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## Article

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Article

# The Role of Consumer and Customer Journeys in Customer Experience Driven and Open Innovation

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**Abstract:** Customer and Consumer Journeys, touchpoints and Consumer Goals have been widely discussed among Customer Experience theorists and practitioners, establishing that a hierarchical relationship between those exist. Customer Experience driven innovation evaluates opportunities mainly within touchpoints in Customer Journeys. However, there is still a gap in understanding how exactly those elements are interlinked and impact each other. This research article aims to create this understanding by answering three research questions: “To what extent, and how do Customer Journeys impact Consumer Journeys and vice versa?” and “Are touchpoints (including other actors) a sub-set of Consumer or Customer Journeys?” and “Where in the hierarchy should Customer Experience driven innovation opportunities be identified?”. Phenomenological interviews with participants of the Cambridge Venture Camp 2021, organized as part of the ERASMUS+ programme of the European Union within Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education were chosen for the research methodology. Grounded theory and open coding were used to interpret the collected data. In this article, we demonstrate how Consumer Journeys impact Customer Journeys, and that Customer Journeys do not impact other journeys directly, but rather by adjusting the higher-order goals of the Consumer through the response to the stimuli in the touchpoints. A theoretical model is proposed that highlights the interconnectivity of the different experience elements, and how to interpret Customer Experience driven innovation within the hierarchy.

**Keywords:** Customer Experience; Customer Experience driven innovation; open innovation; Consumer Journey; Customer Journey



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## 1. Introduction

Customer Experience has become one of the top priorities for organizations worldwide—business leaders are dedicating more resources to and placing greater strategic emphasis on delivering the right Customer Experience to their customers to gain an upper hand in an ever increasingly competitive landscape [1]. The topic of Customer Experience has increasingly appeared as a focal point in conjecture with other research topics in the academic literature—such as innovation. This is not surprising—to compete, organizations need to innovate to drive customer loyalty. There is a proven positive correlation between an increased loyalty and higher spend and positive word-of-mouth [2–4]. To innovate, it is crucial to precisely identify a customer’s needs, goals and journey, and to sometimes even engage the customer in the innovation process itself in the form of co-creation, allowing customers to tailor the journey to their own needs [5] in order to identify and react quickly to differentiation opportunities that deliver an excellent, memorable and personalized Customer Experience [6–9].

Due to its initial conception within experiential marketing and service design, Customer Experience has historically been dominantly firm-centric, viewing the Customer Experience only in the context and limits of their offering (product purchase or service encounter) [10,11]. The general consensus is that these stimuli (direct or indirect interactions) are found as part of the Customer Journey as touchpoints [10,12]. Herein lies one

of the larger gaps within the field, as Customer Experience research has been predominately focused on Customer Journeys: creating methods and approaches for managers to influence and improve the journey considering the touchpoints that are controlled by the organization [10,13–16]. The same applies to research related to Customer Experience driven innovation—literature within the marketing domain has been predominately focused on innovation activities and capabilities from the organization’s perspective, aimed at improving touchpoints and interactions within the control of the organization—its products and services (mainly under the topic of service innovation) [16]. Researchers have pointed out this gap by proposing further research to focus on the experience from the customer’s perspective [12,17,18], and some have already tried to address it by proposing external touchpoints as part of the Customer Journey [10,19–21]. However, this approach still limits the scope to look at the journey from a firm’s perspective, simply introducing additional touchpoints that are outside of the organization’s control (e.g., looking up reviews for a product before making a purchase), ignoring the underlying cause for why a customer decided to partake or start the journey itself. This creates obstacles to fully realize innovation opportunities, as they have been identified to mainly reside within touchpoints of a Customer Journey; however, if an organization is lacking insights into other journeys the individual is taking part in, it can lead to resources spend on touchpoints that do not bring relevant value to the beneficiary [6,22,23].

This research article aims to bridge this gap of knowledge by demonstrating how the different Customer Experience elements are interconnected, and how they impact each other, specifically focusing on Consumer and Customer Journeys, touchpoints and actors that are part of the different journeys in the pursuit of a higher-order goal. This is essential before exploring innovation opportunities within the journey, as to avoid further increasing the gap in customer-centric research views within the research domain.

In the literature review, Customer Experience, the different journeys and their elements are analyzed and described. Additionally, the literature on Customer Experience driven innovation is reviewed to understand at which stages and levels of the Customer Experience innovation opportunities can be identified. Conclusions from the literature review are used to create the framework for the empirical research.

A total of 14 phenomenological interviews were conducted during the Cambridge Venture Camp 2021—a one-month-long interactive workshop and lecture event, organized as part of the ERASMUS+ KA2 Strategic Partnership project “European Entrepreneurship Training Community” [24]. The interview outline was designed to incorporate not only the experience of the participant within the camp itself, but also the other journeys outside of the organizer’s control that they had embarked on in pursuit of their higher-order goals of becoming an entrepreneur.

Grounded theory and open coding were used to analyze and interpret the interview results, and to establish and understand the impact of the various Customer Experience elements to other elements. The findings were then used to create a theoretical model—a hierarchical view on Customer, Consumer Journeys and touchpoints and higher-to-lower order goals, building on Becker’s hierarchical view on Customer Journeys [12].

The Discussion section summarizes the findings and discusses them in connection with previous studies within the domain of Customer Experience. This research article contributes to the topic of Customer Experience by building on the existing theoretical framework to propose a model that highlights the interconnectivity of Customer and Consumer Journeys and touchpoints. Additionally, we propose how Customer Experience driven innovation can be interpreted within the touchpoints that reside in the Customer Journey, through co-creation in an open innovation model in organizations. This can be utilized as a quality baseline for future research directions to validate this model and our findings in other fields. This article also proposes further research possibilities to further enhance this model. The conclusions and findings of this research have been utilized by the ERASMUS+ KA2 Strategic Partnership project “European Entrepreneurship Training

Community”, to further enhance value-proposition towards aspiring entrepreneurs in the various programs organized by the partner universities within and outside of the project.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Customer Experience and Customer/Consumer Journeys

Historically, Abbott can be considered as one of the early founders of the concept of Customer Experience, by suggesting back in 1955 that customers do not really desire products but satisfying experiences [25]. While the authors of this article would argue that his research lacked any concrete suggestions for organizations on how to incorporate this aspect into their strategic model to leverage it against competitors, it still established a core principle of Customer Experience—the goal of the customer is not the product or service itself, but rather the experience, or result, of the consumption of the product [26].

When the term “Customer Experience” first started to be used in the scientific community more than 30 years ago, it appeared in two different branches of research: within behavioral economics, where Customer Experience was studied in the context of experiential aspects of consumption [27,28], and service design, as the customer’s perception of a service encounter [20]. Due to this fundamental fragmentation early in the conception of the research topic, this rift continued to grow over the years—not only continuing the two different directions of experiential marketing and service design, but also creating a chasm between practitioners and theorists [15,29]. Thus, despite the concept of Customer Experience being discussed by marketers, service design theorists and practitioners since the 1990s, recent researchers still point out that the topic of Customer Experience is fragmented, that research is frequently done in isolation and often do not treat it as a holistic and multi-dimensional construct [1,12,18,30].

