Drivers of customers' service experiences
Drivers of customers’ service experiences
A customer perspective on co-creation of restaurant services,
 focusing on interactions, processes and activities
Abstract

It is essential for service companies to understand how their customer service experiences are formed. This is especially important since service experiences are highly subjective and involve customers cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally. Although customer service experiences are a well-recognised research topic in both, culinary arts and service research, dynamic interactions, activities and the customers' active involvement have so far gained little attention. As a consequence the approach in previous research paints a rather static picture of customer service experiences. By introducing the principles of service dominant logic a first person view and the understanding of drivers of customer service experiences could be facilitated.

The overall aim of the thesis is to extend and deepen the understanding of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The context selected is the restaurant context. The overall aim is reflected in four intermediate aims. Two separate studies were conducted. First a two-stage questionnaire based study, describing the phone reservation encounter compared to dining satisfaction; second a critical incident technique study including 195 short narratives of customers' favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants. Interview data were analysed according to constant comparative analysis principles.

The main empirical contributions of this thesis are the move from static descriptions of service to examining dynamic drivers of favourable and unfavourable customers' service experiences, and especially the analysis of social interactions as a driver of service experiences and the categorisation of drivers. Theoretically the thesis introduces the experience driver constellation, reflecting the dynamic process of co-creation in specific situations, when favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences are formed. Suggestions are made to develop the Five Aspects Meal Model and the Experience Room Framework through the addition of actors, the exterior environment and organisational routines to the models.

Keywords: customer service experience, experience driver, dynamic, restaurant, co-creation, critical incident technique, phone encounters, experience room, servicescape, social interaction.
Abstract


It is essential for service companies to understand how their customer service experiences are formed. This is especially important since service experiences are highly subjective and involve customers cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally. Although customer service experiences are a well recognised research topic in both, culinary arts and service research, dynamic interactions, activities and the customers’ active involvement have so far gained little attention. As a consequence the approach in previous research paints a rather static picture of customer service experiences. By introducing the principles of service dominant logic a first person view and the understanding of drivers of customer service experiences could be facilitated.

The overall aim of the thesis is to extend and deepen the understanding of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The context selected is the restaurant context. The overall aim is reflected in four intermediate aims. Two separate studies were conducted. First a two-stage questionnaire based study, describing the phone reservation encounter compared to dining satisfaction; second a critical incident technique study including 195 short narratives of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants. Interview data were analysed according to constant comparative analysis principles.

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Keywords: customer service experience, experience driver, dynamic, restaurant, co-creation, critical incident technique, phone encounters, experience room, servicescape, social interaction.
List of appended papers

The present thesis is based on the appended papers listed below. In the text they are referred to by their Roman numerals.

Paper I

Paper II

Paper III

Paper IV


Reprints were made with the permission of the publishers.
List of appended papers

The present thesis is based on the appended papers listed below. In the text they are referred to by their Roman numerals.


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Introduction

A lunch at Arvid’s restaurant
Together with some colleagues I had lunch at Arvid’s restaurant. We didn’t know anything about this restaurant. On arrival, Arvid welcomes us at the entrance. He shows us to our table, situated in the basement of the building. The room feels very large but because of the sparse lighting, it seems quite familiar. There is no daylight. The candle lights on the table give enough light for us to see comfortably and the surrounding darkness obscures the rest of the room almost completely, although it is still possible to make out other tables, at which other restaurant guests are seated. The round table is laid in a simple but proper way with cloth, napkins, cutlery and glasses. There are bottles of quite a good Italian wine together with water standing on the table. After a while we realise that we are supposed to help ourselves to the beverages: surprise!! Arvid then begins to serve the lunch which has been pre-ordered and is the same for all guests. He starts with laying bread, butter and a bowl with salad on the table: we help ourselves. Everybody gets involved with serving and helping one another. After a while, Arvid serves the hot dish of stewed lentils and roasted lamb, served in a ‘Le Creuset’ saucepan in the classic orange colour. This he also places on the table. Then, contrary to everyone’s expectations, Arvid asks politely for our permission to join us at the table. Everybody agrees, but feels somewhat suspicious because of the extremely unaccustomed restaurant situation – a waiter sitting together with guests at the same table, just as he would do at his home. Arvid guides us through the whole meal, facilitating our conversation and activities at the table and takes care of us extremely well. He is acting as a kind of friend and as a professional waiter at the same time. When everyone has finished eating, Arvid clears the table, brings new plates, serves cassis sorbet as a dessert and prepares for serving coffee. After dessert and coffee we leave the restaurant...

This favourable narrative illustrates the formation of a customer service experience at a restaurant, which is the theme of this thesis. Central to this favourable experience of the service situation at Arvid’s restaurant are the participants and their behaviour. Particularly interesting for us was the way Arvid joined us during our lunch and how he used his knowledge and skills in continuous interactions with all of us. Even though the physical environment and the food and beverages served were continuously present during our quite dynamic lunch session at Arvid’s restaurant, these did not appear to have a significant influence on memory for the occasion. Rather the food and beverages and the physical environment were not mentioned to as great an extent in the discussions afterwards as was the case with Arvid’s behaviour.
The "inline" lunch

Another lunch experience I have had together with colleagues, and which left us with unfavourable feelings, is a lunch eaten in the kitchen of a restaurant. On arrival we are guided to the restaurant kitchen where we are supposed to eat our lunch. We are seated in one line, along one side of the kitchen cooking range. We feel privileged and excited when going back-stage. We sit on high bar-chairs, with little leg-room, unable to reach the foot rest of the chair, and placed rather high in relation to the “table”. In addition the lighting is very bright, as is usual in working kitchens and the appearance of the physical environment is very colourless. The kitchen noise and the sound and draught effect of the air conditioning are noticeable and all together we feel somewhat cold. Overall though, activity going on in the background does not influence us unduly. As we are sitting “inline” communication is only possible with one or two neighbouring people, depending just were in the line one is seated. As the conversation is not really supported by sitting “inline”, some of us move our chairs into a position which enables us to see and talk to several people at the same time. The meal, a creamy soup with perfectly poached pike perch and cooked spring vegetables served with a glass of white wine, is as colourless as the kitchen environment. After sitting there for a while, without any waiting staff being around, feelings of disappointment, of being out of place, and feeling like being some “left overs” appears. These feelings, together with general impressions of the food served and the physical environment, are the dominant theme of our conversation during this lunch. The only contact with employees has been when they served the meal. As nobody cleans the table after we have finished our lunch we decide to leave...

This narrative of an unfavourable customer service experience makes explicit that the physical environment, together with being placed “inline”, had a strong influence on the customers’ experiences of the lunch. Although being excellent in taste and product quality, the colourless food served did not overcome negative feelings. Moreover the sitting “inline” made us adapt our seating to have better opportunities for social interactions. The lack of interaction with staff which we interpreted as a kind of no-action, we responded to by leaving the restaurant. In this case the lunch caused unfavourable feelings as described in the narrative.

In both narratives, the drivers beyond customers’ feelings and reactions are visible. In the narrative from the lunch at Arvid’s restaurant, social interactions are an example of a favourable driver. In the “inline” lunch experience physical elements, both the physical environment and to some extent the physical appearance of the food served, are examples of unfavourable drivers. The drivers evoked customers’ favourable or unfavour-
able feelings, activities and thoughts. Throughout this thesis the term driver will be used to refer to the mechanisms that evoke customer experiences.

Naturally, high quality of food is important for customer restaurant experiences; however it is not enough. The narratives above indicate that the quality of food and beverages seemed to be less important in these particular instances than other aspects of the lunch experiences. In addition, in the Arvid case, the physical environment seems to have played a quite minor role. It was almost never mentioned afterwards by the guests, in contrast to the “inline” experience where it was the dominant driver. Alternatively perhaps, it could be the case that the physical environment in the Arvid case was just about optimal and in the “inline” case it was perceived as disturbing or unbalanced. What the narratives show is that social interactions and the physical environment direct the experiences in different directions and influence to a greater or lesser degree how customers feel, think and act. Thus drivers could have emotional, behavioural and cognitive characteristics. However the drivers seem to differ between situations, even though the “ingredients” available refer to the same type of resources, such as the food and beverages served, the service offered by employees and the physical environment of the restaurant.

The understanding of customer-employee-environment interactions as described in the two narratives is essential both for managers and scholars; especially important are the drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences. The growing importance of the service industry in general as discussed by Normann (1991) and the restaurant industry in particular (De Frumerie et al., 2009) gives further emphasis to the importance of understanding customer service experiences at restaurants. This argument is strengthened by the fact that restaurant services are an important ingredient of hospitality and tourism offerings. The apparently crucial role of customer service experiences in various industries is an important factor to motivate understanding more about experience drivers, both in favourable and unfavourable cases.

The two lunches described in the narratives were part of an international PhD course at the School of Hospitality, Culinary Arts and Meal Science at Örebro University, Sweden in June 2007, and eaten together with other participants in the course. These restaurant experiences, especially the contrast between the importance of social interactions and the physical environment for the lunch guests’ experience, provided the inspiration to focus this PhD thesis on studying drivers of customer favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants.
The aim of the thesis

The overall aim of the thesis is to extend and deepen the understanding of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The context selected is the restaurant context. The overall aim is reflected in four intermediate aims, which are addressed in the appended papers as follows:

1) To describe how restaurants handle customers’ reservation phone calls, as documented by customers and whether these voice-to-voice encounters influence customers’ expectations. In addition customers’ satisfaction with the total dining experience is examined and compared to customers’ perception of the phone call encounter.

2) To identify, portray and analyse the frequent drivers of customer service experiences as described by customers in their own words – the voice of the customer.

3) To analyse and describe the drivers in the physical environment that help to form customers’ restaurant experiences, as described by customers in their own words - the so-called ‘voice of the customer’.

4) To analyse and portray the content and importance of social interactions in customer service experiences, and the role they play as a driver of customer service experiences, as described by customers in their own words – the voice of the customer.

This thesis has its origin in the research discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science at Örebro University, Sweden. The scientific base of the discipline is multidisciplinary and includes ethnology, sociology, anthropology, business economics, nutrition science, public health and domestic science, each of them contributing to the understanding of the meal (Gustafsson, 2004).

To date, research in Culinary Arts and Meal Science has in particular focused on customer meal experiences; however customer service experiences have not received much attention. In contrast, in service research customer service experiences have been an important area of research for many years. Particularly important have been service encounters, which are characterised as human interactions, where the actors involved (customers and employees) are (most often) strangers, the relationships between them being directed by well defined roles; service encounters are goal-oriented and have an underlying business motivation (Czepiel et al., 1985b). Moreover,
the customer service experience is in centre of attention in the discussions of service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Therefore concepts and theory from service research will be used to develop the aim of the present thesis.

This empirically driven and explorative thesis will contribute to the development of the discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science and to the discipline of service research. The main contributions will be: 1) A deeper understanding of customer service experiences through the focus on drivers. 2) The identification and description of drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences in a restaurant context. 3) The description of dynamic interactions between actors, resources and drivers during the service process. Moreover, the results will provide restaurant practitioners with some guidelines for how to avoid unfavourable customer service experiences and how to create favourable customer service experiences.

The thesis is based on an analysis of what customers remember from their restaurant experiences expressed as narratives of their service experiences. The appended papers contribute in different ways to the aim of this thesis. The papers and their respective results and contributions will be summarised next.

**Summary of the appended papers**

This section is intended to give readers an overview over the papers included, and to facilitate their understanding of the theoretical and methodological choices made. The appended papers will each be summarised, including methodological assumptions, the main results and contributions and the role of co-authors, and myself during the work with the papers, and presentations of the results made at research conferences and workshops.
To analyse and portray social interaction as a driver of customer service experiences at restaurants.

To analyse and describe the physical environment as a driver of customer service experiences.

To identify, analyse and describe the drivers of customer service experiences at restaurants.

To describe how restaurants voice-to-voice encounters influence customers’ expectations.

2) In addition customers’ satisfaction with the total dining experience will be examined and compared to customers’ perception of the phone call encounter.

