

CUSTOMER JOURNEY IN AN INDUSTRIAL B2B SERVICES CONTEXT

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of Business and Economics**

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**Author: Salla Suomalainen
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Supervisor: Joel Mero**



**JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**

ABSTRACT

Author Salla Suomalainen	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The relevance of the customer journey as a concept in understanding customer behavior has increasingly been adopted in business operations. Customer journeys are recognized to be complex in the B2B environments, and moreover, digitalization has significantly re-shaped customer behavior, therefore making the understanding and management of customer journeys more challenging. Despite the opportunities provided by the B2B customer journey, research on the topic is highly limited especially in different B2B contexts.</p> <p>The objective of this study is to expand the understanding of the customer journey especially in the context of industrial B2B services. Understanding is aimed to be achieved by investigating the defining features, stages, goals, and touchpoints of the customer journey in this context. The research is conducted as a qualitative study, with a case study strategy. The data is collected through eleven interviews. To achieve an understanding of the customer journey in industrial B2B services context, interviews are conducted with four different industrial B2B service provider companies, with a deeper focus on one. Furthermore, interviews are conducted with four customers of the company under closer examination. The collected data is analyzed with a deductive reasoning, aiming to validate and expand existing research.</p> <p>The findings indicate that the customer journey in the industrial B2B service context consists of seven stages: need recognition, information search, comparison of alternatives, selection, deployment, usage, and reassessment. The findings underscore the critical role of the usage stage, collaboration, and planning as a factor during the customer journey. Additionally, various customer journey goals and touchpoint roles are identified. In the study, customer journey goals can be divided into three sub-categories: provider, financial, and process-related goals. The results indicate an emphasis on individual goals in the context of industrial B2B services. Lastly, the results suggest that both digital and physical touchpoints within the customer journey can be categorized into those associated with purchases and those focused on maintaining customer relationships.</p> <p>Overall, this study contributes to the existing research of the B2B customer journey and provides new perspectives to the subject through a framework, focusing on the context of industrial B2B services. By integrating empirical and theoretical results, it advances understanding of the customer journey in this context, enabling its implementation from a managerial perspective as well.</p>	
Keywords: B2B customer journey, customer journey goals, customer journey touchpoints, industrial services, digitalization	
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TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Asiakaspolun merkitys asiakkaan käyttäytymisen ymmärtämisessä on lisääntyvässä määrin omaksuttu käsite yritysten liiketoiminnassa. Asiakaspolun tunnistetaan olevan monimutkainen B2B ympäristössä, sekä lisäksi digitalisaatio on muokannut asiakaskäyttäytymistä merkittävästi tehden asiakaspolkujen ymmärtämisestä ja hallinnoinnista entistä haastavampaa. B2B asiakaspolun tarjoamista mahdollisuuksista huolimatta, tutkimusta aiheesta on hyvin rajallisesti erityisesti sen erilaisista konteksteista.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on laajentaa ymmärrystä asiakaspolusta teollisten B2B palveluiden kontekstissa. Ymmärrys pyritään saavuttamaan tarkastelemalla asiakaspolun ominaisuuksia, vaiheita, tavoitteita ja kosketuspisteitä. Tutkimus toteutetaan laadullisena tutkimuksena, jonka strategiana on tapaustutkimus. Aineisto kerätään yhdentoista haastattelun avulla. Teollisten B2B palveluiden asiakaspolun kattavan ymmärtämisen saavuttamiseksi haastattelut toteutetaan neljän eri teollisten B2B palveluiden toimittajayrityksen kanssa, joista yhteen keskitytään syvemmin. Lisäksi syvemmin tarkastelussa olevan toimittajayrityksen neljää asiakasta haastatellaan. Kerättyä dataa analysoidaan deduktiivisen analyysimenetelmän avulla, jonka tavoitteena on laajentaa olemassa olevaa tutkimusta uusissa konteksteissa.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että asiakaspolku teollisten B2B palveluiden kontekstissa voidaan jakaa seitsemään vaiheeseen, joita ovat tarpeen tunnistaminen, tiedon etsintä, vertailu, valinta, käyttöönotto, käyttö ja uudelleenarvointi. Tuloksissa korotuu käyttövaiheen, yhteistyön ja suunnittelun merkittävä rooli asiakaspolun ominaisuuksina. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa tunnistetaan erilaisia asiakaspolun tavoitteita, jotka ohjaavat asiakaspolkua. Yksilölliset ja kollektiiviset tavoitteet voidaan jakaa alakategorioihin, joita ovat toimittajaan, talouteen ja prosessiin liittyvät tavoitteet. Yksilöllisten tavoitteiden merkyyksen tunnistettiin korostuvan teollisten B2B palveluiden kontekstissa. Viimeiseksi tulokset osoittavat, että digitaaliset ja fyysiset asiakaspolun kosketuspisteet voidaan jakaa ostoon ja asiakassuhteeseen liittyviin kosketuspisteisiin.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus tukee aiempaa tutkimusta B2B asiakaspolusta ja tarjoaa siihen muodostetun viitekehyksen avulla uusia näkökulmia keskittyen teollisten B2B palveluiden kontekstiin. Yhdistämällä teoreettisia ja empiirisiä havaintoja tämä tutkimus edistää asiakaspolun ymmärtämistä tässä kontekstissa mahdollistaen sen soveltamisen myös liikkeenjohdollisesta näkökulmasta.</p>	
Asiasanat: B2B asiakaspolku, asiakaspolun tavoitteet, asiakaspolun kosketuspisteet, teolliset palvelut, digitalisaatio	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) identified understanding business-to-business (B2B) customer journeys as a top research priority in 2020-2022. Customer journey has emerged as one of the key concepts among marketing research (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). It is crucial for companies to understand the customer journey in order to effectively meet the customer's needs, optimize marketing and sales strategies, foster customer loyalty, and maintain a competitive edge in the market (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). B2B customer journeys are recognized to have a high level of complexity and due to digitalization, the number of touchpoints in B2B customer journeys has increased, resulting in a growing amount of customer journey touchpoints being beyond the control of the company (Steward, Narus, Roehm & Ritz, 2019). Additionally, the growing importance of services in B2B operations has been a phenomenon for several decades, and it remains a critical aspect of contemporary B2B business practices. According to Deloitte's (2023) analysis from the industrial field, findings revealed a growing interest in after-market services, with 71% of industrial companies expressing a positive outlook towards services by the end of 2022. Consequently, services have a pivotal role in the operations of B2B companies today, and examining the characteristics of the customer journey in this context holds significant importance.

In the field of marketing, the B2B purchase process is examined in current research as a customer journey, which is a process-like concept to understand customer behavior. Current definitions of customer journeys often encompass stages both before and after the actual purchase. The B2B customer journey can be defined as a combination of paths taken by different customer journey members, influenced by various goals guiding towards multiple touchpoints, which are affected by the context of business relationships (Purmonen, Jaakola & Terho, 2023). B2B customer journeys has been significantly transformed by digitalization (Lundin & Kindström, 2023), giving customers access to more information and channels than ever before (Steward et al., 2019). As a result, B2B customers are taking a more proactive approach in their interactions with providers and have increasingly active roles in their customer journey (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). However, customers are also facing challenges due to the large amount of information and choices, making it difficult for them to make informed purchase decisions, necessitating providers to simplify the purchasing process across all stages of the customer journey (Toman, Adamson & Gomez, 2017). To achieve this, companies must thoroughly understand the features and factors of the customer journey.

By understanding customer journey, companies can better respond to the needs of the customer by understanding the customer journey and operating in a customer-centric way (Purmonen et al., 2023; Edelman & Singer, 2015). According to Purmonen et al. (2023), research on the B2B customer journey has not yet gained significant academic attention and remains relatively poorly examined. Especially the research of the customer journey in the different B2B contexts is

missing, as existing research on the B2B customer journey is more focused on examining specific customer journey components rather than examining the customer journey as an entity. There are three important research gaps. First, research on B2B customer journeys in various contexts is missing, and there is very limited empirical research on them. Secondly, current research identifies various types of customer journey goals, but it remains unclear what the goals are in B2B contexts and how different types of goals influence during the customer journey. Thirdly, existing research focuses on categorizations and separately addressing digital and physical aspects when concerning customer journey touchpoints. However, it remains unclear what roles digital and physical touchpoints have together throughout the entire B2B customer journey, encompassing both the purchasing and usage stages. Therefore, further research in this field is needed.

Research questions:

1. What is the customer journey like in the industrial B2B services context?
2. What types of customer journey goals do customers have in an industrial B2B services context?
3. What are the roles of digital and physical customer journey touchpoints in the industrial B2B services context?

This study aims to bridge the research gaps by providing a detailed examination of customer journey stages and their characteristics, goals, and roles of digital and physical touchpoints, with focus on the industrial B2B services context. The objective of this study is to understand the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services. The research is conducted in the context of the industrial services and the research utilizes a qualitative study method with a case study strategy. A qualitative research methodology is appropriate as it aligns with the overarching goal of this study, which is to enhance understanding of the customer journey in industrial B2B services context. To gain insights into the customer journey, interviews were conducted from three different angles: customers of the main case company, employees of the main case company, and employees of a few reference companies similar to the case company. The selected interviewees for the research work closely with the customer journey or are customers themselves, operating through the customer journey in industrial B2B services context. By considering both the perspectives of customers and service providers, the aim of the study is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the customer journey in industrial B2B services context, thereby enhancing the reliability and depth of the findings.

This research offers several contributions to existing B2B customer journey research by offering more detailed perspectives and expanding current understanding of the B2B customer journey features, stages, goals, and touchpoints. The research contributes to the existing research with a conceptual framework of the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services, of which there is a significantly limited amount of prior research. This study suggests that the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services consists of seven stages:

need recognition, information search, comparison of alternatives, selection, deployment, usage, and reassessment. In contrast to existing research, the maintenance stage is not relevant part of the usage stage of the customer journey within this context as it often signifies the beginning of a new customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services. Furthermore, this study proposes that individual and collective customer journey goals can be further categorized into process, financial, and provider-related goals. Existing research has identified that B2B customer journeys involve the interaction of collective and individual goals. In contrast to existing research, this study further suggests that in the context of industrial B2B services, the significance of individual goals is emphasized in routine service purchases, while the role of collective goals is emphasized in larger service purchases. Additionally, this study suggests that digital and physical touchpoints can be further categorized into purchase and relationship-related touchpoints. This research also emphasizes the potential of digital touchpoints to nurture business relationships and educate customers. Previous research has strongly focused on significance of physical touchpoints in the context of business relationships. All in all, this study offers valuable empirical research of the B2B customer journey and fills the current research gaps.

This research is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to an introductory section, encompassing an introduction and justification for the study, research questions, study objectives, and finally, the structure of the study. The second chapter of the study includes the literature review and explores the theoretical framework. This chapter covers academic literature on the B2B customer journey and its components, such as features, stages, goals, touchpoints, and the evolution perspectives of the B2B customer journey. Finally, the theoretical framework of the study is presented in this chapter. The third chapter presents the research methodology. It introduces case study as a research strategy with the utilization of qualitative research methods. Additionally, it includes methods for case selection, data collection, and data analysis. The primary focus of the fourth chapter delves into the empirical findings of the study, and they are presented through direct quotes and reflecting the theoretical framework. The fifth chapter encompass discussion, where the results of the research are analysed by reflecting them in light of existing research and addressing the research questions. Furthermore, this chapter delves into the managerial implications, evaluation of the study, and provides suggestions for potential future research.

Artificial intelligence application ChatGPT is utilized in this study for language verification and grammar correction.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the study is introduced and constructed by conducting a review of relevant literature related to the research topic.

2.1 Customer journey as a concept

Research on customer behavior has a long history, whereas the concept of the customer journey has gained significance over the past three decades. Current research on customer journeys predominantly concentrates on customer experience investigations within a business-to-customer (B2C) context. The customer journey outlines the process that a customer goes through while interacting with a company across all stages and various touchpoints, shaping the customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Følstad and Kvale (2018) define customer journey as a sequence that a customer goes through in order to access or use an offering of a company. An essential aspect of the definition is that the customer journey includes various stages, typically categorized into three stages: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase, as defined by Lemon and Verhoef (2016). Therefore, the customer journey definition recognizes the stages before and after the actual purchase. Generally, there is a common thread that defines the customer journey as a process between a company and the customer. The concept of a customer journey is primarily focused with describing the unique journey that individual buyers follow when making purchases and engaging with products or services (Halvorsrud, Kvale & Følstad, 2016). So, the concept is heavily rooted in the individual's path in current research. Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik (2023) characterize the customer journey as the cumulative series of interactions that consumers go through with a brand, influencing their level of engagement, purchasing patterns, and advocacy for the brand over an extended period. Their definition acknowledges that customers seldom consistently progress through the various stages of the journey. The customer journey concept is customer-centric, and it enables companies to strive for a deeper understanding of customer behavior.

In the B2B context, customer journeys have not received as much attention in the research field, but the definitions which are available, are broader and more complicated than in B2C contexts. The B2B customer journey is defined by Purmonen et al. (2023) as interconnected and goal-driven paths taken by purchase and usage center members, involving various direct and indirect touchpoints. These touchpoints are influenced by the context of business relationships. In a B2B customer journey, the customer is also a business, and the examination of the concept shifts more towards individual company and its members. Witell

et al. (2020) define the customer journey in B2B context as a collection of interrelated processes focused on fulfilling the business needs of the customer. Steward et al. (2019) define B2B customer journey as a complex and involving process which entails multiple interactions and their flow over time. Customer journey is rarely linear and unlike B2C customer journey, B2B customer journey often entails several members (Witell et al., 2020). The B2B customer journey is recognized to focus more on the purchase and usage of a specific offering (Purmonen et al., 2023), while in a B2C context, it concerns a broader range of interactions between the business and the customer. The primary distinction from the definition of the customer journey is that the concept has been characterized as a more intricate process, acknowledging the differences in corporate decision-making compared to that of consumers, and the underlying influence of business relationships on all of this. B2B relationships are recognized to be long-standing, dynamic, and continuously developing (Holmlund, 2004). Table 1 presents the definitions of the customer journey with contexts.

Study	Context	Definition
Lemon & Verhoef (2016)	B2C/B2B	The process that a customer goes through while interacting with a company across all stages and various touchpoints, shaping the customer experience
Følstad & Kvale (2018)	B2C	A sequence that a customer goes through in order to access or use an offering of a company
Steward et al. (2019)	B2B	Complex and involving process which includes multiple interactions and their flow over time
Witell et al. (2020)	B2B	Collection of interrelated processes focused on fulfilling the business needs of the customer
Armstrong et al. (2023)	B2C	Cumulative series of interactions that consumers undergo with a brand, influencing their level of engagement, purchasing patterns, and advocacy for the brand over an extended period
Purmonen et al. (2023)	B2B	Interconnected and goal-driven paths taken by buying and using center members, involving various direct and indirect touchpoints in the context of business relationships

TABLE 1 Existing definitions of customer journey

The definition of the customer journey presented by Purmonen et al. (2023) is used to understand the concept of customer journey, with consideration for the B2B context in which this study is conducted. The definition perceives the journey as a process and additionally considers the service perspective through the usage stage.

2.2 Features of the B2B customer journey

The behavior of customers has been an important field of research for several decades, leading to the development of theories on how customers go and behave through the process of making purchases. The concept of the B2B purchasing process seen as a customer journey has been prevalent since 1992 (Steward et al., 2019). For almost four decades now, the significance of the customer journey has continuously increased as a framework in understanding B2B customer behavior throughout the purchasing process. Research of the customer journeys is ongoing, as the concept remains comprehensive and relevant on the field of marketing, because it highlights process angle of purchasing from the customer's perspective, prompting marketing researchers to continue advocating for the continued applicability of customer journey concept (Edelman & Singer, 2015). The customer journey as a concept helps companies understand customer behavior as a process. In this way, companies can better respond to the needs of the customer by understanding customer journey and operate in a customer-centric way (Edelman & Singer, 2015; Purmonen et al. 2023). Through a comprehension of the customer journey, marketers can strive to develop brand experiences that lead to favorable purchasing behavior, engagement, and sustained brand advocacy (Armstrong et al., 2023).

The notion of the customer journey can be conceptualized as designed to broaden the perspective beyond the purchasing process. The B2B purchasing process has transitioned from a transactional standpoint to a more comprehensive framework (Steward et al., 2019). Historically, purchases were perceived as isolated transactions, occasionally recurring. The first conceptual frameworks developed in the 1950s and 1960s regarding B2B buying processes were grounded in a transactional perspective (Steward et al., 2019). The firsts conceptual model of B2B buying process was presented by Cyert, Simond and Thow (1956) and Webster (1965). Based on Cyert et al. (1956) first conceptual model of the B2B buying process, it can be inferred that in the B2B purchasing process, there are two types of decision-making: programmed and non-programmed. Programmed decisions involve routines and simple purchases, while non-programmed decisions relate to new, complex purchases with uncertainty and limited prior experience. This underscores the dual nature of decision-making in companies. In the study, it's observed that the purchasing process may encompass elements of uncertainty, and the processes involved can exhibit variations. The conceptual framework of Webster's (1965) research comprises four sequential steps and is constructed around a single transaction. The stages encompass problem identification, purchasing responsibility, information search process, and selection process. This represents the initial conceptual model that recognizes the purchasing journey as a process centered around the transaction. These theories have influenced research to adopt a customer journey perspective, acknowledging that in the B2B context, making a purchase involves a complex process. Steward et al.

(2019) emphasize in their research six overarching themes in the customer journey research field that have evolved beyond transaction-centricity: situations, influences, responses, relationships, networks, and journeys. The research on the B2B purchasing process has gradually acknowledged and integrated new dimensions over time.

There are numerous approaches nowadays to examining the B2B customer journey. As a conceptual framework, the B2B customer journey or purchase decision process describes how B2B firms engage with their customers, considering the diverse touchpoints, roles, and overall sequence of activities involved in these interactions (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). As mentioned, the definition of the B2B customer journey has evolved over time and today it encompasses aspects such as the customer journey, customer experience, and various touchpoints (Steward et al., 2019). This shift implies that the B2B customer journey is now regarded as a dynamic process that initiates well before the actual transaction and continues beyond it as mentioned before. Furthermore, market environments are increasingly shifting towards a situation where companies no longer have high control over the customer journey (Edelman & Singer, 2015). Toman, Adamson & Gomez (2017) propose that B2B providers believe that customers are highly empowered and need the sellers only at the end of the purchasing process, yet the problem identified is that customers are overwhelmed by information and choices, making it difficult to make good purchase decisions. Therefore, they suggest that providers should simplify the purchasing process by developing pertinent tools, communication strategies, and guidance to assist customers at each stage of their journey.