Still, many researchers have strived to focus and re-define this fragmented field to concrete definitions and context, and, we would argue, have largely succeeded. Meyer and Schwager, Verhoef et al., Becker, De Keyser and others have attempted to create a coherent definition of Customer Experience, its context and limitations [10,12,13,18,31–33], that Becker summarizes as: “Customer Experience is a customer’s response to stimuli” [12]. The stimuli is created by direct (purchase, call, website visit) or indirect (word of mouth, review) interactions with a (set of) market actor(s) [1,10,13,18].

As already established by Abbot in 1955, customers aim not to simply obtain the product, but to gain value from its consumption [25]. Thus, we should not consider Customer Experience through the lens of Customer Journeys, but rather look at the underlying goals the customers are looking to achieve. Towards this, the concept of Consumer Journeys was introduced [30,34,35] as an over-arching concept to Customer Journeys. Consumer Journeys are triggered by more abstract, higher-order goals, such as becoming healthier or finding a more suitable home for the family, and may consist of multiple Customer Journeys—each journey having its own concrete goal, such as visiting the pharmacy to pick up medication or finding a property through a realtor agency [12], [17]. This multi-level aspect of Customer Experience has been covered in some recent research [12]; however, there is still no consensus on how exactly Consumer and Customer Journeys impact each other, if touchpoints are a sub-set of both Customer and Consumer Journeys and how do other non-firm-actors (such as friends, family and others) impact the journey.

### 2.2. Customer Experience Driven Innovation

While innovation as a subject for marketing practitioners and academics has been trending recently as a major source of competitive advantage, the interconnectivity between Customer Experience and innovation is not a new one. In the 2000s, Vargo and Lush proposed a new paradigm shift from goods to Service-Dominant logic [15], where they determine that innovation is directly related to how organizations service their customers, rather than what is produced, proposing that Service Innovation is the appropriate approach towards achieving the competitive advantage in a Service-Dominant environment [16]. This paradigm shift is largely related to most companies and products reaching

a phase where technological innovation no longer offers a sizeable edge over competitors, thus forcing companies to figure out other means of gaining the upper hand, such as managing, improving and designing new experiential aspects of the encounters [22,36,37]. A central aspect of realizing Service Innovation becomes the concept of “value creation” for the customer—new attitudes, skills and competences offered throughout the Service Encounter [15,38]. Customer Experience driven innovation, while similar to and derived from Service Innovation, as it not only focuses on the “how” (service), but also the “what” (the product)—evaluating the entire experience of the customer to find new ways to innovate, regardless of whether this means introducing a new product, or changing the process of how a service is delivered—focuses on the value that can be added within the journey for the customer [7,39,40].

Customer Experience is viewed as the responses to the stimuli that reside within the Customer Journey, where those stimuli are a result of a direct or indirect interaction between the customer and an organization [10,12,18]. Thus, most of the academic literature on Customer Experience driven innovation has been heavily focused on the importance of touchpoints. Three common conclusions can be made from the academic literature, where most scholars agree.

Firstly, each touchpoint offers a unique chance to innovate—to differentiate the Customer Experience from competitors [39–42]. There are multiple touchpoints within each Customer Journey and there is a uniqueness to each Experience due to the different cognitive, emotional, social and physical attributes of each individual that participates in the journey [18]. This means that each time the customer interacts with an organization, this is a potential chance to stand out from the competition. This can be considered a double-edged sword of sorts; even though this means many potential opportunities to truly gain a competitive advantage, as each customer within their own journey with an organization experiences multiple touchpoints, if any mistakes are made, the negative effect can be exponential. Thus, it is crucial to get the experience right.

Secondly, innovation through Customer Experience can be achieved by identifying the various touchpoints to identify the different potential business opportunities to innovate [7,43–45]. Methods to foster innovation in the various touchpoints have been widely used by practitioners over the years—in the form of Service Blueprinting within Service-Dominant logic [46,47] or Customer Journey Mapping within Customer Experience Management [34,48,49]. As described in chapter 2.1. of this article—referring to a gap within the academic literature—by identifying only the touchpoints within a specific Customer Journey, organizations risk missing out on innovation possibilities, by not taking into consideration touchpoints that are not owned by the organization [14].

Lastly, once the touchpoints have been identified, it is necessary to identify the potential for each touchpoint to “add value” towards the total Customer Journey as part of the innovation activity [23]. Here, it is important to add that presently non-existent touchpoints should also be considered at this point [6]. Not always will only new touchpoints be added, or existing ones improved; sometimes some will be removed from the journey, as they either do not bring value or may be duplicating the value addition from a different touchpoint from a different stage of the journey [23]. It is important to note that Vargo and Lush define value as “always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” [16] (p. 7), meaning that the touchpoints within an organization cannot deliver value themselves and can only be considered value propositions. This has a few implications:

For one, it can be concluded that Service Blueprinting or Customer Journey Mapping have glaring shortcomings—they lack customer centricity that is required to determine the value added within the journey and subsequently, each touchpoint, as they have been rather firm-centric, and instead the external environment of an organization should be considered [50].

Additionally, since the perceived value is unique to each individual, and since the value is generated both through the totality of the journey and through each touchpoint, we

propose that this perception depends on what the customer is aiming to achieve through the Customer Journey—their higher-order goals [12,17]. If our goal is to become healthier, the value we perceive from each touchpoint throughout our visit to a local grocery store (Customer Journey) will be very different, compared to if the goal is to reduce our monthly costs to increase the savings. Becker developed a theoretical model that offers a view on how goals on different levels relate to the elements of Customer Experience; specifically, Consumer and Customer Journeys, and touchpoints [12]. An example to illustrate this would be a Consumer's higher order goal to start a new career in a different country. This would merit the inception of multiple Customer Journeys with various market actors, such as applying for potential positions using a headhunting service, finding a suitable place to live, booking travel tickets and arranging transport to and from the airport. While Becker's view does offer a better (in this context—more customer-centric) model to understand the hierarchical view on both goals and journeys, it has ambiguity towards how exactly the different levels of journeys impact each other, and the role of touchpoints within this relationship, which leads to the role of Customer Experience driven innovation lacking context. In order to innovate how value is added at each touchpoint, it is necessary to understand how that would impact the entire Customer Journey this touchpoint is part of, as well as how it impacts other Customer Journeys that have been started to pursue the higher-order goal.

Lastly, since the perceived value is individual, perceived and idiosyncratic, this puts the customer as a co-creator of their own experience [39,51]. Organizations can consider their role as facilitators, creating a potential for value creation, yet the creation of the unique itself lies within the hands of the consumer [16]. This means that part of the innovation process is outsourced to the customer. So far, in this article, we have looked at how organizations can create innovation within the various touchpoints of the Customer Journey that are experienced by the customer or consumer, and evaluated this according to the value perceived towards their higher-order goals. However, the co-creation aspect within Customer Experience means that the customer can actively participate in the innovation process, and create a unique experience, using the tools, resources and know-how offered by the organization within the Customer Journey. Petraite (2011) describes three modes of co-creation that organizations may apply, based on whether the organization applies a closed or open innovation model: from passively collecting data from customers to design new products for customers, to gathering feedback from customers directly, and lastly allowing customers to design the solution themselves, by offering an option to personalize their experience, thus creating innovation [52]. We propose that when considering a Customer Centric perspective to co-creation, allowing customers to design and personalize their own experience in addition to the more traditional closed innovation models is a crucial approach to ensure that the higher-order goals are considered and fully considered. This means that not only can organizations enhance the Customer Experience by adding value-added innovation for the touchpoints within the Customer Journey, but also apply an open-innovation model by offering Customers to innovate themselves to personalize their Customer Journey, to even better tailor it to pursue their higher-order goals. This creates a sort of cycle between Customer Experience and an Open Innovation model through co-creation—an organization innovates within touchpoints in a Customer Journey and supports/encourages co-creation of personalized experiences. This prompts the customer to innovate, which the organization can use as input to additionally innovate and enhance touchpoints for other Customers, and further offer better co-creation opportunities.