DRIVERS OF CUSTOMER’S SERVICE EXPERIENCES

Analysis of the occurrence of social interactions throughout the service process. Interpretive analysis of social interactions as a frequent driver.

Table 1: Overview of the work with and content of the appended papers

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<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>1) To describe how restaurants handle customers’ reservation phone calls, as documented by customers and whether these voice-to-voice encounters influence customers’ expectations. 2) In addition customers’ satisfaction with the total dining experience will be examined and compared to customers’ perception of the phone call encounter.</td>
<td>To identify, analyse and describe the drivers of customer service experiences at restaurants.</td>
<td>To analyse and describe the physical environment as a driver of customer service experiences.</td>
<td>To analyse and portray social interaction as a driver of customer service experiences at restaurants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>1) Documentation of phone encounters by customers, by means of a questionnaire. 2) Customer dining satisfaction measured by application of a structured questionnaire.</td>
<td>Critical Incident Technique study, as a tool to collect short narratives about customer service experiences.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analysed data</strong></td>
<td>1) 209 pre-experience observations. 2) 47 observations including both pre and dining experience observations.</td>
<td>195 incidents, told as short narratives about customer service experiences. 123 Favourable 72 Unfavourable</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
<td>1) Description of how the phone encounter was handled and which questions were asked. 2) Factor analysis and multiple regression analysis with the factors. Comparison between phone encounter experience and the satisfaction with the total dining experience.</td>
<td>Inductive analysis of the main categories of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences, according to constant comparative principles. Analysis of the drivers of favourable and unfavourable service experiences.</td>
<td>Analysis of the occurrence of the physical environment throughout the service process. Interpretive analysis of the physical environment as a frequent driver.</td>
<td>Analysis of the occurrence of social interactions throughout the service process. Interpretive analysis of social interactions as a frequent driver.</td>
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### Paper I
**Contribution**
Description of how restaurants treat phone reservations, seen from the customer point of view.
Description of the relationship between the phone encounter experience and the total dining experience.

**Co-authors**
All empirical work, data analysis and writing were conducted by me.

**Conference presentation**
Parts of the results were presented as a poster at the Sixth International Conference on Culinary Arts and Sciences (ICCAS 08), Stavanger Norway.

**Other**

### Paper II
**Contribution**
Analysis and description of the frequent and less frequent drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants, showing the total picture of drivers involved.

**Co-authors**
Bo Edvardsson
Åsa Öström

**Conference presentation**
The paper is an extended version of the presentation at the QUIS 11 Conference, 2009, in Wolfsburg Germany.

### Paper III
**Contribution**
Description of what the physical environment as a frequent driver evokes in customers. Details and the physical environment as a whole and favourable and unfavourable experiences are considered.

**Co-authors**
Bo Edvardsson

**Conference presentation**
A manuscript of the paper was presented at the Workshop: Exploring spaces and linkages between Services, Markets and Society, 2010 at University of Lund - Campus Helsingborg, Sweden.

### Paper IV
**Contribution**
Description of social interactions as a frequent driver by focusing on customers’ role and positions and how they act upon these roles. Favourable and unfavourable experiences are considered.

**Co-authors**
Bo Edvardsson
Åsa Öström

**Conference presentation**
Paper I: Customer experiences of phone encounters in a restaurant context

In this paper the focus was on pre-consumption experiences and whether they have an influence on expectations and the total dining experience. The context of this paper is phone reservation encounters which occur early in a customer service experience. In earlier research phone encounters were most often examined by quantitative surveys without regard to how phone encounters are managed in practice. The relationship between pre-consumption encounters and customer satisfaction with the total service experience has been seldom studied. Therefore the aim of this paper was to describe how restaurants handle customers’ reservation phone calls, documented by customers, and whether these voice-to-voice encounters influence customers’ expectations. In addition, customers’ satisfaction with the total dining experience was examined and compared to customers’ perception of the phone call encounter. By applying a two step study design, phone encounters were in the first step documented by customers by means of a questionnaire. In the second step a questionnaire for measuring customer satisfaction of dining experiences as developed by Andaleeb and Conway (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) was applied. The two points of measurement were compared.

The results show that phone reservations are treated in a functional way, by restaurants’ employees. There are some differences in how personnel answer the phone; however the questions asked are the same, independent of the type of restaurant. Restaurants generally ask for date, time, number of persons and the phone number and in some cases they ask for a mobile phone number.

About 85 % (of 162 observations) scored the positive effect of the phone call on customer expectations on a relatively high level (between 1 and 4 on the scale). And about 15 % of the observations were scored less positively; point 5 and 6 on the scale, where 1 is agree totally and 7 is don’t agree at all. In total the mean rating is 3.05 which is relatively high. Generally the phone calls had a friendly tone, but there are some phone encounters, 15 %, which were scored on a relatively low level. This indicates that there is a potential to influence more customers in a positive way, even before arrival. The dining experience was analysed by factor analysis and multiple regression analysis with the factors found. Food quality, responsiveness (service) and physical design were found to be significant for customer satisfaction. Regarding the relationship between the phone call experience and customers satisfaction with the total experience the results indicate that customers’ perceptions often change between these points of measurement from being less positive to being very positive.
The empirical work of this study was part of an ongoing project and was planned together with the heads of the project, Professor Lena Mossberg and Professor Inga-Britt Gustafsson. All empirical work, data analysis and writing of this paper were conducted by the author of this thesis. Parts of the results of the study were presented as a poster at the Sixth International Conference on Culinary Arts and Sciences (ICCAS 08): Global and National Perspectives, 23-27 June 2008 at the Norwegian School of Hotel Management, University of Stavanger, Norway.

Paper II: Drivers of customers' service experiences: a study in the restaurant industry

The study is based on the findings from Paper I and on earlier studies in service research (Parasuraman et al., 1985, Stauss and Weinlich, 1996, Lindquist and Persson, 1997, Verhoef et al., 2009, Holbrook, 2006, Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and studies referring to culinary arts (Gustafsson et al., 2006, Hansen et al., 2005, Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003, Andersson and Mossberg, 2004, Kivela et al., 2000). Compared to previous studies treating customers as passive receivers of services, in this study customers are regarded as active creators of their own experiences. Service dominant logic (SD logic) (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Grönroos, 2008) was helpful to do so. Holbrook’s (1999, 1994, 2006) theoretical concept of consumer value was a helpful tool to understand the dynamics of how customers actively create value. This paper focused on the drivers of customer service experiences, defined as the mechanisms that evoke customer experiences. The aim of the study was to identify, portray and analyse the frequent drivers of customer service experiences as described by customers in their own words – the voice of the customer.

The main results of the paper consist of a presentation of the main and subcategories of frequent and less frequent drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The paper also presents a description of how critical incident technique was used, how data were collected and then analysed and how the drivers became apparent. The frequent drivers are social interactions, the core product and the physical environment. The less frequent drivers are the restaurant, the price and payment procedure, the atmosphere, the guest and the occasion.

The main contributions of this paper are the holistic and detailed descriptions of main and subcategories of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences at restaurants. Furthermore, one and two-sided favourable and unfavourable drivers are described by using the principles of satisfiers and dissatisfiers as discussed by Oliver (1996). The
descriptions of the drivers are illustrated by extracts from narratives. The extracts in their turn indicate that numerous interactions occur between actors and drivers and the resources available in the physical environment. These interactions are addressed further in Papers III and IV and will be developed in the discussion and contribution chapter of this thesis.

This paper is co-authored with Professor Bo Edvardsson and Associate Professor Åsa Öström. All empirical work and the main part of the writing were conducted by the author of this thesis. Data analysis and discussions of results were performed by all authors. Professor Bo Edvardsson contributed especially with his background and experience from service research and Associate Professor Åsa Öström with her background from the discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science and her experience from Sensory Science. Parts of the results were presented at the QUIS 11 Conference, Moving Forward with Service Quality, June 11th - 14th 2009 in Wolfsburg, Germany.

**Paper III: The physical environment as a driver of customers' restaurant experiences**

Paper I showed that the physical environment is an important factor of customer satisfaction and in Paper II the physical environment was depicted as one frequent driver of customers’ restaurant experiences. The physical environment has been emphasised in numerous studies as an important issue in marketing. A number of conceptual frameworks, building on the principles of environmental psychology (Kotler, 1973, Baker, 1986, Bitner, 1992), describe the physical environment in a holistic way, including different tangible and/or intangible dimensions. Baker, in contrast to Kotler (1973) and Bitner (1992) includes also the social dimension as a part of the physical environment. Research approaches applied in numerous studies build on cause and effect relationships between stimuli (for example music, lighting, smell) from the physical environment and customer behaviour. Thus, although customers’ reactions are in focus, what the physical environment really means for them and how they create this meaning – their value – has gained little attention. Only a few studies were found to examine the customer-environment interactions and the active and central role of the customer in these interactions (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999, Schembri and Harsvik, 2004, Bonnin, 2006, Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008). A conceptual framework, which includes the customer experience as a starting point and the customer as an active part of service co-creation is the experience room framework according to Edvardsson et al. (2005, 2010).
The aim of Paper III was to analyse and describe the drivers in the physical environment that help to form customers’ restaurant experiences, as described by customers in their own words - the so-called ‘voice of the customer’. Both favourable and unfavourable experiences are thus examined. The results are compared with the dimensions of the experience room framework.

The results show that the physical environment is important for customer experiences, even before arrival at the restaurant, where also the exterior environment could play an important role. The occurrence of the physical environment as a resource throughout the service process is described. The results also show that actors - employees, customers and other representatives of the service firm - are an important element of the physical environment as a resource, which is the precondition for social interactions. The elements of the physical environment as drivers are described in detail and illustrated by extracts. Moreover, the meaning customers create from interactions with the elements of the physical environment is analysed, which was facilitated by regarding customers as a part of their social reality.

Customers make the physical environment their own in different ways. Sometimes their conclusions or feelings refer to their imagination and not to something they in fact have experienced. The results demonstrate that sensory elements such as lighting and music (atmospherics) occur in unfavourable narratives, but are not mentioned in favourable narratives. Other more tangible elements of the physical environment such as furniture and decor are predominantly described in favourable experiences. Finally, the findings are compared with the dimensions of the experience room model, and contributions to this model are discussed. To conclude, the main contributions of this paper are the descriptions of the physical environment as a resource in relation to other resources throughout the service process, the descriptions of the drivers of the physical environment and the meaning the drivers have for customers. In detail, the study contributes with the findings that both the exterior and the actors present in the physical environment can be suggested as additional elements of the experience room framework.

This paper was co-authored with Professor Bo Edvardsson. All empirical work and the main part of writing were conducted by the author of this thesis. Discussions about presentations of the results and further analysis of the data have been a joint product of the authors. The paper was presented at the Workshop: Exploring spaces and linkages between Services, Markets and Society, August 25-27, 2010 at University of Lund - Campus Helsingborg, Sweden.
Paper IV: Social interactions as drivers of customers' service experiences

Social interactions, activities and processes are crucial in services in general (Parasuraman et al., 1985, Bitner et al., 1990, Arnould and Price, 1993, Echeverri, 1999, Grönroos, 2002, Grönroos, 2008) and social interactions are identified as a frequent driver of customer service experiences in Paper II and as a significant factor in Paper I. The fact that service experiences are extended in time (Arnould and Price, 1993, Chase, 1981) and that individuals interact through a verbal or non-verbal social process (Echeverri, 1999) were considered in this paper. A focus on social interactions puts the customer in the centre of attention, as highlighted in the discussions of SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Although dynamic interactions could be mapped out, customer value could not be shown by applying the thoughts of SD logic only. Therefore it was helpful to also look at customers’ roles and positions in service encounters (Solomon et al., 1985, Czepiel et al., 1985b) and regard customers as a part of their reality, which then is socially constructed. The focus in this study was especially on the significance of roles and positions in the social system of the restaurant. The purpose of the study was to analyse and portray the content and importance of social interactions in customer service experiences, and the role they play as a driver of customer service experiences, as described by customers in their own words – the voice of the customer.

