextual language’ and mutual insightful knowledge about each other over time via business and doorstep interaction. But that (physical) doorstep interaction is, as presented before, quite limited. Today, there is less direct communication and less physical interaction, which leads to different forms of mutual knowledge. Therefore, the virtual and mental elements, such as the ones presented before, might become more important. Nevertheless, selected customers reaffirmed that they ‘really know’ their milkmen:

<i>Interview 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 20</i>	<i>Interview 09 – MAXQDA paragraph 14</i>
<i>“I know the name. My brother-in-law is a friend of the milkman, but I wouldn't be able to point him out really if I saw him in the street. I just know that he is called a certain name.”</i>	<i>“We know him in as much we know his name. We don't see him very often. We have a delivery about six, quarter past six in the morning, and that's very, very regular. We know he's Paul. Other than that, would I recognise him necessarily in the street? No, but he delivers pretty much every time what we're looking for. We know he's Paul.”</i>

These examples illustrate that the insights customers have in regards of their milkmen are, even if they exist, not as deep, as might be expected, and indicated by the actors in the beginning. My research unveiled that most of the customers interviewed would not even recognise their milkman in in a different context or without a uniform. One customer summarised the content and character of their relationship as follows:

Interview 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 22

“I know the milkman and I know the days he's coming; I don't know him personally.”

That also raised the questions of: How much do the milkmen ‘really’ know about their customers? Do they have in-depth knowledge, and is it supportive in delivering ‘best service’ to the various customers?

In that respect, the observations presented a different level of knowledge than was verbally indicated by the milkmen. I noted on one of the rounds:

Observation 06 – MAXQDA paragraph 11

“I wouldn't know them if I fell over them’ is one of the statements [the milkman] makes that is (if I'm honest) a bit irritating to me.”

This statement reflects and summarises my observations across all rounds I joined and several interviews I had conducted in the depots with other milkmen. There are few milkmen who serve the area they grew up and, consequently, know a few more customers in person. Most of the milkmen questioned told me that they would also not recognise ‘their customers’ in different contexts. Some of them even told me that they might not even know the surroundings they serve in certain rural areas in the daylight. Such statements confused me even further, as I was convinced after the initial rounds I had joined that at least some milkmen ‘really’ know their customers. But the longer I join the milieu of the milkmen, the more it become transparent to me that many of them do have ‘semi-knowledge’ based on some physical and personal interactions in the past, mixed with individual’s assumptions and projections.

3.2 Fiction in creating ‘real’ relationships

Consequentially, the stories told by the milkmen were quite colourful and showed some notable projections. They are apparently built on the main themes that are fundamentally embedded in ‘the milkman’s DNA’.

The ‘lady’- theme

The first theme deals with a strong stereotyping used in the business of the milkmen: The lady:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 27

“In one house there lives a very beautiful actress, a kind of starlet. Everybody in London knows her and he has been delivering to her for years. Once, she returned early on a Saturday morning just as he was at her stop and she asked him in to have a cup of tea. That story seems to be quite important to him as he tells me the tale in quite a bit of detail and refers back to it several times later.”

I had no reason to doubt the story, and even after a while of retrospection, I am sure that he was really invited in by an actress to have a cup of tea. Nevertheless, I am still wondering why he told me that story in so much detail and why we did not talk about any other customer. My first guess was that he wanted to entertain me and thought that a story like that could be of interest to me. But my second thought brought issues of stereotyping to mind. Such a story fitted, from my perspective, into that stereotypical view of ‘a milkman’ in the UK, without being too offensive in regards of gender issues. I could imagine that there are several other milkmen who might tell me such a story completely different. On some of the rounds I was told about the ‘ladies who need help’ and the ‘housewives who are alone at home where the husbands earn the money’. Two more exemplary observation notes in that respect are as follows:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 17	Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 8
<i>“Nowadays, the young ladies are also working (it really feels like he is talking about his granddaughter) and the internet is everywhere’.”</i>	<i>“If the milkman turns up at ten o'clock, or eleven o'clock, the lady of the house would still be indoors.”</i>

Such statements felt very old-fashioned to me, and appear ill at ease with the reality of the 21st century. But at the same time, there are professions such as the business of the milkmen that are still male dominated, which might be linked to the nocturnal working hours. That is why I intentionally chose the story of the beautiful actress to describe the (still) fundamentally embedded gender-role-understanding that has become part (and which is, at least from my contextual understanding, still part) of the milkmen’s perception. This view seems to be widely-shared among the community of milkmen, and there are also many customers (male as well as female) that still see and use these stereotypes.

The ‘football-boots’- theme

Next to the actors involved, the specific ‘place’ (= doorstep at night) obviously offers some space for projections and interpretation. So, there are also stories created that refer to all kinds of observations taken on the dark doorsteps. From this, many milkmen create imaginary profiles of their customers (e.g., there are football shoes, hence someone plays football). On one of the rounds, I noted:

Observation 03 – MAXQDA paragraph 15
<i>“I realise throughout the entire round that he builds a store of knowledge about his customers by paying attention to very small aspects, like a dairy-based detective (!): ‘There is a young family who moved in some months ago. I can see that, as there are small football boots in front of the door’.”</i>

Thus, it feels like there is considerable invisible space that is used for projections and imaginary pictures built on individuals' nightly observations and mixed with contextually impacted interpretations. Sometimes, it is just a light that is dimmed that tells the milkmen that the people are still awake, perhaps because 'they cannot sleep very well', sometimes it is just the first impression the milkmen get as they get closer to the doorstep. By that, I gained the impression:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 21

"[H]e has a picture of the people living there. 'They are messy, they won't pay their bill' is one example of several statements I get on the nature of the customers."

And very often, these (imaginary) customer profiles depend only on a few personal meetings and minimal direct interaction.

The 'Christmas Eve'- theme

Finally, I recognised a third kind of story reputationally told to me. In some cases, it was a specific event that was presented, which might have built or strengthened the relationship between customer and milkman, beyond the normal business context. These stories were commonly based on additional services delivered by the milkmen that cannot be expected from any other home delivery service. Such services are also beyond normal business routines, as the next example illustrates:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 15

"The good relationship with the 'lady' of that property was founded on special assistance that he gave some years past (he does not give me the date). 'She called me on my mobile phone on Christmas Eve'. In my mind I think, 'why would a lady owning a place like this have his mobile

number and why should she call him?’ – but I do not interrupt. ‘One of the people on site ordered just 10 pints of milk and she needed 30. So, I drove back to the centre on Christmas Eve, gathered the additional bottles and brought them to the house, where I got a big bottle of champagne from the lady.’”

Here, it could be questioned if someone needs 30 pints of milk on Christmas Eve, but the impression I got when we did that delivery convinced me. That milkman was proud of having delivered this additional service to one of ‘his customers’. In that example, he ‘saved’ a special occasion for the client (Nota bene: Is there any more service possible than serving voluntarily on Christmas Eve?) on short notice, almost like an ‘emergency responder’. The customer dialled the milkman’s private cell phone number and asked for assistance. And she got it from an engaged milkman who not only served people. He took care of the needs of his community, even if he has to suffer himself as he had to go the extra mile and had to break his own business and life routines. Thus, it feels to me like the break of routines and one-time-events that are heavily linked to emotionally loaded occasions set the fundamentals for a perceived ‘deep relationship’.

3.2 Trustful information creating relationships

As these three examples might have suggested: Those ‘relationships’ are mainly built on trust in the person and trust in the profession of the milkmen. In that respect, one customer told me:

Interview 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 141

“The milkman is probably the only person that I tell when I’m going on holiday.”

Once more, it feels like the customer gives away **sensitive and personal information** and by that, the customer establishes and confirms the existing

(interactive) relationship. Sensitive information might be, as mentioned above, the absence of the owner. In other interviews, customers explained to me their trust in their milkmen as follows:

<i>Interview 05 – MAXQDA paragraph 30</i>	<i>Interview 08 – MAXQDA paragraph 22</i>
<i>"[T]he trust that I put into my milkman is actually the service I get."</i>	<i>"The trust that people do have for their milkman - As far as they would even leave their purse there, and then, just say to the milkman, 'My purse is on the side there. Take out the money you need'"</i>

Those examples illustrate the strength of the 'relationships'. And I was quite often told such stories in my business role, which surprised me as a Finance Manager even more: How can someone trust that much in someone they do not know personally that they would hand over their purse and enable a relative stranger to take money directly from it, and without having control over that person? But throughout my observations and my participations, I built exactly that kind of fundamental trust in the idea of 'the milkman'. I realised within the analysis of my gathered data that I said in one interview:

<i>Interview 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 49</i>
<i>"If I walk into your front garden during the night to the front of your doorstep and you would see me. You would definitely call the police. That's surprising that the milkman gets so much trust based on a lot of, let's say history, is it?"</i>

So, when I conducted that interview, it had already become my contextual understanding that one of the main perceived values of the milkmen's value

proposition is the traditional element, the incorporation of societal values and additionally other soft service elements. But it must also be stated that some customers do not share my understanding of the trustworthy milkmen. Milkmen are, at least for one customer, still as they were back in the 15th century:

<i>Trustpilot – MAXQDA paragraph 30</i>
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<i>"[U]ntrustworthy and unreliable."</i>
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4. Chapter summary

Therefore, it is finally the result of the milkmen's (real) activities that is recognised and valued by the customers. But as described previously, this outcome also carries many elements of interpretation and contextual understanding as the real interactions between the actors involved are quite limited and hardly individualised.

So, on the one hand there are still the traditional sales leaflets in place, which are left on the doorstep for informing the customers and for supporting the (re-)ordering process. On the other, there are also more modern ways of interacting such as web-based communication or call centre services, have also been established and offered to the customers. Additionally, there is still a process of personal cash collection during daylight in some areas offered. But for me, it is the more 'old fashioned', but romantic style of direct correspondence via messages in the (empty) bottles that makes the milkmen's interaction process unique. This is already one of several observable signs and symbols developed that are (solely) understood by the (dedicated) milkman and the (specific) customer that became transparent when joining the field. There, I observed a special, but limited, way of interaction that fits, from my perspective, perfectly the time, the place, and the needs of the actors involved. Such a regular interaction process, finally, leads to relationships between the milkmen and their customers. One of the reasons for this is the length of interaction. Most of the customers have placed orders with the milkmen for decades and most of the milkmen have served their community for a long time. Nevertheless, it also became transparent

that there exists a different level of mutual knowledge than verbally indicated by both actors. They rarely know each other in person very well. But they have indications and a few observable insights that built the foundation for the creation of their (subjective) image of the opposite party. Furthermore, they use stereotypes or commonly shared meanings to 'enrich' this picture. This is possible as the milkmen's doorstep deliveries offer considerable invisible space that is used for projections and imaginary pictures. Hence, it could be stated that there often exists a trustful relationship between imaginary persons who interact in observable reality and co-create value. As a summary, these insights could be depicted in a graphic and a table as follows:



Figure 6 Summative depiction of chapter 7

Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Traditional' sales leaflet. • 'Modern' communication tools (such as web-based communication or call centre services). • 'Contextual language' represented by the 'message in a bottle'. • 'Being available' or 'being a trouble-shooter'.
Relationships: Observable phenomena creating relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of interaction. • It is the idea of 'the milkman' customers are loyal to. • 'Semi-knowledge' based on some physical and personal interactions in the past, mixed with individual's assumptions and projections.
Relationships: Fiction creating relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong stereotyping used in the business of the milkmen. • (Still) fundamentally embedded gender-role-understanding. • Considerable invisible space that is used for projections and imaginary pictures.
Relationships: Trustful Information creating relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive and personal information.