Outsourcing a certain part of the innovation process to the customer adds another layer of complexity and responsibility for organizations; enabling co-creation within the Customer Experience can be challenging. Generally, customers tend to be suspicious and anxious towards changes in the Customer Journey [44]. When considering that these journeys are embarked on by the individual to serve a higher-order goal, and they are co-creators of the experience, innovation at certain touchpoints within the journey can have an impact on the realization of the goals. This means that it is necessary to create an

environment where the customer feels secure and trusting, which requires the creation of an emotional connection with the customer [43,53]. The importance of the emotional aspects of the experience within a co-creation situation and within service (as opposed to product or technological innovation) has been noted within research [2,50]. Whether an experience is emotional (hedonic) or cognitive (intellectual) is only one of the aspects—as Customer Experience is derived from not only emotional, but also cognitive, social, physical and sensorial responses [51,54].

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that:

- Customer Experience driven innovation aims to create and improve the “customer value” proposition of the Customer Journey by focusing on the touchpoints where the direct and indirect interaction between the customer and organization occurs;
- As “value” is individually perceived, organizations that want to promote Customer Experience driven innovation must recognize and manage co-creation aspects of the experience, as well as think of the journey as customer and not form/organization centric;
- Co-creation can be used to encourage customers to innovate and personalize their experience at certain touchpoints, and this know-how in turn can be collected to repeatedly innovate within the touchpoints to enhance the value-proposition further for all customers;
- Value is perceived by the customer experiencing emotional, cognitive, social, physical and sensorial responses throughout the touchpoints and comparing it to how this helps them move towards higher-order goals.

This means that organizations that want to utilize Customer Experience driven innovation to strengthen their competitive advantage need to have a customer-centric view, and not only manage the touchpoints within their specific Customer Journey, but also consider the macro-levels of the Customer Experience—that Customer Journeys are a sub-set of Consumer Journeys that individuals engage in, with the aim of achieving their higher-order goals. More importantly, there needs to be an understanding of how the various levels in the hierarchy impact each other, where current literature does not offer a cohesive and holistic approach.

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this research article is to build towards an understanding of the role of Consumer and Customer Journeys in Customer Experience driven innovation. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to understand the interrelation between Consumer and Customer Journeys and touchpoints, by answering two research questions: “RQ1: to what extent, and how do Consumer Journeys impact Customer Journeys and vice versa?” and “RQ2: Are touchpoints a sub-set of Consumer or Customer Journeys?”. Once these research questions are answered, a third question can be proposed: “RQ3: Where in the hierarchy should Customer Experience driven innovation opportunities be identified?”

The study was performed as part of the ERASMUS+ KA2 Strategic Partnership project “European Entrepreneurship Training Community” [24]. The objective of this project is to support innovation through cooperation, by identifying the current skill-set demands in the market, and aligning various stakeholders in the entrepreneurial process, such as higher education institutions, business incubators and government institutions [55]. The project is managed by 4 higher education institutions in the UK (Anglia Ruskin University), Latvia (Riga Technical University), Finland (South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences) and the Netherlands (Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences). In the context of the project, the student enrolled in an entrepreneurship study course or program is considered a customer of the University. The project itself consists of multiple activities organized in order to meet the objective, involving a large set of various stakeholders in the entrepreneurial and innovation support ecosystem [55]. This makes it a suitable program to utilize for this study, as it is possible to gain insights from the project partners about the various Customer Journeys taken by the students (customers) in the pursuit of their higher-order goal (starting their business), which allows the researchers to gain deeper

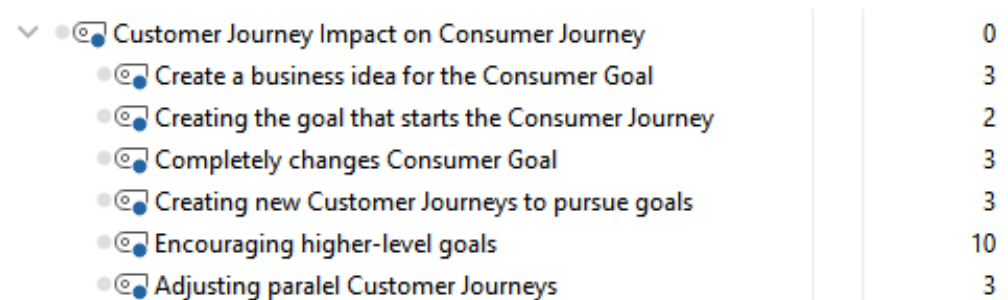
understanding and create more thorough and precise conclusions. As part of the project scope, the “Cambridge Venture Camp 2021” was organized by the 4 partner universities in the UK, Latvia, Finland and the Netherlands. This is an 4 week online (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) event, aimed at helping entrepreneurs with their innovations and business ideas, by bringing them together with leading mentors, providing keynote speakers of different industries and strengthening their entrepreneurial capabilities [56,57]. More than 100 participants took part in the event as participants, lecturers or mentors. The program was structured in three main parts: Week 1—lectures, Week 2 and 3—individual and group mentoring sessions, Week 3—lectures and the “Big Pitch” (where a select entrepreneur would pitch their business idea and plan to a jury to win a prize) at the last day of the 4-week endeavor. Running the study for this article as part of the Venture Camp was selected as suitable for a multitude of reasons.

Firstly, Customer Journeys are dynamic, have a distinct pre, during and after stage, and are iterative and include past experiences and external factors [10,48]. The Venture Camp fits this definition rather well, includes a multitude of different touchpoints throughout the program (in the form of lectures, e-mails, mentoring and informal sessions) and is organized by a group of partners (in this context: firm/organization) where most of the touchpoints reside within their control.

Secondly, it can easily be considered as a sub-set of a larger Consumer Journey for the entrepreneurs—to facilitate their higher-order entrepreneurial goals. That could be starting your business, growing an existing one or having an idea for a business. As the aim of the Venture Camp is to facilitate the execution and realization of those goals, this makes it suitable to support the aim of this study.

Thirdly, entrepreneurship has a dynamic nature, as entrepreneurship is not a linear process, but rather chaotic and unpredictable [58]. This matches the general consensus among theorists that Customer Experience is dynamic in nature [10,59–62].