The findings describe the occurrence of social interactions in the process of restaurant service experiences and as embedded in dynamic interactions described through the extracts from the narratives. By analysing favourable and unfavourable experiences and by focusing on roles and positions, customer action could be understood, as well as customers’ expectations and how they act to achieve a pleasurable experience. When this expectation, however, is not fulfilled the outcome is more likely a customer demanding value for money, rather than a customer who feels treated in a hospitable way in the sense of Lashley and Morisson (2000). These roles became apparent from analysis of favourable and unfavourable experiences. As customers want to have control over the service process they act accordingly. This was described by means of extracts from narratives. Finally, by applying Oliver’s (1997) discussion of satisfiers and dissatisfiers, it became apparent that there are one and two-sided favourable and unfavourable experiences. This indicates that some drivers are only visible (for customers) in their absence.

To conclude, social interactions are described in the context of the service process by referring to other resources available throughout the service process. Social interactions as drivers are described. Furthermore, the illustrations by the extracts from the narratives illustrate and explain the func-
tion of social interactions as a link between physical resources and customers and employees.

This paper was co-authored with Professor Bo Edvardsson and Associate Professor Åsa Öström. All empirical work and the main part of the writing were conducted by the author of this thesis. Analysis of the data and discussions of the results was a joint production of all authors. The paper was presented at the 11th International Research Seminar in Service Management, May 25 - 28 2010 at LaLonde Les Maures, France.

**Structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of this comprehensive summary and the four appended papers described earlier in this chapter. The comprehensive summary is structured as follows:

*Introduction* – This chapter contains an introduction to the theme of thesis, described by one favourable and one unfavourable narrative from the restaurant context. The discussion of the narratives concludes by delineating the aim of the thesis. Finally a summary of the appended papers, which are the foundation for this comprehensive summary, is presented.

*The disciplinary background of the thesis* – This chapter presents the disciplinary background of the thesis in Culinary Arts and Meal Science and in service research especially related to service experiences.

*Favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences* – In this chapter a conceptual framework for favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences is presented.

*Research methodology* – In this chapter my pre-understanding and the research approach are described first. Thereafter the methodological research design, choices made and how data were analysed are discussed.

*Discussion and contributions* – In this chapter the results from the papers are discussed and further developed. Empirical and theoretical contributions are presented. Conclusions, managerial implications and suggestions for further research are made.

*Appendix* – The appendix includes an overview of representative references relevant for the understanding of customer service experiences and the appended papers which represent the basis for this thesis.
The disciplinary background of the thesis

In this chapter an overview will be given of the disciplinary background of the thesis in the discourses of Culinary Arts and Meal Science and service research. Areas of relevance for customer service experiences at restaurants in each of the discourses will be discussed, leading to the description of the research gaps in both of them.

The discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science

The scientific context of this thesis is Culinary Arts and Meal Science, which is a scientific discipline at Örebro University, Sweden. The discipline is multidisciplinary and was initiated by the combined efforts of practitioners and academics to meet the needs of a better understanding of restaurant business. Undergraduate and graduate education at the school is provided in the areas of hotel and hospitality, sommelier and chef at restaurants. A PhD programme in the discipline has been offered since 2002 (see Alsne, 2004).

The overall content and structure of education is presented in the Five Aspects Meal Model (Gustafsson, 2004, Gustafsson et al., 2006, Gustafsson et al., 2009). The model is conceptual and theoretically underpinned. It represents a holistic view of a meal experience and refers to different aspects of the creation process of a meal experience. It is mainly used to structure the production process of a meal experience, but is seldom applied from a customer point of view. The aspects of the model are

- the room
- the meeting
- the product
- the management control system
- the atmosphere

The room constitutes the setting of the meal, encompasses the shape and its connection to other rooms and how diners and staff use the room. The meeting refers to interpersonal relations between customers, between employees and between customers and employees. The product consists of the food and beverages served and the combinations of these. The management control system comprises several different systems of an administrative nature, such as economic and legal rules. For example, rules for treatment of food and the handling of wine and spirits and rules referring to human resources. The atmosphere finally is defined as the degree of feeling comfortable and at ease, experienced by the diners themselves through the interaction of other aspects, the entirety of a meal experience (Gustafsson, 2004, Gustafsson et al., 2006). Thus the basic message of the model is that the four aspects of the room, the meeting, the product and the control management system are the precondition of the fifth aspect, atmosphere,
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which is finally experienced by the customer. However, the descriptions of the atmosphere dimension also indicate that the atmosphere is created by meal designers and service employee behaviour. The FAMM and its dimensions are illustrated in Figure 1.

![Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM)](image)

Figure 1: The Five Aspects Meal Model (Gustafsson et al., 2006)

**Research in Culinary Arts and Meal Science**

Previous research within the discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science has focused on different aspects of the meal experience, approached from different disciplinary backgrounds, such as sensory science, public health, ethnology, consumer research and tourism management. Among the research projects only a few deal with the customer meal experience at restaurants and only one research project so far has examined the customer meal experience at restaurants in a holistic way (Hansen, 2005). Hansen et al (2005) in their study examined customer meal experiences at restaurants by applying a grounded theory approach, and revealed five main categories of customer meal experiences, which are partly comparable with the FAMM dimensions. Other research examines customers’ sensory experiences, particularly of food and of food and beverages in combination (Nygren, 2004) and also customers’ use of sensory and semantic descriptions of fruit and vegetables (Swahn et al., 2010). These studies are based on individuals’ ratings and use of product characteristics in different con-
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Thus two of the research groups deal with customer meal experiences at restaurants seen from a customer point of view. Hansen et al.’s (2005) focus is on meal experiences using a holistic approach, although, their study mainly portrays dimensions and sub-dimensions of a meal experience, and dynamic interactions don’t receive much attention. Jonsson and Piping Ekström (2009) looked at diners’ individual experiences at restaurants when they dine out alone by applying a gender perspective. In their study focus is on the solo diner’s experience and the social context of the restaurant room.

To date, in Culinary Arts and Meal Science research the focus has been mainly on customer meal experiences and its dimensions and customers’ sensory perception of food and beverages. There is little research that facilitates a broader understanding of customers’ experiences at restaurants, in particular consideration of the dynamic nature of restaurant experiences characterised by continuous interactions between customers and employees is limited. Therefore, to contribute to the knowledge gap in Culinary Arts and Meal Science, future studies of customers’ restaurant experiences should have a broader focus than meal experiences and should include dynamic aspects such as interactions between customers and employees. Customer service experiences as viewed in this thesis include dynamic interactions in the social and physical environment of restaurants, seen from the customers’ point of view. Moreover, through the focus on drivers and the role these play for customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences, this thesis will contribute to the research gap in Culinary Arts and Meal Science. As there are different drivers involved and since customer service experiences could be favourable or unfavourable, these differences need to be distinguished in order to paint a more realistic picture of a dynamic reality.

A slightly broader picture than Culinary Arts and Meal Science research is found in other disciplines that have looked at restaurant experiences, such as service research, marketing and sociology. In some of these studies customers’ restaurant experiences are treated as embedded in customer satisfaction and/or service quality. These studies build on measuring the
gap between service quality expectations before and perceptions after the experience (Parasuraman et al., 1985, Knutson et al., 1990, Stevens et al., 1995) or perceptions only (Cronin and Taylor, 1994, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006). They have used various researcher-determined, quality dimensions, such as different aspects of service, core service quality and physical design. The studies confirm the multidimensionality of a restaurant experience and the significance of factors such as satisfaction, responsiveness, tangibles and food quality (Kivela et al., 2000, Correia et al., 2008, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006), the price (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006, Correia et al., 2008), customers’ first and last impressions (Kivela et al., 2000) or the moderating effect of price on satisfaction and quality dimensions (Ryu and Han, 2010). Also, the relationship between factors such as human aspects and ambience have been examined, showing for example that when customers assess the restaurant experience as a whole, human aspects are more important than ambience (Wall and Berry, 2007).

For example Hanefors and Mossberg (2003) in their study examining the characteristics of extraordinary meal experiences, emphasise especially high involvement, which was mainly achieved through employees’ descriptions of the procedures. Another study describes the first time restaurant customers’ experience (Johns and Kivela, 2001), depicting the importance of the restaurant exterior which, in their study was associated with customers feeling threatened when arriving at the restaurant instead of feeling welcome from the very beginning. However, most of the earlier studies apart from the two last mentioned, have only focussed on the cognitive part of customer service experiences and do not consider emotions. In addition, they reflect a third person’s perspective, and not the customer’s own (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002).

Customer action, activities and interactions, which are the core of services (Lindquist and Persson, 1997) have received little attention. Thus the studies paint a static picture of what are in fact dynamic interactions of a customer service experience. Warde and Martens (2000), from a sociological standpoint, put forward a similar critique of the deficiency in earlier sociological studies of customer experiences. This they explained by the dominance of a utilitarian approach and an instrumental view of consumption. They state that in these studies it is not accepted that “people are the best judges of their meaning and value of their feelings of satisfaction” (Warde and Martens, 2000, p 165).

This current critique points towards a common denominator in the studies discussed, namely the passive role, which customers often are ascribed within a static view of customer restaurant experiences. Despite the current body of knowledge, not much is known about customers’ dynamic interac-
tions during a restaurant visit or how customers make sense out of the interactions. For a better understanding of customers favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants there is a need to broaden and deepen the above presented concepts of culinary arts research. This could be achieved by including contributions from service research which could facilitate the description and explanation of dynamic interactions during the service process at restaurants. The principles of service dominant logic (SD logic) (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008), which are a development of earlier service research and marketing thought, facilitate a customer perspective and introduce a dynamic approach to customer service experiences. A thorough description and discussion of SD logic will, therefore, be presented in the next chapter. Before that, a short background of how service has been viewed in service research, explaining the static view of service, will be given.

Henceforth I will use the term culinary arts. Culinary Arts and Meals Science is only used when I particularly want to depict the research discipline at Örebro University.

Service research
In this section a background to service research will be given. The concept service and service experiences will be discussed. Especially, reasons for the mainly static approach to services used in previous research on service experiences will be discussed together with the need for a more dynamic approach.

The concept service and service experience
SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) changes the concept service from one characterising services by comparing them with goods (Lovelock, 1983) to a perspective where service is regarded as being co-created with customers. Earlier descriptions of service, which portray service as a type of offering (a product or service) and utilise the characteristics – Intangibility, Heterogeneity, Inseparability and Perishability (IHIP) (Parasuraman et al., 1985) – have been criticised. These characteristics describe services in comparison with products. Through the focus on products, the core of service experiences, which is the involvement of actors in value co-creation and interactions, could not be viewed (Lindquist and Persson, 1997). As a consequence, mainly the cognitive dimension of services has been considered, whereas the emotional and behavioural dimensions received little attention.
(Edvardsson, 2005). Thus the picture given of service is somewhat incomplete.

The focus of marketing has been mainly on managing the marketing of products to customers, focusing on the exchange of goods (the goods-dominant view (Vargo and Lusch, 2006)) with value regarded as embedded in products and customers as consumers of value. However, since the beginning of the 1980’s the topic of customer experience has been given some attention. Hirschman and Holbrook’s (1982) seminal paper focused on hedonic consumption. They put forward the idea that it is not only the customer’s experience of the food bought and the meal eaten at a restaurant (utilitarian view) for example, but also the customer experience of the eating of the meal (the experience of the buying process) that contribute to an overall customer experience. Contrary to the established marketing practice of emphasising a utilitarian view with the focus on cognitive evaluations of product attributes, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) suggested also the consideration of emotional responses to multisensory stimuli of high involving services and products. These discussions about experiences were further intensified through Pine and Gilmore’s publication “The experience economy” at the end of the 1990’s (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). For them especially memorable experiences are an important part of companies’ marketing and the basis for the emerging experience economy.

Experiential thinking has frequently and predominantly been used by researchers and practitioners, to stage manage formal aspects, such as a special design or theme in the physical environment, to stimulate customers’ senses in order to offer extraordinary experiences (Gupta and Vajic, 2000). However this approach of experiential marketing assumes that experiences are controlled by the service firm and regard the customer as a passive recipient of the stimuli. This development has been criticised, because a deeper understanding of the customers’ consumption experiences and their interactions with a company’s offer is missing (Carù and Cova, 2007). In addition customers’ emotions were not considered as a part of customers’ subjective reactions and feelings. Within service research service encounter studies represent one stream of research examining customers’ favourable or unfavourable service experiences (for example Bitner et al., 1990). However the picture of service encounters given in these studies is often static and includes only cognitive aspects of service encounters. A number of service encounter studies will be discussed in the methodology section of this thesis.