Table 17 Summative table of chapter 7

Chapter 8 | Concluding Reflections

1. Introduction

By now, each of the terms ‘milk’, ‘moon’ and ‘money’, which I have previously used only in different contexts, have gained a wider, contextual meaning to me as the chapters 4 to 7 illustrate. Their meanings were built throughout my narrative analysis story, which carries, of course, also some nostalgic memories of Christian, the milkman (Cheung et al., 2013). Throughout that story, the terms mentioned became more specific to me. So, they now not only carry various situational phenomena observed and experienced through my research design (chapter 3), but they are also linked to the various dimensions of my theoretical (chapter 2) and my situational research context (chapter 1). All that has created a different and more distinct contextual understanding and contributes to the ongoing discussions within the wider research community, particularly in services marketing and anthropology as the following sections demonstrate. This is, from my understanding, possible, as I use William’s concept of ‘moderatum generalisations’ (2000) to generalise and transfer my context-related understanding to the wider understanding of value-co-creation. Therefore, I used relevant categories in theorising and referred to the symbolic meanings embedded in the interaction process. Consequently, the next section focuses on my ‘bottled’ knowledge first (section 2), before my research design is located in the wider area of current research (section 3). By that, my research unfolds the “micro-level detail of a small part of a society, [which] is used to paint a picture of that wider society“ (Williams, 2000, p.211). Finally, I would like to present relevant areas for future research (section 4).

2. Conclusions on my ‘bottled’ knowledge

As highlighted at the beginning of my thesis, ‘milk’, ‘moon’ and ‘money’ are three familiar words that rarely come together in conversation. Nevertheless, I have chosen those terms consciously as each of them individually, but also the combined phrase appropriately aggregates and describes relevant phenomena of my contextual understanding. Additionally, I used one of the most relevant contextual symbols, the iconic milk glass bottle, to collect and depict my theory of value-co-creation in the context of UK’s milk home delivery business. Here, it

might also be worth mentioning that the presented milk glass bottles are “cultural artefacts that facilitate nostalgia as a way of feeling and thinking“ (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.930). So far, I have presented four separate bottles in the summary sections of chapters 4 to 7, which gathered my ‘feeling and thinking’ in the field of interest next to some nostalgic memories. That ‘bottled’ knowledge when aggregated appears as follows:





Presentation of the actors (chapter 4)	(Reliable) rhythms (chapter 5)	(Contextual) romanticisation (chapter 6)	(Interactive) relationships (chapter 7)
			

Figure 7 Summative depiction of the phenomena observed

2.1 Conclusions on the service user and service provider spheres

First, there were the phenomena I linked to the service provider and service user spheres. Those spheres were presented within the situational contextualisation (chapter 1.3) and within the first chapter of my narrative analysis story (chapter 4). Those insights helped me to gain a better contextual understanding, which is required to find adequate answers for my situational research questions, as presented in chapter 1.4. One of the two fundamental questions raised there addressed the sustainability of the business model of the milkmen. I asked myself:

Milkmen, where is your business headed?

From my understanding, an answer to that situational question lies in the contextually influenced interactions of the actors and in the perception of value in the past and present (Lyons & Brennan, 2019). Hence, I have reflected on the history of the business of the milkmen and their currently offered value proposition early in the process of theorising and tried to disentangle service elements such as milk, product-related services, delivery services, and 'individualised' services (chapter 1.3). Additionally, I carefully examined the different 'actors' involved and presented the incorporation of a coordination mechanism (chapter 4). Both are relevant parts of my theory and are described in the following two sections.

2.1.1 Milkmen`s proposition

As noticed earlier, the various service elements of the milkmen's value proposition align well with the underlying theoretical concept of S-D-logic and support the widely-shared understanding of 'services' and the distinctive roles of the actors involved (chapter 2). Those various services were deliberately clustered in line with my early observations, which had already indicated the differences between them and, consequentially, the different level of impact they might have when theorising on value-co-creation in the context of the business of the milkmen in the subsequent chapters.

Here, it might be worth to call once more upon the long and manifold history of the business of the milkmen (chapter 1.3): A 'dubious character' who became a

trusted and well-regarded person, even though the underlying value proposition, in regards of the product range offered, has not changed significantly over the centuries. But there were obviously other adoptions of the value proposition made that 'kept the last Mohican alive'. And, bearing the customers' feedback in mind, the business of the milkmen created a social institution, which comes along with identification (Prus, 1987). And this identification seems to be built over generations and with generations of customers and milkmen. And, they kept the concept of 'the milkman' alive. So, even without knowing any of the other relevant background information, it must be recognised that the traditional milk doorstep delivery business in the UK has been innovative over the centuries. Not everyone might immediately think of such a connection when talking about the well-known 'milkman', but my research unveiled a more distinctive understanding of innovation in services marketing: Since its beginning, the service providers (= milkmen) have constantly adjusted their 'inherited' value propositions to the societal and contemporary context of the communities of their times. And those value propositions always consisted of (physical) goods such as milk and other products. But there have always been other elements relevant to the business model such as the doorstep delivery and the so-called 'individualised' services. Consequentially, the traditional business of the milkmen has been 'innovative' "in terms of what they do (e.g., how they change customer thinking, participation, and capabilities to create and realise value" (Patrício et al., 2018, p.6). So, in my understanding, 'the milkman' is an innovative concept that has been serving generations of people and communities for centuries while representing a wide variety of individualised or subjective phenomena. For instance, most of the milkmen observed delivered their services with a particular 'signature move' or treated their customers in a special, 'individualised' way. Equally, many customers interviewed told me that they can 'see' if the doorstep delivery has been made by their 'regular milkman' or a 'relief'. These phenomena support the widely-shared view within the academic community that the characteristics of the individuals themselves also strongly influence value-co-creation (Baron et al., 2009).

2.1.2 Incorporated coordination mechanisms

Additionally, my research unveiled certain mechanisms relevant to and (partially) embedded in the business model of the milkmen. Interestingly, some of them can be assigned to another relevant 'actor', the supplying company.

The supplying company names, aggregates, and incorporates various service coordination mechanisms that are, from my understanding, inherent in and relevant to the value-co-creation process in the business of the milkmen. Those are, for instance, elements of the internal (Nota bene: Within the group of milkmen and its suppliers) and external communication (Nota bene: With the customers of the milkmen), as well as the (internal) alignment process of the milkmen. Furthermore, it became obvious that the supplying company has taken over several roles within the business model: On the one hand, it is a (hidden) supporter of the business. On the other, it is also an entrepreneur in its own right that interacts regularly and directly with the milkmen's customers.

Therefore, in my research context, the supplying company is not only the dairy producing one of the most relevant group of products and the institution managing various operational business processes, but also the 'incorporation of various institutional arrangements', and consequentially, from an academic perspective, a relevant contextual coordination mechanism. It aggregates various explicit and implicit arrangements and acts and interacts with the service users of the milkmen directly and on its own (e.g., via website, call centre). Due to the variety of activities recognised and the set of roles taken over by the supplying company, it could be even questioned if the supplying company is just the incorporation of institutional arrangements. It is without a doubt, from a theory perspective, the incorporation of coordination mechanisms in the context of the business of the milkmen. And it is, also without a doubt, operationally part of the service operation system of the business model of the milkmen. Nevertheless, it felt sometimes like there is a separate third party involved in the value-co-creation process, next to the single milkman and the individual customer. That view was further supported by the level of direct interaction and the various levels of trust embedded in the business. All that finally challenges the predominant understanding of the diametrical relation of service providers and service users as in S-D-logic and

enlarges the understanding of the relevance of coordination mechanisms in the context of value-co-creation. This understanding finally helps to answer the research questions, which have been of priority in this research.

2.2 Conclusions on the joint sphere

So, the fundamental theoretical research question raised in chapter 2 was as follows:

How do contextual phenomena (e.g., temporal, and local) affect value-co-creation?

That leads directly to the specific context, in which most of the interaction between the service provider and service user is presumed to be located: The joint sphere of Britain's doorsteps at night. Here, I identified several contextual phenomena that were presented in more detail in chapters 5 to 7. I gathered and named those phenomena (reliable) rhythms, (contextual) romanticisation, and (interactive) relationships. These three phenomena are considered in the following sections from a theoretical perspective.

2.2.1 Conclusions on (reliable) rhythms of MILK

Chapter 5 presented the first category, which referred to the concept of (reliable) rhythms. This is worth mentioning, as, from my understanding, there exists a trust-building element of reliability in the business model that fits the rhythms of the actors involved.

Milkmen's and customers' rhythms

These rhythms are everywhere, and by that, also relevant to the interactions in the business of the milkmen concerning value-co-creation. But there is still not enough known about such specifics (Massey, 2019). Hence, the micro-level examination in this research offers further insights from an actor's perspective in that respect. So, on the one hand, there were the milkmen. Their work routines

showed differences even though their work routines are based on a set of common professional values, business guidance, and prescriptive behaviour. Furthermore, it became transparent throughout my research that these routines are significantly influenced by the societal understanding of ‘being a milkman’ and the individual’s interpretation of the role in a certain local and temporal surrounding. Those dimensions are, from my understanding, central to the concept of ‘the milkman’, and, as Melbin (1978) highlighted, both are dependent to the other. And even as there are “[t]oday more people than ever [...] active outside their homes at all hours engaged on all sorts of activities“ (Melbin, 1978, p.5), there is still an isolated group out there, delivering to Britain’s doorsteps and serving as milkmen. And as presented in the situational contextualisation, there is little known on that ‘isolated’ group working in nocturnal hours. Nevertheless, there is a common, widely-shared understanding within society on “the milieu [that] harbours a deviant subculture that is tolerated and even expected“ (Melbin, 1978, p.10). ‘The milkman’ opposes that subcultural understanding and incorporates elements, such as protection and preventions. These positive characteristics feed expectation of the milkmen and provide a basis for ‘how to behave in line with the concept of “the milkman”’.