B2B markets exhibit a higher level of complexity compared to B2C markets, primarily due to the involvement of a greater number of stakeholders in the purchasing decision-making process (Steward et al., 2019). These stakeholders encompass purchasing managers, engineers, technical experts, end-users, and other internal customers. According to Grewal et al. (2015), B2B buyers are moving towards fulfilling their comprehensive needs rather than simply purchasing a specific product. This implies that buyers seek a multifaceted offering, which may encompass aspects such as training, technical support, financing, delivery terms, and more. Given the complicated nature of the B2B environment, both buyers and sellers encounter challenges in determining what constitutes a favorable offer. Additionally, the B2B purchasing process usually requires a significant amount of time and may involve extensive negotiations, which can further complicate the customer journey (Grewal et al., 2015). B2B markets frequently demand personalized solutions to address the distinct needs of individual customers (Steward et al., 2019). This could entail the creation of new products or services or adapting existing offerings to align with customer specifications and needs. Table 2 illustrates the differences in B2B markets, and the customer journey compared to the B2C environment.

Aspect	B2B	B2C
Customer	Business	Consumer
Market complexity	Higher	Lower
Number of stakeholders	Higher	Lower
Decision-making process	Longer	Quicker
Offerings & services	Multifaceted	More standardized
Customer relationships	Longer	Shorter

TABLE 2 B2B customer journey characteristics compared to B2C

In this study, the concept of the B2B customer journey is in the center of the research, as it directly pertains also to the goals and touchpoints within the B2B customer journey. This study contributes empirical findings to the conceptualization of the B2B customer journey.

2.2.1 Customer journey stages

Current research on the customer journey enables a comprehensive understanding of the overall customer experience by analyzing its structural components into different stages. These categorizations provide a deeper understanding of how customers progress in their purchasing processes and interactions with the provider company. However, it should be noted that the stages of the customer journey can depend on the context, and customers may revisit certain stages, skip stages, or move back and forth between them (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020). There are several ways to break down the customer journey, but one approach is to divide it into three stages which are prepurchase stage, the purchase stage, and the postpurchase stage (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Traditionally, the customer journey has been examined through the lens of these five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Armstrong et al., 2023). In theory, these five stages have been implemented in Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) stage categorization of the customer journey, which is presented next.

The first stage, prepurchase stage, encompasses all elements of the customer's engagement with the brand, product category, and business environment prior the actual purchase transaction (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This stage typically comprises all interactions with the company, its brand or offerings occurring even before the recognition of a need, information search, and the comparison of various alternatives. From Armstrong et al. (2023) customer journey stages this phase includes need recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives. Need recognition in the customer journey can be triggered by internal stimuli or external stimuli (Armstrong et al, 2023). In a B2B context, the internal acknowledgment of a need may rise within the organizational field, emanating from an inherent realization of a requirement. Externally, the recognition of such a need may be prompted, for example, by advertising efforts or through proactive measures taken by a provider. Information search usually involves in B2B markets detailed product specifications, written purchase offers and careful provider considerations (Armstrong et al., 2023). Therefore, multiple providers

may be more evaluated during the customer journey. The purchase stage covers all interactions with the company in the actual purchase event (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In practice, this stage may include the choosing, placing an order, and the payment transaction. The purchase stage is a central component of the customer journey, representing the culmination of a customer's decision-making process. Last stage of the journey is postpurchase stage. Postpurchase stage covers all customer interactions with the company and its brand and offerings after the actual purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Features of this stage are the use of the solutions, postpurchase engagement and possible service requests. Figure 1 illustrates the stages of customer journey according to Lemon & Verhoef (2016). In B2B settings current research highlights extended usage processes and integration within enduring business relationships (Rustholkkarhu et al., 2022) This emphasizes the importance of understanding of the postpurchase stage and the potential impact of relationships on the overall journey.

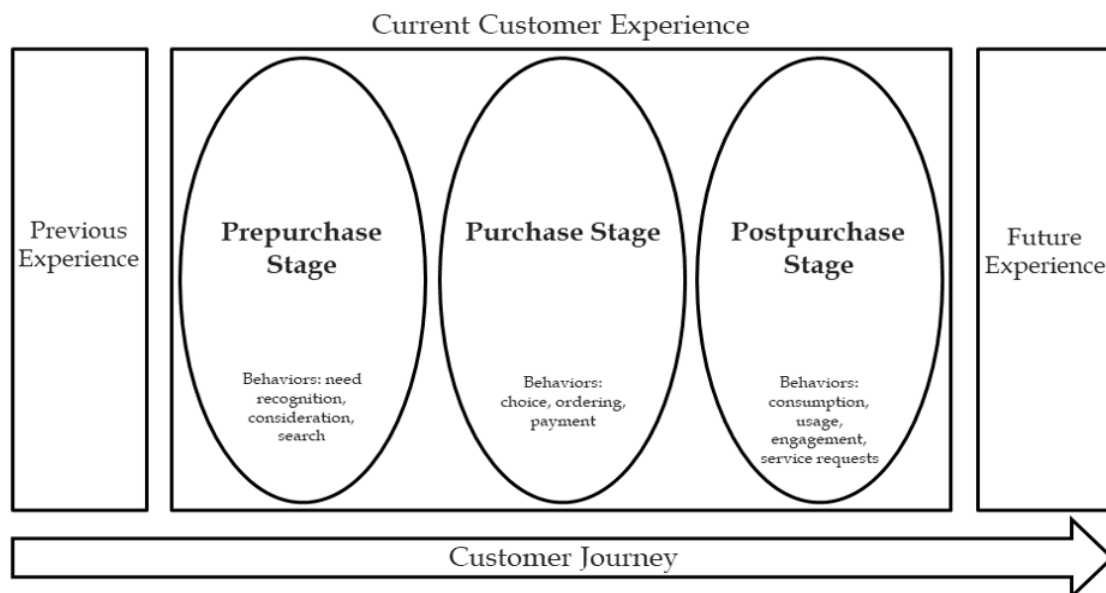


FIGURE 1 The stages of the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p. 77)

Purmonen et al. (2023) have divided B2B customer journey in their conceptual framework into two main stages which are purchasing and usage center. These stages can also be divided into more detailed stages. The research suggests that the stages of the B2B customer journey describes the individual paths of different purchase and usage center members and the characteristics of different stages, processes, and duration are likely to exhibit significant variations based on the specific context of the purchasing scenario. They also note that traditional B2B buying research has modeled the purchase process using four to seven steps, and they align prior buying process models with the journey literature to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the purchase stage. The stage model illustrates a comprehensive B2B customer journey and as mentioned, the prevalence and characteristics of different stages, steps, and paths are expected to exhibit notable variations depending on the circumstances of the purchasing scenario. Purchasing scenarios can vary from routine purchases to more strategic

and complicated depending on the solution being purchased (Purmonen et al., 2023).

According to Purmonen et al. (2023) study, the purchase center of the B2B customer journey can be divided into four steps: need recognition, information search, comparison of alternatives, and selection. The usage stage can be divided also into four stages, which are deploy, use, maintain and reassess. In service-intensive contexts, particularly the phases of delivery and usage are a significant part of the customer's overall process (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021). In the context of services, their realization of the solutions often requires the participation of both parties in the customer journey. Purmonen et al. (2023) B2B customer journey framework also emphasizes the importance of usage center and highlights its possible connection to the new customer journeys. They suggest in their research that customer journey is not confined to a linear sequence but is inherently iterative and the usage phase can potentially initiate a new journey within reassessment stage (Purmonen et al., 2023). There can also be several of these customer journeys and cycles occurring simultaneously. In Figure 2 is presented the B2B customer journey stages according to Purmonen et al. (2023).

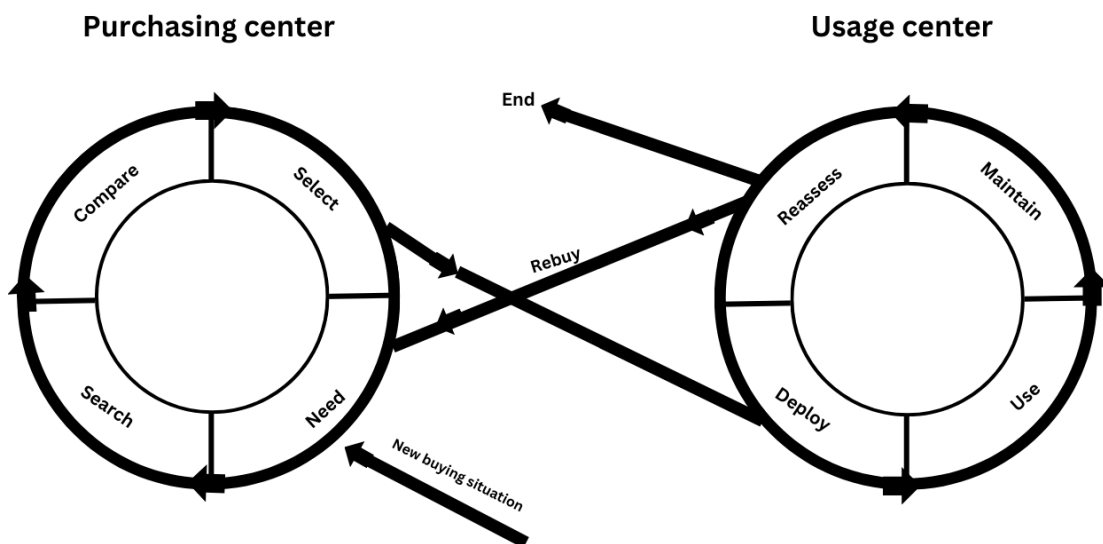


FIGURE 2 The stages of the B2B customer journey (Purmonen et al., 2023, p. 80)

2.2.2 Customer journey actors and members

B2B customer journeys encompass a multitude of stakeholders and members who exert influence across various stages. In the stages of usage and purchase, various members of the usage and purchase center may be involved (Purmonen et al., 2023). This theoretical concept takes into account the nature of B2B purchases and considers both the usage and purchase phases, as well as the potential involvement of various members in these processes. The buying center has been extensively researched, offering valuable insights into B2B customer journey research, as highlighted by Purmonen et al. (2023). Subsequently, Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson (2016) expanded this research field by introducing

the concept of the usage center and recognizing the potential existence and importance of distinct individuals utilizing the solution. The significance of the usage center has gained attention, given that the perceived value-in-use significantly impacts future purchasing decisions. According to Witell et al. (2020), these stages involve a diverse array of participants within both the provider and customer organizations. These participants encompass a spectrum of roles, such as buyers, senior managers, board members, end users, and frontline service staff. Given that both the customer and provider are organizational entities, individual members representing different functional and hierarchical levels may engage in interactions with distinct responsibilities (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). As these various actors can engage in different phases of the customer journey, each brings unique experiences and expectations to the process. Beyond participants within the provider and customer organizations, the B2B customer journey may extend to involve external partners and third-party entities within the broader ecosystem (Witell et al., 2020). This broader spectrum of actors may include consultants, competitors, and other customers. Consequently, in the B2B context, these diverse actors may assume different roles throughout the customer journey, a dynamic not typically observed in B2C markets.

Buying center refers to the individuals within an organization who engage in the purchase process for a specific product or service (Johnston & Bonoma, 1981; Robinson et al., 1967). In essence, a buying center comprises the group of people in an organization who share the collective responsibility for making buying decisions, particularly when it comes to intricate or important products and services. The composition of the buying center may change based on the complexity of the purchasing situation and the unique goals of the organization (Purmonen et al., 2023). The structure of the buying center may also differ, influenced by the complexity of the purchasing scenario and the objectives of the organization. Occasionally, individuals within the buying center may lack awareness regarding all the participants involved in the procurement decision (Armstrong et al., 2023, p. 184). The presence of specific steps and their thoroughness, as well as the complexity and dynamics of the buying center, are likely to be influenced by these situational factors (Robinson et al., 1967). For B2B marketers, having a comprehensive understanding of the internal dynamics and interactions within the customer's buying center is essential. It allows them to adeptly navigate the customer journey and adapt their marketing strategies to align with the requirements and preferences of various buying center members.

According to Huber and Kleinalternkamp (2020) usage center members who are involved in the usage processes within an organization, specifically in B2B settings. Usage center is partly associated with service context because it focuses on the development of service ecosystems in business usage centers (Macdonald et al., 2016). Usage center members consist of multiple actors who interact with each other in multi-actor usage processes. Ideally, interactions between usage center members can influence positively on the co-creation of the value in use. Especially in the context of service purchases usage center members role is crucial, because usage stage engage the customer potentially to the provider. Members of the usage center play a pivotal role in customers' assessments of the

utility and quality of purchased solutions. The evaluation of utility encompasses both individual and collective perspectives and objectives, with collective goals potentially spanning cross-functional or inter-departmental dimensions (Macdonald et al., 2016).

Macdonald et al. (2016) identified the different types of usage center members based on their behaviors and perceptions. The research explores how understanding these types can help companies improve their customer satisfaction and repurchase rates. The five types of usage center members are lead, doer, soldier, maven, and laggard. Lead is defined as proactive and takes the initiative in the usage process and they are often responsible for managing the usage process and coordinating the activities of other usage center members. Doer is described as task-oriented and focuses on completing their assigned tasks efficiently. Doers are identified to be often responsible for executing the usage process and ensuring that everything runs smoothly. Third type, soldiers, are found loyal and committed to the usage process, they are often responsible for ensuring that the usage process is carried out according to established procedures and standards. On the other hand, maven possesses expertise and experience in the utilization process, frequently assuming the role of offering counsel and guidance to fellow BUC members. Their responsibility includes ensuring the effective execution of the usage process. The final category, referred to as laggards, is characterized by a reluctance to embrace change and a slow adoption of new technologies or processes. Laggards typically contribute to friction in the usage process and may require persuasion to engage fully. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these types are not mutually exclusive, and members of the usage center may manifest characteristics of multiple types depending on the circumstances. Nevertheless, by comprehending these nuances, companies can gain a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships among actors in a usage center, facilitating collaborative efforts to generate value for all involved parties.

2.2.3 Customer journey goals

In the customer journey research, an acknowledged aspect and a fundamental determinant are the customer journey goals, which customers possess. In comparison to consumer markets, B2B purchasing situations often involve multiple customer journey members who to some extent, operate within formal procedures and rules (Macdonald et al., 2016). Purmonen et al. (2023) have emphasized the importance of the customer journey goals in their definition of the B2B customer journey, suggesting that customer journeys are goals driven paths taken by multiple members. In their research, they propose that customer journey goals can be divided into individual and collective goals. Additionally, Macdonald et al. (2016) suggests that customer journey goals are possible to categorize into organizational and individual goals. Therefore, it is possible to analyse the B2B customer journey and customer behaviour by understanding the individual and collective customer journey goals and their significance and influence on customer behaviour throughout the customer journey.

The evaluation and execution of purchases are influenced by the individual objectives of the multiple actors involved in the customer journey (Macdonald et al., 2016). However, the formal journey of the organizational purchasing process is perceived to be guided by shared goals within the organization (Terho et al., 2017). Still there are instances where individuals within the organization may be influenced by goals that are partially aligned but occasionally divergent with organizational goals (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). In the context of traditional B2B customer journeys, which often involve multiple actors, differing opinions regarding the value of a product or service can come to the forefront due to various goals (Witell et al., 2020). According to Macdonald et al. (2016) individual goals encompass a spectrum ranging from the simplification of occupational tasks to the mitigation of uncertainty, preservation of personal reputation, and the pursuit of social comfort. These influences emerge from the preconceptions, historical experiences, and expectations inherent to individual customer journey members. According to Armstrong et al. (2023) B2B purchasers exhibit responsiveness to a combination of organizational and personal objectives during the customer journey. Typically inclined toward rational considerations, these buyers also demonstrate sensitivity to emotional factors (Armstrong et al., 2023, p. 184). Within the practical context of the B2B customer journey, it can be conceived that these individual and collective goals interact with each other during the customer journey.

One important aspect to customer journey goals are the higher and lower order goals. According to Purmonen et al. (2023), customer journey goals can be classified into higher-order and lower-order goals. They suggest that higher-order goals represent the ultimate objectives pursued by the customer, such as entering a new market segment or expanding market share. These overarching goals are realized through the establishment of more specific lower-order goals, which correspond to individual purchase tasks, such as achieving rapid market entry or obtaining high-quality device (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). They propose that businesses must look beyond immediate customer journey goals and consider the entire customer ecosystem to provide relevant touchpoints and better support for goal achievement. Additionally, according to Becker, Jaakkola, and Halinen (2020) to achieve a comprehensive view when examining customer journeys, emphasis should be placed on understanding customers' higher-order goals. They also suggest that providers should extend their viewpoint beyond immediate customer journey goals to identify also relevant touchpoints and customer journeys that impacts the overall customer experience. Therefore, this way B2B providers can possibly increase their customer orientation and enhance their customers experiences by supporting and understanding these customer journey goals.

2.2.4 The role of relationships

Relationships play a crucial role in the B2B customer journey between providers and customers. Notably, during the 1980s, a significant transformation reshaped the conceptualization of the B2B buying process. The shift involved moving away

from a predominantly customer-centric examination of individual transactions towards an emphasis on enduring and collaborative relationships between customers and providers (Stewart et al., 2019). Purmonen et al. (2023) suggest that business markets typically revolve around a limited number of key actors and enduring relationships. Additionally, Rusthollkarhu et al. (2022) and Witell et al. (2020) propose that frequently B2B customer journeys are characterized with long-term business relationships. According to Möller and Halinen (1999) in a business network, relationships are part of a broader network where individual actions and interactions are interlinked. Constructs such as trust, commitment, switching costs, and relationship quality have been identified as important antecedents of these customer relationships (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

According to Witell et al. (2020) maintaining B2B relationships requires ongoing interactions and cooperation among organizational entities. Furthermore, Lemon & Verhoef (2016) propose that the cultivation of strong customer relationships can yield long-term customer loyalty and produce positive outcomes for the firm, including enhanced sales and an expanded market share. According to Purmonen et al. (2023) the bonds and routines formed affect B2B customer journeys, as interactions forming journey touchpoints with a certain provider are influenced by the interaction history. Purmonen et al. (2023) also argue that the atmosphere of business relationships, encompassing elements like trust and commitment, can exert an influence on the character and progression of B2B customer journeys. Trust and commitment promote collaboration, mitigate the inclination to terminate the relationship, and diminish functional conflicts and uncertainties within the relationship, all of which can significantly affect the course of the customer journey.

Pagani and Pardo (2017) propose that digital technology has found to profoundly impacted to business relationships by enabling direct connections between companies and customers, enhancing communication, transparency, and collaboration in the customer journey. The shift from traditional offline business settings and interactions to digitally interconnected platforms has swiftly impacted B2B network relationships by expanding reach, accelerating information flow, transforming business processes, evolving value creation, and adapting to new business ecosystems (Peruchi et al., 2022). All in all, relationships are significant part of the B2B customer journeys. Maintaining these B2B relationships necessitates ongoing interactions and cooperation among organizations, ultimately resulting in long-term loyalty and positive outcomes for businesses.

2.2.5 Digitalization of B2B customer journey

Digitalization has become an integral part of contemporary life and continues to evolve constantly. Its influence extends to the B2B customer journey and associated processes. Digitalization, defined as the implementation of digital technologies that impact B2B interactions, businesses, and markets, is triggering transformation across all facets of commerce (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Therefore, a growing segment of the B2B customer journey now occurs in digital platforms. It is also estimated that in the context of a complex B2B sale, approximately 60%

of the purchasing process has already been undertaken by the potential buyer before they engage with the representatives of the sellers (Grewal et al., 2015). Digitalization has reshaped the B2B customer journey by giving access to information, enriching comprehension of the purchasing process, and presenting both prospects and challenges in effectively using technology (Steward et al., 2019). As a result, B2B customers are becoming increasingly proactive in their interactions with providers and customers take increasingly active roles in their customer journey (Lundin & Kindström, 2023).