By contrast, the recent discussions of SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) develop this view of services as offerings towards a customer perspective. SD logic puts the customer at the centre of action and describes service
experiences as emerging from customer value, without making distinctions between experiences. Customers’ service value is realised as value-in-context at the point of time in a specific context, when customers actively use (integrate) the service and/or product, in interactions with other actors (Vargo, 2008). This approach shifts the focus from a static view of product marketing to a dynamic view of service value creation.

In this chapter the theoretical positioning of the thesis in Culinary Arts and Meal Science and in service research have been addressed. The common denominator across these research areas is that a changed view of customer service/meal experiences is needed, as they have mainly been described through the lens of a product view using factors and attributes. Interactions were given little attention resulting in static descriptions of a dynamic context. The SD logic perspective, which will be applied in this thesis, facilitates putting the customer service experience, customers’ active role and what drives customer service experiences in the centre of attention. Customer service experiences at restaurants relate to many facets and some of them drive favourable and some of them drive unfavourable experiences. Therefore a conceptual framework for customers’ favourable or unfavourable service experience will be presented in the following chapter.
Drivers of customer service experiences

A conceptual framework for drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences is presented in this chapter. The framework aims to facilitate the understanding of drivers of customer service experiences and interactions, processes, and activities described as central issues in customer service experiences in previous chapters. The discussions are influenced by the SD logic perspective, where co-creation is the fundament of customer value and thus customer service experiences. Interactions are central in co-creation and co-creation refers to a specific point of time and place. Therefore co-creation of value, customer value, social interactions, the core service, and the physical environment will be discussed in detail. Furthermore, favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences will be discussed, as customer experiences are not always favourable, as the narratives in the beginning of this thesis illustrated. The chapter will be concluded by a definition of customer service experiences, which will apply this thesis. First, I will give an overview over how the literature included in this thesis was gathered.

Literature review

Customer experience is a multifaceted and abstract concept that has been used in various ways. A literature review was conducted in order to find relevant literature, helping to get an overview of the use of the concept customer service experience in empirical studies and theoretical concepts, with relevance for the aim of this thesis.

At the beginning of the research process literature was gathered from different databases covering different disciplines referring to culinary arts and the subsidiary aims of this thesis. Search was conducted in the databases ABI inform, FSTA (Food Service and Technology) and The Leisure Tourism database (available from 2009), looking for scholarly articles. Besides the database search the Swedish University and research libraries search service – Libris – was used to find other publications such as books and doctoral theses and conference proceedings, as well as research documents with a Swedish origin. In ABI inform and Leisure and Tourism experience was searched in the title, customer and service in citation and abstracts. In FSTA the search terms restaurant, experience, and customer were used and service was excluded, as this search term did not lead to any findings. Citation frequency was used as an extra indicator to identify important contributions. This initial search gave an overview of how cus
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customer service experiences were approached in culinary arts research (or comparable disciplines) and in service research. The references in these documents helped to trace more relevant references, not always accessible via databases. The search for references continued and developed throughout the whole process of this thesis.

The findings were scanned by referring to several criteria: whether the study was conceptual, qualitative or quantitative; the focus of the study referring to a provider or a customer perspective, or how a customer experience was defined or used.

Numerous studies found were based on quantitative surveys regarding a customer experience as embedded in service quality or customer satisfaction. Various studies found were based on a qualitative research approach and some studies found were conceptual, especially those focusing on service design. The literature on SD logic was predominantly conceptual and held on a theoretical level while the literature referring to the physical environment included both conceptual frameworks and empirical studies. The definitions of or how a customer experience was used varied from no definition at all to very detailed definitions. Of note is that all studies within the group of service design provide a detailed definition of a customer experience or a customer service experience. Among all studies found there were only a few which viewed customers as active creators of their experience. This pattern is common for studies in culinary arts and service research and confirms the need for a shift in focus. Furthermore, a number of review articles referring to culinary arts, customer experience and the physical environment, give an overview of how terms or phenomena were treated in research in the respective fields. The findings were structured in order to keep research in culinary arts and service research apart, and also to fit the subsidiary aims in the four papers of the thesis.

One stream of research refers to culinary arts research. Here papers and books are included, which have a certain focus on customers’ restaurant and meal experiences (e.g. Kivela et al., 1999a, 1999b, 2000, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006, Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003, Johns and Kivela, 2001, Hansen et al., 2005, Warde and Martens, 2000). Furthermore a review article focusing on research approaches applied in consumer research in the area of food service (an area of research with a strong relationship to culinary arts research) is included (Johns and Pine, 2002).

A second area of research refers to literature examining experiences as consumer experiences. These papers and a book supported my understanding of consumer/customer experiences in the area of consumer research and marketing, and how the term was developed and applied by researchers.

A third group of literature refers to service research. Here literature referring to SD logic, co-creation of value and customer value is included, which relates to the view on service in this thesis. This body of knowledge is the basis for my understanding of how customers’ service experiences are realised through co-creation of value, in interactions with other actors. This section of the literature was also useful in understanding reasons for the dominant static picture painted of service (Holbrook, 1994, 1999, 2006, Lindquist and Persson, 1997, Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, Grönroos, 2008).

Finally, one section of literature refers to important ingredients of a customer service experience, which are social interactions (Solomon et al., 1985, Arnould and Price, 1993, Czepiel et al., 1985a), the core service (Grönroos, 1987, Normann, 1991) and the physical environment (Kotler, 1973, Baker, 1986, Bitner, 1992, Edvardsson et al., 2005, 2010, Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008, Ezeh and Harris, 2007, Ek, 2005). The references will be integrated in the discussions in the following chapters. An overview of representative references for each group relevant for the understanding of customer service experiences is presented in Appendix 1.

Co-creation of value and resource integration
As noted earlier, SD logic is about value co-creation where customers are active co-creators of value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo, 2008, Grönroos, 2008). Co-creation occurs through interactions when operant resources (customers’ and employees’ knowledge and skills about how to do things) act on other operant resources or on operand resources (goods and physical resources) (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Value is determined by customers as value-in-context (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) at the time and place of consumption and realised as the customer experience. By shifting the focus onto customer value creation the differences between product and service are not essential anymore, rather the mixture of product and service involved in value creation should be considered. The resulting value-in-context of e.g. the customer’s experience of a restaurant service is finally judged by the customer in the customer’s own processes and activities (Normann and Ramirez, 1993, Holbrook, 1994, Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Grönroos, 2008). This means, for example, that restaurants can offer what they perceive to be a nicely designed room, excellent food and an appropriate selection of wines combined with skilled restaurant employees. Customers then actively extract value from these
value propositions (Grönroos, 2008) by mobilising their operant resources in co-creation; value is finally experienced by the customer during/after consumption.

SD logic is presented by 10 foundational premises (FP). Among these FP 6 the customer is always a co-creator of value, puts interactions in the centre of attention. FP 9 all social and economic actors are resource integrators, means all actors involved actively use resources available in the specific context. Finally FP 10 states that value always is “uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” which expresses the experiential nature of value as a particularly subjective experience which Vargo and Lusch describe as “idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning laden” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The focus of this thesis is restricted to FP 6, 9 and 10, through the focus on drivers, interactions and processes and the focus on customer service experiences in a holistic way seen from the customer point of view.

**Resource integration.** Customers, employees and other representatives of the service company act, during co-creation, as resource integrators (Lusch and Vargo, 2006, Baron and Harris, 2008, Payne et al., 2008) by actively using their personal operant resources (knowledge and skills) in varying degrees (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) in continuous interactions, in order to reach and enhance their personal consumption experience (Baron and Harris, 2008). SD logic discussion gives little attention to interactions; the descriptions are on a high level of abstraction (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). In contrast, Ballantyne and Varey (2006) offer a framework using operant resources to explain interactions between actors. They describe three types of operant resources which act as enablers in value-creating activities.

**Knowing, relating and communicating.** Knowing refers to both tacit and explicit knowledge within the organisation and the continuous development of this knowledge within the organisation in order to be able to meet customer needs. It is important that service employees actually possess the special competencies needed to perform a particular service. Thus knowing is about keeping the organisational competence up to date, through a climate that facilitates individual and thus organisational learning. Relating refers to the influence of the service environment in which the service is co-created, through interactions. The social and physical environment will be discussed in the sections that follow. Communicating occurs through dialogue and other forms of communication. Dialogue between actors is the mode of communication supporting co-creation and thus interaction. At restaurants, for example, employees often describe the food on the menu.
and the matching wines for customers, or an employee could give some specific wine recommendations in dialogue with a customer. Within these dialogues employees’ knowledge and skills, the wines available at that time and customers ability to use (integrate) these resources (knowledge), are important preconditions for value creation. In this thesis I will especially refer to communicating. I agree with Ballantyne and Varey (2006) who state that the value-creating activities are located between the actors involved, not uniquely with one of the actors. This means in the dialogue between the actors, where both parties’ operant resources are made available.

To conclude, actors’ resource integration represents the dynamic part of value co-creation. Resources are linked together through customer-employee activities and actors’ use of knowledge and skills in interactions. In contrast, the static part of value creation refers to the preconditions or the resources available in a specific situation. This could be described as the resource constellation.

Value co-creation as described in SD logic occurs through an arrangement of resources integrated into a service system (Vargo et al., 2008b). The resources are required for the service to be enabled and realised and include for example people, technology, information, management, organisation and control and physical resources (Edvardsson et al., 2000, Vargo et al., 2008b). Value is evident as an improvement in system well-being and can be measured in terms of a “system’s adaptiveness or ability to fit in its environment” (Vargo et al., 2008b). When creating value, different service systems (organisations or customers for example) and the resources included in them, interact with each other by applying their knowledge and skills. In a restaurant context the customers (with their resources) interact with the resources included in the service system of the restaurant, such as the physical restaurant environment, the core service, people, technical equipment, the kitchen environment (especially in a self-service context and in open kitchen restaurants) the management of the restaurant or the homepage.

By applying SD logic the customer and other actors involved in resource integration are put in the centre of attention. However, the descriptions of SD logic are mostly on a theoretical and conceptual level and on a high level of abstraction, where interactions and value-creation seem to be given, and are not further explained in detail. Therefore Ballantyne and Varey’s (2006) principles of communication through dialogue are helpful tools for a better understanding of interactions and activities as a part of resource integration between the actors involved. SD logic does not consider in detail how restaurant customers realise value in sense-making ac-
tivities like how they think, what they compare with, which the situation is at the moment, when they might express their feelings such as just like being at someone’s home. Therefore Holbrook’s (2006) concept of customer value will be introduced next.

**Customer value**

One empirically grounded framework which captures the dynamic and multidimensional nature of customer value and of customers as active reflecting individuals is Holbrook’s framework of consumer value (Holbrook, 1994, Holbrook, 1999, Holbrook, 2006). He defines customer value, as “an interactive relativistic preference experience” (Holbrook, 2006, p 212). Value is realised through a customer experience and is described from the customer’s perspective. Value occurs always in an interaction between an offering (goods, services or products) and a customer - whatever a producer can offer and whatever the type of customer. The interaction is relativistic in at least three senses: comparative, personal and situational. The customers’ experienced value depends on what they compare with and the context or situation of consumption. The experience is different between individuals: an evening dinner could be a pleasure for the grownups at the table and less pleasurable for the children at the table for example. In addition consumers’ preferences illustrate that individuals prefer one thing to another, which could be expressed in different ways such as attitudes (like/dislike), affect (favourable/unfavourable), evaluation (good/bad), behavioural tendency (approach/avoid) to name a few. Finally, Holbrook states that value is really to be found in the consumption experience and not in any product per se (Holbrook, 1994, 1999, 2006).