Becker’s proposed goal-oriented view of the Customer Journey (see Figure 1) was used as a conceptual model for the study. This model illustrates the general hierarchy between higher- and lower-order goals, Customer and Consumer Journeys and touchpoints. The author demonstrated how customers enter a self-regulating model of behavior, by constantly comparing their goals with their current experience and adjusting their behavior in order to keep moving towards achieving it [12].



Customer Journey Impact on Consumer Journey	0
Create a business idea for the Consumer Goal	3
Creating the goal that starts the Consumer Journey	2
Completely changes Consumer Goal	3
Creating new Customer Journeys to pursue goals	3
Encouraging higher-level goals	10
Adjusting paralel Customer Journeys	3

Figure 1. Example of code and code category from MAXQDA software.

While Becker’s framework is a great stride towards understanding how a customers’ goal hierarchy affects the Customer Experience, this research builds on this model by establishing the relationship between the different levels of the Customer and Consumer Journey, customer and touchpoints. To collect data, phenomenological interviews were conducted with a sub-set of participants of the Venture Camp 2021. This type of interview method was chosen to match Becker’s research methodology, as it allowed the production of comparable results from a different context. The structure for the phenomenological interviews was split into three distinct parts: Contextualization, Apprehending the Phenomenon and Clarifying the Phenomenon [63].



The interview script followed this structure (see Table 1), with every stage serving multiple goals towards understanding the Consumer and Customer Journey elements. Introduction: to create an open environment where the participant feels safe to share their experience openly and elaborate. Contextualization: to set the stage of the interview understandably between the higher-order goals (entrepreneurial goals) and lower-order goals (Venture Camp), in order to focus the conversation on the relevant context of the study. Apprehending the phenomenon: participants were invited and prompted to share additional information on their entrepreneurial goals, with the hope of gaining insights into the other Customer Journeys that they have been part of during their pursuit of starting their own business (entrepreneurial journey) to also gain insights into the different touchpoints and actors they have interacted with. This part of the interview was the most flexible and least scripted, as it required constantly adapting and actively listening to the course of the conversation, to identify whether to clarify the participants’ mentioned impressions in more detail or ask as to elicit and specify more examples.

**Table 1.** Interview outline of the Venture Camp 2021 participants, as adopted from Becker and Bevan [12,63].

Interview Stage	Interview Structure
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Icebreaker (social small talk to make the participant more relaxed and open).</li> <li>• Explaining the aim of the study.</li> </ul>
Contextualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the participant to introduce themselves, give an overview of their background.</li> <li>• Invite to share their entrepreneurial goals (if this information was already obtained during observation, they were asked to confirm and elaborate).</li> </ul>
Apprehending the Phenomenon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite the participants to share more details on their entrepreneurial goals (Consumer Journey).</li> <li>• Asking the participants to share other journeys (Customer Journeys) they have participated in in the pursuit of their higher-order goals.</li> <li>• Inviting the participants to share activities they have taken part in during the Venture Camp, and the impact on their higher-order goals (touchpoints),</li> <li>• Asking the participants to share information about other actors who have been part of the inception or follow-through of the goal (journey actors)</li> </ul>
Clarifying the Phenomenon	<p>Applied during the analysis of the transcribed interview data—to bring structure and adjusting it to the context of Customer Experience [63].</p>

Grounded theory was chosen to guide the data collection and analysis for the purpose of this research paper. There were a multitude of reasons for this: This method allows not only working with codes and categories, but encourages an iterative approach in the analysis, and it also allows both developing and validating theoretical models at once [64]. This approach fits well with the aim of this research, as it allows forming theoretical conclusions inductively from the collected data, and since Consumer and Customer Journeys and touchpoints are both rather unique to the individual experiencing them, yet still have collective similarities for similar individuals in a similar context, performing the analysis iteratively, and constantly building a theory while still collecting the data, gives a better chance of identifying and capturing both individual and collective Customer Experience elements.

Participants were selected by two main methods: by offering to participate in the research as part of the post-course evaluation survey, or by approaching a certain student directly via e-mail/phone call. Participants were students of the 4 partner universities (Latvia, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom); however, in addition to these countries, we also enrolled participants from Russia, India and Germany. Initially, 4 interviews were scheduled and conducted from the group of students who volunteered to participate in the research. These interviews were constantly analyzed with each new interview to determine how the further interview participants should be selected, as well as understanding how the interview outline sections should be adjusted.

While analyzing the initial interviews, and discussing the results amongst the researchers as well as the partners organizing the Venture Camp, it was determined that there are 3 main types of entrepreneurial students participating in the program: those who realize they want to start their own business but do not have an idea yet (Ideation), those who already have an idea, but are yet to launch it (Preparation), and those who have already launched a business, and now need to advance it further (Growing business). It was important to ensure that all 3 of these groups were represented in the collected data, to enable cross-comparing any emerging conclusions and to determine, whether it applies to the entire population of the sample, or just a sub-set of it.

After the initial analysis of the first 2 interviews, we determined that some leading questions needed to be formulated differently, in order to obtain more detailed and thorough answers. One example from the “Apprehending the phenomenon” stage of the interview related to the actors: initially, we invited the participant to share who had “helped” them in their entrepreneurial pursuits. We realized that different participants interpret “help” in various ways and degrees of involvement, thus for future interviews we refrained from using this term, and rather used “who was involved”, “who do you remember from your journey”—sometimes re-phrasing and repeating this question multiple times during a single interview.

In total, 14 interviews were conducted over the period between the 18 February and 8 April 2021, with durations from 45 to 90 min, with an average duration of about 55–65 min. It was important to conduct the interviews no more than 1.5 months after the Venture Camp to ensure that the memories and perception of their experience were not distorted.

As the later interviews were conducted considerably later than the initial ones, we also collected participation overviews, survey responses and viewed Session Recordings from the Venture Camp before the interviews, in order to correct for potential loss of memory related to which sessions were attended by the interviewee. The interviews were conducted using the ZOOM conference software, recorded and then transcribed using TRINT software, manually correcting some of the unclear text. The interview transcripts were anonymized and the only identifying parameters were the stage of the Consumer Journey (Ideation, Preparation, Growing business)—see Table 2.

**Table 2.** Interview participant overview—created by authors.

Consumer Journey Stage	# of Participants in the Interviews
Ideation	5
Preparation	3
Growing business	6
Total	14

MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software was used for the analysis, as it allows the easy merging/splitting and combination and linking of various codes and code categories. Initially, all the interview transcripts were read without any coding, to look for general themes, similarities, differences and emerging patterns in the context of the two research questions. Then, the transcripts were processed again, where open coding was performed.