And so are the customers. They strongly emphasised their own repetitive, routine-like shopping activities and their ‘normal rhythms’ at home.

This outcome supports the widely-shared understanding that human behaviour in business contexts is also socially embedded (Mangus et al., 2020). Therefore, many of the actors observed and questioned referred proactively to the wider context of their shopping behaviour in general, including their daily work routines, and their communities. But they also referred to the repetition of the doorstep deliveries and the constant consumption of milk. The so-called ‘standing orders’ are still a fundamental characteristic of the business of the milkmen and seem to be the concurrent intersection of otherwise separated rhythms. That is a contextual phenomenon that distinguishes the business of the milkmen to many other businesses whose “demand levels are rarely stable and predictable” (Baron et al., 2009, p.56). That does not mean that the business of the milkmen is stable in regards of its overall development, but it is perceived as being more

stable in regards of the rhythms of the actors involved. Akaka and Schau (2019) also emphasised the relevance of that phenomenon in regards of value-co-creation. They state, from a service user's perspective: Value "is continually created through consumption, over time" (p.499). Such a repetitive process forges the bonds to the involved service providers and their service assortment. At the same time, it supports the creation of reliable routines and interactive relationships, which supports value-co-creation for each beneficiary. From a service provider's perspective, Grönroos has presented a similar findings (2011).

Thus, my research combines the views of both actors and strengthens the indicated relevance of temporal dimensions of value-co-creation, which has recently been requested by other researchers, as well (Lyons & Brennan, 2019). And my research showed on a micro-level that time, chronology, as well as frequency, play a significant role for value-co-creation. Therefore, it could be stated that the various temporal aspects unfolded throughout my research are services in their own right offered by the business of the milkmen to their customers. Those are the mental links between past, present, and future but also physical elements of asynchrony of actions on the shared doorstep (= chronology) and the elements of frequent deliveries (= repetition). And these are the temporal dimensions, which define a service on its own and which are different to other services as they cannot "be stored and used later" (Baron et al., 2009, p.7).

Reliability

But such a 'service' can be perceived as value adding only if it is constantly offered by the service providers, as it carries a certain understanding of time and temporal rhythms in human lives that help to understand the organisation of humans' everyday lives (Blue, 2019). Hence, I took a deeper look into the delivery routines of the business of the milkmen and identified some phenomena, which I gathered and named reliability. Reliability is, in my understanding, "linked and accompanied by certain experiences of time" (Blue, 2019, p.933), including the frequency and regularity of doorstep deliveries.

So, it became transparent throughout my research that both, milkmen and customers, strongly characterise the business of the milkmen as ‘being reliable’ in regards doorstep deliveries no matter what challenges. Even in that respect, it is obviously the temporal dimension that influences today’s value-co-creation. There is a long tradition of ‘having a milkman’ in the UK, which represents in people’s mind-sets also the constant milk supply during war times and the constant fight against the challenges of weather. In line with that, my research outlined the constant fight against the almost overpowering natural forces and the frequency and regularity of the deliveries, particularly in distinction to other home delivery services. So, it can be stated that the business of the milkmen reliably ‘feeds’ the routines of their customers.

2.2.2 Conclusions on (contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows

Next to that, I also identified a category of phenomena, which I named (contextual) romanticisation. They were presented in chapter 6 in more detail. Here, a brief representative, pictorial summary could look like so: Most people in the UK are used or know about the tradition of ‘having a milkman’ from their childhood. Consequentially, there are many individual experiences and impressions linked to that specific form of doorstep delivery. For instance, some customers value the aspects of local and regional supply embedded in the business next to the sustainable business model overall. This is expressed by concrete references to the products, such as ‘regionally sourced’ but also by common societal mind-set. Furthermore, there is the milk glass bottle, which is for many service users a symbol for societal and professional values represented by the business of the milkmen. And in the business, there are mutually, context-related symbols and signs are embedded, which have been built by generations of milkmen and customers that support the creation of imaginary pictures of ‘the milkman’ and ‘the customers’. Thus, the well-known space of customers’ doorsteps and the unknown person wearing the umbrella of a trusted, well-known profession is obviously used for individual’s projections and interpretations of the business of the milkmen and its (individualised) value proposition. Small

gestures, such as closing gates, or the placement of the products support customers' impressions of being treated differently and in a (special) manner by night. The night itself offers a special atmosphere, which impacts on the one hand the "perception and precedes any other associated phenomena" (Ellis et al., 2003, p.718). On the other hand, the night is a time of the day that is not commonly used by a diurnal species as humans (Melbin, 1978). Here, it could be mentioned that "[it] is also a popular image of the night as the haunt of weirdos and strange characters" (Melbin, 1978, p.10), which is somehow opposed by the widely-shared understanding of 'the milkman'. The night is, and is often seen as, being "outside of ordinary social control [, as...] police coverage is sparse" (Melbin, 1978, p.11). Consequently, people appreciate, as my research unveiled, 'someone trusted' being out there. Here, the milkmen take over the role of policemen and incorporate public surveillance (Ellis et al., 2003). This is an example of one of the service elements unfolded through my research that characterise the concept of 'the milkman'. Additionally, there are all the other 'social functions' taken over or projected onto the role of the milkmen, which build the widely-shared understanding of the social institution of 'the milkman' (Cheung et al., 2013). Additionally, all that is linked to a moment of magic, when the customer opens the front door and finds the milk bottles in the morning. The following sections present these subjective insights from an academical perspective.

Personification

First, there are the insights I linked to the term 'personification'. Here, the individualised activities of real people, the embodiment of some professional values and the embodiment of certain societal values became obvious. Those aspects have already been partially described in the context of the roles of the various actors involved and the relevance of the incorporated coordination mechanism. Additionally, it stood out that the business of the milkmen also incorporates societal values, such as sustainability or regionality. Those are topics that are about to become even more relevant to academia as current research showed, for instance, that the willingness of customers to buy certain

products relates to the attractiveness of products. And this willingness is influenced by the societal focus on sustainability (Keane & Morschett, 2017). So, it could also be said that the traditional business of the milkmen incorporates and serves the societal values of its place and time.

Place and time

Place and time are, as my research displayed, relevant phenomena that influence the perception of the involved actors, particularly, the milkmen. Throughout the nightly rounds I joined, it became transparent to me that many milkmen have a feeling of loneliness in the dark surrounding. This impression is shared, even without being explicitly and verbally expressed, within the wider group of milkmen. Hence, it could be stated that loneliness is a characteristic of the concept of 'the milkman' (Diekema, 1992). But it is not only the milkmen who are influenced by the specific place and time. It seems like customers' willingness to request milkmen's value proposition is also influenced by those contextual elements, which are linked to the local and temporal dimensions of 'place' throughout my research. I call these two sub-categories the 'invisibly visible' and 'unknown known'.

The first category, the 'invisibly visible', describes customer's first impressions on the mornings when it looks like magic has happened throughout the night, right on the almost private domain of customers' doorsteps. This place carries privacy and reflects many norms and spatial arrangements of wider society, such as the gate or the letterbox (Diekema, 1992). Customers know, as my research unveiled, little about the real activities of the milkmen, but they know a lot about their doorsteps. This knowledge about a specific place supports the creation of stories on the back of few observations, impressions, and experiences. From individual customer's perspective, it looks like there is an 'invisible force' that manages the movements of the physical goods to a specific place, which is commonly restricted in access throughout the night, a time of the day, that additionally delivers many societal tales and interpretations. And, as presented throughout my research, customers take those impressions beyond their

doorsteps to the place of consumption. So, it can be assumed that in the context of my research both places are locally, in regards of the physical distance, and temporally, in regards of time between picking up the milk glass bottle on the doorstep and having breakfast, close to each other. Hence, the customers bring, from my understanding, the interpretatively enriched doorstep impressions to the breakfast table, and by that, to value-co-creation.

That supports the ongoing research in regards of the impact of actor generated rhythms on the space of consumption (Massey, 2019) and the widely-shared understanding of time being a relevant operant resource for value-co-creation in relation to both parties (Baron et al., 2009). By that, my research also contributes, next to value-co-creation, to the understanding of service experience. In both areas, it is a collective understanding that visible, experienceable elements next to “their interactions with people and the physical evidence” (Baron et al., 2009, p.10), determine actors’ perceptions. This interaction might become even more important in a context owned, created and interpretationally defined by the service users themselves. The specific context of the ‘doorstep’ is used for different, most of the time private activities, which also creates a different meaning of that space to the individuals (Massey, 2019). So, the milkmen deliver their services to that well-known place, and the customers use their established impression of their own locality and take milkmen’s deliveries on-board for further value-co-creation. In this domain, it is important that milkmen do not violate any of the ‘norms’, as it could be seen as a violation of the privacy of the customers and, following Diekema (1992), as a “a violation of the self because they imply a loss of control over access to personal history” (p.488). The doorstep is loaded with many experiences and impressions gathered by the customers over the years, and those are, partially incorporated by the doorstep and the close surrounding. To bear that in mind, is a fundamental element of milkmen’s behaviour by night when they try to create a ‘special moment’ for the customers on their doorsteps. This care fits to the current understanding of the service providers’ activities in the so-called ‘servicescape’ (e.g., Chronis, 2019; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2011; Baron et al., 2009; Bitner, 1992).

That became even more transparent in the second category, the 'Unknown known', which collected some of the attributes linked to the profession from customers' perspectives. Due to those elaborations individuals' projection and interpretation processes are even more significant for value-co-creation than the pure delivery services. The various customers' impressions of 'the milkman' offered insights that uncovered a mental service element provided by the service users to the value-co-creation: They connected terms such as 'shadows of the dark night cover danger and crime' to the business of the milkmen. They also see 'someone trusted being around', although they commonly do not see or meet anyone throughout the night nowadays. But all that has finally become a fundamental element of the business of the milkmen over centuries of constant and reliable service to customers.