Most central in his concept is that customer value is individual. Moreover, customer value is relative, with a customer comparing his experiences continuously with other situations and contexts and that value/the experience may differ for example between individuals within the same situation. Interactions are depicted as the most central element of consumption experiences, where consumers are active individuals who are continuously involved in the creation of their own experience, which in its turn is one of the core messages SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). However Holbrook’s (2006) concept puts the customer in the centre of attention, as an acting and active thinking and reflecting individual who determines his or her own customer value. His concept reflects the complexity of individuals’ reactions and interactions, and describes Vargo and Lusch’s (2004, 2008) abstract concept on a more concrete level illustrated with concrete examples. Vargo and Lusch in their turn describe customer value as a particu-
larly subjective experience, which is contextual and meaning laden (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), and acknowledges the importance of the context. In the following sections the contextual aspects of customer service experiences, social interactions, the core service and the physical environment will be discussed.

**Social interaction**

Social interaction is a major driver of both favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. Social interactions occur between different actors, present in the physical service environment. However, they could also occur as more indirect interactions, such as phone encounters. Examples for this category of drivers are the behaviour of a restaurant employee in dialogues with customers at their table (see the narrative from Arvid’s restaurant in the beginning of the thesis), or the answering of reservation phone calls by employees, a type of organisational routine.

Customer-employee interactions are well represented in research, whereas customer-customer interactions have received less attention. However, they could be important because of the unpredictable effect they can have (Verhoef et al., 2009, Wu, 2008). This could be of particular interest in a restaurant context, where customers can interact spontaneously for a short period of time, as described by Lugosi (2008). Customer-customer interactions could also occur when customers are waiting at the bar to be seated or after being seated if the seating encourages contact between them. Customers can also disturb each other through talking too loudly or just being seated too close to one another. Furthermore, customers can voluntarily assist and support other customers (and the service organisation) through their advice and thus contribute to other customers’ (and also their own) favourable experience (Verhoef et al., 2009) by acting as strangers, as friends and as quasi-friends (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007). Social interactions among customers and employees occur in a verbal and non-verbal social process aiming at shared knowledge, experience and thoughts (Echeverri, 1999, Sommers et al., 1989). In this thesis the focus will be on social interactions as drivers of customer service experiences, as remembered and told by customers.

One important area of service research where social interactions are central is service encounters (Bitner et al., 1990, Czepiel et al., 1985b). Research studies of service encounters identified events and behaviour as reasons for customers’ favourable and unfavourable experiences from both a customer and employee point of view. A number of these studies applied critical incident technique (Bitner et al., 1990, Nyquist et al., 1985). Other
studies of service encounters focus on the interaction between the actors as such. For example Solomon et al. (1985) examined service encounters defined as goal-oriented dyadic interactions. Czepiel et al. (1985b) characterise service encounters as human interactions, where the actors (customers and employees) involved are most often, I believe, strangers. Service encounters are seen as goal-oriented with an underlying business motivation and the relationships between actors being directed by well-defined roles. Some service encounter studies will be discussed in the methodology section.

A role is “a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual’s behaviour in a given setting” (Solomon et al., 1985, p 102). In role-taking the individual is imagining the world from the point of view of the other. Adopting roles creates special behaviours and thus expectations from within these roles (Goffman, 1959, Solomon et al., 1985, Charon, 2009). The other’s reaction may be regarded as the sign for our interpretation of what the other actor is thinking and what we are able to interpret of the other persons feelings (Charon, 2009). Roles are connected with role scripts (Broderick, 1999) which are behaviour patterns or learned sequences of causal chains (Solomon et al., 1985) containing information on the expected behaviour of oneself and the other. Customers’ behaviour in restaurants is directed by scripts (Schulz, 1996), with which customers most often are familiar or which they most often accept. As Schulz (1996) illustrates, scripts could also be actively used by restaurant companies to enhance customers’ feelings. Purposeful interactions between customers and employees, who most often don’t know each other, involve a fundamental set of rules which are a part of the roles (Czepiel et al., 1985b). In restaurants for example, this indicates that customers’ expectations build on employees playing the role of the host, and employees’ expectations from customers build on customers playing the role as a guest. The term ‘position’ refers to a person’s socially defined position relative to others in the setting, for example a waiter, a headwaiter, a chef, a restaurant manager, the owner of a restaurant (Solomon et al., 1985). These positions in their turn are associated with special roles and behaviours (action), leading to expectations (ibid).

Imagine someone visiting a restaurant together with some business guests. The person acts as a host towards his/her guests and at the same time presupposes that the headwaiter and his waiting employees are interested in and will take care of him/her and her guests, by playing the role of being their host. In restaurant services the question of power is particularly important as the one who is in power unilaterally determines what is going to happen (Bitran and Hoech, 1990, Mars and Nicod, 1984). As a restau-
The core service

The core service is one central element of a service offering as it is expressed in the product oriented goods-dominant view, or in the value proposition as expressed in SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The core service is also described as the reason for a company’s existence in the market (Grönroos, 1987). First, I will describe briefly the principles of the core service as they have been presented in previous service and culinary arts research, with a goods dominant view. Thereafter I will describe the core service as a part of a value proposition.

The core service has been described as part of the service concept together with supporting services, also called peripherals (Edvardsson et al., 2000, Normann, 1991). The core and peripherals are part of the service package (Normann, 1991). In restaurants the core service could be thought of as the food and beverages served and the combination of these (Gustafsson, 2004). A peripheral might be a bar area at a restaurant, where customers can wait, take a drink until their table is available. However, a restaurant’s homepage could also be regarded as a peripheral service, which facilitates customers’ information seeking, offers on-line reservation opportunity and is a contact link between the customer and the restaurant firm.

Hansen et al. (2005) state that without the core service at restaurants (food and beverages served), there would not be any meal. Thus the core service characterises the type of service offering or value proposition, whereas the peripheral services could be added to enhance or to give the core service a special character. When I was studying the literature the core service seemed to be taken for granted. However, as stated by Hansen et al. (2005) the core service determines the character of the service. Moreover, as discussed by Gustafsson (2004), the core service involves a complex system of details involving employees, physical equipment backstage and front stage and customers.
When customers assess a service Normann (1991) noticed that they are guided by habit and expectations, although we do not notice whether or not the service package meets expectations. As far as the food and beverages and the service at a restaurant are good we accept this without a comment. When the food served and/or the service is not as expected we either complain or are surprised. From the service firm perspective, it seems not to be so easy to find the right way to meet customers’ expectations, especially as these are individual and only expressed when they are extreme.

From a SD logic point of view (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008) the core service is (only) part of the service firm’s value proposition. Value is determined by the customer in co-creation through activities and interactions and finally realised through customer service experiences. According to this view restaurant firms only are able to offer propositions of value to their customers. The customers in their turn make their decisions in interactions with other actors in the physical environment of the restaurant. Finally customers decide what is of value for them in the specific situation. Moreover, they decide individually what the service means for them in that specific situation.

In this thesis the core service emerged as one of the frequent drivers, referring to the nature, presentation and the timing of the core service; moreover the presentation of the menu and hygiene and cleanliness aspects have been described as drivers. The core service is regarded in context, so to say as one part of restaurants’ value constellations (c.f. Normann and Ramirez, 1993). In this thesis, the core service is not further examined in a separate study. In the appended papers priority was given to social interactions as they seemed to play a crucial role as a driver of customer service experiences, as described in theories. Moreover, the physical environment was further examined in a separate paper. This choice was made partly because of the impressions from the lunch at Arvid’s restaurant and the “inline” lunch (the narratives in the beginning of the thesis) and also because this aspect seems to be perceived as very important to many restaurants. Restaurants often invest substantial funds in the design of the physical environment. Furthermore there are few empirical studies focusing on the role of the physical environment in customer service experiences. The physical environment will be discussed next.

**The physical service environment**
The physical restaurant environment is an important source for customers to draw conclusions about the intangible restaurant services they will ex-
experience later on (Edvardsson et al., 2010, Wall and Berry, 2007, Bitner, 1992, Cherulnik, 1991). The importance of the physical environment for customers’ experiences has been discussed in numerous studies. In two early conceptual studies, Kotler (1973) and Baker (1986) emphasised the physical environment as an important issue in marketing. Kotler’s (1973) framework is built on atmospherics, which he describes as sensory elements of the environment (visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile), taste being excluded. In her model Baker (1986) includes ambient (sensory aspects), design (aesthetic and functional such as furnishing and layout) and social factors (referring to employees and customers).

Two more recent frameworks are Bitner’s (1992) servicescape framework and Edvardsson et al’s (2010) experience room framework. Bitner’s (1992) servicescape framework has its origin in environmental psychology, and it describes the influence of the built environment on customers and employees. The dimensions of the framework include ambient conditions (intangibles, atmospherics), space and function together with signs, symbols, and artefacts, the latter being tangible elements. These have varying cognitive, emotional and physiological impacts on customers, which ultimately are associated with approach or avoidance behaviour. The underlying principle of the servicescape, and also Kotler’s (1973) and Baker’s (1986) models, is the widely cited stimulus-organism-response (SOR) principle (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974). This implies a causal relationship, treating customers’ behaviour as an outcome (for example buying more, staying longer) of a reaction towards, most often, a single stimulus from the physical environment, such as slow music.

By applying these principles a steady stream of research studies were conducted mainly in the retail context (Journal of Business Research, 2000, Turley and Milliman, 2000, Ezeh and Harris, 2007, Kearny et al., 2007, Edwards and Gustafsson, 2008). The studies focused most often on one type of stimulus from the physical environment – music, odour, scent, colours and lighting. According to these studies the servicescape framework reflects a functional perspective of the physical environment, excluding the social dimension as a part of it. Neither human actors as an element of the physical environment nor social interactions occurring between actors while present in the servicescape are considered in the model. As Ek (2005) argues from a cultural geographic perspective, the servicescape framework does not take into consideration that the design of the physical space is socially constructed by individuals designing it and that the individuals present in it contribute, through their action, to how the physical environment is perceived. This makes the servicescape a functional description of
the physical context, whereas the many dimensions of human action in relation to the physical and social context are not included.

One conceptual framework with the customer experience as a starting point and including customers as one element of the physical environment is the experience room framework according to Edvardsson et al (2005, 2010). The framework is built on the view that customers are actively involved in co-creation as described in SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). It is partly inspired by Bitner (1992) (physical and intangible artefacts) and by Mossberg’s (2003) “upplevelserum” model. Besides physical and tangible resources, Mossberg applies customer involvement, customers’ relationship with the environment and time as important dimensions to understand the dynamics of customer experiences. The Edvardsson et al (2005, 2010) framework includes physical and intangible artefacts, technology and different types of social elements. These are represented by customers’ placement in the experience room (how customers physically are placed in the experience room), customer involvement (the roles played by customers in interaction with other customers, employees and technology) and finally customers’ interaction with employees (added in the 2010 paper). The framework aimed to describe customers’ anticipated experience of co-creation prior to the real occasion, through a test drive environment, for example a homepage or test rooms at a furniture retailer. They found that not only social interactions but also cues linked to the physical environment in the experience room have a major impact on customers’ service experience and thus are important experience drivers. The framework links together the functional part of the experience room (comparable with the servicescape by Bitner (1992) and the interactive part of the experience room, which includes social interactions.

The frameworks of Kotler (1973), Bitner (1992) and Edvardsson et al. (2010) are theoretical or theoretically developed. They demonstrate a holistic view of the physical environment and how people experience it. Whereas Kotler (1973), Baker (1986) and Bitner (1992) reflect a functional view, describing the customer as reacting to stimuli, Edvardsson et al. (2010) build on co-creation thoughts and include social elements in their model. All of them, however, apply a service company perspective. Only a few studies applying, in particular, the servicescape framework, focus on how customers use the physical environment to create their own meaning and are interpretive in nature (compare with Arnould and Price, 1993, Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008). A need for further empirical research on the physical environment of services has been noted by several authors (Ezeh and Harris, 2007, Turley and Milliman, 2000, Kearny et al., 2007, Schembri and Harsvik, 2004, Ek, 2005). However, in such research, cus-
tomers must be regarded as active creators of their own meaning and experience (Aubert-Gamet, 1997, Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Holbrook, 2006).