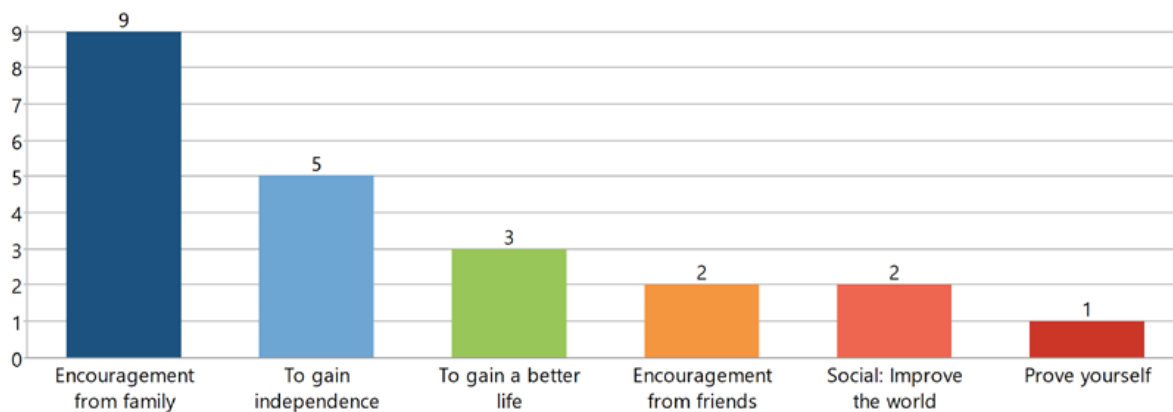
Following open coding, the literature gathered for the theoretical analysis was reviewed repeatedly, and another cycle of coding was performed—axial coding this time, looking to develop overarching categories for each code (see Figure 1).

Then, codes and the code categories were examined in relation to each other and the Consumer Journey stage using selective coding, to ensure all intricacies are captured and analyzed. Thus the entire process of open, axial and selective coding was applied during the analysis, creating a logical set of codes and categories [63,64].

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Impact of Customer Journeys on Consumer Journeys

When asked about their entrepreneurial goals during the contextualization phase over the interview, all the interview participants at first seemingly had a similar entrepreneurial goal—to find an idea for, start or grow a business. This makes up 3 major groups of the 14 interview participants: 3 participants had not yet defined a concrete business idea, and were working on establishing it, 5 participants had already defined a business idea, and were working towards launching their business, and 7 participants had already launched their business. However, when asked about more details during the apprehension phase, by asking questions as: “Can you tell us about the first time you recall setting this goal? What did you feel? How did you come up with this goal?”, the motivation behind the higher-order goal became more differentiated (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Identified motivation of the entrepreneurs behind the consumer (higher-order) goal.

This does need to be evaluated in the context of the Stage of the Consumer Journey the participants are in, to determine whether there are any discrepancies. As can be seen in Table 3, “Encouragement from family” is in the top 2 codes for all 3 phases of the Consumer Journey—as it relates to actors that are part of the broader ecosystem of the Customer Journey: as illustrated by Verhoef [10].

**Table 3.** Ranking of codes related to the motivation of setting the participant’s consumer goals for each of the stages (N/A indicates that this code was not present for this Consumer Journey stage).

	Ideation	Preparation	Growing Business
To gain independence	1	3	2
Due to encouragement from family	2	1	1
Due to encouragement from friends	3	N/A	3
Social causes	N/A	4	5
To prove themselves	N/A	N/A	4
To gain a better life	N/A	2	N/A

In this study, when examining the context of the Venture Camp 2021 and the entrepreneurial higher-order goals, it becomes clear that actors such as family and friends have a high influence on the Consumer Journey itself, where not only can they be considered as participants in the Consumer or Customer Journey, but rather as catalysts and triggers to establish and motivate a higher-order goal. This is further analyzed in Section 4.2. of the article. It can also be concluded during the interview and analysis process that similar goals could have very different reasoning behind them, and apprehension with additional follow-up questions might be necessary to reveal the true motivation and goal behind it, which points to another level of hierarchy above the consumer or higher-order goal. As an example, where “To gain independence” is the actual highest-order goal of the entrepreneur, that can be achieved by setting up a higher-order goal: Starting/growing a business. This points to a possibility of another level of journeys that could be considered, to which Consumer Journeys are only a sub-set.

Further during the interview process, we invited the participants to share other activities they had been engaging in (in addition to the Cambridge Venture Camp 2021), to obtain an overview of the other Customer Journeys they had engaged in, in order to fulfill the higher-order goals. The identified journeys can be seen in Figure 3.

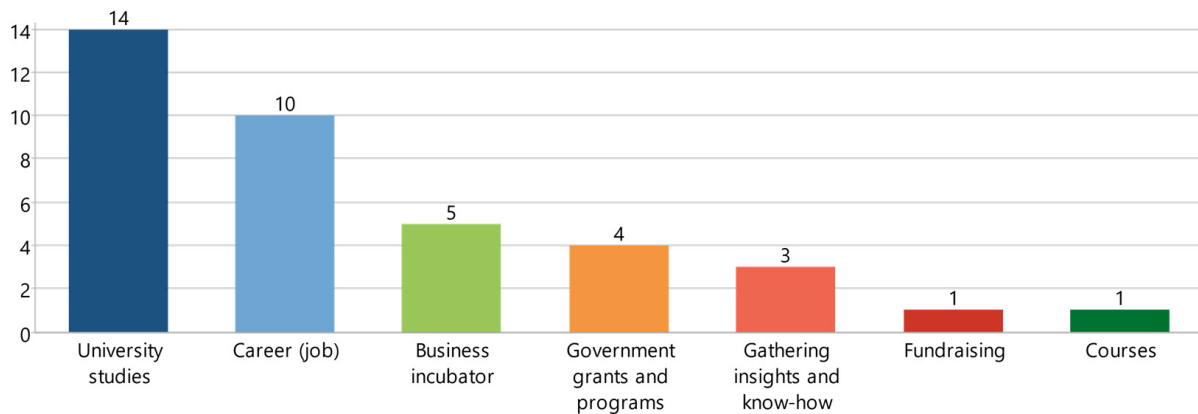


Figure 3. Count of codes of other Customer Journeys towards the consumer (higher order) goal.

When fragmented based on the Consumer Journey stage, there were not any notable discrepancies that became visible, except for one—“Gathering insights and know-how”—for participants in the Ideation phase (see Figure 4). While it is expected that journeys related to activities that logically would start after a business idea has been determined are not seen at this stage of the Consumer Journey, we were surprised to see that the activity related to gathering know-how and insights is predominately featured at this stage, and not the others.



Figure 4. Participants in the Ideation phase: count of codes related to other Customer Journeys towards the consumer (higher order) goal.

When analyzing these interview transcripts in more detail, we realized that while the other participants do mention gathering information at various stages of the interview, they mention them as sporadic touchpoints in other Customer Journeys. Rather, during the

apprehension stage of the interview, it became clear that the participants do not view this as a journey, but rather as a sub-set of touchpoints in other Customer Journeys (for example: university studies, courses). It can be seen that as their Consumer Journey progresses, and they move towards a higher-level goal, they also adjust their needs and lower-order goals as necessary, as established by Becker’s framework of self-regulating behavior towards higher-order goals [12]. As the aim for this research article is to establish the hierarchy from a customer’s perspective, a customer-centric approach requires us to establish the different journeys and touchpoints from their point of view [30,35]. This means that while some might see and engage in this activity deliberately, setting up a lower-order goal to find industry-related know-how and insights, and see it as a set of touchpoints in a separate Customer Journey, others might view it as separate touchpoints of another Customer Journey, demonstrating the dynamic nature of Customer Journeys [10,59–62].

During the interview process, participants were asked to elaborate and evaluate how their participation in the Venture Camp 2021 has affected their higher-order entrepreneurial goals (See Figure 5).