Nostalgia

All that finally led to the third category I link to (contextual) romanticisation: Nostalgia. In my research, the term nostalgia follows the understanding of Davis (1979). "The term nostalgia derives etymologically from the Greek 'nostos', meaning to return home, and 'algia', meaning a painful condition" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.921). But despite that general definition, nostalgia does "neither [name] an absolute nor a singularly universal phenomenon" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.934), as there are various and manifold elements that characterise or support the creation of nostalgia. Within the business of the milkmen, there is still the milk glass bottle, which is a cultural artefact that "facilitates nostalgia as a way of feeling and thinking" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.930) and interpreting today's 'reality'. So, there are elements embedded in the business of the milkmen that link yesterday's experiences with today's interpretations and tomorrow's actions (Cheung et al., 2013). Here, today's interpretations of 'the milkman' might also carry a melancholic, sentimental and retrospectively glorifying understanding of the profession. But, in relation to my research, 'nostalgia' is also associated with modernity and future-orientation, which distinguishes my understanding from the interpretation of other researchers (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). But, similar to

them, my research also unveiled other reasons that can be linked to 'nostalgia'. Those are the elements "of feeling oneself a stranger in a new period that contrasted negatively with an earlier time in which one felt, or imagined, oneself at home" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.922). This was at least an interpretation I gained when talking to the milkmen and customers who have been with the business for a longer period. This length of serving, or receiving services obviously supported the understanding created around the concept of 'the milkman', which definitely carries a certain degree of relevant knowledge on the business and its historic roots. Both groups of actors tend to glorify the past and load their individual remembered situations of interactions with the business with nostalgic elements. Finally, it became transparent that the nostalgic impression is also supported by the uniqueness of the business of the milkmen today: It is the 'last Mohican' in the context of the traditional doorstep deliveries. And all kinds of doorstep deliveries have had a long tradition in the UK, and most people in the UK still know about the tradition of 'having a milkman'. Consequentially, my research supports other research that highlights the relevance of the sociocultural dimension for value-co-creation (e.g., Becker & Jaakola, 2020; Kelleher et al., 2019; Akaka & Vargo, 2015).

But it cannot only be highlighted the relevance of doorstep deliveries in the past. It needs also to be considered that the other services offered, particularly the ones serving the entire community, shaped the conception of 'the milkman' within society. Here, the point is "that historical meaning is popularly constructed and understood in both ways, at different times and in different contexts" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.925). So, for instance, 'the milkman' had a wider social contribution (Baron et al., 2009) within WW I and WW II, but also incorporates the reliability of doorstep deliveries no matter of the weather or some of the phenomena, which were observed by me and which are presented in the upcoming section. But all those phenomena were predominantly relevant to the people of their times. Nevertheless, the actors involved obviously tried "to reinforce these assumptions to maintain the existing social order" (Harmon, 2019, p.543) and to create an institutionalised, widely-shared meaning. Therefore, they still tell stories of the glorified past, use contextually embedded

symbols, such as the milk glass bottles and milk minders, and keep 'standing orders' in place.

Hence, it can be stated that service users' perceptions of the services offered and delivered by the milkmen seem to rely strongly on nostalgic impressions, imaginations, and projections. This supports Chronis (2019) who highlighted recently, based on other research, the 'indirect influence' of imaginations. Customers "infuse the stage with their own meanings and bring their own interpretation" (p.458). From my interpretivist understanding, 'reality' is created by that, and, in consequence, that is why customers rely on "sign perceptions, interpretations, and uses" (Baron et al., 2009, p.107). And that is, why my research supports the view that value-co-creation strongly refers to previous interactions (Baron et al., 2009), but even more to the individual's contextual expectations and the customer's overall lifeworld (Becker & Jaakola, 2020).

2.2.3 Conclusions on (interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY

But those expectations and customer's lifeworld consist not only of sign perceptions or uses. They also contain real interaction and relationships with other people. So, I gathered and named my last group of phenomena (interactive) relationships (chapter 7).

Those dealt, as the name implies, predominantly with the (real) interactions between the actors involved on the doorstep. But there were also 'interactive relationships' identified that exist solely between suggestive counterparties. Those relationships are created by milkmen's and customers' imagination, projective and contextual interpretation, and few 'real' experiences. All that is finally reflected in the upcoming section of my research.

Interactions

Numerous 'interactions' happen between service providers and service users during business activities. As presented before, some of them are rendered

directly by the service provider, while others are provided by the supplying company. This is supported by some form of communication between the involved parties. For instance, there are still 'traditional' approaches to communication, such as the presented idea of the sales leaflet, and there are more 'contemporary' communication tools, such as web-based messages or call centre services in place. When taking a deeper look, it is evident that, irrespective of the medium, the same 'contextual language' is used. This is in my research represented by the 'message in a bottle'. Furthermore, my research unveiled a specific service offered to some customers: Some milkmen are for specific customers always 'available' and serve as 'trouble-shooters' neon demand.

From an academic perspective, there is little doubt that the 'contemporary' communication tools should be part of the communication concept of a 21st century doorstep delivery business. It widens the value proposition offered to the existing customers and, at the same time, addresses new customers. Through this, the service proposition also changes from solely being 'bricks' (Nota bene: Delivered physically) based to some kind of 'bricks and clicks' proposition (Baron et al., 2009) and offers additional value to the service providers. Previous research in that respect has already shown that there is a strong business impact from positive online feedback from current customer on the buying decision of new customers (Sweeney et al., 2020). Oppositely, it should be borne in mind that those 'contemporary' communication tools change the entire context (Patrício et al., 2018) and, by extension, the 'relationship' between the milkmen and their customers. Those relationships were founded, as my research unveiled, significantly on "multiple layers of imagined community" (Phillips, 2002, p.598), which strongly impact self-perception and the overall contextual understanding. Nevertheless, there has been limited research in that respect. One of the reasons might be that it is difficult to unfold those layers and to understand them contextually. Here, it is the individual milkman who acts locally in the group of milkmen of the same depot as well as, and historically, in the group of the milkmen across time. All together, they build the institutionalised concept of 'the milkman' that serves the customers and strengthens the relationships to that are developed with them.

Relationships

And the phenomenon of 'relationships' is manifold in the business of the milkmen. That is why I separated it into three sub-categories and used narratives to describe that category metaphorically. There were objectively observable phenomena that seemed to be relevant for value-co-creation, as well as fictive information that is finally used by the actors involved, to generate a form of trust built on the exchange of sensitive and personal information. This connects to the fundamental understanding in services marketing that services are dependent on the already mentioned "people element" (Baron et al., 2009, p.9). The 'people element' represents, in my research, also the "multifarious character of individual attachment to imagined communities" (Phillips, 2002, p.605) and the imagined concept of 'the milkman'. Given this, individual's preferences, and characteristics "such as age, gender and socio-economic group" (Baron et al., 2009, p.8) also come into play. Here, in all fairness, it must also be mentioned that not all customers want a 'relationship' with all their service providers they use (Baron et al., 2009). Furthermore, it must be stated that my research presented the "complex nature of personal attachment to imagined communities" (Phillips, 2002, p.606) but addressed only a small part of society. Nevertheless, the research design chosen explored that there is some kind of self-connection that people feel towards these social phenomena" (Phillips, 2002, p.612) of imagined counterparts and communities. So, my research supported the general concept of shared situations (or even places) that support the creation of relationships between the parties involved, 'real' or 'fictive'.

That has already been previously by other researchers (e.g., Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2011; Bitner et. al., 1992). From a relationship perspective, it seems favourable to have milkmen dedicated to rounds, even if they might not have direct daily interaction with customers, they gather local insights and can adjust their services accordingly. That might be why some customers mentioned that they 'see' when the delivery is done by a 'relief', even though they might not even recognise their usual milkman without a uniform. To build such 'round-specific knowledge' is a challenge and requires some effort.

Hence it is, from both a theoretical and practical perspective, recommended to establish a territory-person-relationship (Mangus et al., 2020).

The developed relationship also impacts perceived service quality, supporting the value proposition offered by the service providers (Lyons & Brennan, 2019). And, even if actors do not intend to create such 'relationships', the research findings support the widely accepted view that "[b]usiness exchanges are socially embedded in personal relationships [...] and previous personal interactions guide future behaviors" (Mangus et al., 2020, p.1143). Furthermore, the relationship can create mutual trust, as my research unveiled. So, as highlighted predominantly in chapter 4 and chapter 7, there are distinct levels of trust observable, which are well researched in academia and that also refer to interactions and reliability (Mangus et al., 2020). And, like Mangus et al.'s work (2020), research in this context uncovered a level of "interpersonal trust construct beyond what is examined in the current literature" (p.1138). Therefore, my research also contributes to the comprehension of trust in a business context. So, the understanding created throughout this research supports Simmel who "recognises that trust is nuances and thus the additional quasi-religious element can vary in strength and importance" (Möllering, 2001, p.406). The 'quasi-religious element' became transparent in the various interview sessions, in which customers regularly emphasised the reliability of 'their milkmen' and the stories told by the milkmen on their 'Christmas deliveries' done. And, as with Simmel, their contextual knowledge, "rests on vague and partial understanding" (Möllering, 2001, p.411). In this research, the milkmen and the customers had little specific knowledge of the opposite party. Nevertheless, they somehow built that element of trust and a particular form of relationship. Consequently, each party had a primarily imaginary picture, or some kind of expectation, on the other party in mind. These expectations are, as presented in chapter 7, the outcome of the real interaction processes next to individuals' projections and interpretations (Möllering, 2001). Such behaviour is finally not exclusive to the business of the milkmen, but to the asynchronous interactions that help to unfold a special kind of relationship, built in particular social context. As the research displayed, it is even more illustration and interpretations than expected (Möllering, 2001) and more than just a relationship between a milkman and a customer. There are, as

described before, several layers of trust that finally serve society. So, my research supports the understanding that trust is “one of the most important synthetic forces within society“ (Möllering, 2001, p.405). All this contributes to the understanding of how people develop relationships (Prus, 1987).

3. Conclusions on ‘THE MILKMAN’

These particular (interactive) relationships, (contextual) romanticisation and (reliable) rhythms are, in combination with the fundamentals on the actors presented, for me the concept of ‘the milkman’.

From my perspective, ‘the milkman’ aggregates various arrangements and guides the actors involved as a social institution on its own. It conceptualises and articulates “significant social phenomena [and] supports the reproduction [...] of regular, everyday, and ‘normal’ activities” (Blue, 2019, p.927). It also incorporates social norms and simplifies the decision making process of the actors involved. By that, the actors ‘know’ how to act in certain contexts (e.g., Sandven, 2020; Harmon, 2019). Milkmen know exactly how to behave on Britain’s doorsteps at night, and customers have a ‘clear’ understanding of how to order and how to ‘interact’ with the milkmen. So, the concept of ‘the milkman’ “provides [useful] templates for their actions“ (Maier & Simsa, 2020, p.5). This social institution impacts the lives of the actors involved even more extensively than I expected at the beginning of my research, when I had ‘just’ a professional business in mind. That was, for instance, strongly supported when I looked at the fundamental necessity of having breakfast. “In order to make a meal, it is usually required for one to go shopping for the necessary ingredients, and to transport these items home, sometimes by driving. This spatiotemporal extension of practices is what reproduces everyday and ‘normal’ way of living and consuming“ (Blue, 2019, p.926). In here, it is ‘the milkman’ who has taken over some of those everyday practices and has ‘fed’ customers by delivering reliably to Britain’s doorsteps for centuries. Consequently, the concept of ‘the milkman’ became part of ‘normality’ and achieved “a taken-for-granted status” (Harmon, 2019, p.543).