In research studies referring to culinary arts the same type of stimulus-organism-response studies were found. Studies show that the physical environment has influence on customers’ ratings of their actual meals (Meiselman et al., 2000, Meiselman, 2003, Hersleth et al., 2005, King et al., 2007), that lighting has effects on guests’ ordering and length of stay (Wansink, 2004), that ambient scent has an influence on the number of social interactions guests were involved in (Zemke and Shoemaker, 2007) as well as music tempo having an impact on purchases and length of stay for example (Milliman, 1986). Hansen et al. (Hansen et al., 2005) depicted the restaurant interior as one out of five main aspects of customers’ restaurant meal experiences. In line with Gustafson et al. (2006), they describe different dimensions of the restaurant interior from a customer point of view.

Within the field of hospitality a few papers discuss atmosphere and ambience by relating these terms to the physical environment (Heide and Gronhaug, 2006, Heide et al., 2007, Heide and Gronhaug, 2009). Heide et al (2007) examine and review the concept of atmosphere. The results, show that atmosphere is important for managers and that hotel managers are more sensitive to costs related to investments in atmosphere design than are designers. Interestingly, Heide and Gronhaug (2009) elicited distinctiveness and employees’ hospitable behaviour as the most important descriptors of atmosphere as communicated in the hospitality context (for example on homepages). Accordingly, the social dimension seems to play an important role in how the intangible character of atmosphere is assessed.

Conceptual frameworks of the physical environment discussed above, differ in whether or not to include the social dimension. Baker (1986) and Edvardsson et al. (2010) include social elements in their models, whereas Edvardsson et al (2010) include interactive elements. Kotler (1973) and Bitner (1992) do not include social elements as a part of their models. Moreover Bitner (1992) describes social interaction as a consequence of customer-servicescape interactions.

Those studies which focus on the physical environment most often examine the cause and effect between a stimulus and a response. There are few studies examining how customers actively create their meaning from the physical environment (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999, Schembri and Harsvik, 2004, Bonnin, 2006, Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008). For example, as described in Venkatraman and Nelson’s (2008) article, young Chinese consumers use the environment and elements in the environment
of a Starbucks to feel like being at home and not as the service company thought - to visit Starbucks for its coffee. It is obvious in this study that it is not the elements in the physical environment at Starbucks that make the experience, but what these elements evoke in customers – drivers of customer experiences - in interaction with other influences in the specific situation. To conclude, the meaning of the physical environment is both spatial and social. Therefore, studies of the physical environment, in order to be holistic, should focus on service experiences and consider actors as both creators and as a part of the physical environment through their presence and action as stated by Schembri and Harsvik (2004) and as discussed by Ek (2005). In this thesis co-creation of value in a certain context, where interactions between actors are central, will be in focus.

The discussions in this chapter so far have described how customer service experiences are formed during a service process. Different drivers of customer service experiences have been described (social interactions, the core service and the physical environment). Next a framework, useful for categorising favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences, will be presented.

**Categories of favourable and unfavourable service experiences**

Customer experiences are not differentiated in SD logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008). However, as discussed in the two narratives at the beginning of the thesis, customer service experiences could be favourable or unfavourable. Moreover, not all of the resources available contribute to customers’ favourable experiences. The customers at Arvid’s restaurant did not remember the physical environment after the lunch. However, the physical environment was not an unfavourable driver either. In contrast in the “in line” experience the physical environment, especially lighting and effects of air conditioning were unfavourable drivers.

A helpful tool to interpret favourable and unfavourable drivers is the categorisation of satisfiers and dissatisfiers, discussed by Oliver (1996). The categorisation, building on Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation and hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1987), helps to look beyond favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences, especially high-involvement services such as restaurant services as discussed by Oliver (1996). The two-factor theory is based on the principle that satisfiers and dissatisfiers could not be considered to be the ends of one continuum. Rather, they should be regarded as two separate constructs, resulting in three categories of satisfiers and dissatisfiers, as follows (adapted from Oliver, 1996, p 147).
The categorisation illustrates that someone could be satisfied and dissatisfied at the same time, although the reasons might be different. Thus a customer at the restaurant could be satisfied with the food served, but dissatisfied with the lighting in the restaurant. Moreover the categorisation allows uncovering and removal of dissatisfying components and the determination and addition of satisfying components.

Johnston (1995) studied sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of customer perceived quality with bank services. He discusses a number of studies examining the causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, indicating that there might be a difference between the causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. He also states that it is important to collect data directly from customers because data collected from frontline employees does not automatically help to understand customers. Johnston (1995) in his study used the critical incident technique to collect short stories from bank customers’ favourable and unfavourable experiences with their bank. A questionnaire was used to collect data on critical incidents, reported by the respondents as short stories. The stories were then classified by using predetermined categories (service quality determinants) and the results presented as showing the main sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with bank services.

To conclude, most interesting for the present thesis are the principles of satisfiers and dissatisfiers, discussed by Oliver (1996) and applied by Johnston (1995). The categorisation is considered to be a useful tool to examine and classify drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. A more nuanced picture of drivers could be gained, which better illustrates their complexity.

Conclusions
In this chapter a conceptual framework of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences was presented. Discussed especially were customers’ active roles in co-creation, emphasising customers’ interactions with other actors through dialogues and activities during co-creation. Moreover, central resources included in restaurant firms’ value propositions were examined. In co-creation, both a static part - the resource constellation and a dynamic part - resource integrating activities, become evident. Two frameworks, the FAMM referring to meal experiences and the experience room framework referring to service experiences were pre-
sented. Both of them refer to the resource constellation and to resource integration although in somewhat different ways. Regarding a customer service experience as being realised through co-creation as value-in-context, indicates that a service experience occurs not in isolation, but in a physical and social service environment where interactions between actors are central. Therefore in this thesis a customer service experience is defined as the customer’s interaction with the service process, the organisation, the physical facilities, the service firm’s employees and other customers. These interactions in turn create the customer’s cognitive (thoughts), emotional (feelings) and behavioural (actions) responses and leave the customer with memories (in accordance with Johnston and Clark, 2005)

Moving from a static approach where service is regarded as a provider controlled product/service offering, to a dynamic approach where value is regarded as emerging through co-creation, makes customers a part of their value creation. A customer is therefore in this thesis regarded as actively involved in co-creation of value where interactions with other actors, the core service and the physical environment are important parts of the value proposition. Thus customer value is a customer’s individual “conclusion” drawn after co-creation. The service firm is only able to facilitate how customers’ service experiences are formed. Questions about how to approach customer service experiences and the research methods applied in this empirically driven, explorative thesis will be discussed in the following chapter.
Research Methodology

Empirical and disciplinary starting points and a conceptual framework for customers' favourable and unfavourable service experiences were presented in the previous chapters. The purpose of this next chapter is to describe how the empirical study was conducted, how data were analysed and how the empirical data facilitated the understanding of drivers of customers' favourable and unfavourable service experiences. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the credibility of the thesis. I will introduce the chapter with a description of my own pre-understanding of the research phenomenon.

Pre-understanding and research approach

Gummesson (2000) states that a researcher’s pre-understanding is an important basis for conducting research. Pre-understanding includes both a researcher’s knowledge and skills as a researcher, but also her personal experience of the research phenomenon together with other personal skills.

My interest in restaurant services, especially customer experiences, has its origin in my personal practical work experience in different positions as a waitress and a chef, at hotel restaurants and at some highly ranked fine dining restaurants. This professional relationship to restaurant services has driven my interest to better understand what really drives customer service experiences at restaurants and it has been a motivation to start this PhD project. Moreover, my pre-understanding will be a part of my interpretations. Therefore a detailed and transparent presentation of the research process and data analysis has been my intention.

Another important ingredient of my pre-understanding is the theoretical understanding of the area of research. Here my university studies in business administration and tourism, PhD courses, literature studies, participation in a research project, research seminars and discussions with research colleagues, and writing, contributed continuously to the development of my pre-understanding (c.f. Gummesson, 2000). The integration of the different parts of my pre-understanding with previous research studies in culinary arts and service research, with particular reference to customer service experiences, led to the formulation of the aim of this thesis and the specific research questions. While the empirical studies were being conducted and the appended papers were written, my pre-understanding was further developed through the practical research work, reading of theory and writing. Throughout the whole research process theory was an important source of inspiration and help (c.f. Silverman, 2006). Theoretical stud-
ies helped in particular in my understanding of the background to the static approach of customer service experiences used in previous research studies and in identification of the research gaps and formulation of the main aim and the intermediate aims of the thesis.

The development of my own understanding of services from a static approach towards a dynamic approach is demonstrated in the appended papers. Paper I has its origin in the static approach, where customers are ascribed a mainly passive role and service experiences are characterised by factors and attributes. Paper I gives a detailed picture of the process of the phone encounter. However, what this encounter means for the customer, by referring to the total dining experience could only be expressed through the ratings of the relationship between pre and post experience. Thus this approach did not help with understanding of value co-creation and interactions.

In this type of study interviewees’ accounts are treated as accounts about the reality of which they are part of (Alasuutari, 1995), meaning that the interviewee/respondent and her reality are studied as two separated entities, without taking the context of the specific situation and person into consideration. Moreover the research process is theory driven and characterised by a deductive approach. This type of approach, described as a priori (Deetz, 1996), only helps to get a finite understanding of customers’ reality, which is the case in Paper I.

Therefore the method applied in the subsequent papers was adopted in order to support the understanding of customer service experiences in their context, especially drivers, which could be of emotional, behavioural and cognitive nature. Consequently interviewees’ statements are treated as a part of the reality that is studied as described by Alasuutari (1995) or as interviewees’ own perceptions and interpretations of their reality (Czarniawska, 2004). This is the case for example, when interviewees recounted what they remembered from their favourable and unfavourable service experiences.

This view of reality is the basis for the methodological choices and interpretations made in Paper II-IV. Here Critical Incident Technique (henceforth CIT) (Flanagan, 1954) was chosen as a tool to collect subjective and context-specific short stories (Czarniawska, 2004). After further examination of earlier CIT studies with relevance for service experiences, the application of CIT was adapted in order to enable collection of short narratives of customer service experiences at restaurants.

In the following sections the method applied in Paper I will be described followed by a description of how CIT had been applied in previous studies of service encounters. Then follows a description of how CIT was applied
in the present thesis. Thereafter the various steps of data analysis are described. The chapter is concluded with an evaluation of the research process.

**Phone encounter perception and dining experience satisfaction**

Paper I belongs to the research approach described as being static, because of the method applied and the underlying view on services as products. The study was conducted at the beginning of the research process. The purpose of this paper was to describe how restaurants handle customers’ reservation phone calls, as documented by customers and whether these voice-to-voice encounters influence customers’ expectations. In addition customers’ satisfaction with the total dining experience was examined and compared with customers’ perception of the phone encounter. Accordingly, a two step study design was applied.

In the first step, restaurant customers documented their reservation phone calls by means of a questionnaire, which was designed to guide the participants while documenting the characteristics and the content of the phone call. The questions asked were chosen from an intuitive assessment of how phone calls are treated by restaurants. In step two Andaleeb and Conway’s (2006) transaction specific model to measure customers’ dining satisfaction was applied. The model is built on Servqual principles and measures how customers’ score different dimensions of their dining experience satisfaction. This method helped to depict the significant factors of customers’ dining experiences, which are in accordance with the frequent drivers found in the CIT study. Customers’ ratings of their dining satisfaction were then related to their ratings of phone call perception. However, precisely what drives favourable or unfavourable customer experiences at restaurants could not be shown. Therefore CIT combined with an interpretive approach was chosen as method in the subsequent papers.

**Critical incident technique**

CIT has been used in several empirical studies as a method to identify and analyse shortcomings in service quality (Nyquist et al., 1985, Bitner et al., 1990, Bitner et al., 1994, Edvardsson, 1988, Edvardsson, 1992, Grove and Fisk, 1997). The principles of the method are described by Flanagan (1954). The method is especially useful when the purpose is explorative and when thorough understanding is needed for describing a phenomenon (Grove and Fisk, 1997, p 67, Olsen, 1992) and when the goal is to collect
short narratives (Czarniawska, 2004, pp 43-44). In short narratives the context of critical incidents becomes apparent, which is helpful in understanding of the reasons for and the effects of incidents (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000). According to Flanagan (1954) both interviews and observations could be used to collect data of critical incidents.