According to Wang et al. (2019) digitalization has enabled an omnichannel customer experience, allowing customers to interact with brands across multiple touchpoints such as websites, social media, mobile apps, and email, creating a seamless and integrated experience. Pagani and Pardo (2017) suggest that digitalization empowers data-driven improvements in solutions, personalized marketing, supply chain optimization, and fosters the emergence of new business models, potentially reshaping traditional relationships, and interactions in customer journeys. Consequently, B2B customers now possess a wealth of information and different channels, and companies must adeptly navigate this digital landscape and digital customer journey.

Interaction in B2B markets is progressively shifting to digital platforms, necessitating the adoption of new technological tools and solutions by companies to manage their customers' journeys effectively (Purmonen et al., 2023). Technological advancements have empowered B2B customers with comprehensive information about providers and insights from other buyers' experiences, enabling them to gather knowledge and make well-informed decisions (Steward et al., 2019). In navigating complex purchasing processes, B2B buyers are overwhelmed with online information, highlighting the importance for providers to adopt a customer-centric approach and provide tailored content to individual members of buying units (Terho et al., 2022). Jaakkola and Terho (2021) emphasizes that digitalization facilitates the establishment of transparent content, thus simplifying the customer's ability to harmonize touchpoints across their journey while also fostering seamless interactions among diverse roles of actors in the customer journey. Consequently, it has become increasingly crucial for B2B companies to actively engage customers in during their customer journey.

Considering the challenges posed by digitalization, it is essential for B2B companies to investigate the customer journeys taken by B2B customers. This examination is essential to enable them to adapt and respond effectively to evolving circumstances. Therefore, influencing on contemporary B2B buyer-driven buying processes requires the deployment of digital resources that empower buyers to progress in their purchasing journey according to their preferences (Terho et al., 2022). Within this digital landscape, the focus of customer journey management initiatives should be on identifying and tracking the relevant indirect touchpoints that shape customer behavior (Rustholkkarhu et al., 2022). Increasingly, the possibilities of such initiatives have grown due to the advancement of digital technologies, which empower businesses to collect and utilize customer data better. This capability facilitates the implementation of personalized marketing

strategies, customized product recommendations, and individualized experiences across various stages of the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Therefore, B2B companies must strategically assess and strategize the digital customer journey to enhance its overall engagement factor. To encourage customers to engage more actively and independently, it is crucial for providers to have the ability to digitalize the customer journey (Lundin & Kindström, 2023).

2.2.6 Impact of servitization on the B2B customer journey

The context of this study focuses on services. In the contemporary business landscape, there has been a notable shift in the focus on the transformative processes by which companies transition from a product-centric to a service-centric business model, a phenomenon defined as servitization (Kowalkowski et al., 2017). Service can be described as the direct delivery or collaborative creation of value between a service provider and a customer (Rust & Huang, 2014). Oliva and Kallenberg (2003) suggests dividing services into two categories: transaction-based services and relationship-based services. According to Baines and Lightfoot (2014), servitization describes the strategic shift of manufacturing firms towards adding services that complement their traditional product offerings. Kowalkowski et al. (2017) further delineate servitization as a process where a business elevates the role of services in its business model, thereby transitioning towards a more service-centric approach. This evolution holds particular significance in the context of B2B interactions. It influences the expectations of customers, alters the dynamics of corporate relationships, and reshapes the entire customer journey. Additionally, Kowalkowski et al. (2017) propose that servitization represents a fundamental shift in the way companies generate and create value to their customers, marking a crucial change in business strategies and operations.

In transitioning towards a service-centered business model, numerous advantages have been identified. However, according to Oliva and Kallenberg (2003) successful servitization transitions typically necessitate a methodical and structured approach to transformation. This involves developing new capabilities at each phase of the process. The research further indicates that integrating services into primary product offerings can significantly boost revenue, lead to higher profit margins, and provide a more reliable revenue stream (Oliva & Kallenberg., 2003). This stability is due to the resilience of services to economic instabilities that typically affect investment and equipment purchases. Furthermore, servitization offers companies unique opportunities to differentiate themselves from competitors and to strengthen customer relationships (Kowalkowski et al., 2017). According to Rust and Huang (2014) also information technology has enabled companies to deepen their relationships with customers, which has also affected to a significant expansion of the service sector in the economy. They also argue that this shift is leading to a significant change in marketing, with a greater emphasis on catering to individual customers and establishing relationships with them, rather than relying on mass marketing strategies. B2B firms can benefit from the use of information technology to deepen customer relationships and provide better service (Rust & Huang, 2014).

However, servitization also presents challenges related to service expansion and necessitates modifications in organizational culture and business strategies to support a service-oriented approach, as suggested by Kowalkowski et al. (2017). To effectively meet customer service needs, companies must thoroughly understand the customer's perspective and situation, which may entail increased interaction. This shift in focus can reshape the dynamics of customer interactions by prioritizing a deeper understanding of customers' ongoing needs rather than simply pursuing one-off sales transactions. Additionally, analyzing customer process data might identify new service opportunities and possibly provide information advantage for the company (Kindström & Kowalkowski, 2014). According to Vargo & Lusch (2004) shifting towards a service-centered business model also necessitates a reevaluation of conventional marketing approaches. They also underscore the importance of value co-creation and require active involvement of consumers in the delivery of services. This fundamental shift in the business model with focusing more on the benefits delivered to customers rather than just the products or services sold (Kowalkowski et al., 2017). So, during this transition, it is crucial for companies to engage consumers in the specialization process and in the creation of value.

Servitization may pose various challenges, including those concerning organizational structure, service innovation processes, and the risk of service investments failing, as identified by Kowalkowski et al. (2017). They suggest that servitization often demands a significant reorganization of a company's resources, capabilities, and structural framework. Such changes can be particularly challenging for larger, well-established companies. Regarding service innovation, the introduction of new service offerings can present difficulties, especially for industries where service provision is not a traditional strength. Moreover, there exists the risk that investments in service expansion may not yield proportional returns or enhance shareholder value. Kindström and Kowalkowski (2014) identifies additional challenges related to servitization which might regard customer relationships, balancing product and service interests and cultural shift. As previously mentioned, for companies to achieve success with servitization, it's crucial to thoroughly understand the customer process. This includes acknowledging that not all customers are inclined to invest in relationships and services. Kindström & Kowalkowski (2014) point out the challenge of balancing resources dedicated to both product and service innovation. As firms expand into providing more advanced services that combine both product and service components, the challenge of maintaining this balance becomes even more significant. Therefore, it is a continual process to find balance between service and product innovations. They further argue that transitioning from a product-centricity to a service-centricity necessitates profound shifts in organizational culture and mindset, a transformation that may require considerable time to become fully integrated into the organization's culture. Therefore, while servitization offers numerous potential benefits and opportunities, companies must navigate several challenges to achieve success.

Servitization has a notable impact on the characteristics of B2B customer journeys and procurement processes. In this context, Jaakkola and Terho (2021)

emphasize that exceptional customer journeys in service contexts exhibit three critical attributes: seamlessness, personalization, and coherence. A seamless service journey involves the smooth progression and interactions at various touchpoints, providing a consistent and unified experience for the customer. Personalized service journeys are tailored to meet the individual needs and preferences of the customer, fostering a sense of uniqueness and relevance throughout the journey. Finally, coherent service journeys encompass a logical and interconnected sequence of interactions, with each touchpoint contributing meaningfully to an overall unified experience for the customer. According to Kowalkowski et al. (2017) in the context of servitization, companies must understand their customers' requirements and provide tailored solutions. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to interact more with the customer, which naturally can increase the number of touchpoints in the customer journey. This can lead to more complicated purchasing processes.

While products and services can complement each other, there are cases where adding more services does not necessarily represent a viable strategy for all product firms (Kowalkowski et al., 2017). Therefore, the addition of services can sometimes complicate the purchasing process rather than simplifying or enhancing it. According to Kowalkowski et al. (2017) in a service business model, the provider needs to commit to enhancing the value that customers achieve from using their services. This may require the provider to engage more deeply and participate in co-creating value with customers. Therefore, when examining the B2B customer journey, servitization places a stronger emphasis on valuing long-term relationships above transactional interactions. As this study delves into the customer journey within the context of industrial B2B services, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and typical features associated with this context.

2.3 Touchpoints in B2B customer journey

In current research, the customer journey is conceptualized as comprising individual touchpoints throughout the customer journey. According to Purmonen et al. (2023) customer journey can be defined as consisting of multiple touchpoints between the customer and the provider, which are affected by the context of business relationships. A touchpoint signifies any instance of interaction or engagement between a customer and a business (Wang et al., 2019). All points of interactions can be understood as guiding individuals towards unique experiential encounters (Gao et al., 2022). Therefore, these customer journey touchpoints collectively illuminate the entirety of the customer journey, encompassing various interactions between the potential or existing customer and the provider. Customer journey touchpoints can take various forms, such as an advertisement, receiving a phone call from a salesperson, or receiving a recommendation from a colleague. Touchpoints trigger customer experiences, including sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioral responses and reactions that are subjec-

tive to the customer's unique situation and context (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Understanding and managing touchpoints is crucial for businesses to effectively engage with customers throughout their journey and ensure a positive overall customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In the context of customer journey and customer experience concepts, touchpoint is a well-established concept in academic literature.

Different types of touchpoints can be categorized based on various criteria, but there is currently no consensus on a specific framework for their categorization. Multiple researchers have proposed different categorizations based on their research context and objectives. The categorization of touchpoints can help companies to identify and manage the touchpoints that are most critical for customer outcomes and to allocate resources effectively to improve the customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Lemon & Verhoef (2016) categorize touchpoints into four types based on who controls or initiates them: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external touchpoints. Witell et al. (2020) have proposed a categorization based on the angle of control, a concept similarly employed by Lemon and Verhoef (2016).

Gao et al. (2022) classify touchpoints into three categories owned by the service provider: digital touchpoints, human touchpoints, and spatial touchpoints. This classification is grounded in the B2B service touchpoint categorization presented by Aichner and Gruber (2017) and Witell et al. (2020). Aichner and Gruber (2017) propose classifying touchpoints into six categories: human contact, physical products, services, communication, spatial elements, and electronic interactions. In the B2B customer journey framework presented by Purmonen et al. (2023), touchpoints are classified into two main categories: direct and indirect. Direct touchpoints encompass touchpoints where customers engage with brand or offering representations directly managed by the provider, including corporate websites, advertising materials, and interactions with sales personnel. On the other hand, indirect touchpoints involve customer interactions with brand or offering representations that are outside the direct control of the provider, such as third-party maintenance, customer reviews on external platforms, or discussions in online forums. Existing touchpoint categorizations are summarized in Table 3.

Study	Context	Touchpoint categorization
Lemon and Verhoef (2016)	B2C	<p>Brand-owned touchpoints: touchpoints fully controlled and managed by the brand or company</p> <p>Partner-owned touchpoints: touchpoints controlled by third-party partners or affiliates of the brand</p> <p>Customer-owned touchpoints: touchpoints initiated and controlled by the customers themselves</p> <p>Social/external touchpoints: touchpoints that occur in external environments and are not directly controlled by the brand</p>
Aichner and Gruber (2017)	B2B	<p>Human: interactions between customers and company employees</p> <p>Product: physical products or materials provided by the company</p> <p>Service: services provided by the company</p> <p>Communication: any communication between the company and the customer (ex. advertising and emails)</p> <p>Spatial: physical spaces where the customer interacts with the company</p> <p>Electronic: any digital interactions between the customer and the company (ex. website or social media)</p>
Wang et al. (2019)	B2B	<p>In-person events: physical interactions organized by the service provider</p> <p>Digital events: online interactions facilitated by the service provider through digital channels</p>
Witell et al. (2020)	B2B	<p>Supplier controlled touchpoints: supplier firm has the primary control over the interaction</p> <p>Customer controlled touchpoints: customer has a significant degree of control over the interaction</p> <p>Partner controlled touchpoints: Interaction initiated by partner</p> <p>External (ecosystem) controlled touchpoints: interactions initiated by external actors in the environment</p>
Gao et al. (2022)	B2B / services	<p>Digital touchpoints: firm-initiated interactions with business customers</p> <p>Human touchpoints: involve provider representatives</p> <p>Spatial touchpoints: physical elements of the service transaction</p>
Lundin and Kindström (2023)	B2B	<p>Digital touchpoints: interactions through digital channels and technologies</p> <p>Physical touchpoints: interactions which involve physical presence or tangible experiences</p>
Purmonen et al. (2023)	B2B	<p>Direct touchpoints: controllable by provider</p> <p>Indirect touchpoints: beyond provider's control</p>

TABLE 3 Existing typologies of touchpoint categorization

One method of categorizing touchpoints involves the separation between digital and physical channels. According to Wang et al. (2019) the categorization can be delineated into two primary groups in service B2B context, depending on the nature of engagement activities provided by the service provider. The first

suggested category of touchpoints are in-person events, and this category encompasses seminars, conferences, workshops, and roundtable discussions initiated by the service provider. These events serve to facilitate face-to-face interactions and foster relationship building with both clients and prospects. The second classification according to Wang et al. (2019) is digital events and content, encompassing on-demand audiovisual presentations, live webcasts, and digital materials accessible on the service provider's official websites. This category also involves actions like accessing, downloading, and sharing digital content. Lundin and Kindström (2023) also categorize touchpoints into digital and physical domains. Although physical interactions continue to hold significant importance in many B2B contexts, contemporary B2B customer journeys are progressively incorporating digital touchpoints. These digital interactions occur across diverse channels, including search engines, company websites, digital service platforms, and social media platforms (Aichner & Gruber, 2017). According to Lundin and Kindström (2023) there is a growing presence of touchpoints within digital platforms. They further suggest that existing touchpoints can be influenced by digital technologies, in addition to instances where interactions take place exclusively in digital platforms. In this research, the classification of touchpoints into physical and digital categories is utilized.

2.3.1 Physical touchpoints

In various B2B contexts, the significance of physical touchpoints persists. Physical customer journey touchpoints can encompass face-to-face meetings, site visits, product demonstrations, and the physical delivery of solutions (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Additionally, forms of communication such as seminars and workshops are considered as part of these physical touchpoints, representing interactions that occur outside digital platforms. Current research emphasizes the enduring importance of physical service delivery environments and touchpoints in B2B customer journeys. For instance, according to Gao et al. (2022), physical touchpoints are vital in shaping the perceptions of business customers toward the service provider and the overall service experience. This influence extends to fostering the building and maintaining of long-term relationships between the service provider and the business customer.

Physical touchpoints serve as a foundation for building relationships and networking, enabling more personal and direct engagement with potential customers (Wang et al., 2019). The physical presence enhances the ability to establish relationships, which is a central factor in B2B contexts. According to Wang et al. (2019) face-to-face interactions are viewed as conducive to fostering trust and bond between service providers and customers, potentially influencing purchasing decisions. These tangible touchpoints significantly shape customer perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, ultimately influencing overall customer satisfaction and loyalty (Aichner & Gruber, 2017). While numerous studies emphasize the growing significance of digital touchpoints in the B2B landscape, Aichner and Gruber (2017) argue in their research that human interaction will remain a pivotal

and influential factor in the B2B sector. They assert that in the B2B settings, physical touchpoints remain almost essential, particularly when solutions need to be sought through collaboration. According to Aichner and Gruber (2017) human interactions, encompassing consultations, project meetings, and sales discussions, rank prominently among the most crucial customer touchpoints in terms of influencing customer satisfaction. They also propose that, in the context of problem-solving, tangible points of contact offer exceptional value in B2B relationships. Therefore, current research emphasizes the role of physical touchpoints as a significant factor in building and maintaining business relationships.

Additionally, physical touchpoints can provide a platform for the sharing of industry-specific knowledge and expertise (Wang et al., 2019). These events provide a platform for professionals to come together, interact, and engage in meaningful discussions. In this way, value can be generated collaboratively through physical touchpoints. Nowadays, it is possible to support digitally various physical touchpoints and with digital support providers can enhance customer's experience and provide more seamless customer journey possibility (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). This provides more possibilities to support the customer and gather information about customer interactions, preferences, and feedback, which can be used to improve future touchpoint experiences and tailor offerings to customer needs, including physical touchpoints.

2.3.2 Digital touchpoints

As mentioned, in the context of B2B interactions, physical touchpoints remain crucial for customer experiences. However, there is a noticeable shift as digital elements become more prevalent in B2B customer journeys nowadays (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). The B2B customer journeys are including a growing array of digital components, such as search engines, corporate websites, digital service platforms, and social media channels (Hallikainen, Alamäki & Laukkanen, 2019). Digital touchpoints can also encompass emails, virtual meetings on digital platforms, digital content, and online forums, essentially covering all interactions that occur on digital platforms. According to Hallikainen et al. (2019) one of the benefits of digital touchpoints is that they provide customers with access to information, products, and services, and enable them to communicate with businesses in real-time. Customers can utilize digital touchpoints to investigate and compare product offerings, reviews, and search information about providers, which was not as easily achievable prior to the rise of digital channels (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Overall, digital technologies have influenced the B2B customer journey by allowing customers access to independently complete parts of their journey digitally, thereby giving them greater control and a sense of empowerment (Steward et al., 2019).

According to Pagani and Pardo (2017), digital touchpoints are essential for creating new connections among businesses. In their research they introduce the idea of actor-bonds-centered digitalization, where the main impact of digital technology is to form new connections among businesses. This happens when a new customer uses digital systems, allowing connections between businesses

that were not linked before or changing the nature of existing connections. It has been observed that digital touchpoints are more commonly encountered at the initial stages of the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). According to Terho et al. (2022) these digital interactions play a crucial role in shaping the early stages of the customer journey in a B2B context. Additionally, they suggest that digitalization has caused B2B customer journeys to begin earlier than in the past, primarily through the introduction of digital touchpoints that allow for early customer engagement and interaction.

Through the utilization of digital touchpoints, companies can expand their reach to a broader audience and interact with customers across various channels and platforms (Rustholllkarhu et al., 2022). The increase of channels for provider interaction, including websites, social media, email, and online chat, contributes to enhanced communication and engagement. Therefore, this in turn can foster a more interactive and dynamic customer experience (Rustholllkarhu et al., 2022). Digital touchpoints offer customers the convenience of accessing information and seeking support from anywhere with an internet connection and it also reduces the need for physical travel and overcomes time constraints (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.3.3 Managing digital touchpoints

The digital realm's growth has led to an increased array of touchpoints, with certain touchpoints falling outside a company's immediate control (Steward et al., 2019). According to Lundin and Kindström (2023) with digitalization the amount of customer journey touchpoints has expanded, and it's essential to recognize that only a portion of these touchpoints can be controlled by the company. Customers now have access to a wealth of information and are actively engaged in independent information search and comparison activities, reshaping their role in the customer journey more proactive than in the past (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The significance of digital touchpoints is on the rise, enabling customers to initiate a customer journey at their convenience and independently acquire information. This has the potential to reduce the duration from the beginning of the customer journey to the final purchase decision (Lundin & Kindström 2023). According to Marvasti et al. (2021), due to advancements in digital marketing, B2B buyers may engage in more than half of the purchasing process through digital channels before initiating major interactions with the B2B provider. Digitalization has made it easier for customers to navigate between physical and online realms, allowing them to transition smoothly across different digital touchpoints and channels (Hallikainen et al., 2019). Managing touchpoints effectively involves ensuring that each interaction with the customer meets their expectations and contributes to a cohesive and engaging customer journey (Lundin & Kindström, 2023).