Additionally, the concept of ‘the milkman’ still leaves, as my research unfolded, enough space for further projections of individual and societal phenomena, such as sustainability. This is, furthermore, enforced by the additional roles taken on within society by ‘the milkman’, such as the charity functions in WW I and WW II. Furthermore, it can be mentioned that ‘the milkman’ represents, for certain customers, various positive characteristics of other extinct doorstep salespersons.

But it is not only the abstract concept that defines ‘the milkman’. There are, of course, thousands of milkmen out there by night, continuously delivering to Britain’s doorsteps. And all of them also add a bit of their own understanding of ‘service’ and their subjective experiences of their night-time deliveries to the concept of ‘the milkman’ (Blue, 2019).

So, finally, my research displays that an institution is fundamentally characterised by its specific context, including its cultural surrounding. This is relevant, as culture not only impacts the mind-set of the actors involved, but also unconsciously guides contextually driven interpretation (Maier & Simsa, 2020). Hence, I had a closer look into the UK’s milk home delivery business and found artefacts, such as the milk glass bottle, that represent the British culture of ‘having a milkman’. Consequently, I have also used the artefact of ‘the milkman’ to gather my knowledge on value-co-creation.

4. Conclusions on services marketing

Finally, all that ‘bottled’ knowledge supports the ongoing discussion in academia in services marketing, particularly in S-D-logic as the following section details.

As displayed in chapter 2, the nucleus of the theoretical concept is ‘services’, which consists of many dimensions and carries various core views of the theoretical framework of S-D-logic. One of those core views is the meaning of goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). In S-D-logic, goods are a service-delivery mechanism for exchange processes (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011) or service platforms that indirectly render the offered services (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; Gummesson, 1993). Consequentially, all goods lose, within S-D-logic, their

physicality and become part of the abstract term 'services', which names all kinds of physical and non-physical goods as well as abstract services. Similarly, the business of the milkmen combines many different service elements, such as variety of products offered and the reliability of daily doorstep food supply, which are fundamentally linked to physical goods. Nevertheless, it is not the individual good that is most relevant to the milkmen's customers. Customers are also interested in the wider product range and even more in the wider service assortment of the milkmen. These services also include societal embedded views and contextual projections that see 'the milkman' as the 'eyes and ears of the community' or the 'guardian of reliability'. Such connotations, which are built on the long tradition of the profession and the many different situations, in which milkmen have served society, are finally key for the services and value propositions offered by contemporary milkmen. That becomes central when it comes to the interactive exchange process between the actors involved.

That leads to the second relevant element of Vargo and Lusch's theoretical framework: The two groups of actors involved in such exchange processes.

Those are the service providers on the one hand who offer their services as their value propositions (e.g., Ng et al., 2019; Vargo & Lusch 2004a). Here, it should be mentioned that there are also other human actors that support these service providers, such as the employees of the supplying company. I even raised the question if there might not be contexts, which request, in a move away from the manner, in which it is currently conceptualised, the existence of a third active party as an incorporation of certain mechanisms and representation of institutional arrangements. But, as mentioned earlier, this has not been the focus of my research that predominantly addressed the relevance of contextual phenomena on value-co-creation. Therefore, it can be summarised here, that there are several people who 'as one' provide services to the customers. All these providers are represented by the 'face of the businesses': 'The milkman'. Through this, the service provider, 'the milkman', represents, as stated earlier, a wider set of roles (e.g., Karpen et al., 2012; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). In this research context, the milkmen are these 'faces of the business' that take care of

the various business routines but also, as ‘eyes and ears of the community’, for their neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, there is the group of customers who are called service users within S-D-logic. Service users are active participants who interact with the service providers and integrate resources to create value (Payne et al., 2008). They are no longer simply a ‘passive audience’ (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000) as in G-D-logic. So, for instance, the fundamental elements of the business of the milkmen rely solely on the interpretative projections of their customers that are, from my understanding, derived from their own experiences (e.g., from childhood), individual situations or well-known tales of the milkmen. In contrast to other research, within this context, however, the relevant interaction happens asynchronously. Nevertheless, those interactions also become part of the value proposition offered by the milkmen to their communities.

The process of reflection and interpretation is already part of the third relevant element of the theoretical framework: The iterative process of interactions (e.g., Yazdanparast et al., 2010; Vargo, 2009). Grönroos and Ravald (2011) state, ‘interaction’ is “a mutual or reciprocal action where two or more parties influence one another” (p.11). The interaction is focused, from a theoretical perspective, on the co-creation of value in concert with, rather than for, customers within each, and every, relational context (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Additionally, the inherent aspect of connectivity becomes relevant here (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). Connectivity, or at least the subjective impression of connectivity, can be a central element in the iterative interaction cycle between service providers and service users (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006), by which the other party is influenced (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). That interaction has already been partially described by many other researchers, such as Grönroos and Voima (2013). They tried to describe relevant characteristics when they stated: “The core of interaction is a physical, virtual, or mental contact, such that the provider creates opportunities to engage with its customers’ experiences and practices and thereby influences their flow and outcomes” (p.140). Ballantyne and Varey (2006) tried to link service providers’ and service users’ actions and reactions to a form of interactive cycle that is built on a repetitive

mode of interactions and dialogical exchanges. And those interactions finally create relationships between the service providers and the service users (e.g., Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Grönroos, 2011), which contain subjective experiences with the other parties and the offered services, including the other's contribution to the value-co-creation process itself. By that, these interactive cycles finally support the creation of value in each beneficiary's area. Hence, value in S-D-logic is also often called subjective value-in-use (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). That subjective value-in-use became transparent when talking to the milkmen's customers. Here, they presented individual experiences and certain situations, by which they became aware of their milkmen and the special services that were offered. In return, the customers started regularly to participate in the iterative cycle by placing 'standing orders' or giving individualised notes to their milkmen. Interestingly, some of the fundamental characteristics of interaction in S-D-logic, as presented by Grönroos and Voima (2013), were absent in my research context. The actors interacted more often via symbols and signs in a defined, mutually shared 'place': The doorsteps at night. This is, from services marketing perspective the 'servicescape' that incorporates manifold coordination mechanisms, which impact the interaction process of both actors.

This leads to the core of value-co-creation. As presented above, value is finally understood as subjective value-in-use. In my research context this notion is strongly linked to the service user's sphere, where the ultimate step of value-co-creation happens. And that starts right beyond those mutually shared doorsteps at night. From a theoretical perspective, the term 'value' itself has not clearly been defined (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) but researchers in services marketing widely agree that value is at least actualised within the customers' own context. Value is actualised through a process of integrating and interacting with what is provided (e.g., by the milkmen), as well as by applying their own resources (e.g., breakfast routine) (Grönroos, 2008). Hence, it is the customer (= beneficiary) who ultimately determines (based on the contextual and individual perception) value (e.g., Grönroos, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). This means in my specific context that milk doorstep delivery encapsulates the various phenomena identified and 'bottled' throughout this research.

Based on that proceeding argument, it can be summarised that my research supported the overall theoretical framework of S-D-logic and contributed by way of example to the current understanding of the focused foundational premises (Vargo & Lusch, 2016), which are depicted in the following table:

#	Foundational premises and axioms
FP 6 (axiom 3)	Value is co-created by multiple actors always including the service beneficiary.
FP 7	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.
FP 10 (axiom 4)	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.
FP 11 (axiom 5)	Value-co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.

Table 18 Focused foundational premises and axioms

Therefore, at the end of my narrative analysis story, it could be stated that in line with the current understanding of Vargo and Lusch's foundational premises (2016), I posit that value is co-created by multiple actors always including the service beneficiary. My research offers only indications, such as the different levels of trust or the various traits of interaction, that the relation between service provider and service user might be widened even further as other 'actors' on their own also propose values to the beneficiaries. Furthermore, my research supports the current position in academia that actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions. Nevertheless, the embedded variety of the value proposition and the asynchronous interaction process offer relevant contributions in that respect. Additionally, my research has shown that value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary. Here, the insights gathered as **MILK, MOON & MONEY** enriched the widely-shared understanding of the relevance of contextual phenomena in value-co-creation. And finally, it can be stated that value-co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.

My research presents a different view of institutions and provides examples at the micro-level in relation to the variety of signs and symbols present in daily lives that are not 'seen' or consciously recognised, but remain relevant for human rhythms.

So, it can be said that the research design chosen offered a key to gain a better understanding of the interactions within my research context. My research not only supports the theoretical framework of Vargo and Lusch (2016), but also combines different areas of social research (services marketing and anthropology) and offers a different methodological approach (ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and reviewing customers' online feedback). Through that approach, additional knowledge has been created, helping me to answer the theoretical research question for my research context:

How do contextual phenomena (e.g., temporal, and local) affect value-co-creation?

5. Areas for future research

However, my research has also left many relevant questions unanswered or offered further research avenues promising further meaningful knowledge for services marketing and anthropology.

First, research has yet to address in services marketing, particularly on S-D-logic. As presented earlier, there have recently been done some relevant adjustment of the foundational premises and axioms (*Appendix A*). Nevertheless, the understanding of the process of value-co-creation and the relevance of institutions is still not fully researched. Particularly in that respect, I see a need for further research. More specifically, further research considering the role of institutions and arrangements seems to me necessary. My research has questioned the role of the supplying company (as incorporation of many institutional arrangements) and offered, by way of example, various institutions, such as the milk glass bottle. But there is still empirical research missing in regards of their impact on the service users (Becker & Jaakola, 2020). That call comes along with the fundamental request in services marketing to gain further

insights and a better understanding of the customers and their contribution to services and the resource integration (e.g., Gao et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2019). I, therefore, recommend using a research design that embeds observations and semi-structured interviews (Kelleher et al., 2019). Equally, it might also be worth taking a deeper look into the area of value-de-construction. In my research, I did not touch on the (mutual) process of value-de-construction, although the overall amount of milk glass bottles in circulation and milkmen has decreased over the decades and a substantial number of service users have left the business. So, my data could have offered insights in that respect as well. But as I focused primarily on existing customers (= semi-structured interviews and customers' online feedback) and supposed-to-be-customers (= review of customers' online feedback), it was not possible to reflect in a satisfactory manner on the process of value-de-construction that then might also help to understand value-co-creation still further.