Bitner et al.’s (1990) study includes 719 reports of relatively short incidents collected by 75 students, focusing on employee behaviour in interactions customers within the restaurant, hotel and airline industry causing favourable or unfavourable service experiences. The favourable and unfavourable incidents collected were analysed by grouping them in three main categories and 12 subcategories of favourable and unfavourable incidents. The same classification scheme was applied by Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994) in their CIT study. The focus in that study was on events that could lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and they examined employees’ views on customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Their study includes 781 incidents reports, collected by 37 students. Within the same industries, Nyquist et al. (1985) collected 378 critical incidents by 12 students (131 interviews). They examined how employees perceive communication problems with customers. The interviews were focused on the description of specific interactions or situations and then analysed by grouping them into two main categories.

In summary, in these CIT studies only specific parts of the stories told were used in analysis; content analysis was used. The contexts of the entire narratives and other aspects, important to the interviewee, have not been considered. In contrast, Edvardsson (1988) in his CIT study examined 205 critical incidents from 15 companies in the engineering industry. The focus was on problems in meeting customers’ demands in selling situations, seen from the companies’ point of view. The incidents were collected by means of a semi-structured interview guide and data was analysed in an inductive way, according to constant comparative principles. However, the results are presented by categories on a high level of abstraction, without making the interactive context of selling situations explicit.

Olsen (1992) studied 272 unfavourable critical incidents in about 300 semi-structured personal interviews with private bank customers. The interviews were all conducted by him and the focus of the interviews was on customers’ perception of unpleasant encounters in their contacts with the
bank. Olson’s centre of attention was on episodes as a part of the service process, which paints a dynamic picture compared to the static one given by the other CIT studies described above. His analysis is based on several critical moments as part of a critical incident, triggers and the outcome of the process for customers, compared to the focus on one critical moment in the other CIT studies. Other CIT studies focusing on the process are, for example, Stauss and Weinlich (1996), who developed the sequential incident technique (will be discussed later in this chapter). Their study follows a predetermined customer process while taking critical and non-critical incidents into account (will be discussed in detail later).

The CIT studies discussed above could be summarised as follows. Incidents collected seem to be very brief and were most often restricted to one specific activity. The focus of the studies is most often on interpersonal relationships during service delivery or on specific service quality aspects. Often students are used to conduct a large number of interviews, which could be criticised as a lack of closeness to the data, from the researchers’ point of view. The studies applied quantitative analysis by using categories that were predetermined or emerged from the data. The content of the incidents was treated as mere detail and not considered in context or in relation to customers’ subjective feelings. The characteristics of the CIT studies discussed indicate that they were influenced by the dominant principles of research at that time. Moreover, the physical service environment is not considered in the CIT studies discussed, and according to Gremler (2004) seldom studied in CIT studies in general. Furthermore, the application of content analysis has divided the content of interviewees’ narratives into some specific details, but the details were not related to the complete customer stories. In so doing, only one specific detail was described, but not the interplay around this detail. In contrast, Olsen (1992) and Stauss and Weinlich (1996) adapted CIT to include process aspects and the context of critical incidents. Given these characteristics of the CIT studies discussed above, the CIT technique has been adapted and developed to fit the aim of the present thesis. This will be discussed next.

The use of critical incident technique in this thesis
The overall aim of the thesis is to extend and deepen the understanding of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The context selected is the restaurant context. In this thesis the term driver is refers to the mechanisms that evoke customer service experiences including customers’ favourable or unfavourable feelings, activities and thoughts. There are different drivers such as the core service, social interactions or
the physical environment and customer service experiences could be both favourable and unfavourable. The aim of the thesis refers to a broad understanding of drivers based on experiences from different types of restaurants and from persons with different backgrounds and origin.

The goal of applying CIT in this thesis has been to collect critical incidents which allow for examination of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences, in detail and in a holistic way by focusing on interactions, processes and activities. Personal interviews were used to collect short stories by applying CIT. It should be mentioned here, that CIT as it is applied in this thesis does not allow one to collect “normal” experiences, lying within the zone of tolerance (Oliver, 1996). Observations, which are described as a method to collect data in CIT studies (Flanagan, 1954) were not chosen in this thesis. Next, information about the interviewees and the interviews will be described.

The interviewees and the interviews
The present thesis includes 195 short narratives (123 favourable and 72 unfavourable) of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants, collected through personal interviews applied in CIT. Critical incidents were treated as narratives and the meaning, context and understanding of the customer experience was in focus. The focus was on what happened, the circumstances and what the interviewees remembered, seen from their point of view and told in their own words. All interviews were conducted by me. The interviews provided a good opportunity to get direct access to individuals’ personal experiences.

In total 206 persons were asked to participate and 65 of them did not want to join the study; thus 141 interviews were conducted. Among these 19 were unusable, because the interviewee was not able to remember an experience or because the narrative was incomplete. Thus 122 interviews were included in the analysis. Among the interviewees, approximately 90 per cent were aged 31 or older and approximately 10 per cent were aged between 18 and 30 years. About half of the persons interviewed eat out more than twice a week and the rest eat out about twice a month, with only a few eating out less than twice a month. Half of the interviewees were women and half were men. Inclusion criteria for incidents were that 1) The interviewee should be part of the story told; it should not be a third person perspective. 2) The incidents should be very favourable or unfavourable. Evaluation was presented from the point of view of the interviewee and this was accepted. 3) The incident should be a discrete, remembered episode that the interviewee
can describe. 4) Each description should have sufficient details to be fully understood. 5) The incident should have occurred in restaurants in Sweden.

The interview - Before each formal interview was started, the interviewees were introduced briefly to the research project and asked whether they wanted to participate in the study. The goal was to create an interview situation that ensured that the interviewees felt confident to share their earlier restaurant experience with me. The interviewees were also told that the interview would be recorded and that the information will be treated as confidential. After agreeing to participate they were asked the questions of Step I as described in Table 2. The interviewees were free to describe their own experiences. No criteria for restaurants were given, as the goal was to obtain a broad picture of restaurant experiences from different kinds of restaurants and from different geographical regions. The consecutive questions were organised as described in Table 2, which follows the recommendations of Stauss (1993, p 412). Follow up questions were asked when it was considered necessary and when the situation allowed it. Probing questions were used when I wanted to get more details about facts provided by the interviewees. Finally, the interviewees were asked for some background details and whether they wanted to add anything else. The interviews were recorded.

Table 2: The different steps of asking and the questions asked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions Step 1</th>
<th>Think of 2-3 occasions when you have been at a restaurant in Sweden in the last 2 years (or, if earlier, then the interviewees were asked to tell when the incident occurred), where you experienced your restaurant visit very favourably or very unfavourably.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions Step 2</td>
<td>Could you describe in detail the situation and what happened during the restaurant visit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up questions</td>
<td>What exactly made you feel the situation was favourable or unfavourable, how did the experience influence you, how did the employees handle the situation and how did you experience the physical environment and the atmosphere?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The narratives differed in both length and content detail. Reasons for these differences are that not all of the interviewees were able to tell very detailed and verbose stories, and some of them kept their account very short. These individual differences were difficult to influence by questions, and thus accepted. The interviews were conducted at three different real life restaurant environments. As the interviewees were at these places – hotel lobbies and airport restaurants – for normal, everyday reasons, they felt confident
and relaxed. In addition, these environments helped the interviewees to begin telling their stories.

From an interviewer point of view it was no problem to get in contact with the interviewees. Most of the times it was possible to sit down with the interviewee at a table, put the recorder on the table and make some notes while interviewing. The time available for interviews was quite restricted, as it was dictated by the interviewees’ schedule; however, the interviewees were willing to tell their stories.

Interviews in this thesis are regarded as being semi-structured, as determined in a particular way by the researcher, to facilitate the answering of the questions addressed. The material obtained should always be treated as an “activity occurring in a certain situation” (Alasuutari, 1995, p 94). In other words “the interview data gathered are the result of an interview situation, not just a statement from that particular interview” (ibid). The stories told in the interviews are not regarded as facts, but as the interviewees’ construction of the incident which in some way made a difference for them, and which they remembered and recalled in the interview situation. As Czarniawska (2004) states, they are “locally negotiated and ... valid only for a given place and time” (p. 12).

Next the process of data analysis will be described.

**Data analysis**

In data analysis researchers process and organise data in order to extract meaning, draw conclusions and generate contributions (Spiggle, 1994). The goal of the data analysis in this study was to find out how interviewees imagine and construct drivers of favourable and unfavourable service experiences from restaurants. In order to get an overview of the data the first step of analysis was to get a broad picture of the facets of customers’ service experiences at restaurants. This step of data analysis resulted in identification of the main categories of a customer service experience at restaurants as described in Paper 2 (Table III).

In effect, data analysis had already begun when I conducted the interviews and continued when the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. While interviewing and listening to the stories it became obvious to me that different resources are important for customer service experiences, and especially that social interactions seemed to play an important role; however, at that point of time I could not point out what it was exactly that made them so important. Analysis was conducted according to constant comparative principles (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The constructs found in the texts were thus the basis for data analysis, not my
own predefined categories. These constructs were then in a process of constant comparison, being compared with each other forwards and backwards and adjusted when needed until a stable pattern appeared.

First, a preliminary coding frame was extracted from the first eight interviews. These eight interviews were not fully coded until all others had been done, as a check on the preliminary coding frame. The content of the texts was read several times and text passages concerning the same area/aspects were marked with the same colour, reread and compared. The passages with different colours were then given a preliminary name or several names when it was deemed necessary. Both preliminary main categories and substantive codes were used in this phase; this was, so to say, the first step of organising data. The preliminary main categories referring to the different facets named in the texts were context and situation, atmosphere, social interaction, physical restaurant environment, the guest him/herself, the core product of the restaurant, price level, the restaurant itself.

Then the remaining texts were read, compared to the basic coding frame and thereafter coded, which lead to a preliminary structure for every main category and substantive codes, kept close to the texts (Glaser, 1978). In between those two code levels more interpretive codes were gradually developed (Miles and Huberman, 2007). Gradually the coding frame was confirmed while the type of coding changed from open to selective coding (Glaser, 1978, p 61). Text segments were related to several codes when considered necessary, and the same code could be applied several times in one narrative. The codes were revised four times and all codes and text segments were compared, grouped, with some of them being changed and regrouped. During these revisions subcategories were refined which gave structure to the substantive codes. In total there are three code levels, namely substantive, interpretive codes (henceforth called subcategories) and main categories. After this procedure the main and subcategories of customer service experiences at restaurants emerged.

Parallel with this procedure the process of a customer restaurant experience as told in the narratives was mapped out. The narratives were reread and the main categories were related to the different stages. The narratives are different in detail and each may not refer to all stages. The frequencies for every category and stage were arranged in a frequency table for both favourable and unfavourable experiences. The results of this part of the analysis reveal the main categories involved in the different stages, as remembered by the interviewees.

In the second step of analysis, the drivers of customers’ service experiences were analysed in each narrative. The drivers were described by the
interviewees and followed up by probing. The main and subcategories from step one analysis were used. There could be one or several drivers involved in a narrative. Two examples of drivers are illustrated in the following extracts. In the first extract the driver refers to the main categories, the core service and the atmosphere while in the second extract it is the core service.

- ... it was extraordinary food with a lot of fantastic tastes, and then there was the atmosphere, it was so beautiful - the whole archipelago and the environment around the restaurant, it is so calm and peaceful... I can get high on taste there... (A14)

- could you summarise what made you feel so favourable? It was nice food, it was a lot of food.... (A7)

Between one and three drivers (sub categories referring to certain text segments), relating to the text in every single narrative were registered in a separate file for drivers. The drivers were valued equally. Frequencies were then counted, as an aid to further structuring the result. Finally the main and subcategories for frequent and less frequent drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants emerged. The driver categories emerged as a subset of the main categories of a customer service experience.