Lundin and Kindström (2023) identify three approaches to digitalizing touchpoints within the B2B customer journey: adding new digital touchpoints, converting existing touchpoints into digital, and facilitating enhancements to existing touchpoints. In touchpoint management, the addition of new touchpoints

requires careful consideration of their integration into the overall customer journey (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to highlight important locations where digital interactions can adeptly engage customers and impact their decision-making processes. Lundin and Kindström (2023) suggest that provider can potentially secure customer loyalty and increase the hurdles for competition by establishing early connections with customers via new digital channels. Converting existing touchpoints into digital formats and improving those already in digital form requires a strategic approach to ensure a seamless transition and to maintain or enhance the customer journey. Lundin and Kindström (2023) also propose that converting physical touchpoints into digital has the potential to decrease the resource requirements from the provider. Additionally, digitalizing a single touchpoint can either reduce the need for incoming physical touchpoints or eliminate them altogether. Lastly, they suggest that existing touchpoints can receive support and facilitation from digital technologies. Digital technologies enable the collection and management of diverse customer data, offering opportunities for providers to enhance their touchpoint journeys.

Steward et al. (2019) acknowledge that compared to B2C markets, B2B providers are presently falling behind in their utilization of customer data. Digital touchpoints have noticed to provide additional customer data for B2B companies, such as offering deeper insights into customers' actions and perceptions (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). According to Marvasti et al. (2021), it is proposed that B2B firms should adopt a machine learning approach to anticipate and understand the phases of the B2B purchasing process by analyzing the online browsing activities of purchasing organizations. This is since nowadays, potential customers leave extensive digital traces of their information-seeking behavior, which can be leveraged for identifying the stages and behavior of the customer journey (Marvasti et al., 2021). According to Rust and Huang (2014) advancements in information technology also assure the growing significance and utilization of computationally intensive data processing. For B2B companies dealing with big data, the challenge lies in learning to effectively leverage and develop technologies in a way that facilitates the efficient utilization of data to support touchpoint management. Within the realm of B2B, digital touchpoints afford companies the opportunity to acquire valuable data on customer behavior, preferences, and interactions (Rusthollkarhu et al., 2022).

Many touchpoints, particularly those involving customers' social interactions with colleagues or other customers of the provider, are beyond the direct influence of sellers (Purmonen et al., 2023). The utilization of digital technologies has expanded the scope for customer involvement, and such engaged customers are often more inclined to participate in collaborative efforts (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). However, heightened customer activity may also lead to a reduction in the provider's control over interactions. In B2B context, control pertains to a company's ability to shape and govern the actions of other companies (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Consequently, B2B customers now assume a more dynamic role, introducing complexity and potentially diminishing the provider's control over touchpoints, as external actors can influence during customer journey. The provider should avoid attempting to control every touchpoint along the

customer's journey and instead consider the importance of finding a balance between more proactive and less proactive roles (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). According to Yakhlef and Nordin (2021) businesses intervention in customer-owned touchpoints, for example social media platforms, online forums, can even lead to a negative customer experience when it frustrates basic needs for autonomy, competence, and social relatedness. In essence, it would be advantageous for the company to develop a strategy that encompasses both active and less active roles to achieve success in touchpoint management.

Given the increasing complexity associated with managing the B2B customer journey due to the increase of touchpoints, artificial intelligence (AI) tools can offer valuable assistance. These AI tools contribute to the management of B2B marketing by enhancing the management of the customer journey, providing valuable insights, automating tasks, and enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction (Rusthollkarhu et al., 2022). Solutions for B2B customer journey touchpoint management are therefore increasingly available. It is possible that B2B purchasing may transition towards an online format with minimal to no face-to-face interactions. There is evidence indicating that traditional in-person relationships could diminish in importance, while digital interactions assume a more significant role (Steward et al., 2019). The extent to which customers become active participants will, to a larger extent, depend on how effectively B2B companies adapt to the digitalization of the customer journey and its touchpoints. In a broader context, digital touchpoints are essential components of B2B customer journeys, offering businesses new opportunities to engage with customers, personalize their experiences, and improve the effectiveness of their marketing and sales strategies (Rusthollkarhu et al., 2022).

2.4 Theoretical framework

Based on the literature review, the theoretical framework of this study is presented in Figure 3. The theoretical framework represents the customer journey and its stages, goals, and touchpoints influencing through the journey in the B2B service context. The theoretical model is based on Purmonen et al. (2023) conceptual framework, with little modifications. Purmonen et al. (2023) suggest that future research should examine and be grounded in their conceptual framework, refining and validating the framework through empirical research. Their framework also considers the purchase and usage stages characteristic to the B2B customer journey, as well as recognizing their continuous nature. Therefore, their conceptual framework was chosen as the background for this study.

According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016), customers go through various stages and touchpoints in their journey. The theoretical framework describes different stages within purchasing and usage, with more detailed substages. The framework includes eight stages suggested by Purmonen et al. (2023) which are need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, selection, deployment, use, maintenance, and reassessment. The purchasing and usage center

includes its own set of customer journey actors and members, which may vary at different stages of the journey (Witell et al., 2020). The framework also provides a lens for understanding how individual and collective goals drive the customer journey actors. B2B purchases has noted to typically require the involvement of several professionals who are influenced to varying degrees by established regulations and protocols, while pursuing a range of organizational and personal goals (Johnston & Bonoma, 1981; Macdonald et al., 2016). According to Purmonen et al. (2023) and Macdonald et al. (2016) customer journey goals can be categorized into collective and individual goals, and they are represented in the theoretical framework. Additionally, the purchasing and usage centers are presented in framework as interconnected, symbolizing the ongoing journey where the end of usage may loop back to a new buying situation, reflecting the continuous nature of the business relationship.

The theoretical framework has been adjusted from Purmonen et al. (2023) framework to categorize touchpoints as digital and physical touchpoints instead of direct and indirect touchpoints. According to Lundin and Kindström (2023), touchpoints can be categorized into digital and physical ones. This division allows the study to explore the roles of the different kinds of digital and physical touchpoints. The distinction between digital and physical touchpoints is significant because it reflects the changing nature of customer interactions in the digital age. With the increasing prevalence of digital technologies, customers are increasingly engaging with providers through digital channels (Hallikainen et al., 2019; Aichner & Gruber, 2017), and providers must leverage digital tools to enhance customer journeys. To cover this challenge, the framework has been adjusted from Purmonen et al. (2023) framework.

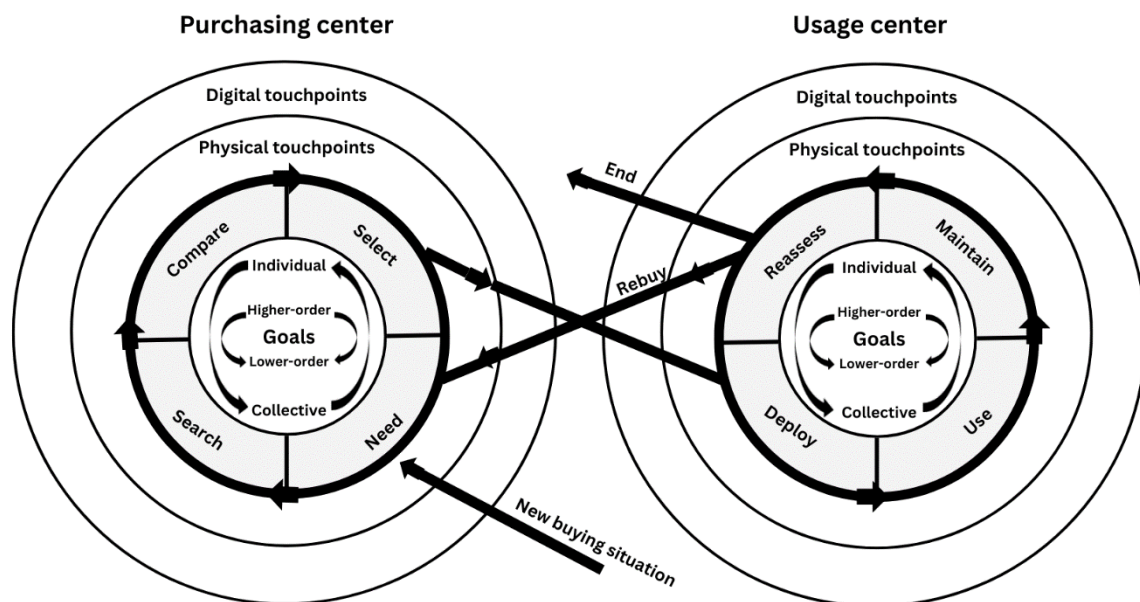


FIGURE 3 Theoretical framework of the study (adapted from Purmonen et al., 2023)

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the empirical research methodology utilized to address the research questions. It begins with an introduction to case study as a research strategy using qualitative research methods. Subsequently, a description of the case selection follows. Lastly, there is an examination of the study's data collection and analysis methods, along with a discussion of the characteristics of focused interviews utilized in this study.

3.1 Research design

The research utilizes qualitative research methods, with the implementation of a case study research strategy. Specific definitions are connected to the nature of a case study research. Case study research should not be understood as a method but moreover as a research strategy (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 116). According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) case study research has a strong qualitative spirit, yet also quantitative data can also be used to build a case. So, a common approach in qualitative research is the utilization of a case study strategy, and these two methods are often interconnected. Yin (2009, p. 18) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the context and phenomenon are not clear. As a comprehensive research strategy, a case study encompasses the overall design, techniques for data collection, and approaches to analyzing the data. Shared among different definitions of case study research is the focus on generating comprehensive and in-depth knowledge, grounded in the analysis of numerous empirical sources that are abundant in contextual information (Tellis, 1997). All in all, case study research is nowadays considered more as a research approach or strategy rather than a method, allowing flexibility in data collection and analysis methods. Yin (2009, p. 18) suggests that a case study should be employed as a research strategy when the goal of the research is to gain a profound understanding of a real-life phenomenon. This is particularly applicable when comprehending the phenomenon requires considering significant contextual factors, as these are highly relevant to the study's focus.

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 133) in a case study, it is essential to consider various viewpoints that analyze the evidence from diverse angles. Furthermore, the chosen case should hold significance, either by being unique or of general interest in some manner. Additionally, the case's evidence should be presented in such a manner that readers can independently formulate their own opinions about the case's conclusions. Moreover, it is crucial to provide supporting and opposing perspectives. The nature of this study aligns with this

framework, and the research topic was selected due to its unique nature, relevance, and the practical insights it may offer when examining the customer journey in the B2B service context.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 119) divide case studies into two categories: intensive and extensive case study research. Intensive case study research is described to focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of a specific case by offering a comprehensive, detailed, and contextualized description. On the other hand, extensive case study research aims to expand, test, or create theoretical concepts that can be applied broadly by examining several cases for comparison. Correspondingly, according to Yin (2009) case studies can be divided into two categories: single- and multiple-case studies. According to Yin (2009) to define the limits for the analysis and data collection, it is crucial to determine cases being studied. One of the advantages of multiple-case studies is potential for direct replication and better foundation for creating broader inferences than single-case study. However, multiple-case studies conducting multiple-case studies demands significant time and resources, which might could outreach the capabilities of an individual researcher (Yin, 2009). Taking into consideration the resource limitations, in this study there is one case selected. However, there are also nuances of a multiple-case study in the research. This is because one company is studied in-depth, with interviews conducted with both employees and customers, and in addition to this, the research includes three interviews with employees of similar reference companies based on industry and service context.

This study utilizes qualitative research methods, as mentioned. Research methodologies can be categorized into quantitative and qualitative approaches (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). There are five main methods employed among qualitative researchers including observation, interviewing, ethnographic fieldwork, discourse analysis and textual analysis (Travers, 2001, p. 2). According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) with qualitative research methods are aiming to constitute a holistic understanding of the studied subject. They also emphasize qualitative methods being especially relevant when prior research of the subject is limited, and qualitative research often exhibits an adaptable nature due to dealing with unstructured issues. The research on customer journeys in B2B different contexts is notably limited so qualitative methods provide the opportunity to form new angles and in-depth examination of the phenomenon. As qualitative research methods are perceived as tools specifically designed to emphasize the significance of conceptual contemplation of empirical phenomena (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, p. 11-12), due to the complexity of B2B customer journeys, qualitative research methods were considered the most suitable and well-justified choice for this study. This research aims to expand the conceptual framework presented earlier to meet the context of industrial services.

3.2 Case selection

As mentioned earlier, the context for this research is the industrial B2B services sector. In this study, the main case company and additional reference companies are utilized to research the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context. The main case company, which is examined more in-depth through employee and customer interviews, is a Finnish industrial manufacturing company with roots dating back to the 1750s. Despite being Finnish, the main case company operates internationally across all continents. It is a global leader in providing process technologies, automation, and services, primarily to the pulp, paper, and energy industries. The main case company is segmented into five primary operational business lines: services, pulp and energy, paper, automation systems, and flow control. This study focuses on the operations of the main case company's services business line.

Roughly one-third of the company's revenue comes from services. With a wide array of services across various industrial sectors such as pulp, paper, and energy, the main case company offers a versatile landscape for examining customer journeys in the industrial B2B services context. The services under examination in this research include manufacturing related services, such as improvement projects, maintenance services, and various spare parts and process components. In terms of scale, the range is significant, with some services being routine purchases while others involve larger investments. The selection criteria for interviewees within the main case company employees were based on their involvement in customer journeys and the relevance of their job aspects to it.

The primary focus of this research involved selecting customer companies of the main case company with the intention of interviewing large-scale companies that have considerable experience in service procurement. This encompasses smaller, routine purchases as well as potentially larger procurement projects aimed at improvement initiatives. This way, the study aims to obtain the most comprehensive view possible from the customers' perspective of their customer journey in the industrial B2B services context. The criteria for selecting individual interviewees within customer companies were that they are actively involved in various stages of the service customer journey, from purchasing to usage.

Additionally, three reference companies, similar to the main case company, were selected for interviews to establish a comprehensive framework of the customer journey in industrial B2B service settings. These companies also operate in the technological or manufacturing field and are major multinational corporations. Therefore, the reference companies are somewhat comparable but also offer different types of B2B services compared to the main case company, which helps avoid one-sided results and provides a broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. All three reference companies are categorized as large companies. Reference company 1 (R1) operates in the field of mobility solutions, while reference company 2 (R2) specializes in process technology and equipment. Additionally, reference company 3 (R3) operates within the field of

material handling solutions. Interview participants from the reference companies were chosen based on their expertise and involvement in managing the customer journey within the context of B2B services. This ensures that the individuals participating in the study have a deep understanding of the subject under investigation and can provide valuable information from the angle of research objectives. By complementing the case selection with reference companies in addition to the main case company and interviews with its employees and customers, this study offers a more holistic viewpoint on the topic under examination. By choosing these cases for examination, this research provides access to a comprehensive service context and enhances understanding of B2B customer service journey processes. The reference companies in this study provide additional valuable evidence and strengthen the research findings. By interviewing multiple companies, the reliability and validity of the study improve as the results are consistent across different organizations.

3.3 Data collection

The theoretical framework of a study largely determines the type of data suitable for the research and the methodology employed in the analysis (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Eskola and Suoranta (2008) also emphasize the essentiality for the framework and method to be in harmony to facilitate the characteristic approach of conducting qualitative research. Interviews are one of the most commonly used methods in case studies and the interviews are usually guided conversations rather than structured questions (Yin, 2009, p. 101). Interviews are selected as a data collection method in this study. According to Yin (2009, p. 107-108) there are three types of interviews used in case studies: in-depth interview, focused interview and structured interview. In-depth interviews are characterized with open-ended and relatively unstructured questioning where the aim is to explore the interviewees' feelings and perspectives on a particular subject in detail and they can involve multiple interview sessions. On the other hand, structured interviews often rely on a predetermined set of questions mirroring surveys and are more common in mixed method studies. Focused interviews are often more structured than in-depth interviews, but they still include an open-ended and conversational nature. Interview questions are frequently prepared in advance and tailored to focus on a specific aspect of the study.

In this study, focused interviews were utilized as the interview type, as they combine the benefits of pre-planned structured questions while maintaining a relatively informal and conversational tone during the interview. Additionally, as a data collection method, it also provided the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the topic during interviews. Considering the limited research on the topic, this data collection method was considered the most advantageous approach.

The research data consisted of interviewing employees and customers of the main case company and reference companies. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) in the realm of qualitative business research, it is a common practice to employ convenience sampling procedures or leverage pre-existing contacts. In this study, the suitable interviewees for the research were estimated with the case company employees from the sales and marketing departments, because they possess a comprehensive understanding of customers and individuals working closely with customer journeys. Engaging in work closely related to the B2B customer journey or being a member of the customer's journeys purchasing and usage stage within the context of B2B served as a criterion based on established theoretical principles. Also, pre-existing contacts were utilized to gather the suitable interviewees for this study from the reference companies. Individuals with strong customer journey involvement brings a more extensive range of insights and expertise concerning the research topics. Altogether, four case company employees, four case company customers and three reference company employees were interviewed to get a comprehensive understanding of the customer journey and its goals and touchpoints in the industrial B2B services context.

All eleven interviews were conducted during the period of November and December 2023, specifically from November 16th to December 8th, 2023. The interviews were primarily conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams, with one interview conducted at the office of the main case company (E1). Out of eleven interviews, ten were conducted in Finnish, and one was conducted in English. The interviewees were informed in advance about the research topic. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Teams application. In the beginning of the interviews, the concept of B2B customer journey and its purchasing and usage stages was explained to the interviewees to ensure they understood the questions and could respond effectively. Definitions of services were also provided to help interviewees grasp the context. Additionally, the interviewees were informed how the research material is handled and how the material will be deleted afterwards.

The interviews covered six main themes: background, need recognition, information search, comparison, selection, and usage. In the background section, the focus was on understanding the role of services in the interviewees' operations, as well as communication and relationships between customers and service providers. Subsequently, the interview themes delved into the stages of the customer journey, with questions focused to explore the characteristics, goals, and touchpoints of each stage in more detail. At the end of the interview, the interviewees were given the opportunity to provide further clarifications, and it was ensured that the interview comprehensively and realistically addressed their understanding and experiences of the customer journey. Interviewees responded comprehensively to the interview questions and shared their experiences and opinions. The average duration of the interviews was 1 hour and 19 minutes. The interview lengths varied based on the interviewees' perspectives and experiences on the topic. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended so that each interviewee could respond and elaborate on their perspectives to the extent they desired. The interview questions proved to be essential for the research as

they elicited relevant and comprehensive responses in all interviews. Additional and clarifying questions were posed during the interviews to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, anonymity is maintained for all interview participants and their companies to encourage honest and thorough responses, as well as for privacy reasons. Summary of the interviewees is presented in Table 4.