Secondly, I see fruitful avenues for further research in the area of 'naming phenomena'. As my research presented, it has been a constant challenge to find adequate terms to describe the manifold subjective experiences and interpretations evident. In that respect, it can be stated that "affective phenomena consists of textures, intensities, directions, desires and valances that are known corporally before they are identified linguistically" (Ellis et al., 2003, p.725). Throughout my research, I experienced that challenge myself. Hence, I highlighted several times the relevance of creating a meaningful understanding of terms, or symbols, used in the research context, which is fundamentally necessary for any 'group life' as it "enables shared understandings to exist between members of a group as well as transmitting these intergenerationally" (Ballis, 1995, p.423). So, language as an institutional arrangement itself, and its relevance for establishing institutions in society, request further research in institutional and organisational theories (Harmon, 2019).

Thirdly, there might be the opportunity to use other theoretical concepts, such as symbolic interaction that "concerns itself with the actor's point of view as well as the nature of the situation in which collective action is constructed" (Ballis, 1995, p.421), to gain a better understanding of human interactions within

various phenomenologically determined contexts, such as the dark surroundings of night-time doorstep deliveries in the UK.

That might also support the creation of knowledge on some of the phenomena unveiled in the course of this research. Those are, for instance, the relevance of subjective experiences (Blue, 2019) on the creation of subjective local and temporal meanings or the relevance of trust (in relation to persons and institutions). Particularly, in regards of a phenomenon such as trust, it can still be stated “that purely observational studies of trust are strongly limited“ (Möllering, 2001, p.415).

That said, I would like predominantly to call for empirical work and further ethnographic research in services marketing, as there are obviously many areas ripe for further research: ‘Reality’ and human interaction are fraught with many unanswered questions.

Chapter 9 | End

One unanswered enquiry is the strategic question I initially raised. Under the light of my research, the question should adjusted anyway:

‘Milkman’, where are you going to?

I still cannot answer that strategic question and it seems no one else can either. The question concerns a fundamental element of any business: How can a specific business model be adapted to the needs of different times and trends in society? All business models must deal adequately with the challenges of their time. One of the challenges Drucker (1980) saw in such evolutionary processes was the application of yesterday’s logic to present day turbulences. Although the success experienced over almost three hundred years offers no guarantees for the next three hundred years, the long history of the business of the milkmen, progressing from being seen as an ‘untrustworthy person’ in the beginning to becoming a ‘pillar of the community’ shows the ability for an professional conception to evolve. The business of the milkmen has reinvented itself several times in the recent centuries. It adjusted to different societal needs, dealt with the privations of war, and enfolded the trends of different times, whether that be e-commerce growth in the 20th century or what was surely as seismic a change for its time, the replacement of the ‘yoke and pail’.

Additionally, there is the unveiled phenomenon of nostalgia, which is obviously embedded in the concept of ‘the milkman’. This often promotes some kind of “sunny outlook on the future“ (Cheung et al., 2013, p.1485). This positive outlook includes the business of the milkmen as well as the sustainability of humans’ behaviour in general. So, it might well be that another evolutionary step of ‘the milkman’ commenced in 2018: “After 40 years of decline doorstep milk delivery is undergoing a remarkable resurgence -driven by the ‘Attenborough effect’ and a new generation of eco-friendly shoppers.” (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.4). The ‘Attenborough effect’ refers to a reaction in British society that was instigated by the national airing of the Blue Planet II documentaries, aired on television at end of 2017 and beginning of 2018, which explicitly presented environmental challenges to the British population. In these documentaries, the plastic pollution generated by modern societies was hauled out into the open and laid in front of a horrified viewing public. According to Dr. Patrick Müller (CEO of Milk & More),

new customers “watched the programme and saw the devastating effect plastic has and they wanted to do something” (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.4). Furthermore, he says in the same article that “[g]lass bottles are an easy solution, and they don’t end up in the sea” (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.4). Of course, it could have been a coincidence that the business of the milkmen was one of the only suppliers of milk in glass bottles across the UK and that people still remembered that niche supplier from their childhoods. But these elements make the Grocer Dairyman believe: “Indeed, having arrived back in the future, milkmen have a more important role to play in society than ever. Elderly people are increasingly isolated and there are fewer police patrol than 30 years ago. Trundling through the streets in the early hours, milkmen are the ‘eyes and ears of the neighbourhood’ [...]” (The Grocer Dairyman, 2018, p.8). But, as stated in the Milk Marketing Board’s training booklet ‘The Milky Way’ (1977) more than 40 years ago, “[...] you as the milkman are the last vital link in the chain connecting the contented cow with the contented customer” (Ward, 2016, p.19). And I am proud to say: I was one of them in 2018.

Back on that specific night in February 2018 when I was just about to become one of Britain’s icons, people like Ian and myself embodied exactly that ‘vital link’ in the chain to the customers by delivering our services. From my described theoretical perspective, at least my services offered might have looked as follows:

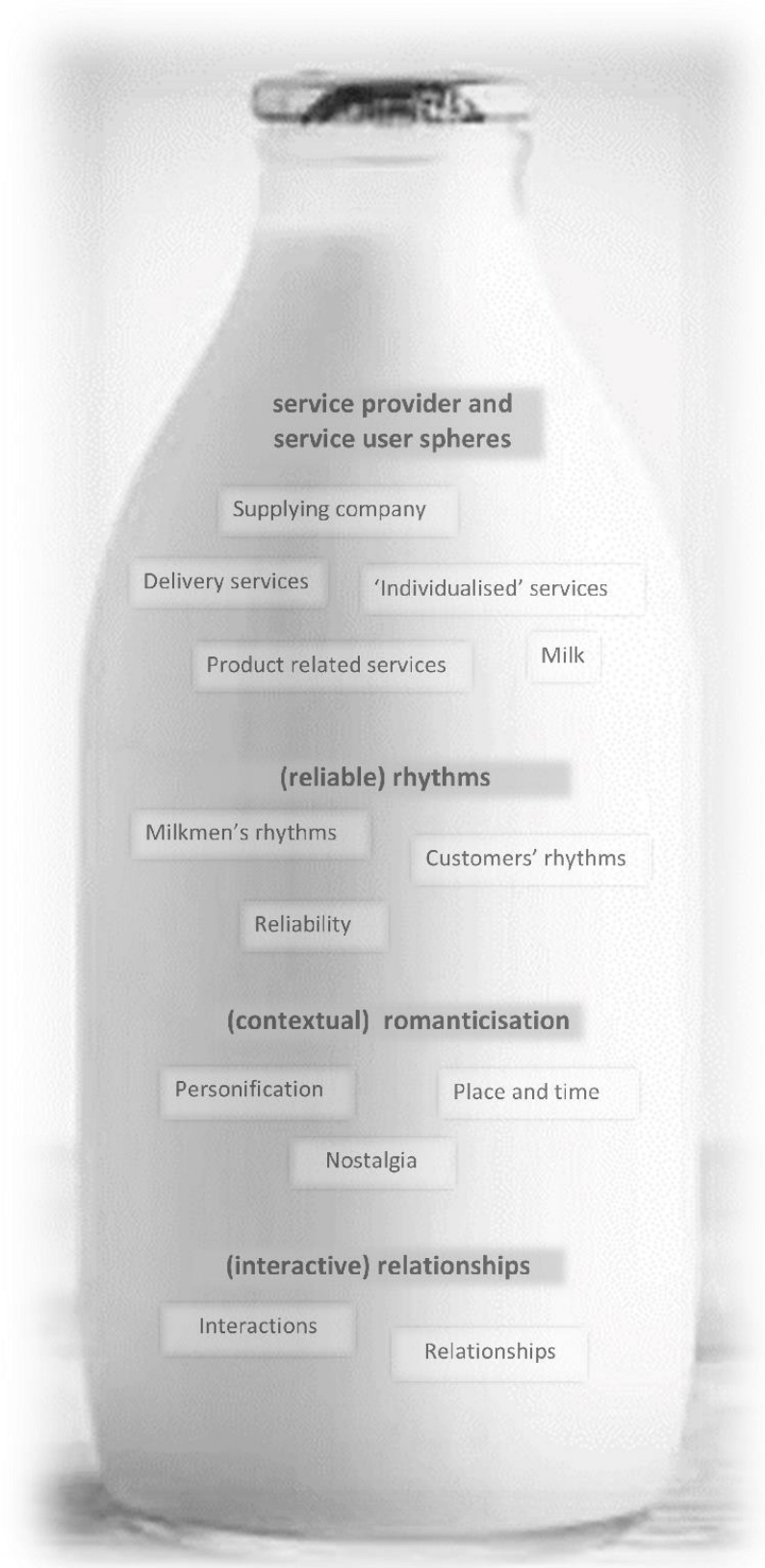


Figure 8 Depiction of the services offered by Christian, the milkman

And Ian and I delivered those services, albeit some unconsciously, to the doorsteps of our neighbourhoods. Speaking for myself, I continued repetitively, routine-like, with the same activities all night long when becoming one of the people ‘carrying the white stuff’ through the dark: A milkman. My job on that specific night:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 18

“In general: exchanging empty bottles for full bottles.”

But the longer it took and the later into the night the experience lasted, I realised that I am used to different work routines: ‘Number crunching’ and Excel spreadsheet data analyses, even when worked on until midnight, are a separate ways of working, different realities. My common routines and common lifestyle, including the after-work routines of having dinner and doing sports are, as projected, less physical, less dependent, and less impacted by weather. For others, my routines might appear to be full of dark shadows and opaque areas, particularly if you are not trained to read Balance sheets. And if you follow some of the news and reports on management, my routines carry deep within them something of the spirit of lawlessness. But on that specific night in February 2018, I was part of a different reality, one, in which I fully focused on the search for empty bottles, milk minders, stones, or (written) notes from ‘my customers’ for about five hours without a break. But then I realised:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 30

“I am not used to being up this early. I see myself starting to make some mistakes (‘red, not blue lids’), so I slow down, double-check, repeat all the orders verbally.”

For the following two hours, I fought the increasingly problematic effects of fatigue. I tried to stay focused. I felt cold. I was ready to leave the scene. And with

dawn breaking, a time that “always has a miraculous charm” (Levered, 2004, p.73), I saw myself almost knocked-out, punch drunk with fatigue:

Observation 01 – MAXQDA paragraph 39

“For the last 30 minutes of the shift I am just counting the steps and the customers: 5...4...3... and so on until I see 6:45A.M. roll around – the time he wants to drop me off at a certain bus stop.”