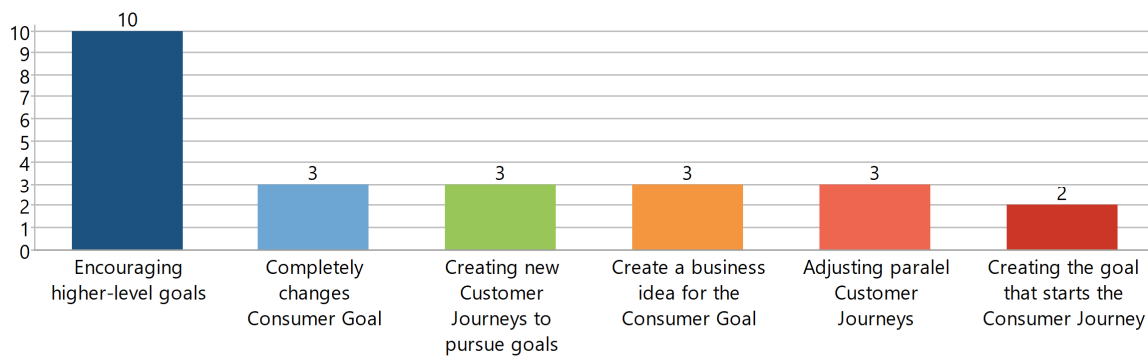


Figure 5. Count of codes for Customer Journey impact on Consumer Journey.

We first noted examples of participants mentioning a negative impact towards Consumer Goals—where participants pointed out how certain touchpoints during the Venture Camp caused them to re-evaluate their entrepreneurial goal, whether this is feasible and whether this should be pursued. However, when evaluating this in more detail, and looking at this from an overarching higher-order goal perspective, it can be deduced that the impact is not negative, as it allowed them to completely readjust and change their Consumer Goals, to set more realistic ones, re-evaluate their motivation (highest-order goal) or adjust their other Customer Journeys to be able to achieve their entrepreneurial goal.

As expected, based on similar previous research [12,30,65], Consumer Journeys are the higher-level and have a larger impact on Customer Journeys than vice versa. However, we can see that a Customer Journey can not only foster changes in other, parallel Customer Journeys, but also start new Customer Journeys. In this study, we can determine that this does not happen directly (Customer Journey to Customer Journey), but rather through the proxy of the Consumer Journey; specifically, the higher-order goals that initiated the journey. For example—an experience derived from a session in the Venture Camp (touchpoint creating a reaction via a direct interaction) affects and adjusts the Consumer Goal, triggering a top-down adjustment of multiple Customer Journeys that have been started and entered in the pursuit of this higher-order goal.

#### 4.2. Touchpoints as a Sub-Set of Customer Journeys

The academic literature offers a consensus that touchpoints reside within Customer Journeys and can be split into brand-owned, partner-owned and customer-owned touchpoints, and these touchpoints may involve multiple actors [10]. During the interview process, this was also determined when encouraging the participants to share the various activities and milestones (touchpoints) they engaged in while attempting to fulfil their higher-order goal. When speaking about these touchpoints and clarifying the context of

their responses and experience, they were always associated with a specific Customer Journey, rather than the higher-order Consumer Journey. However, despite expecting that actors (friends, family, professors, other entrepreneurs) would also be part of the same touchpoints within specific Customer Journeys, we realized that when asked specifically about various actors who have helped in the progress, regardless of whether these were mentioned in the context of a Customer or Consumer Journey, they were associated with the higher-order goal by the participants. It is important to point out that all the participants mentioned university studies as one of the parallel journeys to the Venture Camp (as can be determined in Figure 3). When examining the time when during their life they first incepted their higher-order entrepreneurial goal, more than two thirds of the participants did that during their university studies (see Figure 6).

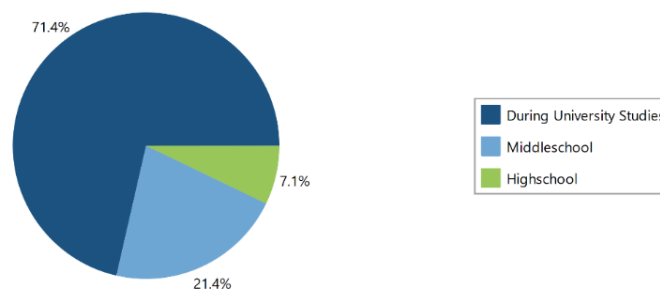


Figure 6. Education level when the higher-order entrepreneurial goal was incepted by the participants.

However, when compared to the motivations described earlier in this article (see Figure 3), we see those actors such as friends and family (who are not part of the different Customer Journeys as separate touchpoints) have a higher influence on the higher-order goal, compared to other actors (mentors, college professors, etc). When apprehending the other Customer Journeys the participants are part of, it can be determined that they view the actors that have helped them towards their higher-level goal to be part of the Consumer Journey (see Figure 7). We identified the common actors that had the most influence on the aspiring entrepreneurs, and it can be seen that the family and other entrepreneurs are the actors who had the largest impact on their higher-order goals.

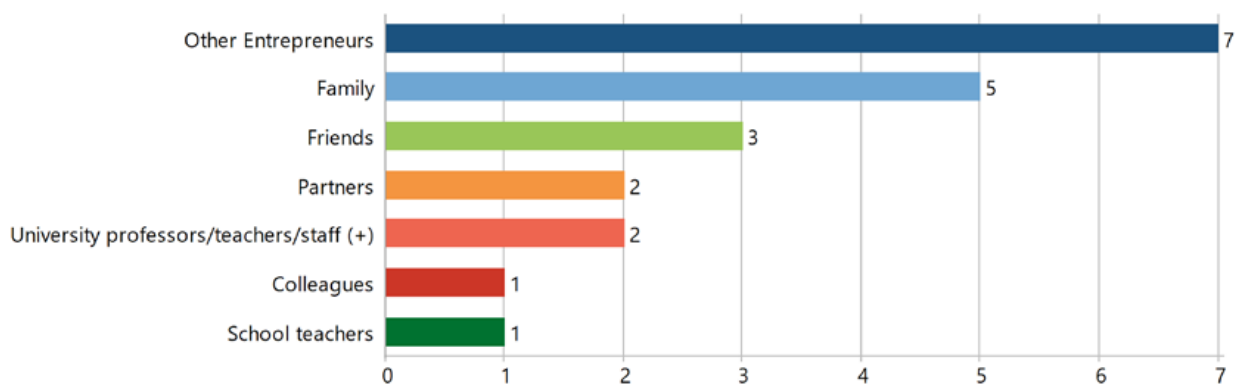


Figure 7. Actors with a high level of influence (impact) on the Consumer Journey.

To ensure that all actors that were part of their experience were identified, we specifically asked participants to elaborate and clarify whether there were additional actors that have been present in their journey, even if it did not directly influence their entrepreneurial goals. What we realized during the clarification of the phenomenon in the analysis of the interview transcripts is that those actors that do not have a direct impact on the Consumer Journey should be considered as part of the touchpoints within the Customer Journeys. These included other entrepreneurs, university professors and schoolteachers who were experienced within touchpoints in their specific journeys; for example, the Venture Camp.