Identification	Interview group	Job title	Duration of the interview
C1	Customer company 1	Supervisor Maintenance	1h 07min
C2	Customer company 2	Senior Manager, Maintenance Operations	1h 16min
C3	Customer company 3	Production Manager	53min
C4	Customer company 4	Maintenance Manager	1h 13min
R1	Reference company 1	Business Process Reengineering Transformation Lead	1h 19min
R2	Reference company 2	Director, Sales and Services	1h 24min
R3	Reference company 3	Head of Digital Marketing in Industrial Equipment and Services	1h 46min
E1	Case company employee 1	Vice President, Services development	1h 34min
E2	Case company employee 2	Senior Manager, Sales Enablement and Business Development	1h 44min
E3	Case company employee 3	Mill Sales Manager	56min
E4	Case company employee 4	Mill Sales Manager	1h 18min

TABLE 4 Summary of the interviewees

3.4 Data analysis

Analyzing qualitative data can have multiple possible aims. According to Flick (2016, p. 5), when analyzing qualitative data, there can be three aims: describing a phenomenon, comparing several cases, or developing a theory. When conducting research, it is important to examine the logical reasoning within the study, as it provides a foundational framework for systematically analyzing data, connecting disparate ideas, and generating new theories (Flick, 2016, p. 123). Flick (2016, p. 123-133) identifies three logical reasoning types: deduction, induction, and abduction. Abductive logical reasoning does not rely directly on any single theory. Instead, it uses theory as a lens to examine the subject and generate new perspectives. On the other hand, deductive reasoning applies existing theories to new data to test their validity, thereby confirming or disproving their applicability in specific contexts. Lastly, inductive reasoning involves analyzing specific data to formulate broader generalizations and theories. Deductive reasoning was selected as a logical reasoning in this study. The aim of this study is to understand the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services, and deductive reasoning enables the validation and testing of existing theories within the new context. However, it also simultaneously provides a foundation for generating new insights to the existing research. This approach not only confirms the validity of the existing theories but also guides the direction of future research. The analysis involves a back-and-forth process between existing theories and the results obtained from the collected data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014, p. 10) describe common ways to analyze data in qualitative research. The analyzing process begins with assigning codes to interview transcripts and then coding these materials into themes or categories. Eventually, this elaborates into a smaller set of assertions that cover the consistencies in the qualitative data. They define codes as labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Miles et al. (2014, p. 73) divide coding into two main stages, which are first-cycle coding and second-cycle coding. First-cycle coding methods involve the initial assignment of codes to segments of data, while second-cycle coding focuses on analyzing and categorizing the codes generated during the first cycle. Alternatively, Yin (2016, p. 184) divide the analysis of qualitative data into five stages: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the data. These stages involve organizing the data, breaking it down for closer examination, identifying emerging patterns, creating a new narrative with visual aids, and finally, drawing comprehensive conclusions to summarize key insights from the entire research.

This study's data analysis follows the steps specified by Yin (2016) and Miles et al. (2014). The process began with verbatim transcription to ensure no information was overlooked. As mentioned, interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Teams application. Subsequently, the transcription materials

were precisely reviewed, and the transcripts were verified by listening to the recordings to ensure transcription accuracy. Then, the interviews conducted in Finnish were translated into English with maintaining their original meaning as closely as possible. During the first-cycle coding, data was reorganized under the themes and sub-themes according to the theoretical framework of the study. Utilizing themes allows the diverse use of material to achieve research objectives and ensures that the key themes of the research are properly addressed (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). The guiding conceptual framework suggested by Purmonen et al. (2023), regarding B2B customer journey supported coding of this research. The data was reorganized into main themes and sub-themes related to the B2B customer journey stages, goals, and touchpoints. The complete list of themes, subthemes and codes is presented in Table 5.

Moreover, the data analysis proceeded according to Miles et al.'s (2014) two-stage coding process, and second-cycle coding was implemented. After the first coding stage, relationships between the themes and sub-themes were examined. Following this, new codes emerged for the second coding cycle from the data. The codes that emerged for the second-cycle coding included more detailed codes related to both individual and collective customer journey goals, as well as codes related to digital and physical touchpoints. The codes related to more detailed customer journey stages emerged from the data, but it can be noted that they also align with the theoretical framework, excluding the maintenance stage during the usage stage. During the second-cycle coding, the data was coded under these detailed codes, and they were grouped into the study's sub-themes to gain a clearer understanding of the subject matter. In the context of this study, the identified themes were inherently aligned with the theoretical framework, facilitating a seamless and coherent data coding and interpretation process.

Theme	Subtheme	Code
Stages and features	Purchasing	Need recognition
		Information search
		Comparison
		Select
	Usage	Deployment
		Use
Revaluation		
Goals	Individual goals	Individual process-related goals
		Individual financial-related goals
		Individual provider-related goals
	Collective goals	Collective process-related goals
		Collective financial-related goals
		Collective provider-related goals
	Lower-order goals	
	Higher-order goals	
	Touchpoints and digitalization	Digital touchpoints
Digital purchase related activities		
Physical touchpoints		Physical relationship related activities
		Physical purchase related activities

TABLE 5 Themes, subthemes, and codes of data analysis

4 CUSTOMER JOURNEY IN THE INDUSTRIAL B2B SERVICES CONTEXT

In this chapter, the findings from the interviews are presented and reviewed. The structure of the chapter aligns with the themes of the research questions and encompasses multiple layers of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context. First, the customer journey stages, and their features are presented. It can be conceptualized that collective and individual goals direct the customer journey in the B2B context. Therefore, after presenting the customer journey stages, this study analyzes the different kinds of goals influencing the customer journey. Various customer journey goals can be considered to guide towards different touchpoints between the provider and the customer. Consequently, the findings delve into the roles of digital and physical touchpoints throughout the customer journey, critically examining their significance in purchase and relationship-related activities. This chapter also provides a conceptual framework for understanding the customer journey within the industrial B2B services context.

4.1 Customer journey stages

The stages of the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services mostly align with current research on B2B customer journey stages, based on their corresponding stages. The theoretical framework on B2B customer journeys by Purmonen et al. (2023) comprehensively illustrate the B2B customer journey, as it also divides the usage stage into various sections, encompassing multiple stages beyond the purchase stage itself. Purmonen et al. (2023) proposed a framework for the B2B customer journey consisting of a total of eight stages: identifying needs, searching for information, comparison, selection, deployment, usage, maintenance, and reassessment. In contrast to previous research, one key finding of this study is that within the context of industrial B2B services, the maintenance stage isn't typically included as a stage of the customer journey. Frequently, it signifies the beginning of a new customer journey within the services context. This is because in the context of industrial B2B services, maintenance itself is often the solution being purchased by the customer. Therefore, the maintenance stage could be seen as serving better the products within their context. This study suggests that the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services can be divided into seven stages under purchasing and usage phases: need recognition, information search, comparing, selection, deployment, usage, and reassessment. Next, the seven stages of the customer journey and their features in the industrial B2B services context are presented.

4.1.1 Need recognition

In all interviews, the need recognition was identified as the initial stage of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context. However, the interviews revealed various mechanisms for recognizing needs. The mechanisms of need recognition can roughly be divided into two categories: needs that arise from the customer themselves and needs that arise through collaboration with the provider. In the context of industrial B2B services, it can be observed from the interviews that the awakening of needs in collaboration with the provider is possible, as the customer relationship is often long-term and there is extensive collaboration with the customer. With collaboration and a good customer relationship, the provider may have the capability to proactively engage in identifying needs for example before any breakdown occurs. Proactive need recognition can be also facilitated by the provider's thorough understanding of the lifecycle of their solutions, enabling them to propose new solutions in advance based on this knowledge. When dealing with a new customer, it entails a new purchasing situation, where the need typically is awakened from the customer's own initiative. The identification of needs can also leverage technical data from equipment operation, enabling the provider and the customer to proactively identify needs.

"Every purchase is initiated by some underlying need or idea. We also use data to identify needs, utilizing various technologies. Service procurements are often planned well in advance." C2

"Disruptions are one scenario when needs arise; then we consider how to address them. Additionally, there may be development projects. In our processes, we also use data to support need identification. New needs may also arise through collaboration with the provider, and the advantage there is that with an experienced provider, suggestions may come to mind." C3

"In practical terms, customer needs for services can arise in three ways: through the customer's own maintenance team, through our inspections where the inspector reports on the device's status, or by predicting from data. In certain industries, we can also anticipate what errors might occur after five years of certain equipment usage." R3

"We aim to inform customers about new opportunities, bring ideas, and enrich their thinking about how to improve their production. However, currently, needs are largely arising through planning. Customers are, of course, familiar with their equipment and production goals, so most needs still come directly from the customer." E3

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that in the context of the industrial B2B services, purchasing services often involves annual planning, meaning that needs are sought to be identified in advance. Within the industrial manufacturing contexts, annual planning often relies on shutdown periods, during which

actions and services are scheduled for the machines. Shutdown timeframes are often known well in advance, and the demand for services often focuses on this period, so availability is a crucial factor. Therefore, the need must be identified in time to allow enough time for clarifications. However, this can vary across industries and firms, and within the B2B market, certain industries and companies may lean towards employing a "run to failure" operational strategy. This means that services are procured only upon the occurrence of events such as equipment or technology failure. All in all, based on the interviews this approach varies among companies and industries, and many strive to anticipate future needs and faults in advance as equipment malfunction can prove costly even in the short term.

"We have a more proactive approach, and for example, we regularly have meetings well in advance to discuss why certain parts are worn out, and we already know what needs to be purchased next year." C4

"Customer needs often arise through annual maintenance shutdowns. They receive alerts in their own systems about what needs maintenance, and then they start planning and budgeting for it. A lot of service procurement is determined by the schedules and requirements of these annual maintenance shutdowns." E4

If the provider is involved in need recognition, they are usually already involved in the customer journey in this phase. In breakdown scenarios, customers typically reach out to providers immediately and expect prompt action. The customer journey in such scenarios may advance rapidly if the provider can promptly offer the necessary resources and assistance. On the other hand, in planned service procurements and larger improvement projects, customers usually take more time to thoroughly explore their options, often without reaching out to the provider right away.

"In disruption situations, the hope is to make progress as quickly and smoothly as possible, but when it's more of a long-term improvement development project, then we need to agree on the schedule with the possible providers." C3

To sum up, the interviews highlighted the role of need recognition as a initial stage of the customer journey in the B2B service context. It was emphasized that procurement of services in the manufacturing sector often emphasizes annual planning and proactive identification of needs. Additionally, needs can also arise unexpectedly, but providers may potentially prevent this through their proactive approach.

4.1.2 Information search

Based on the interviews the next stage of the customer journey after need recognition is information search. Once the need has been recognized, searching for

information about the service begins. This often occurs through personal relationships between customer and provider, and information exchange typically takes place in various channels. Therefore, the provider typically becomes involved in the customer journey at the latest at this stage if the need recognition has not occurred in collaboration with the provider. An important factor in the information search stage is the viral offer and the communication series that surrounds it with the provider. In the interviews, it was emphasized that depending on the scope of the service, sometimes a joint meeting is organized between the customer and the provider before and after the viral offer. This ensures that both parties are aware of the customer's requirements and that there is alignment regarding the proposed service.

"I know people who have insights at the provider's side, so I email them or call them, and that's how we start gathering information. So, personal relationships are the channel there. Information often comes from a series of communications, including of course the important offer. But there is often a lot of discussion around it." C2

"Often, before making an offer, we hold a meeting and decide if the service is right for the customer's case, meaning we assist the customer in making that decision. Sometimes the customer asks for an offer for completely the wrong thing, so we want to make sure we're talking about the same thing." E3

As mentioned, information search in the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context largely emphasizes personal relationships between the customer and the provider. Interviews revealed that customers often have defined contact people on the provider's side. However, it also emerged in the interviews that the customer prioritizes a reliable contact person from the provider's side, and this may not always be the defined contact person. Also, in many cases the trusted contact person from the provider also directs the customer to the right person on the provider's side, who is an expert in the relevant field. In the interviews, it is also highlighted that in certain cases information search does not exclusively rely on interpersonal relationships. In addition to personal relationships, customers may also rely on online resources, such as websites, for this purpose. In the interviews, it was also emphasized from the provider's side that there is an increasing desire to establish an online store on the platform. However, at present, it is often not possible to purchase services or get personalized information online without personal communication.

"Conversation with customers is multi-dimensional, with many customer relationships based on personal connections. Probably the primary source of information is websites, which offers various functionalities and search options. The learned behavior among customers seems to be calling or directly contacting a trusted individual. Larger themes such as sustainability and circular economy, as well as comprehensive service and product offerings, may be topics where customers seek more information, for example, independently on the website." E1

"In some, but fewer cases, we might search for information on Google, seeking what's available in relation to this. There's relatively little information available generally on process-level tasks, as it involves such specific knowledge. Offers come from almost everything, and a procurement proposal is made with it. Through that, an order is then placed." C3

"I don't believe there's much information searched beforehand on the aftermarket side before contacting us. Sales representatives, of course, inform customers about new parts and services during visits. Customers haven't had access to a digital portal yet. The upcoming online store will open new opportunities. For some services, the aim is to make the customer journey entirely digital." R2

In information search stage multiple types of information are searched and in the interviews the importance of the offer and technical specifications were emphasized. Throughout the customer journey, the customer search for a technical solution, and the provider's willingness to be involved in solving the problem is emphasized. One of the key factors at this stage, however, is the detailed technical comparison, as the discussion typically revolves around technical aspects. The importance of references is also pointed out, especially in the case of larger service and improvement purchases. Customers want to know and hear more about previous successes with similar solutions. During the information search stage, customers can also receive case study articles and videos featuring previous clients, effectively serving as reference materials. Clear pricing breakdown has also been identified as an important factor in the information search stage.

"When seeking information, we mainly look for willingness and a technical solution to one of our challenges. Of course, the offer and price are also factors." C2

"For information search, it's important to have technical descriptions, specifications, and detailed images. And then, if we're considering a costly project, we definitely want to ask about references and possibly inquire about arranging a meeting with the reference companies via Teams or similar platforms." C4

During the information search stage of the customer journey, key questions regarding questionable services are answered for the customers. Overall, interviews highlighted the importance of personalized information and the need for additional queries to tailor solutions effectively. At this stage, the customer is already forming a comprehensive picture of the provider and the relevance and quality of their services.

4.1.3 Comparison of alternatives

In the industrial B2B services customer journey, the third stage involves comparing different alternatives available to the customer. This comparison typically oc-

curs because there is a set price limit for purchasing services, leading to a requirement for competitive bidding. Customers compare alternatives primarily based on the offer, as well as the specifications and information provided by the provider. Influential factors in comparison stage may include provider characteristics, such as responsiveness towards the customer and clear indication of understanding of the customer's needs. In the interviews, it was emphasized that the process of comparison takes place consistently throughout the entirety of the customer journey, with the conception of a prospective provider gradually shaping in the early stages of this journey. On the other hand, comparing offers was perceived as challenging since they typically do not come exactly in similar formats, therefore requiring more time and tools to facilitate the comparison process. Additionally, because of this factor, a significant amount of communication occurs between customers and potential providers during the comparison stage.

"Comparison naturally occurs. We have a specific price limit for when services need to be competitively tendered. Purely based on the offer, then comparison is made." C1

"Usually, comparison is easy because the need initiator from our side is involved, so they know the key points, and therefore, the comparison is quick. The understanding begins to form right from the start, and I believe comparison happens already during the acquisition of information and in discussions very early on." C2

"Comparison is difficult to make. We create the technical description to be included in the request for proposal to indicate what we want in the offer. Then we have to compile a comparative excel sheet between companies, where we look at prices and references. It can be challenging at times; you need to be quite skilled to have the technical description of what is wanted and then to check that the offer is as requested. It's important for comparison that the offer is clear and detailed, with a clearly outlined technical specification. Then we often have to discuss the offer to ensure it is understood correctly." C4

The provider is often involved in the comparison stage of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context. Communication with the provider is considered important at this stage as well, and it is perceived as essential throughout the customer journey for the purposes of comparison and decision-making. Based on the interviews, communication is perceived to be customer-centric during the comparison phase, meaning that inquiries and questions from the customer are addressed, and clarification is provided as needed. As mentioned earlier, in some cases, a meeting is organized after receiving the offer to facilitate easy comparison and ensure mutual understanding of the proposal by the customer and provider. In these meetings, representatives of the specific solution usually also participate, bringing their own perspective to the customer about the technical solution. At this stage, the provider aims to provide the customer with easily accessible personalized support. However, providers only represent their

own offerings and do not undertake the comparison of different offers on behalf of the customer.

"After receiving the offer, there's still communication because the purchase isn't really possible without that interaction." C2

"Of course, we aim and want to be involved in customers' comparisons. In larger repair or replacement projects where a quote is requested, we try to discuss what our response is to that request for proposal. We rarely compare to competitors but rather focus more on explaining our own services and solutions. Then we also try to take into account things that may differ from the request for proposal." R1

"We're almost always involved in the comparison. But the customer does make comparisons between competitors, such as price and offer content comparisons." E3

Based on the interviews conducted in the research, it is evident that the comparison stage is often complex and requires active participation, attentiveness, and communication skills from both customers and providers. Customers need to be willing to invest time and resources in comparing offers, while providers must provide clear and detailed information about their products and services and demonstrate their readiness to support customers in decision-making. This is especially applicable in the context of significant service investments, while in the case of smaller purchases, the necessity for comparison may not arise and purchases are more routine and other offers are not necessarily requested.

4.1.4 Selection

The fourth identified stage of the customer journey in the B2B service context is making a selection of the provider and the actual purchase. At this stage, the customer finalizes their selection of a provider typically either independently or, for example, with the assistance of external consultants. Making the selection is recognized as a pivotal aspect of the customer journey, as the comprehensive understanding typically evolves gradually for the customer. In more extensive service purchase processes, the customer may select a few providers for final negotiations, from which they then choose the best one. In interviews, it became evident that during these negotiations, providers may strive to offer additional value to customers or adjust their offers accordingly. Typically, larger final negotiations may take place physically, but the study also highlighted the emerging theme of digitalization. According to the interviews, customers have learned to make decisions in the context of the B2B service purchases without physical meetings, which have previously been integral to nearly every customer journey. This has been facilitated by continuous digitalization. Finally, the customer communicates their final decision to the provider, indicating their choice.

"The decision is a gradually evolving process, so it's not a single point; naturally, there are discussions involved throughout the entire selection process." C2

"In larger tender processes, the customer negotiates and may select, for example, two providers for final negotiations. Then, we discuss whether we can compromise on pricing or service content in some way. However, the customer ultimately makes the final decision themselves, or a consultant assists them in making it."