One of the few things I do remember that is not linked to our customers and all our deliveries we did that night: Yes, he dropped me off at a bus stop in Wimbledon right on time, and someone from the depot picked me up. One of our colleagues, another milkman who had already finished his round, brought me back to the depot where I had to stay for another two hours and talked to the local Operations Manager and some of the other milkmen about our institutional strategic ideas. I was tired, but at least I was in an office with a cup of coffee and some PowerPoint slides in front of me. These things made me feel a bit more ‘at home’, or back in my ‘normal rhythm’ again. But finally, a night out with the milkmen did not feel so uncomfortable anymore. It became another part of my ‘home’, for the next twelve months of my life.

At the same time, and at the same place, there was Ian Beardwell, the milkman who must have been at the same depot at the same point that night as well. As I still had not been introduced to him, it might well be that he was my kind pick-up service, or perhaps one of the milkmen joining in the discussion in the depot between 7:15A.M. and 8:30A.M., or even one of the milkmen loading his vehicle at the same time we were preparing our round. And: “He leaves the centre by 9A.M. and arrives home at 10am” (The Grocer Dairymen, 2018, p.6). But unlike me, he is used to these working hours and the routines on the round. Therefore, he can easily do some more chores after work, and he goes to bed at around 12P.M. to be ready for the next round and his customers the following night (The Grocer Dairymen, 2018). ‘And me?’ I just went home after the two hours

meeting in the depot. But different to my normal working days, I did not return home still with figures and data in my mind. I did not have my laptop with me and not even my calculator was on hand. I was just too tired and full of new impressions and pictures of MILK, MOON & MONEY. Thus, arriving home, I merely crawled into bed:

Observation 04 – MAXQDA paragraph 23

<i>“A very insightful night’ is my last thought before falling into bed.”</i>



APPENDIX | Appendices and references

Appendix A: Development of the foundational premises and axioms in Service-Dominant-logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016)

Foundational premises	2004	2008	2016
FP1	The application of specialised skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange.	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.	No change. Axiom status.
FP2	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental unit of exchange.	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange.	No change.
FP3	Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision.	No change.	No change.
FP 4	Knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage.	Operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage.	Operant resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit.
FP 5	All economies are service economies.	No change.	No change.
FP 6	The customer is always the co-producer.	The customer is always a co-creator of value.	Value is co-created by multiple actors always including the beneficiary. Axiom Status.
FP 7	The enterprise can only make value propositions.	The enterprise cannot deliver value.	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.

Foundational premises	2004	2008	2016
FP 8	A service-centred view is customer oriented and relational.	A service-centred view is inherently customer oriented and relational.	A service-centred view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.
FP 9		All social and economic actors are resource integrators.	No change. Axiom status.
FP 10		Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.	No change. Axiom status.
FP 11			Value-co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements. Axiom status.

Appendix B: Interviewing guideline

#	Issues/ Areas for discussion	Questions
1	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidentiality and ethics. • Myself. • My research topic. • My research approach.
2	The interviewee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are you? • In which area do you live? • What does the community you live in look like? • How would you describe your shopping behaviour (in regards of frequency, products and 'basket spend')? • Are there any routines in your life that impact your shopping behaviour?
3	The milkman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does 'milkman' mean for you? • What comes to your mind if we talk about 'the milkman'?
4	Relationship customer-milkman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been the customer of a milkman? • Have you/your family always 'had a milkman'? • How did you get a milkman? • Do you know your milkman? • What do you know about him/her? • What do you know about his/her business? • What do you think is he/she doing? • How can you recognise this in daily working practice? • What is special about him/her?
5	Time and place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it ok with you that a 'stranger' walks on your property during the night? • Why is he/she allowed to do so? • Do you realise that the milkman comes to your doorstep? How? When? • Is there any reason why you accept that? • Would you like the service as much as you do if he/she would come during the day? • What are the boundaries for the milkman? How do you assure that he/she behaves as you expect him/her?

#	Issues/ Areas for discussion	Questions
6	Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you communicate with your milkman? • What does he/she know about you? • How often do you meet in person? • What does your interaction process look like? • Did the interaction change over the years? • Why do you 'trust' your milkman? • How would you describe the relationship you have with your milkman? • Are there other aspects, which might impact your relation as well (e.g., communication, having a tea)?
7	Advantages/ disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the advantages and disadvantages of 'having a milkman'? • Why do you buy from 'the milkman'?
8	My experiences for reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal elaboration on some of my observations.
9	Value-co-creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What 'services' are delivered by 'the milkman'? • Do you realise that the milkman takes your feedback into account (not only new products)? How? • Are there any examples of your feedback on the services he/she is offering given and being taken upon? • What do you like most about those services? • Which services make the difference for you? • Do you think he/she is delivering value? • How do you measure that from your perspective?
10	Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the interview. • Confidentiality is promised. • Next steps of my research approach. • Thanks a lot for your time and your input.

Appendix C: Word cloud of customers' online feedback



Appendix D: Codebook: Initial coding (January 2019)

Code	No of coded text blocks
1 Analytical Descriptions	0
1.1 Citeable statements on phenomena	135
1.2 Narrative descriptions of the context	0
1.2.1 Me in/and Milk & More	40
1.2.2 Milkman	5
1.2.3 Customer and Community	11
1.2.4 Milk round	1
1.2.5 Milk Float	3
1.2.6 Products and Services	4
1.2.7 Depot	9
1.2.8 Colleagues' or mess room	6
1.2.9 Doorstep	7
1.2.10 Weather is a central element to be reflected by milkmen	11
1.2.11 City or Rural Area	11
1.3 Manual Replacement of gaps in transcriptions	148
1.4 Research Ethics	28
1.5 Interviews	0
1.5.1 Number of my statements (=interviewer)	599
1.5.2 Number of customer statements (=interviewees)	616
1.6 Trustpilot_Number of Customers	95
2 SDL_Service-Dominant Logic (=sensitising theoretical concept)	0
2.1 SDL01_Services offered by the milkmen	0
2.1.1 Milk as in Milk-man	23
2.1.1.1 Iconic Packaging: Glass Bottled Milk	10

Code	No of coded text blocks
2.1.2 What's next to milk (Bread, Fruits and Juices)	20
2.1.3 More and more (Range and Bundles)	12
2.1.4 Treat yourself right and be luxurious (biscuits)	10
2.1.5 good, better, premium	0
2.1.5.1 "No damage" or "how do the products look like"	9
2.1.5.2 BBF dates indicate quality	6
2.1.5.3 Origin = quality: locally, in best from farmers	13
2.1.5.4 Organic logo expresses premium quality	4
2.1.5.5 It has to taste "fresh"	15
2.1.5.5.1 Right packaging supports the character of the product	6
2.1.5.5.2 Temperature equals freshness (and quality)	5
2.1.5.6 Quality is relative and subjective	16
2.1.6 Supportive service elements of the milkman's proposition	0
2.1.6.1 Tea requires milk	5
2.1.6.2 Delivery / being served	12
2.1.6.3 Heavy stuff needs a lift (in those situations)	6
2.1.7 Behavioural service elements of the milkman's proposition	0
2.1.7.1 Nothing specific at all	7
2.1.7.2 Sometimes, it is about the small gestures	7
2.1.7.3 Higher levels define "service"	3
2.1.8 We do a lot - even service!	76
2.2 SDL02_Institution Milk & More	0
2.2.1 Nothing personal!	9

Code	No of coded text blocks
2.2.2 Needed like a hole in the head	9
2.2.3 Nothing than product supply	4
2.2.4 Creation of business.	1
2.2.5 Information and Informality influence institution's intra-action	6
2.2.6 Flow of relevant business information	4
2.2.7 Select trustworthy people fitting to your brand!	9
2.2.8 The brand is a trustworthy person on its own.	10
2.2.8.1 Money for nothing.	5
2.2.8.2 Don't fool around with money!	20
2.2.9 The handheld shall support the milkman	13
2.2.10 Rules of the game!	4
2.2.11 Conservation of the "milkman"	9
2.3 SDL03_Value descriptions via symbols	1
2.3.1 Expensive stuff cannot be left at the doorsteps	1
2.3.2 GBP or no specific GBP in mind	8
2.3.3 Tipping	8
2.3.4 Life takes Visa (rest is priceless)	5
3 DGC_Data Grounded Coding (=indirect SDL)	0
3.1 DGC01_It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas	0
3.1.1 private area = doorstep	1
3.1.2 Real Visibility in Traffic	1
3.1.3 Visibility/Invisibility	5
3.1.4 Magic	15
3.1.5 I need my sleep: be quiet!	0
3.1.5.1 Self-reflection on being quiet enough	6
3.1.5.2 Be quiet at the doorstep!	24

Code	No of coded text blocks
3.2 DGC02_ Being reliable is key!	0
3.2.1 Preparation is needed	13
3.2.2 Don't mess it up the first time	5
3.2.3 Frequency of Deliveries Once too many than once too few	18
3.2.4 Quickness Fastest track to call it a day	2
3.2.5 If you promise something than do so!	4
3.2.6 Deliver as promised: on time	13
3.2.7 Reliability of service, no matter the weather	6
3.2.8 It's more than on time and in full (fresh, free...)	13
3.2.9 Everything for everyone!	2
3.2.10 Individuals_Reliable service is all about the people serving	13
3.2.11 Unreliable service_No milk today!	38
3.3 DGC03_Nostalgia gives us a warm feeling	0
3.3.1 All in a bottle	2
3.3.2 Last of a (special) kind	8
3.3.3 Old times are golden	5
3.3.4 Reminds me of my childhood	16
3.3.5 Heritage from the parents	10
3.3.6 Part of History and evolution	12
3.3.7 Visible Part of the community	14
3.3.8 Tradition (can be and) has to be kept alive!	3
3.4 DGC04_Why am I doing that?	0
3.4.1 Adorn oneself with borrowed plumes	1
3.4.2 Money, money, money	4
3.4.3 All show and no substance / No biz like sow biz	8
3.4.4 The world is not enough	9