That being said, it does not mean that these actors do not have an impact and influence on the Consumer Journey; however, it is not direct, as it first elicits responses [18,33,66] that then in turn affect and adjust the higher-order goals of the consumer. This points towards the higher impact of some actors such as family (as described earlier in the article) on the Consumer Journey, rather than Customer Journeys. To conclude, this means that while most touchpoints should be considered as part of a Customer Journey, there is a sub-set of actors (in this study, they were determined to be the family and friends of the entrepreneurs) that the participants do not view as part of the Customer Journey, but have a larger and direct impact on their higher-order goals outside of the touchpoints within the specific journey.

4.3. Customer Experience Driven Innovation within the Goal and Journey Hierarchy

As an answer to both of the Research Questions, the conclusions and findings of the literature analysis as well as the analysis of the interview transcripts, Becker’s goal-oriented view [12] of the Customer Journey was used to create a more structured model (see Figure 8). Our model illustrates how the various aspects of the Consumer and Customer Journey interact with each other, and how they are related to the hierarchy of goals (from higher- to lower-order goals).

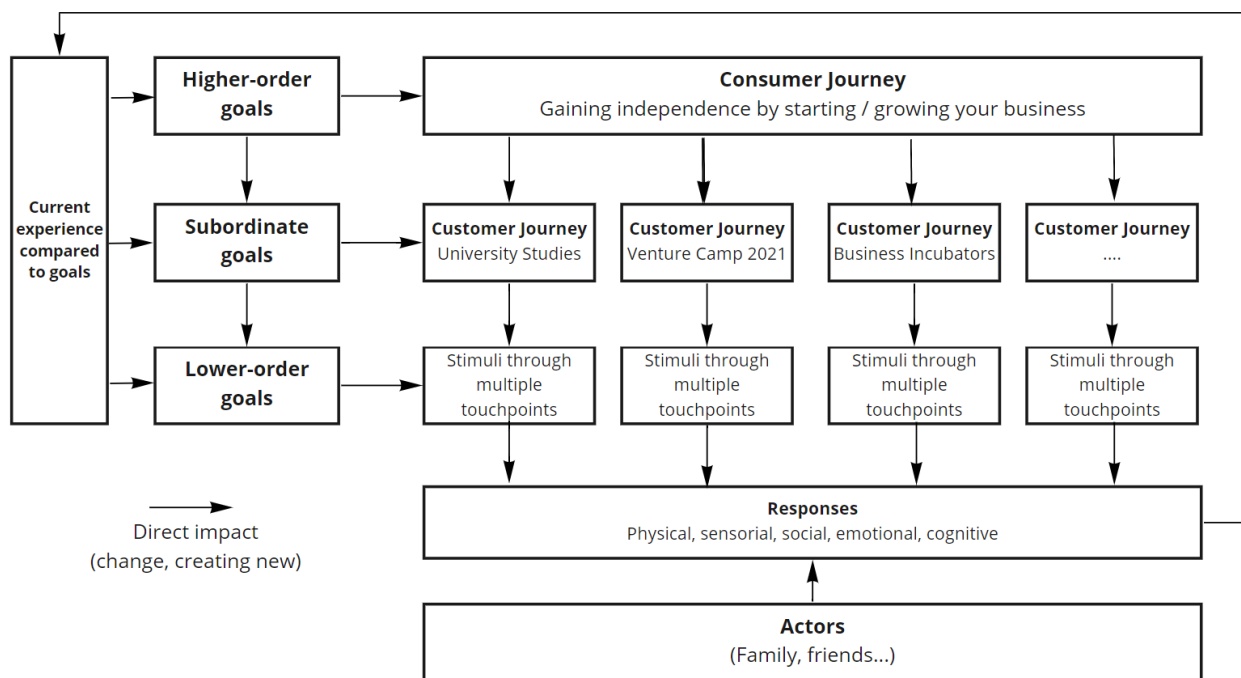


Figure 8. A goal-oriented hierarchical view of Customer and Consumer Journeys.

As demonstrated in the model, when a higher-order goal is created, this puts the participant in a Consumer Journey that has the aim of guiding the person towards this goal. As higher-order goals are split into subordinate goals, Customer Journeys with already more specific goals are created. In the example of this research article, a student might be encouraged by their parents to be more independent in life by starting a new business. This would trigger them to set subordinate goals to reach their long-term one, such as enrolling in an entrepreneurship program in a university, participating in camps such as the Venture Camp or becoming part of a business incubator. Throughout those separate journeys, they will experience stimuli through the various touchpoints—both internal and external from a firm’s perspective [10,18]—in this case, the organizers of the Venture Camp. These reactions would elicit a response—social, physical, sensorial, emotional or cognitive—and those responses can be considered the current lived experience. This in turn triggers a comparison on one or many of the different levels of the goal hierarchy,

triggering a need to adjust or create new Consumer or Customer Journeys, where they can engage in new touchpoints. In addition, there are touchpoints (or actors) that are not part of Customer Journey, as they have a more substantial and direct impact on higher-order goals, as they elicit direct responses that have a much quicker impact on the goal hierarchy, thus the different journeys in return.

Since it has been established that Customer Experience driven innovation is value-creation based, this model offers insights on how organizations should consider improvement ideas in the hierarchy of the journeys. The outcome of any innovation implemented is being experienced by the customer through the touchpoints within the Customer Journey. It is important to consider the entire macro-level view, starting from identifying the overarching goals of individuals. This leads to the understanding of the Consumer Journey that an individual embarks on, and allows us to conceptualize the different Customer Journeys before considering any innovation at a touchpoint level. This allows the organization to avoid potential pitfalls, such as adding new touchpoints that are duplicated in other Customer Journeys, where they can be perceived by a customer as higher value. An example of this is business incubators and government grants in the context of the Venture Camp. These are separate and parallel Customer Journeys—by identifying even some of the touchpoints, the organizers of the Venture Camp can remove touchpoints that are similar to ones the participants have already experienced or may experience in the future as part of their Consumer Journey. Alternatively, they may create a new touchpoint that references and supplements the value that they will gain within a touchpoint in a parallel journey, allowing the participant to associate the perceived value with a touchpoint within an organization's owned journey.

## 5. Discussion: Customer Experience Driven and Open Innovation

### 5.1. Customer Experience Driven Innovation

This article contributes to the widely fragmented topic of Customer Experience by building on already existing and proven framework, expanding it to create a more structured theoretical model that offers insights into how Customer Experience driven innovation should be viewed considering how the various levels of the multi-level Customer and Consumer Journey interact with one another. We build on already established elements of Customer Experience—such as Customer and Consumer Journeys, touchpoints, the market and other actors and the different response of customers to the stimuli within the journey [10,18,65]. We expand current knowledge by clarifying how Consumer and Customer Journeys impact one another, and how they relate to higher- and lower-order goals. We build upon widely accepted theories and frameworks in the field to avoid further fragmenting an already widely siloed field. Specifically, we build upon Becker's goal-oriented view of Customer Experience [12], by adding additional understanding of how the various elements impact each other, and how the negative feedback loop affects the different Customer Journeys and touchpoints in pursuit of a higher-order goal. We believe this to be an important aspect, as not to further contribute to the siloed and fragmented nature of the research topic [1]. Then, we examine the findings in the context of Customer Experience driven business innovation, to see how this hierarchical view impacts value-creation within the touchpoints in the Customer Journey, by considering the larger hierarchy of the various Customer Experience elements.