R1

"Customers have learned to make decisions without physically meeting due to continuous digitalization." E1

In the interviews the most important factors when making a select was identified. As previously mentioned, customers largely base their comparisons on the offer, therefore making the offer and its specifications important assets for decision-making. Price is a significant determinant in the decision-making process for customers along their customer journey, alongside the provider's comprehension and capacity to customize solutions tailored to the customer's issues and processes. In the interviews, service quality also emerged as a significant factor alongside these, with its importance being understood by the customer, particularly in the context of services.

"The price has to be competitive, and that's number one. The number of providers has increased, so there's more choice nowadays. We hope for understanding from the provider. In a partnership, you can't just demand anything, especially regarding pricing, assuming that trust will remain. So, we hope to be listened to, for customer-centricity and tailored solutions." C2

"In maintenance, quality is the most important factor for us. Recently, I chose a provider whose price was slightly higher. Similarly, in spare parts, quality is key, so we prioritize quality to a large extent, and then pricing comes after." C4

"In larger development projects, the importance and presence of technology are emphasized, and the projects are highly tailored because solutions need to be integrated into existing processes." E3

Within the context of the customer journey in industrial B2B services, it can also be observed from the interviews that the customer's relationship with the provider can influence their selection. Often in this research context, customer relationships are long-term, and this study also emphasizes that the contacts between the customer and the provider's representatives have often been collaborating for a long time. As a result, a trusting relationship may have developed between the provider and the customer, which influences during the decision-making. In the context of services, purchases often occur in cycles due to annual planning. Therefore, through repeated purchases, the provider's employees also become familiar, which can serve as an asset to the provider.

"The relationship with the provider has great importance in the selection process. Even for us, we might have hundreds of technicians involved in annual maintenance. We know the people from provider, and those who have been here before, we gladly recommend them. They can operate here in various capacities, know the rules of the game, produce good reports, and the interaction is good here. In annual maintenance, these things are significant to ensure we get the right people for us."

C4

"Indeed, relationships have a significant impact on the selection process. It's an advantage to work with a familiar provider because they often understand the processes in certain location. This makes things a lot easier." C3

All in all, the selection stage of customer journey in the B2B service context customers finalize their choice of provider, and the selection often takes shape during the early stages of the customer journey. Negotiations may involve multiple providers, with digitalization increasingly facilitating decision-making without physical meetings. Key factors in selection stage include the competitiveness of the offer, price, providers understanding, and ability to tailor solutions. Long-term relationships with the provider influence selection, as repeated purchases build trust and ease collaboration, especially in a service environment.

4.1.5 Deployment

The fifth stage of the customer journey, identified after the selection and actual purchase, is the deployment of the service. This stage also indicates the beginning of the usage stage following the purchasing stage of the customer journey. The deployment stage may involve supplementary planning sessions and meetings related to the purchased service, as well as preparatory discussions concerning delivery. This could include arranging maintenance schedules, agreeing on implementation approaches, and verifying readiness for the delivery process. At this stage, it is crucial to establish a common understanding between the customer and the provider regarding the purchased service and the process moving forward. In the case of more comprehensive and large service purchases, the provider may also organize a kick-off meeting, during which the individuals responsible for the delivery are introduced to the customer. However, some smaller service purchases do not require additional information, and they are delivered as planned in the offerings and discussions before this stage. Meetings and more detailed discussions are usually features of larger improvement projects or maintenance operations, for example, during shutdowns.

"If, for example, maintenance is carried out during a shutdown, it is usually planned via Teams meeting. So, in practice, there is this kind of preparation in advance, and we ensure that everything is in order to carry out the work of maintenance." C1

"Depending on the scope of the service, it may require a meeting to agree on the implementation. In some cases, discussions have already taken place during the earlier phases on how to implement it, so it may require a process of phone calls or emails to proceed according to the plan." C3

"After the purchase is made, there will be a transition discussion with the customer, where everything related to the delivery is discussed. After the decision, the responsible persons for the delivery are introduced to the customer. Then comes the delivery phase, sometimes it can be delivered digitally or sent as a package." E2

After possible additional planning, the delivery of the service follows. The method of delivering the service varies depending on the nature of the service. In scenarios of minor service purchases, as previously noted, supplementary negotiations are frequently unnecessary. This may mean, for example, that maintenance is carried out as agreed or certain solutions are sent directly to the customer, typically arriving at the customer's warehouse in such cases. Also, in breakdown situations, the delivery rarely requires further discussion, and the emphasis is on getting the equipment running again rapidly. Interviews also revealed that in some service purchase cases, services can be delivered remotely, and support can be provided to the customer through online channels. In this case, service delivery occurs using digital platforms. As mentioned, delivery planning is required in larger maintenance projects, such as during shutdown periods, as well as in development projects, which typically demand more time and investment resources. For these services, the service may then be delivered all at once or in multiple stages, depending on the scope of the service.

4.1.6 Usage

Following the delivery and deployment stage is the usage stage of the customer journey. According to the interviews, the common features identified in this stage are customer satisfaction queries, billing, reviewing, and delivering service reports, and maintaining customer relationships through ongoing communication. This stage of the customer journey can also include annual or quarterly meetings to review various aspects of the customer's production operations and processes. As emerged in the interviews, remote or digital monitoring of equipment may also be included in this stage. This means that the operation and data of the equipment are monitored using technological solutions either by the customer themselves or in collaboration with the provider. Through equipment monitoring, new needs can once again be identified, prompting consideration for further action.

"Customer satisfaction surveys are sent via email to understand the customer's opinion. Agreements may be made regarding services and deliveries, requiring parties to fulfill certain tasks within a specified timeframe. The communication between contact persons and its role becomes emphasized after the delivery." E2

"We always have quarterly meetings where we review our various areas. We discuss how things have been going and conduct lifecycle analyses and similar activities." C4

"Sometimes remote services are also utilized, allowing us to monitor how the equipment is functioning from a distance and ensuring it meets the agreed-upon standards. This may be done collaboratively with the customer or agreed upon that we handle it ourselves." E4

In the usage stage of the industrial B2B services customer journey, ongoing communication, and the importance of maintaining customer relationships become more emphasized. Ongoing communication between the customer and the provider encompasses dialogue regarding aspects of the customer relationship, such as the functionality of equipment and the impacts of previous purchases. During the interviews, it became apparent that ongoing communication between the customer and provider is one significant cornerstone in shaping a good relationship. However, this requires active involvement, dedicated time, and genuine willingness from the provider to engage in the customer's daily operations. In the context of industrial B2B services, this ongoing communication often develops between designated contacts. However, there may be multiple channels for ongoing communication between the same companies, which could be location-specific, meaning that each location has its own contacts. In the interviews, it emerged that there may be multiple contact persons on the provider's side as well, with specific individuals being approached for certain areas of concern. Nevertheless, the designated main contact for the customer relationship is often aware of all aspects related to the customer and possesses a comprehensive understanding of the customer's situation.

4.1.7 Reassessment

The last stage identified in the industrial B2B services customer journey is the reassessment stage. Features of this stage involve the customer engaging in a reevaluation of their actions and processes, alongside conducting evaluations of their experiences with providers and services. Therefore, the customer reevaluates their operations in a new light and considers, for example, potential areas for future development and upcoming service needs. In the interviews, it became evident that customers usually conduct reassessments themselves. However, in some scenarios, such as process reevaluation, the provider may be involved in identifying possible development ideas and emerging process-related needs. These topics and themes may arise in discussions and annual meetings between the customer and the provider. Additionally, interviews revealed that the provider can proactively contribute to identifying areas for improvement and potential future needs, for instance, through lifecycle marketing and sales actions. In practice, this means making efforts to provide customers with advanced information about various upcoming challenges and possibly educating the customer

in preparation for them. It is also possible to digitally provide comprehensive reports to the customer based on collected data from the equipment, helping them reevaluate upcoming needs. Moreover, in industrial B2B services contexts, different campaigns can be utilized to help customers identify upcoming challenges and potential needs.

"Then there's sending out customer feedback surveys and reviewing maintenance reports, which hopefully leads to further interaction with the customer. After the delivery and related matters, communication revolves around customer relationship management. This includes activities such as annual planning and visiting the customer's premises, essentially being involved in the customer's daily life."

E2

"In our online service platform there is more focus on the annual planning where we assess the condition of the equipment and anticipate any major repairs that may be needed. The report can be accessed online or, for larger clients, we go through it together. There are campaigns where emails are sent to customers offering them the opportunity to make purchases, for instance, informing them about the replacement of alarm devices. So targeted emails are sent proactively to customers. This means we can act proactively either through sales representatives or through communication channels." R1

The reassessment stage represents the final phase of the usage stage, from which the customer journey can continue along two possible pathways. The customer journey can continue with rebuying from the provider upon recognizing a new need or concluding altogether. The ending of the customer journey may result from negative experiences with the provider or perceived poor service quality. Therefore, during the reevaluation, the customer typically excludes that provider from consideration. On the other hand, if experiences and services are perceived positively, the interviews emphasized that in such cases, the customer journey may continue again to the purchasing stage with the provider. The stages of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context are presented in Figure 4.

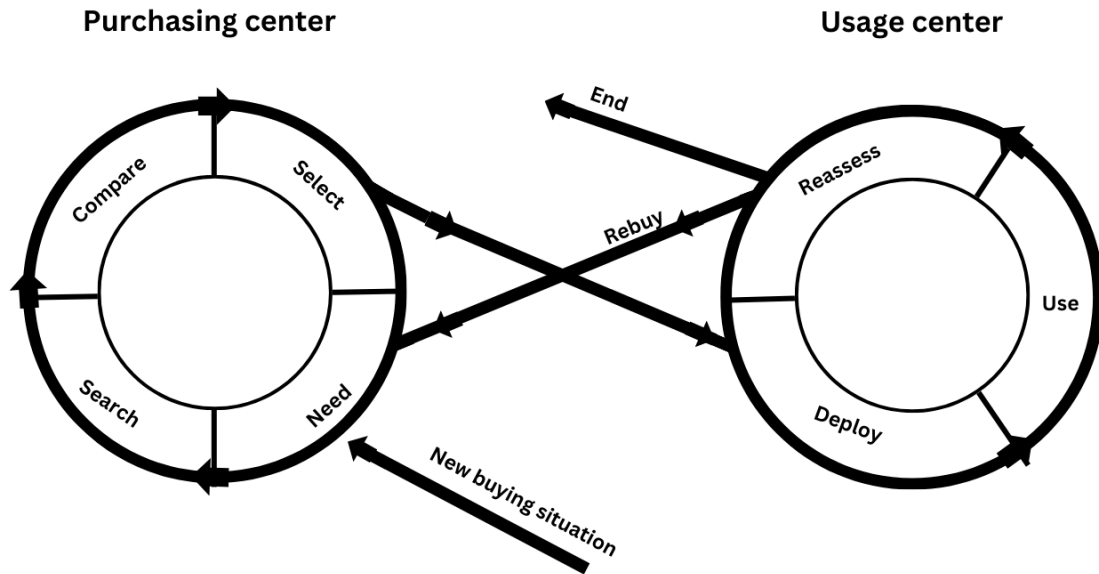


FIGURE 4 Customer journey stages in the industrial B2B services context

4.2 Customer journey goals

In the research interviews, it became evident that the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context encompasses various types of objectives that both guide and shape its nature. This study focused on the goals of the customers during the customer journey. In the customer journey, it is possible to identify individual and collective goals, which determine the customer journey and its progression, and how these goals interact with each other. Interviews emphasized that in the context of B2B services, the role of individual goals often takes precedence and strongly shapes the objectives that customers have regarding the services. Individual goals particularly prevail in service purchases that do not necessitate competitive bidding, highlighting their significance. On the other hand, in larger service purchases and investments, the significance of collective goals increases within the customer journey. Based on the research findings, individual and collective goals can be categorized into three separate subcategories: process-related goals, financial goals, and provider-related goals. Next, different kinds of individual and collective goals will be analyzed and identified, and their interaction and role within the industrial B2B services customer journey will be explored.

4.2.1 Individual goals

In the context of B2B services, the customer journey encompasses individual goals that often represent the objectives of the members and individuals involved in the journey. In the interviews conducted for the research, it was emphasized that individual goals are often prioritized in the customer journey from the customer's perspective. Additionally, it was noted that particularly in small and medium-sized service purchases, the needs of both the initiator and the facilitator

are often primary, as the requirements can directly impact their work and personal performance. Individual goals within the customer journey seldom conflict with collective objectives. However, in certain situations, individual goals may serve as pivotal determinants, particularly in decision-making processes. In the context of B2B services in the industrial sector, service purchases, especially those revolving around planning, are often under the responsibility of maintenance and production managers. These individuals are heavily involved at the operational level in production and actively guide the matter along the customer journey. Routine service purchases and similar transactions on the customer's side may often be facilitated by one or a few individuals, making their goals more apparent and significant as they may be the only members of the purchasing center on the customer's side.

"The goals of the requester and need recognizer take precedence. For example, if maintenance brings up a need, then maintenance ultimately decides who gets chosen." C4

"Of course, whoever is in contact about the issue, that's where the need lies to find a solution. But certainly, if efficiency goals aren't met, then it becomes the goal of our entire staff. Probably for the individuals who are driving and working on the issue, their goals can be primary, especially in emergency situations. They have an immediate benefit when they can then go home once the issue is resolved." C3

As mentioned, the goals of the industrial B2B services customer journey can be categorized into provider, financial, and process-related goals. Individual process-related goals identified in the interviews included maintaining production quality control and ensuring the upkeep and functionality of production. These individual process-related goals are mainly associated with everyday manufacturing actions and maintenance. When everyday individual process-related goals are achieved, they contribute to the fulfillment and success of collective process-related goals as well.

Throughout the customer journey, individual provider-related goals can be identified, which are associated with the service provider and their actions along the customer journey. The provider-related individual goals that emerged in the interviews included effective negotiations, prompt responses, and clear quotations from the provider. Especially during the purchasing stage of the customer journey, the goal for the customer is to engage in effective negotiation, which requires prompt answers and proactive engagement from the potential service provider. Additionally, the provider aims to customize services to fit into existing processes while maintaining high-quality services. Establishing trust towards the provider and the individuals working there is one of the identified individual goals of the customer journey. Additionally, effective interpersonal dynamics were sought from the customer's perspective, which can be considered as individual goals.

"Sometimes getting a response takes time, and it would be important that before I have a chance to call, there would be contact from the provider's side. Also, the tone changes slightly to a more negative tone when you must inquire responses a lot. So, we hope for smoothness in negotiations and responses." C1

Lastly, financial goals can be identified among the individual goals. Financial individual goals often revolve around personal motivators, cost management, and efficiency, which ultimately contribute to the financial status of the customer's organization. Individual financial goals that emerged from the inter-views were related to managing a departmental budget effectively and, in some cases, achieving specific performance metrics to earn a bonus. The individual financial goals primarily aim to optimize team resources and time to stay within budget constraints. The success of this also affects the success and performance of customer journey members in their own job. Therefore, it can be analyzed that often collective financial goals also become individual sub-goals in the context of industrial B2B services. Financial goals are mainly located in the purchase stage of the customer journey because that's when new services are acquired, and their costs are relevant at that time.

"Factors such as bonus systems, reward programs, or other financial incentives can indeed influence purchasing decisions. At a more practical level, departmental budgets also play a significant role. These budgets are quite prescriptive, requiring careful consideration of where funds can be allocated and prioritizing needs, which serves as a driving force within the factors." E2

According to the interviews, it can be identified that financial and process-related individual goals are strongly rooted in higher-order goals, whereas provider-related goals can be perceived often based on lower-order goals. Financial and process related goals are closely intertwined with the performance of the customer's company, usually directly affecting its operations and objectives. On the other hand, all provider related goals may not have a straight influence concerning customer's higher-order goals. For example, establishing trust with key contacts with provider may not directly align with the customer's higher-order goals. However, through these lower-order goals, it is possible to facilitate and support the attainment of higher-level goals. Building a reliable relationship with a provider and fostering good interpersonal chemistry among contact people can, for example, lead to better outcomes in line with production targets and make operations more proactive in collaboration with the provider. Therefore, based on the analysis, lower-order goals can effectively complement achieving the higher-order goals.

4.2.2 Collective goals

In the context of industrial B2B services along the customer journey, it is possible to identify not just individual goals but also collective goals, which often represent widely shared objectives within the customer company. In the interviews it

was emphasized that individual goals are mainly aligned with the collective goals. However, it can be observed that there are differences among the customer journey actors and members regarding which goals are emphasized. As mentioned earlier, in the industrial B2B services context, the goals of need initiators are usually most emphasized during the customer journey, and they are typically individuals responsible for maintenance or production. Their goals were identified as leaning more towards individual goals, but they also usually align with collective goals. However, in the interviews it emerged that especially with larger scale service purchases, there is usually customer's procurement department involved. Based on the interviews, procurement from the customer's side is identified as representing more of the collective goals during the customer journey. Procurement is often involved, particularly in competitively tendered service purchases and contributes perspectives to the customer journey. Therefore, collective goals are particularly emphasized in larger and competitively tendered service purchases.

"When the purchase process doesn't go through public tendering, then whoever has the need decides, and procurement brings its own view on the contract content and whether sustainability matters are in order. We, on the other hand, bring the quality and technical expertise and perspective into the matter. So ultimately, we make the decision. Procurement looks more purely at the financial and contractual aspects to ensure they are in order." C4

Among the collective goals, it is possible to identify goals related to processes and production. In the interviews, it emerged that process-related collective goals are usually associated with process efficiency. Associated goals in this context may encompass factors such as process energy optimization and performance efficiency, thereby leading to enhanced process productivity. Process-related goals were also noted to prioritize sustainability themes. Examples of collective goals associated with sustainability in processes included enhanced production sustainability and reduced consumption of energy and other materials needed in the processes. These process-related collective goals also frequently serve as initiators for larger service investments and purchases.

"The inspiration for improvement projects varies somewhat, but certainly one important topic is energy savings, and it's constantly considered from a strategic level onwards." C2

"I'm sure those responsible for strategy at the customers' end have increasingly had to consider sustainability aspects when making service purchases." E1

"In practice, the need for larger development projects comes from the customer's product figures, such as efficiency metrics, quality, and production efficiency." E4

Within collective goals, another category identified are goals related to financial matters. These financial collective goals are typically set at the organizational level, focusing on factors such as company productivity. In practical terms, these goals are related, for example, to the company's budgeting and cost-effectiveness. Based on financial collective goals, a company may, for instance, prioritize innovation and staying competitive in the markets. Customers may focus on service projects and purchases that promise high return on investments balancing short- and long-term benefits. Identified financial goals usually include strategies to minimize financial risks and ensuring the stability of the company's revenue. Organizational-level financial goals naturally also define individual financial goals too, and it can be stated that organizational-level financial goals are often higher-order goals in the customer journey.

"At the moment with customers, the costs are the number one priority, so the primary goal is to cut costs on organizational level." E2

Finally, it is possible to identify collective goals during the customer journey that are related to provider. The collective provider-related goals were identified in interviews to be associated with providers' way of actions and procedures, such as safety-related matters. Compared to individual goals, collective provider-related goals are more closely associated with the general operating procedures and values of the provider company. The goals identified in the interviews were operating safely and according to the rules for example during the purchase stage but also during delivery, while also considering topics such as sustainability, innovation, and quality of the services. In some service purchasing situations, ethical practices are also expected from partnerships and providers. One of the commonly shared goals was also the establishment of long-term collaboration and partnership with the provider, as in the context of services, cooperation is often continuous, and new partnerships and providers may require more resources than working with a long-standing and trusted provider.