Code	No of coded text blocks
3.4.5 Education is key to the future	2
3.4.6 We are not alone on earth	0
3.4.6.1 Current social discussion	5
3.4.6.2 Glass vs. Plastic (Recycling)	21
3.4.6.3 Willingness to actively participate	14
3.5 DGC05_Behind the shadows of the night	1
3.5.1 Night-Shifts are one out of three shifts	2
3.5.2 Darkness=Challenge on orientation	10
3.5.2.1 Which part of Door-step don't you get?	2
3.5.2.2 Empty bottles guide you through	2
3.5.2.3 Milk Minders guide you through	5
3.5.2.4 Given information guide you through	5
3.5.2.5 He just knows and remembers	2
3.5.3 Light into the dark - be cautious	8
3.5.4 Night is not made for common people	2
3.5.5 Night=Dark=Danger	5
3.5.6 Night=My space=Freedom/my world	5
3.6 DGC06_Lonesome wolves out on their tracks	0
3.6.1 Wolfes do not have to talk!	9
3.6.2 Lonesome wolves	10
3.6.3 Milkfloats are the horses joining the lonesome cowboys	0
3.6.3.1 Traditional English	6
3.6.3.2 Function and functionality over forms	4
3.6.3.3 Get ready for the ride	3
3.6.3.4 My partner in crime - my horse	15
3.7 DCG07_Life is about Routines!	9

Code	No of coded text blocks
3.7.1 Start to the day (breakfast) or the weekend	25
3.7.2 My work routines are unique, different and leading!	23
3.7.3 You do as you've always done (including shopping)!	24
3.7.3.1 I do most of my stuff online	1
3.7.3.2 Product('s quality) impacts the shopping routines of customers	7
3.7.4 I have a back-up (top up) - even for my routines	12
3.7.5 I have to fight my habits and Routines can be adjusted	7
3.7.6 The other one (=the milkman) has work routines, too?!	27
3.7.6.1 He/she does even have a normal life beyond work	6
3.8 DGC08_My area, my customers, my business	0
3.8.1 All you see is my land	5
3.8.2 The customers are mine	11
3.8.3 Like a married couple (we know all about each other)	0
3.8.3.1 I have done it for a while...for at least a decade	33
3.8.3.2 Greenhorn!	3
3.8.3.3 It is never the same (again)	2
3.8.3.4 You don't need to know them	7
3.8.3.5 I don't know you, but I know you	6
3.8.3.5.1 imaginary profiles of customers	4
3.8.3.5.2 old fashioned image of woman	4
3.8.3.5.3 traditional is offline	3

Code	No of coded text blocks
3.8.3.5.4 Judge the person on the first impression	6
3.8.3.6 face to face: milkman meets customer	4
3.8.3.7 You need to know your customers	27
3.8.3.8 Stories on customers	19
3.8.3.9 Loyalty is a fundament for any kind of relationship	3
3.8.3.10 Relationships build trust	0
3.8.3.10.1 Institutions (via uniforms) build trust	1
3.8.3.10.2 I inform you in detail and let you do 'cause I trust	8
3.8.3.10.3 I don't know why but I trust	6
3.8.3.10.4 Service = Trust	1
3.8.3.11 The highest level of trust: Take YOUR money	2
3.8.3.12 We know each other inside out	1
3.8.4 if you have your own vehicle, then you can load it	5
3.8.5 I am Rockefeller (independent entrepreneur)	9
3.8.6 I protect my 'hood'	0
3.8.6.1 I can protect my home by myself!	4
3.8.6.2 Milk, vehicles and money can be stolen	11
3.8.6.3 Private area, which can be locked	5
3.8.6.4 Eyes and ears of the community	13
3.8.6.5 concrete scenes for Sherlock	14
3.9 DCG09_Let's have a chat!	1
3.9.1 Notes have gone unnoticed	7
3.9.2 Message in a bottle (or a stone)	28

Code	No of coded text blocks
3.9.3 Leaflet_the old way is always the best one	3
3.9.4 IT let me down (again)!	7
3.9.5 Websites are the modern style of communication	9
3.9.6 Show me that you are not a bot	1
3.9.7 be personal - send me an e-mail	8
3.9.8 I don't need human interaction: I love robust processes	8
3.9.9 Why talk to beginners - I am calling the experts	9
3.9.10 911 help is needed asap	0
3.9.10.1 long time to get someone on the phone	18
3.9.10.2 Intense in costs and efforts	6
3.9.10.3 Milkman's private phone	1

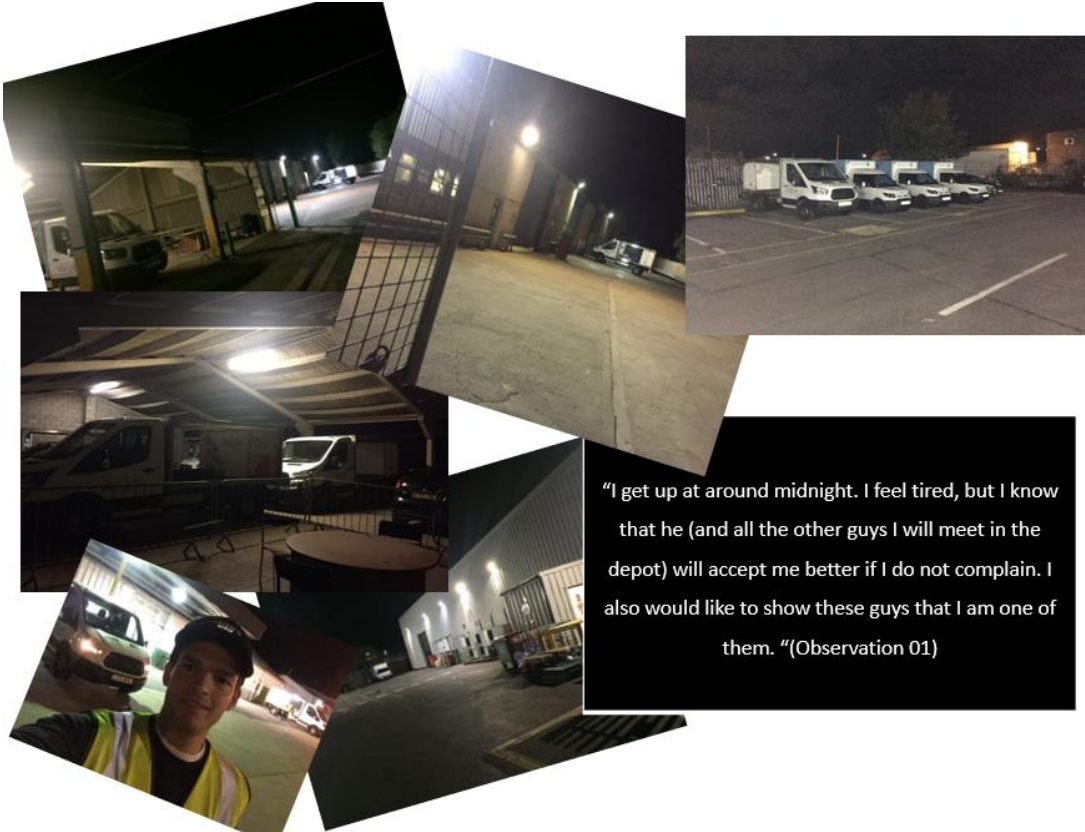
Appendix E: Codebook: Final coding (January 2021)

Code	No of coded text
1 Descriptive statistics of my research	
1.1 Manual Replacement of gaps in transcripts	148
1.2 Research ethics	27
1.3 No of my interview statements (=interviewer)	599
1.4 No of customer interview statements (=interviewees)	616
1.5 No of customer Trustpilot statements (=online feedback)	95
2 Service provider and service user spheres	0
2.1 Milkmen's proposition (=chapter 1.3.5)	0
2.1.1 Milk	0
2.1.1.1 Diversity, complexity, and relevance of milk	14
2.1.1.2 Milk volume and standing orders	7
2.1.1.3 Milk glass bottles	21
2.1.2 Product-related services	0
2.1.2.1 Diversity, complexity, and relevance of the product range	15
2.1.3 Delivery services	14
2.1.4 'Individualised' services	5
2.1.4.1 Quality of services	58
2.1.4.2 Freshness of services	15
2.1.4.3 Occasions and moment of usage	0
2.1.4.3.1 Dairy related	3
2.1.4.3.2 Breakfast	33
2.1.4.3.3 Tea requires milk	5
2.1.4.3.4 Christmas	3
2.1.4.4 Extra services	0

Code	No of coded text
2.1.4.4.1 Heavy stuff	6
2.1.4.4.2 Prices and tipping	16
2.2 Incorporated coordination mechanisms (=chapter 4)	0
2.2.1 (Internal and external) communication and alignment processes	44
2.2.2 Entrepreneur by itself and (hidden) supporter of the milkmen	85
2.2.3 Incorporation of institutional arrangements	26
3 Joint sphere (=chapter 5, 6 and 7)	0
3.1 (reliable) rhythms of MILK	0
3.1.1 Rhythms	0
3.1.1.1 Milkmen`s rhythms	13
3.1.1.1.1 Individual rhythms of work routines	18
3.1.1.1.2 Responsibility for defined areas and their own businesses	5
3.1.1.2 Customers' rhythms	50
3.1.1.2.1 Repetitive, routine-like shopping activities	32
3.1.1.2.2 'Normal rhythm' at home	6
3.1.2 Reliability	0
3.1.2.1 Frequency and regularity of the deliveries	83
3.1.2.2 Fight the almost overpowering natural forces	5
3.2 (contextual) romanticisation in the MOON-light shadows	0
3.2.1 Personification	0
3.2.1.1 Individualised activities of real people	16
3.2.1.2 Embodiment of some professional values	40
3.2.1.3 Embodiment of some societal values	47
3.2.2 Place and time	4
3.2.2.1 'Invisibly visible'	85

Code	No of coded text
3.2.2.2 'Unknown known'	107
3.2.3 Nostalgia	0
3.2.3.1 Degree of relevant knowledge on the business and its historic...	29
3.2.3.3 Glorify the past and load these remembered situations with...	26
3.2.3.2 The 'last Mohican'	10
3.3 (interactive) relationships creating values and MONEY	0
3.3.1 Interactions	10
3.3.1.1 'Traditional' sales leaflet	6
3.3.1.2 'Modern' communication tools	48
3.3.1.3 Contextual language represented by the 'message in a bottle'	36
3.3.1.4 'Being available' or 'being a trouble-shooter'	6
3.3.2 Relationships	0
3.3.2.1 Observable phenomena creating relationships	38
3.3.2.2 Fiction in creating 'real' relationships	50
3.3.2.3 Trustful information creating relationships	47

Appendix F: Impressions of being a milkman



"I get up at around midnight. I feel tired, but I know that he (and all the other guys I will meet in the depot) will accept me better if I do not complain. I also would like to show these guys that I am one of them." (Observation 01)

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