Based on the analysis of the interview transcripts and the results of the previous two chapters, we have demonstrated how Consumer Journeys have a larger and direct impact on Customer Journeys than vice versa, as they are often the starting point of multiple Customer Journeys in the pursuit of a higher-order goal. Customer Journeys can still cause changes in the Consumer Journeys through the negative feedback loop that adjusts a the higher-order goal, and in turn, the Customer Experience. This adds some needed clarity to the various hierarchical levels of journeys within the topic of Customer Experience [30,67]. Specifically, this allows organizations to better understand how their owned Customer Journey can potentially impact a consumer's higher-order goals—both positively and



negatively. This becomes increasingly important when considering Customer Experience driven innovation; to offer a feasible and actionable value proposition, it is necessary to first understand the wider context of the individual, and their goals [7,39]. This was proposed by De Keyser et al. (2020), highlighting that previous research has too heavily focused on innovation across the various touchpoints within the Customer Journey, while neglecting the wider context and qualities of the individual [6]. We believe that our suggested view offers a solution to this, allowing us to view the totality of the Customer Experience.

We also demonstrate how Customer Journeys can affect parallel journeys that are hierarchically in the same Consumer Journey; however, this affect is not direct, but rather through the proxy of responses elicited from the various touchpoints and actors in the journey. The mapping of the various touchpoints of a Customer Journey in the form of Service Blueprinting of Customer Journey Mapping has been applied by management consultants and practitioners for years [46]. This exercise provides a great visual method to create a joint view within an organization on a service or product experience [14,34,49,68]. While we do not add any new practical guidelines to these tools, our research adds additional depth and understanding when performing this exercise. Service Blueprinting and Customer Journey Mapping has been criticized in the past for lacking customer centrality [12,17,18] and not sufficiently incorporating co-creation aspects [10,11]. Our suggested model of how organizations should look at how their owned and mapped journey during the visualization exercise addresses this, to ensure a better identification of the value-added opportunities for innovation. Additionally, by first looking at the Consumer Journey, rather than the organization owned touchpoints, we can better understand the consumer as a co-creator, and identify the stages of the journey where they might be more involved in creating their own experience, than the organization that owns the journey itself.

We determined that, as proposed by Lemon et al. (2016) on the topic [10], touchpoints should be generally considered as part of Customer Journeys. However, we did identify a sub-set of touchpoints that cannot be considered a part of those, as they have a much larger influence on the higher-order goals, and are also not associated with and contextualized by the participants as a part of touchpoints within Customer Journeys. However, further research should be conducted to see if similar conclusions can be replicated in Customer Journeys that are in a different industry, such as hospitality or retail, as the entrepreneurship process tends to have a less linear journey [58]. We do not expect there to be a large difference when looking from a customer-centric view as proposed in this article, as Consumer Journeys following a higher-order goal will always be less concrete, long term and dynamic in nature [12]; however, this should be empirically tested on a larger scale.

Additionally, we believe that there is a discussion to be had and a consensus to be reached among academics within the Customer Experience domain about the usage of the term customer versus consumer. This is in the context of Customer-Centric Journeys, as if we include Consumer Journeys as an overarching level, we should no longer be viewing and referring to individuals interacting with an organization as customers, but rather consumers. This might seem a minor distinction, but within a field that is already fractured and with just recently defined terminology on the Customer Experience context, definition and elements, any misunderstandings should be avoided [45].

## 5.2. Customer Experience and Open Innovation

Our research highlights the importance of enabling co-creation possibilities within the Customer Journey (specifically, in the organization-owned touchpoints), in order to further enhance the innovation capabilities of an organization. The importance of customer co-creation within open innovation is not a new notion—previous research has highlighted how enabling co-creation practices can reduce the possibility of competitors being able to copy the business model, design solutions more suitable to a user's needs and better harness external knowledge, thus adding additional value [52,69–71]. As we have concluded in this research, Customer Experience driven innovation occurs within the touchpoints of the Customer Journey. Thus, this know-how should be obtained,

analyzed and utilized to further create innovation within these touchpoints. Here, it is important to note that the extent of it does depend on whether the organization in question is willing to adopt an open innovation model, in order to facilitate gathering and using the know-how generated from personalized experience creation in Customer Experience driven innovation [52]. In an open innovation model, organizations should not only obtain knowledge of how customers react to innovation created by organizations within specific touchpoints, but also insights into how different customers choose to innovate and personalize their experience. Customer Experience driven innovation research has previously been focusing on the first—innovation in the service touchpoints (matching a more closed innovation model)—rarely emphasizing open innovation practices through co-creation, thus lacking customer centricity. Our research highlights the importance to include open innovation practices through co-creation within Customer Experience driven business innovation to fully harness the knowledge generated within the Customer Journey, to further enhance the value created by each and every touchpoint.

Previous research within customer and user involvement in open innovation practices has established the identification of customer needs or goals as a central activity for any innovation and design activities for services and products, but this has been often examined from a firm/organization-centric perspective [52,71]. Our research shows how a customer's higher-order goal translates into Consumer Journeys, that consist of multiple Customer Journeys in order to achieve and realize this goal. We believe that identifying this full hierarchy of journeys is crucial to realize true customer centricity, thus improving the customer open innovation potential. Organizations should not only consider the touchpoints within the Customer Journeys controlled by the organization, but also external touchpoints, even those belonging to parallel, competitor owned Customer Journeys—in turn even further expanding the external knowledge channels within the open innovation practices.

### 5.3. Limitations and Further Research Directions

It should be noted that this study has several limitations that have implications for future research directions. Although we have suggested an adjusted theoretical model to understand the different levels of journeys within Customer Experience, this model should be validated in different fields of research outside of entrepreneurship and education; specifically, to categorize the characteristics of the touchpoints (actors) that reside outside the Customer Journey. In our research, we have only considered a single Consumer Journey. However, an individual may embark on multiple Consumer Journeys at the same time. Currently, there is no research that offers insights on how the different higher-order goals impact each other, and in turn, the various Customer Journeys and their touchpoints experienced in the pursuit of these goals. Further research should evaluate whether there is a sizeable impact, or this should not be considered within the field of Customer Experience. Although we define a theoretical model on how to view the journey and goal hierarchical relationship, a practical methodology should be developed on how to map Consumer Journeys. While there are enough practical models and tools on how to map out the touchpoints within a Customer Journey, the same do not exist on the overarching level [10,34,48,68]. Lastly, we have determined that in an open innovation model, co-creation can be used to enable and facilitate innovation by customers to personalize their experience to reach their higher order goals; however, further research should look at how this know-how can be captured from the touchpoints, specifically, the external touchpoints residing in parallel (not company owner) Customer Journeys.

Conclusively, we believe that this hierarchical view offers organizations the potential to establish a better emotional connection to the individual, as they better understand the higher-order goals, and how the organization-owned journey contributes (by adding value) towards this goal. This can allow investing less resources into technological and product innovation while still obtaining a competitive advantage. In a time where copying another organization's products and technology has become easier than ever, organizations should consider Customer Experience driven innovation.

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