"For the customer, the most important thing to know is whether they can trust us as a provider, and references and capability are among the things the customer seeks." E2

In summary, it can be stated that collective goals are clearly more of higher-order goals that guide lower-order goals. Collective goals, set at an organizational level, are essential for maintaining a defined direction and ensuring that individual actions contribute towards common objectives. Identifying higher and lower-order goals helps in strategically planning and executing actions that are coherent with the company's overarching collective goals. It was analyzed based on the interviews that these different customer journey goals also influence individual actions along the journey and therefore understanding these goals are an essential for the B2B services providers. The customer journey goals in the industrial B2B services context are presented in Table 6.

	Process goals	Financial goals	Provider goals
Individual goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality control - Keeping the equipment running daily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bonus systems - Rewarding programs - Departmental budgeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective negotiations - Achieving mutual understanding - Ability to trust the provider and contact person
Collective goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased manufacturing efficiency - Energy and resource savings - Increased sustainability of process - Risk management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased profitability - Cost savings and efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operates safely and according to guidelines - Innovative partner - High-quality services - Reliability

TABLE 6 Individual and collective goals of customers along the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context

4.3 Customer journey touchpoints

Throughout the interviews conducted for this research, different kind of customer journey touchpoints were identified in the industrial B2B services context. Customer journey touchpoints in this context based on the interviews can be divided into physical and digital touchpoints. The various roles of touchpoints were identified, revealing that currently digital touchpoints are mainly perceived to support physical touchpoints, but the role of digital touchpoints is continuously growing. In the research context, one influential factor affecting is the need to tailor solutions to fit existing processes within the service environment. Seeing customer's processes physically can be beneficial, and it aligns with the goals of the customer journey outlined in previous chapter where customers prioritize building relationships with their providers. Establishing these customer and provider relationships are seen as more challenging in digital touchpoints compared to physical ones. Effective communication between customers and providers is crucial, emphasizing the importance of direct interaction. These interaction channels include both digital and physical channels. Based on the interviews, the study identifies two categories of touchpoints within digital and physical touchpoints: purchase touchpoints and relationship touchpoints. Purchase touchpoints are related closely to the purchase of the service, extending from the purchase stage to the usage stage. In contrast, relationship touchpoints involve ongoing communication and the building and maintenance of relationships beyond

the point of purchase between customer and provider. In Table 7 customer journey touchpoints identified in the study have been categorized according to the digital and physical touchpoint framework and findings categorization regarding to purchase touchpoints and relationship touchpoints.

	Physical touchpoints	Digital touchpoints
Purchase touchpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-person sales meetings - Trade shows - Service delivery and service providers - In-person reference and provider visits - Brochures and catalogues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website - Search engines - Social media, email, and phone communication - Digital catalogues and brochures - Virtual sales meetings - Feedback surveys - Document exchange - Billing - E-commerce platforms - Virtual reference company meetings and calls - Remote service delivery
Relationship touchpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Casual discussions during visits - In-person annual or quarterly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media - Email newsletters - Virtual annual or quarterly meetings - Digital networking events and groups - Customer portals

TABLE 7 Framework of customer journey touchpoints in the industrial B2B service context

4.3.1 Physical touchpoints

Physical touchpoints are recognized as integral components of the customer journey within the industrial B2B services context, serving as important channel for interaction between the customer and the provider. In the context of the research, physical touchpoints encountered mainly include meetings and discussions held face-to-face at the premises of either the customer or the provider. These touchpoints can be further categorized into those related to purchasing and those related to building and maintaining relationships, which may not be directly related to purchasing services. However, it should be noted that relationship touchpoints become more present in the evolving and maintaining of long-term customer relationships, which are typical in the industrial B2B services context. The role of physical touchpoints is emphasized in both fostering and sustaining customer relationships because physical meetings are an investment of resources into the relationship. This originates from the point that physical meetings require travel and more time compared to digital meetings. The interviews also revealed that physical touchpoints facilitate the potential for improved customization of services, as providers can gain more insights into customer processes by physically seeing them. Interaction in physical touchpoints is perceived as seamless due to the possibility of immediate feedback and interaction, making it easier to solve especially complex challenges.

Physical purchase touchpoints

As earlier mentioned, physical touchpoints allow for the identification of purchase-related touchpoints among them. The purchase-related physical touchpoints brought up in interviews may occur during both the purchasing and usage stages of the customer journey. In interviews physical purchase related touchpoints that emerged included trade shows, visits to provider premises to familiarize with the services and solutions being purchased, physical sales negotiation meetings, reference visits and deliveries. Also, at the beginning of the customer journey, brochures and catalogues can serve as a physical touchpoint where consumers search for and examine various service options. Additionally, if there are service agreements made between customer and provider, provider may have obligations to regularly visit the customer's premises. In the interviews it was emphasized that the larger service investment, the higher the probability that the customer journey will include physical touchpoints during the customer journey.

"Our sales representatives aim to meet with customers as much as possible. Similarly, field service personnel visit customers when there are issues or when the customer orders work to be done." R2

"If the service delivery requires a visit, then yes, and also if it's part of a larger package, then in those cases, the contact person will visit too. Additionally, for larger projects, it would be desirable for provider to come on-site and go through the work in person." C3

"The provider comes on-site when the annual maintenance of the facility is scheduled, and maintenance technicians come here. There are very few visits either way, but that happens when we want to finalize the year or during an annual maintenance meeting, so there's an opportunity to visit them. And if we're choosing expensive equipment or a project, then we want to and ask for things like the provider's references and possibly inquire if we could arrange meetings, like via Teams, physically or some other way." C4

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that meeting in person and seeing each other is believed to offer deeper insights into customer needs in the sales negotiations. In larger service projects, customers often prefer to meet early in the buying process to ensure mutual understanding of the needs and situation. Therefore, face-to-face meetings can provide a stronger understanding for both parties involved. Also solving more complicated issues in-person is experienced easier being physically present Later in the purchasing process for larger service investments, there is also a desire to meet in person for the same reasons. Other touchpoints related to the early stages of the customer journey may include trade shows, which sometimes possibly mark the beginning of new purchase. In addition to these, during the purchasing stage for larger service purchases, references emerged as an important touchpoint in interviews when considering different providers. When considering purchasing a larger-scale service, customers often

seek references, and this may involve physical meetings with the reference company to see how the solutions have been working and possibly ask some questions. After purchasing, the delivery of the service can occur physically, for instance, when an improvement project or maintenance is carried out on-site at the customer's location. All in all, physical touchpoints related to purchasing can provide confidence for both parties that they share a mutual understanding of the needs, challenges, and suitable services for the customer in comparison to digital touchpoints.

Physical relationship touchpoints

In addition to touchpoints related to purchases, it is possible to identify physical customer journey touchpoints associated with relationship building and maintaining between the customer and the provider. In the context of industrial B2B services, a significant factor during the customer journey is maintaining relationships and touchpoints associated with them can occur at any point along the customer journey, regardless of its stages. Physical relationship touchpoints that emerged in the interviews included casual discussions with contact people, quarterly or annually arranged meetings. Naturally, the customer relationship is also built through collaboration related to purchases, but these touchpoints specifically relate to the customer relationship and partnership. Based on the interviews, it can be analyzed that a crucial aspect of developing customer relationships is the functionality and duration of personal relationships in the background. Often, the contact people may have collaborated and known each other's for decades, leading to a strong and long-term relationship between customer and provider.

"Then, even if the contact persons visit for other reasons, we usually meet them and thus maintain those personal relationships." C1

"Often, face-to-face communication happens when the contacts visit in person. Long-standing client relationships add to reliability when you've been working with the same type of person for years." C3

"We have many long-term employees, and friendships with clients also develop when you see them frequently and are in constant contact." R2

Therefore, the foundation of a long-term customer relationship frequently is developed through personal connections between the customer and the provider. In the interviews it was emphasized that these personal relationships have the potential to evolve into friendships. The significance of physical interaction and discussion between contact people was perceived as crucial, and trust in the provider increases the longer the same individuals have done collaboration. The interviews emphasized that relationships strongly influence the customer journey during decision-making and strong relationships can provide a competitive advantage. In the annual and quarterly meetings, the customer's current situation and future needs are discussed collaboratively, further enhancing long-term

commitment as the provider is involved in future planning. Therefore, the significance of physical relationship touchpoints is extensive, especially in forming personal connections, which serve as the foundation for long-term partnerships in the context of industrial B2B services.

4.3.2 Digital touchpoints

The second types of touchpoints are digital touchpoints, which encompass all non-physical elements and are digitally implemented solutions. In the interviews it became evident that the significance and number of digital touchpoints have grown in the recent years. For example, some meetings which have been held in person previously have shifted to live meetings on digital platforms. These meetings may involve sales negotiations for some services and regular annual or quarterly meetings. According to the interviews, there has been a significant effort and ongoing development to digitalize especially purchase-related touchpoints, aiming to expedite certain functions within the customer journey and make some processes more seamless. It is evident that there is a focus on enhancing digital purchasing processes categorized as routine service purchases, with some services now offering the possibility of complete digital and independent purchase. Digital touchpoints can offer the possibility of saving resources from both the provider and the customer angles. For example, there are potential cost savings in travel expenses if meetings take place on digital platforms. On the other hand, customers may find it quicker to purchase and gather information digitally, saving time resources. Based on the interviews building relationships was perceived as more challenging in digital touchpoints and they were found to be impersonal and lacking personalization. However, in interviews it emerged that targeted digital activities can be used to educate customers timely based on data throughout the customer journey, therefore enabling the opportunity to enhance and maintain relationships.

Digital purchase touchpoints

Digital purchase touchpoints can be found within both the purchase stage itself and the usage stage, often in the form of delivering remote services, for example. It was emphasized in the interviews that purchasing entirely digitally, without direct contact with the provider, is still uncommon, but online store platforms are constantly under development. In the case of more complex and customized services, there is a desire for physical touchpoints and direct interaction with the provider to tailor the solution, particularly to existing processes that require more discussion. However, especially in simpler and routine-oriented service purchases, digital touchpoints during the purchase process are seen as beneficial. During the interviews, it emerged that customers perceive the possibility of making purchasing decisions exclusively through digital channels, without the necessity of physical meetings in the purchasing process. Interviews revealed that digital touchpoints effectively support the purchasing process, for example, through virtual meetings, digital document exchange, and customer portals. In

the customer journey, digital platforms also enable an efficient channel for information search, and customers can monitor the data generated in processes and review matters related to the customer relationship and previous purchases.

"Digital channels are particularly emphasized in simpler purchases, such as spare parts purchases. There, such information is not needed as much, and the needs of the processes are not so complex." E4

"The role of digital communication platforms, such as Teams, has grown, providing a solution for busier schedules and thus allowing for time savings by not always requiring in-person travel." E2

"However, there is no service where a customer can purchase for example a maintenance agreement online; we are always physically present in the customer's purchasing decision. But in the future, there will certainly be online shopping available, where this can also be done." R1

"Digital mediums have made it easier to find reliable partners and to interact throughout the sales process. We offer digital solutions for various stages of customer interaction, from pre-sales to after-sales service." R3

Digital touchpoints that do not involve direct presence of the provider are observed to have emphasis especially in the early stages of the customer journey, when information is sought from websites, search engines, digital catalogs, and customer portals. Following this, comparison and decision-making stages highlight the significance of direct digital touchpoints in the customer journey. Examples include meetings on digital platforms with providers or reference companies, as well as other forms of digital communication such as emails. During the usage stage, digital document exchange, potential meetings on digital platforms, and the potential implementation of remote services are occurring. In summary, digital purchase related touchpoints have growing role as part of the customer journey in its various stages. In the best-case scenario, they are also reshaping the immediacy and efficiency of purchase. However, the interviews emphasized that digital touchpoints can be perceived as impersonal and lacking in customization, highlighting the importance of developing them to meet customer needs and preferences.

Digital relationship touchpoints

The digital relationship related touchpoints are mainly focused on maintaining customer relationships and on-going communication. Identified digital relationship touchpoints emerged in the interviews included customer newsletters and informative social media posts, featuring for example industry insights or company news. With customer newsletters and social media posts, it is also possible to target content aimed to educate customers and inform them in advance about potential upcoming challenges. Leveraging digital elements this way facilitates

the enhancement of provider proactivity, and it was highlighted in interviews that data can be employed to ensure the provision of timely digital content. Digital relationship touchpoints also involve annual or quarterly meetings held on digital platforms, where the customer's status is reviewed in collaboration. For these types of meetings, the provider may have gathered data to review the current situation of the customer. Furthermore, as brought up in interviews, digital customer portals allow for the creation and delivery of reports to customers based on data that they can explore independently on the platforms. These digital customer portals often provide customers with the ability to examine specifics related to the relationship with the provider on their own terms.

"The meeting yesterday and today, for example, were held on Teams, where we went through last summer's reports. Then we have these quarterly briefings where we go through the data on algorithm-based breakdowns, and the provider compiles a good summary of the various areas, and then we go through it on Teams. And they present their findings." C4

"Digital tools streamline the process of service and maintenance reporting, making it more efficient and transparent for customers. Digital platforms allow for easier access to parts, manuals, and other resources, accommodating changes in personnel and ensuring continuity of knowledge and service. Then there is a certain lifetime of every component or equipment which is manufactured. We need to educate also digitally our customers on the basics so that they understand the lifetimes of usage and can recognize when services are required." R3

Digital elements have increased transparency and provided channels to access data and review various materials and documents. In digital touchpoints, customer-related data remains more accessible compared to physical touchpoints. Real-time communication on digital platforms is perceived as stimulating as face-to-face interaction. Digital relationship-related touchpoints can save resources for both customers and providers, for example, time spent on travel and meetings can be targeted to a larger audience. Moreover, by personalizing digital touchpoints, they can positively influence customer education, engagement, and encourage customer's proactive behaviour in purchasing. The interviews revealed that targeted digital activities can be used to educate customers timely based on data throughout the customer journey. Therefore, enabling more active communication with the customer and the opportunity to enhance and maintain relationships. Accordingly, the role of digital relationship touchpoints is multifaceted. They not only provide a cost-effective and efficient method for ongoing communication but also offer a storage of information that can empower both customers and providers. The challenge and opportunity lie in leveraging technology to deliver personalized, relevant, and timely interactions that develop the depth of in-person relationships.

4.4 Summary of the findings

In general, the findings both support existing perspectives found in the literature review and introduce new insights. This chapter presents these findings concisely and Figure 5 demonstrates the findings of the results. New perspectives introduced in this study compared to previous research include identifying that customer journey in the industrial B2B services context encompass seven stages: need recognition, information search, comparison of alternatives, selection, deployment, usage, and reassessment. The findings emphasize the significance of the usage stage in the service context, noting that it may initiate the beginning of a new customer journey. Throughout the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context, collaboration between the provider and the customer is emphasized to find and tailor the right services. Collaboration also enables the proactive identification of new areas for development within the service context, as an industrial B2B services context is characterized by long-term relationships and ongoing communication.

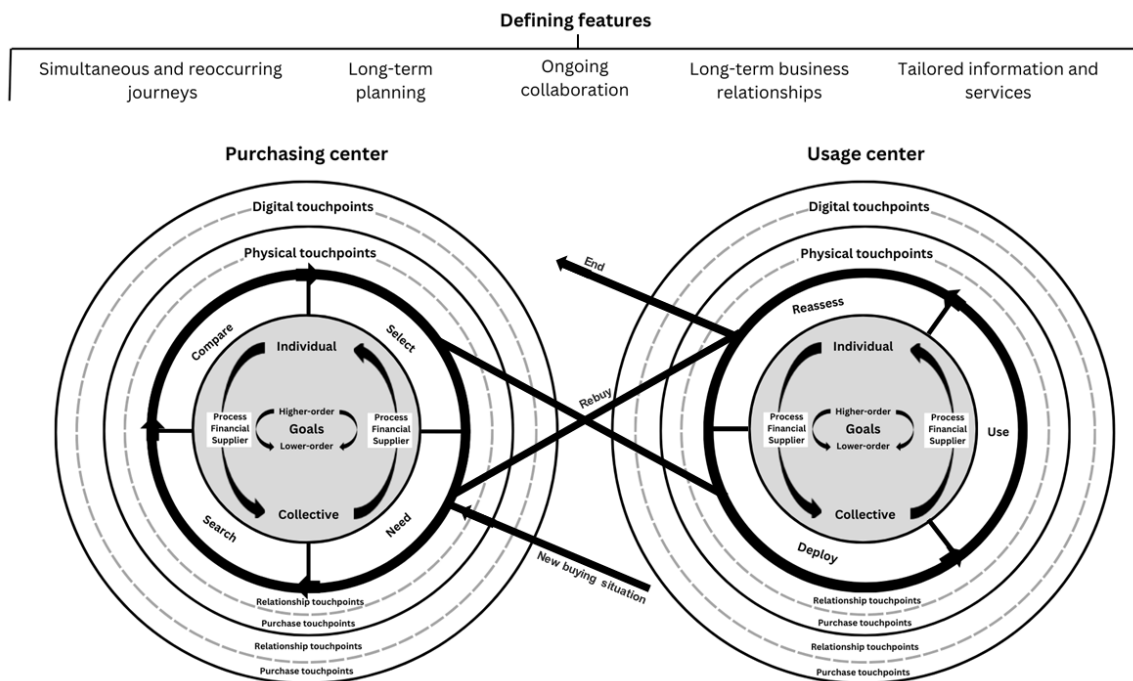


FIGURE 5 Conceptual framework of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context

The findings also focus on customer journey goals and, consequently, on touchpoints. In the findings, individual and collective customer journey goals were categorized into subcategories: provider, financial, and process-related goals. Results indicate that in the context of industrial B2B services, the significance of individual goals is emphasized in routine service purchases, while the role of collective goals is emphasized in larger service purchases. Additionally, digital and

physical touchpoints can be divided into two subcategories: relationship and purchase-related touchpoints. The role of physical touchpoints remains crucial in building and maintaining relationships, while currently, purchase-related digital touchpoints are emphasized in the early stages of the customer journey. However, the results highlight the potential of digital touchpoints to nurture business relationships and educate customers proactively.

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the conclusions of the research will be discussed. The conclusions from the research can be categorized into two main sections: theoretical conclusions and managerial implications. First, the research findings will be examined in the light of the research questions and current research of the topic. Whereas the managerial implications aim to provide angles and ideas related to customer journey management in industrial B2B services context. The trustworthiness and limitations of this research are evaluated in terms of reliability, validity, and generalizability. Finally, suggestions for future research directions are proposed.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

In the current research customer journey as a concept has emerged to be one of the key concepts for marketing and service research (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). However, most of the research focuses on customer journeys in the B2C context, while research in the B2B context has been relatively limited so far. Purmonen et al. (2023) developed a comprehensive and general framework for the B2B customer journey. However, research on the various contexts and situations of the B2B customer journey is lacking, and they suggest in their study that possible future research should explore different types of B2B customer journeys. Therefore, this research provides new perspectives on customer journey research within the context of industrial B2B services.

Theoretical contributions of this research can be divided into three categories. Firstly, the research offers new perspectives on the stages and specific characteristics of the customer journey within the context of industrial B2B services and provides a comprehensive conceptual framework. Secondly, it identifies various characteristics of customer journey goals and their roles within the industrial B2B services context. Lastly, it enhances understanding of the different types of roles of digital and physical touchpoints during the customer journey related to purchase and relationship related activities. Moreover, the research introduces new categorization models for customer journey goals and touchpoints. All in all, this study enhances the understanding of the B2B customer journey by offering a more detailed perspective and elaborating the existing research concerning the stages, features, goals, and touchpoints of the journey.

First, this research provides a deeper understanding of the B2B customer journey features, both in the purchase and usage stages in contrast to existing research. According to Purmonen et al. (2023), the B2B customer journey is iterative rather than linear and can be divided into purchase and usage stages. This research suggests that in the industrial B2B services context, the customer journey consists of seven stages: need recognition, information search, comparison of alternatives, selection, deployment, usage, and reassessment. A key finding, in

contrast to the conceptual framework stages of Purmonen et al. (2023), is that the maintenance stage often signifies the beginning of a new customer journey within the industrial B2B services context. Therefore, this study proposes eliminating the maintenance stage from the usage stage in this context. The reason is that maintenance is frequently a service that customers purchase, which typically initiates the start of a new cycle in the customer journey, making the maintenance stage irrelevant in the industrial B2B services context. Current research notices that delivery and usage stages are crucial parts of the customer journey in service-intensive contexts (Jaakkola & Terho, 2021), and the usage stage can initiate a new loop in the customer journey (Purmonen et al., 2023). This study's findings further confirm that in the industrial B2B services context, the usage stage is critical because it often triggers a new service purchase, thus initiating a new loop in the customer journey. This is due to the cyclical and repetitive nature of purchasing in this context, which is heavily based on annual planning and often involves routine purchases. As a result, the customer journey becomes possibly a sequence of multiple loops.

This study adds knowledge of the features of the B2B customer journey to existing research. In the study, the significant role of relationships in customer journeys is emphasized as a key customer journey feature. Current research has noticed that B2B customer journeys are often characterized by long-term relationships (Rusthollkarhu et al., 2022; Witell et al., 2020). According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016), trust, commitment, and the quality of customer relationships have been identified as crucial factors in well-functioning customer relationships. In addition to existing research, this study suggests that in the context of industrial B2B services, it is important that the provider demonstrates a strong understanding of customer's operations, leading to increased trust towards the provider. The significance of relationships in the industrial B2B services context is emphasized as service providers usually need to deeply understand customer's processes and needs to be able to provide especially tailored services. Relationships usually develop between individual persons during the customer journeys, which has a positive impact on the overall customer relationship and the comparison process of the providers. Customers prefer service providers that are already familiar to them and have trusted contact people.

Previous research suggests that maintaining B2B relationships requires ongoing communication and cooperation (Witell et al., 2020). This study aligns with this and emphasizes that especially ongoing communication is crucial in B2B relationships. In addition to existing research, it is noted that in the context of industrial B2B services, the importance of ongoing communication and relationships is highlighted because critical information suitable for customers' existing processes often needs to be tailored and therefore searched directly from contact people from the service provider. Additionally, to enable typical long-term planning for the context, ongoing communication is necessary to be able to collaborate and align with the future service purchasing plans. With functioning communication and relationships, industrial B2B service providers can proactively offer solutions, therefore adding value for the customer.

Secondly, this research provides theoretical contributions regarding B2B customer journey goals. Customer journey goals have been identified as a key determinant in B2B customer journey research and it can be argued that customer journeys are driven by various goals (Purmonen et al., 2023). Additionally, existing research proposes that customer journey goals can be categorized into collective and individual goals (Purmonen et al., 2023; Macdonald et al., 2016). In contrast to existing research, this study provides new information regarding the categorization of collective and individual goals within the B2B customer journey. This research proposes that individual and collective customer journey goals can be divided into process, financial, and provider-related goals. The categorization offers a new perspective for examining and understanding customer journey goals.

Furthermore, this study suggests that individual goals have emphasized role in the context of B2B service customer journeys. This is because often most customer journey members from the customer side remain the same in the purchase and usage stages and sometimes a customer journey member may just be one individual depending on the service. The role of collective goals is emphasized in larger service investments, but in smaller service purchases, the role of individual goals is emphasized. As service purchases are inherently cyclical and involve reoccurring purchases, consequently highlighting the significance of individual goals for the smoothness of the customer journey with the provider. The current research suggests that there are instances where individuals within the organization may be influenced by goals that are partially aligned but occasionally divergent with collective goals (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Additionally, among multiple customer journey members, differing opinions regarding the value of a product or service can come to the forefront due to various goals (Witell et al., 2020). This study supports these proposals, as it highlights the perspective that different members of the customer journey have varying goals and values, which they prioritize. All in all, this research provides deeper insights into customer journey goals while also supporting existing research.

Lastly, this research presents theoretical contributions regarding the touchpoints throughout the customer journey within the B2B service context by providing new information on the roles of digital and physical touchpoints. First, in contrast to existing research, this study suggests that digital and physical touchpoints can be classified further to purchase and relationship related touchpoints. Existing research emphasizes that due to digitalization, the number of touchpoints in B2B customer journeys has increased, resulting in a growing amount of customer journey touchpoints being beyond the control of the company (Steward et al., 2019) and has made it easier for customers to navigate between physical and online elements (Hallikainen et al., 2019). Nevertheless, a key challenge identified in this research to achieving a more digitalized customer journey lies in the need to customize services in close collaboration with customers to align with existing processes. Existing research indicates that digital touchpoints are particularly present at the beginning of customer journeys (Lundin &

Kindström, 2023). This study aligns with this and proposes that especially purchase-related digital touchpoints are more prevalent at the beginning of the customer journey.

Existing research indicates that physical touchpoints serve as a foundation for building relationships (Wang et al., 2019) and human interaction will remain a pivotal and influential factor in the B2B sector (Aichner and Gruber, 2017). This research aligns with these suggestions yet indicating the role of digital and physical touchpoints in relationships building more in detail. In contrast to existing research, this study suggests that digital relationship-related touchpoints offer opportunities for data-driven and proactive interactions, therefore enabling possibilities for the digital customer relationship building and maintaining. There is potential of digital touchpoints to nurture business relationships and educate customers. The new insights offered by this research facilitate a more nuanced comprehension of the digital and physical elements of the customer journey. This knowledge can significantly contribute to optimization of purchasing efficiency and enhancement the depth of relationships within the business context.

5.2 Managerial implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions, this study developed numerous managerial implications from the perspective of companies operating in the field of B2B services. As previously mentioned, research on B2B customer journeys, particularly in various contexts is lacking. This study has contributed to expanding this area of research. Especially, industrial B2B service providers can utilize the findings of this research to optimize their customer journey strategies and gain insights into the various factors that influence during the customer journey. By understanding the characteristics, stages, goals, and touchpoints of the customer journey, businesses can more effectively meet customer needs and design comprehensive customer experiences.

Firstly, this study provides an opportunity to understand more in depth the stages and features of the customer journey in the context of industrial B2B services and offers a conceptual framework that can be utilized in customer journey mapping. Specifically for the industrial companies producing B2B services, this study provides valuable insights into customer journey management. By understanding the different stages and the nature of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context, businesses can tailor their strategies to meet the specific needs at every stage of the journey, thereby allowing for more targeted and effective engagement strategies.

This study emphasizes that in the context of industrial B2B services, it is important to consider the usage stage and acknowledge its significance in customer journey management, as it holds the potential for new needs that can also be identified collaboratively. Therefore, close collaboration with the customer may be beneficial for both parties and the potential of the usage stage be always investigated. This research emphasizes the importance of relationship building

and maintenance throughout the customer journey for companies providing B2B services. It highlights the necessity for these companies to focus on long-term engagement rather than merely transactional interactions. By utilizing the insights from this study, businesses can deploy tactics that nurture trust, reliability, and loyalty for maintaining and building B2B partnerships within the competitive manufacturing sector. Strong relationships often provide a competitive advantage in this sector as customers select and compare service providers. Therefore, service providers should focus on nurturing and maintaining business relationships and regularly gather high-quality customer feedback to maintain good relationships.

Secondly, this study identifies individual and collective customer journey goals and explore their roles during the customer journey in industrial B2B services context. The study considers the categorization of these goals into provider, process, and financial-related goals, which provides an opportunity to examine the goals included within the customer journey from different perspectives. The study enhances understanding of what customers expect from providers during the customer journey in the industrial B2B service context. Specifically, by understanding individual provider-related goals, a seamless customer journey experience can be achieved by acknowledging these in addition to goals related to the customer's own operations. By understanding the individual as well as collective goals of the customer journey and their connections, as explored in this study, B2B providers can potentially enhance their customer orientation and improve customer experiences by supporting and helping customer to achieve these goals during the customer journey. Therefore, managers should develop sales and marketing strategies that consider the defining individual and collective goals in the customer journey. For this purpose, it would be beneficial to identify and map the key goals of different customer groups or personas involved in the customer journey.

Finally, a detailed exploration of digital and physical touchpoints and their roles provides valuable insights into purchase-related and relationship-related activities during the customer journey. Based on this research, managers should focus on creating a seamless experience where digital and physical interactions complement each other, enabling customers to move smoothly between different channels and touchpoints. In practice, this means that companies should actively optimize and examine the roles of both digital and physical touchpoints, as the business landscape is continually evolving. Since information in the context of industrial B2B services often needs to be customized for the customer, managers should focus on how this tailored information can be facilitated through digital platforms.

For a comprehensive understanding of how each touchpoint influences the overall journey and addresses the specific preferences of B2B customers, it is crucial to invest in data analytics tools and technologies, consolidating extensive data in one place to gain insights into customer preferences and pain points. Taking into consideration the increasing number of digital touchpoints in the B2B customer journey, companies should invest in the technology to support these interactions, while also paying attention to personalizing digital touchpoints to

match the preferences of the customers. Therefore, managers should also explore the potential and opportunities of digital touchpoints to nurture business relationships and educate customers throughout the customer journey.

5.3 Evaluation of the study

The objective of this research was to generate a comprehensive understanding about the features of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context. This was realised by creating a framework about the customer journey in this context focusing on customer journey stages and features of them, different kinds of goals and touchpoints. The developed framework is based on eleven focused depth interviews with the main case company employees, its customers and additionally with three reference companies operating in similar contexts. Next, an evaluation is conducted regarding the trustworthiness concerns of this study.

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) research must be evaluated based on generalizability and credibility. They also propose that reliability, validity, and generalizability provide a framework for the evaluation of business research, and this will be utilized to evaluate this study. Additionally, Yin (2009) proposes that evaluation of the case study should be applied throughout the whole research process.

Generalizability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied or generalized to a broader population or context beyond the specific sample studied (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p.293). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that with case study strategies, analytical generalization is usually the objective instead of statistical generalization (Yin, 2009, p. 39). According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 294) analytical generalization involves comparing the real-life findings of a case study with a theory that was developed. This study supports and complements existing research, therefore enhancing the generalizability of the study. However, in the context of a single case study, it is crucial to recognize that while this study may contribute to broader understanding, its generalizability is limited.

When evaluating the reliability of the research, it refers to whether the research results are repeatable if the study were to be conducted again (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 292). The emphasis should be on replicating the same study again, and the goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in research (Yin, 2009, p. 45). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018), qualitative research can be assessed from the perspective of reliability by focusing on factors such as the transparency of the research process, data collection techniques, and analysis methods. Transparency in the study has been emphasized by detailing precisely how this research was conducted. While the study has followed the guidelines of a case study, transparency has also been considered by transcribing the interviews verbatim, and the study's framework is based on previous B2B customer journey literature. In this study, the research data was collected through focused interviews, the majority of which were conducted via Teams and one interview

conducted in person. Most of the interviews were conducted via Teams, considering the preferences of the interviewees as well as the long distances and environmental considerations. It is possible that responses in remote interviews may differ somewhat from those in face-to-face interviews, but the effects of this on the interviews are evaluated to be quite limited. The interviews were conducted with a focused interview method, enabling the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and allowing interviewees the freedom to articulate their perspectives in their own words.

Additionally, when considering reliability, it is important to take into account the researcher's position. Relevant aspects to consider may include whether the researcher is familiar with the topic and whether the researcher's position could have influenced the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Cuba & Lincoln, 1984). This ensures that the findings are derived from the data and not from the personal consideration of the researcher and therefore is connected the reliability of the research. The researcher had previous knowledge of the context, which may have helped in making observations and interpreting them correctly. The research has analysed the data objectively, ensuring truthful conclusions. However, since the interviewer had prior knowledge and connections to the main case company and the interviewees were aware of this, it may have potentially influenced the responses during the interviews. Despite the potential influence of the researcher's position, the study remained committed to objectivity and honesty, ensuring the integrity of the research findings, and highlighting the importance of ethical inquiry.

Next, the validity of the research is evaluated. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 292) validity refers how accurate the conclusions of a research seem based on the phenomena under investigation. They also suggest that the findings should therefore be accurately represented and backed by evidence. During the research planning phase, significant attention was dedicated to ensuring the validity of the study to yield the most accurate conclusions through appropriate research methodologies, which are extensively described in the "Methodology" chapter. The selection criteria for interviewees were thoughtfully framed to enhance validity, with specific criteria defined. However, a potential limitation concerning validity lies in the exclusion of interviewees from departments such as procurement in the customer interviews, despite they are often involved in especially in larger service purchases. Including these individuals could have potentially led to different conclusions. Additionally, it is worth acknowledging that in the study, the interviewed companies were large multinational corporations, so by selecting smaller companies, different perspectives could have been obtained. Nevertheless, the primary focus in selecting interviewees was to ensure their presence throughout the entire customer journey, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of all stages involved. Anonymity is maintained for all interview participants and their companies to encourage honest and thorough responses.

To strengthen the validity, data collection was complemented by interviewing not only the case company and its customers but also reference compa-

nies, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the industrial B2B services customer journey. All interviewees were briefed on the study's objectives, with relevant concepts clarified to prevent misunderstandings. Additionally, interview questions were designed based on a theoretical framework. Furthermore, interviewees had the chance to expand on their answers or offer further clarification on topics after answering the interview questions. One possible limitation concerning this study identified is limited prior research of the customer journey in the B2B services context. However, with selected research methods were able to establish connections between empirical findings, the theoretical framework, and existing research of B2B customer journey, so it can be concluded that the methods were successful.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Additional research on B2B customer journeys is required because the extant research is still quite limited, especially across different B2B contexts. Therefore, future research should prioritize investigating various B2B customer journeys in diverse contexts to gather more empirical data and enhance the existing research. This study focused on examining the characteristics, stages, goals, and touch-points of the customer journey in the industrial B2B services context from the perspectives of both service providers and customers. In future research, a similar investigation could be undertaken on a broader scale to potentially produce more widely generalizable results or extend to other service sectors beyond industrial B2B services.

Additionally, within the industrial B2B service context, in future research, a more detailed examination could be undertaken regarding the varied goals and characteristics of different customer journey members. Therefore, as a proposition for further research, conducting interviews with multiple individuals from a single company is suggested. Further investigation of multiple customer journey members goals could serve to deeper comprehension of how targeted strategies for multiple customer journey segments might contribute to the enhancement of overall customer experience. Lastly, as the relevance of digital touch-points is constantly noted to be evolving, it would be beneficial to further investigate the digitalization of customer journeys and the role of digital elements in future research. Specifically, the role and potential of digital activities on business relationships should be investigated more extensively.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview structure is divided into six different sections based on stages of purchasing and usage within the B2B customer journey, as well as background questions. Additionally, there were separate sets of questions for providers and customers.

Customer interviews

1. Background questions
 - How would you describe the relationship with the provider?
 - How and when do you interact with provider?
 - Which individuals do you work with from provider? Who are typically involved in the buying process?
 - How would you say that digitalization has affected the relationships and how you interact with providers in general?
2. Need recognition related questions
 - How does the need for a service purchase arise and how does the process progress in terms of fulfilling that need?
 - Are you using data/ AI to identify emerging needs and support your buying/ deployment process?
 - What are the most important key factors and touchpoints in this stage?
3. Information search related questions
 - Who usually search for information and through which channels?
 - What channels are most important for information searching, and how significant are digital channels in this stage?
 - What kind of information is typically searched?
 - What are the most important key factors and touchpoints in this stage?
4. Comparison related questions
 - How does the comparison of alternatives usually happen, and is it challenging to compare between different providers or offers?
 - Which channel provides the most important information when making comparison of alternatives?
 - When conducting comparisons, are you in contact with the provider through any channels?
 - What are the most important key factors and touchpoints in this stage?
5. Selection related questions
 - How does the typical decision-making process progress, and what are the most important factors when selecting a provider?
 - How do you inform about the selection, and through which channel?

- Is the provider involved somehow in the decision-making process?
 - What are the most important key factors and touchpoints in this stage?
6. Usage related questions
- Describe what occurs after the purchase and how does the process progress towards a potential next purchase?
 - How do you communicate with the provider during the usage stage, and how has digitalization affected post-purchase relationships and interactions with the provider?
 - What are the most important key factors and touchpoints in this stage?

Provider interviews

1. Background questions
 - What role services do have in your company?
 - How would you describe your company's relationship and role with customers?
 - How and when is communication with customers conducted, and on what platforms does the communication take place?
 - How has digitalization impacted the relationship and communication with customers?
 - Is your role as a provider to be available or to proactively offer solutions?
2. Need recognition related questions
 - How do customers' needs typically arise and do you aim to identify or stimulate new needs from customers that they were not previously aware of?
 - Does the customer contact you immediately after the need arises, and if they do, who do they contact and through which channel?
 - What are the factors and touchpoints offered to customers at this stage, and what is their objective? Which ones are the most crucial?
3. Information search related questions
 - How and through which channels do customers search for information, and what channels are provided to customers for that purpose?
 - What kind of information are customers usually searching for, and do they reach out to you during the information searching stage?
 - What are the factors and touchpoints offered to customers at this stage, and what is their objective? Which ones are the most crucial?
4. Comparison related questions
 - Are you involved in the comparison phase, and do you aim to assist the customer in their comparison?

- What material do you provide to the customer to help them make comparisons?
 - What are the factors and touchpoints offered to customers at this stage, and what is their objective?
5. Selection related questions
- How and through which channel does the customer communicate their purchase decision?
 - Does the customer make the choice entirely on their own, or is the provider somehow involved in the decision-making process?
 - What are the factors and touchpoints offered to customers at this stage, and what is their objective? Which ones are the most crucial?
6. Usage related questions
- Could you describe what happens on the customer journey after the actual purchase and how it progresses until a possible next purchase?
 - How is the customer supported and served during the usage phase?
 - What are the factors and touchpoints offered to customers at this stage, and what is their objective? Which ones are the most crucial?