Two of the frequent drivers, in their turn, were further analysed in depth in Papers III and IV. In these papers the process was presented and the drivers for every main category were described in detail. In addition, the meaning the drivers have for restaurant customers was interpreted within the conceptual framework presented in the previous chapter. The presentation of the results was illustrated by extracts from the interviews. The coding procedure was supported by the qualitative data analysis software Maxqda. All texts were imported into the data system and all coding was processed in the system. All data is systemised and stored in the system. The process of the CIT study and data analysis is illustrated in Figure 2.
Evaluation of the thesis

In this section of the thesis some reflections on the methods applied in this thesis will be presented. Thereafter the credibility of the thesis will be discussed.

Reflections on the methods applied

The thesis is built on two separate empirical studies resulting in Papers I-IV. In Paper I two questionnaires were used. Questionnaire 1 was developed for the purpose of describing the phone encounter procedure. Questionnaire 2 was developed and tested by Andaleeb and Conway (2006) and considered to be suitable for the purpose of describing the dining experience satisfaction. The results of this study gave some interesting indications about how restaurants treat reservation phone calls and customers’ ratings of phone call encounters and dining experiences satisfaction and also the relations between these two. However the results mainly paint a static picture of a phone encounter experience. Therefore, in order to extend the understanding of customer service experiences, another approach of study-
ing customers’ service experiences was required. Therefore CIT combined
with an interpretive approach was applied in the subsequent papers.

The results of the CIT study (Paper II-IV) are rich and give a nuanced and dynamic picture of drivers of customer service experience compared to the static description of factors and relationships in Paper I. Compared to earlier CIT studies, the results of the present thesis paint a more dynamic picture of customer service experiences, by describing drivers, the service process, activities and interactions. The choice of method and, in particular, how it is applied in this thesis was influenced by the purpose of the thesis, the discussions of how CIT was applied in previous studies, and by viewing customer service experiences as not separated from customers’ reality. CIT was applied by using an interpretive approach, which also was recommended by Gremler (2004). Understanding and interpretation of the results were facilitated by the conceptual framework.

The results represent “extreme” incidents and do not include ‘normal’ ones. That means the results include incidents that made a difference for customers, which they remembered and eventually recounted at the interview. What is extreme (favourable or unfavourable) for one customer could be neutral for another. For example, as the present study shows, large food portions are appreciated by some individuals, but also experienced as very unfavourable by others; for another individual it could be normal. In other cases large portions could be a reason for visiting a specific restaurant. One way of obtaining data on normal incidents could have been to carry out observations at restaurants. Observations could also support the picture of interactions, activities and processes. However, this method was not chosen. The criticality of the incidents as stated by the interviewees was accepted, and not examined further. Examining the criticality further would have been more important had critical incidents over time been studied in the context of one company and its customers.

As the focus of this thesis was on drivers of customer service experiences and the service process, it is perhaps useful to discuss alternative methodology that might have been utilised. Stauss and Weinlich (1996) recommend the Sequential Incident Technique (SIT) as a method which takes the process into account and also records common incidents. This is a modification of the CIT. After a pre-survey to ensure the customer path (different steps of the process), the incidents are collected during the steps of the service process while customers are on site. This method of studying critical incidents examines a few predetermined phases of the service process and is very closely related to one company. The focus is on single incidents in different stages of the process, rather than on interactions and activities, meaning that only parts of the customer service experience are considered.
Thus the use of this approach gives a narrow picture of the phases chosen and only for customers of one company. In addition the researcher has to be present at the same time as the customers are present, to conduct the interviews. This is a time consuming procedure and difficult to match with restaurant services as customers often make late, perhaps spur of the moment decisions about going to a particular restaurant.

Thus the SIT was considered not to be a suitable method for the present thesis, as the goal was to describe a broad picture of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences at restaurants seen from the customer point of view. The purpose of the study was not to focus on one or a few companies or one or a few parts of the service process.

We could have applied unstructured, more open-ended interviews to gather data. However, to conduct longer interviews with a large number of individuals, without giving them some advance notification would have been difficult to organise, especially in the restaurant context. Perhaps then choosing groups of people could have been a possibility, in line with Hansen et al. (2005), either in focus group interviews or in individual interviews. However, in that option, the choice of interviewees would have been less random compared to the choice made in this thesis. Interviewees were chosen purposively among numerous individuals from all over Sweden, who happened to be available at the time and place of interview. The places for interview were two hotels and a number of airport restaurant facilities. The places of restaurants named in the interviews are different from the places of interview. The choice of interviewees and their background was described in detail.

Interviewees’ background could influence how believable the stories told are. In the CIT study half of the interviewees eat out more than two times a week, half of them eat out about twice a month. Thus they are accustomed to eating at restaurants and their stories were convincing for me. Information and facts about individual restaurants was kept confidential. The background of the interviewees is varied and age and gender are well distributed. The empirical data in this thesis represents all types of restaurants, from all over Sweden, giving a broad picture of customers’ service experiences at restaurants. By contrast, Hansen et al.’s (2005) choice of persons was more homogenous. Their respondents had more than average experience of eating out and came from two major cities and a number of companies and their focus was on meal experiences from à la carte restaurants.

Overall, CIT as a research method worked well in collecting short narratives about customers’ earlier service experiences at restaurants.
Credibility of the thesis
Silverman (2006) describes a number of criteria for the evaluation of qualitative studies. Principally, the evaluation of a study can be supported by making the research process transparent for the audience. This could be done by describing the theoretical starting points leading to the identification of the research gap and influencing the choice of method as well as describing theories which support analysis and interpretation of the data. Research discussing the development of CIT as a qualitative research method and its credibility (Gremler, 2004, Butterfield et al., 2005, Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000) has been of valuable help when the CIT study in this thesis was planned and conducted. In line with Silverman (2006) the criteria reliability and validity will be used to discuss credibility. Moreover the transferability (Leininger, 1994) and pragmatic use (Riessman, 1993) of the findings will be discussed.

Reliability in qualitative studies refers according to Silverman (2006) to the degree to which the findings of a study are biased by the method applied and the researcher. It is important that every interviewee understands the question in the same way and that data analysis and coding is confirmed by additional judges. Silverman recommends additionally that the data analysed is as close as possible to the interviewees’ original narrative, and not coloured with the researchers’ personal descriptions of the data, which he describes as low-inference descriptors. Moreover, he recommends the presentation of extracts from the interviews.

In this thesis the goal was to keep the research process and strategy transparent, helping the audience to evaluate the work of this thesis. Previous research was discussed and the research gap was described. The connection to an existing body of theory has been presented. The choice of method was discussed and related to the research gap and the research questions. The application of the CIT in earlier studies was described and discussed. The selection of the interviewees, places of interview, number of interviews, kind of data collection and data analysis applied are discussed and described. The interview procedure was planned and conducted systematically making the data collection a reliable process. The interviews and questionnaires were discussed in different groups and pre-tested. All of the empirical work and all interviews were conducted by me and field notes were made continuously. The interview process was stopped at the point where patterns told in the interviews were already familiar (Alasuutari, 1995).

All interviewees were first introduced to the background of the interview and participation was voluntary. The questions asked were standardised.
Data collection was kept systematic; all interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim by myself, and are stored on my PC both as text files and as audio files. The text files from the CIT study are systemised in the qualitative data analysis software Maxqda. Data analysis is discussed and references are made. Consistent use of the categories was assessed by involving two additional judges and agreement between the judges was consistent. Different views between the judges were discussed until agreement was reached. Extracts from the narratives were used to illustrate the results. The extracts were kept close to what was said in the interviews, within translation limits.

In the phone encounter study the participants were instructed personally on how to use the questionnaires and all follow-up contacts were made by me. The results from the questionnaires are stored as a SPSS dataset. All practical work with the study and all data transfer from questionnaires to SPSS and data analysis were carried out by me. The returned questionnaires are stored in traditional files.

*Validity* refers to whether the inferences made in any study are well founded. As described in Silverman (2006) when applying qualitative data “the issue of the warrant for their inferences must be confronted”. This thesis is built on two empirical studies.

In the phone encounter study the questions asked and the results referring to these could be discussed. Questionnaire I gives a good description of this procedure, the answers are consistent between different restaurants and participants and thus considered to be valid. The results from Questionnaire II differ from the results in the original paper (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) with reference to the significance of the factors. These differences have been discussed. Nevertheless, the results are considered to give a valid description of the topic. Combination of the two points of measurement was assessed by the same person in every observation and both observational data and satisfaction scores were combined.

In the CIT study constant comparative principles were applied in data analysis. The coding procedure helped to develop the results gradually from initially including small entities until the whole dataset was included, i.e. until all narratives were coded and fitted the model. The gradual process also included several revisions of all coded sections at different points of time, until all data fitted the model of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customers’ service experiences at restaurants. Frequencies were used to further structure the results. Finally the results, including eight main categories, were presented in a comprehensive table (see Table III, Paper II). The presentation of the results was illustrated by means of ex-
tracts from the narratives. The results were further interpreted by analysing the drivers in their context and their interplay as described in the narratives.

Transferability refers to which extent findings could be transferred to other similar contexts. This criterion focuses on to what extent the general findings and thus the knowledge gained, can be used in other contexts or situations, with similar character and still maintain the meanings, interpretations and conclusions drawn (Leininger, 1994). The results of this thesis are mainly based on interview data, collected as short narratives which are accounts of customers’ subjective experiences from restaurants. However, as they are constructed by every interviewee, generalisation does not make sense. Important questions to ask are instead: 1) Do the results make sense and do they make sense in other contexts and 2) Are the results useful for other researchers and for practitioners.

The goal with this thesis has been to give readers, other researchers and also practitioners, enough information to decide whether the results make sense and are applicable in their own context. The procedure of the whole thesis, the theoretical basis, the method applied and the analytic procedure have been described in detail. The results are discussed and compared with earlier empirical studies, with theoretical concepts and earlier knowledge. The results provide the grounds for further explanations of earlier knowledge and thus contribute in different ways. Furthermore, the results have been illustrated by extracts in order to give readers a picture of what drives customers’ service experiences at restaurants as told by the interviewees. If one reads weekly industry journals there are articles published regularly about what is important for restaurants or for customers. It is obvious in these articles that employees’ knowledge and skills and how employees take care of customers play a main role for customers’ service experiences at restaurants, irrespective of whether for example the restaurant offers the customers excellent quality of the core service. The descriptions and discussions of the frequent and less frequent favourable and unfavourable drivers offer a basis for understanding how to avoid unfavourable and how to create favourable customer service experiences. The results are discussed by relating them to theoretical discussions and to managerial issues.
Discussion and contributions

In this chapter I will first summarise, discuss and partly develop the main results from the appended Papers. Thereafter empirical and theoretical contributions of this thesis will be discussed. This will be followed by a presentation of potential managerial implications together with suggestions for further research.

Discussion

In this section, after a short summary of the results from the papers, I will develop a discussion of the results. I will start with a description of the frequent and less frequent drivers. These are summarised in Table 3. Thereafter each of the frequent drivers will be discussed separately, with reference to earlier research and to unfavourable and favourable experiences. In Figure 3 the differences between favourable and unfavourable drivers are illustrated, showing that there are different categories of favourable and unfavourable drivers. These differences will be discussed. Finally the discussion will be extended to include those aspects of service research which have previously not been paid much attention to because service has mainly been viewed as a type of offering. Value was regarded to be inherent in product or service offerings and thus controlled by the service firm. In contrast, I will discuss drivers, interactions, processes and activities and how they contribute to co-creating activities between actors and form customer service experiences.

The phone encounter experience

The results from Paper I describe customers’ experience of phone encounters with restaurant employees when making a table reservation and their total satisfaction with the dining experience compared to customers’ perception of the phone encounter experience. The results, described from a customer point of view, show that phone encounters are treated like a reservation order for some kind of product. Customers are regarded as passive consumers, even though they make an active choice to call, and employees act as order takers, which is consistent with goods dominant principles (Grönroos, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The facts asked for (date, time, number of persons and phone number) by all types of restaurants refer mainly to the number of customers as the important variable useful for planning functional aspects, such as size of table, amount of food and number of employees necessary. However information about customers’
particular individual needs, which could help to direct their restaurant experience in a favourable direction, does not seem important at that point of time. Regarding the results referring to the dining satisfaction, the significant factors found are food quality, service and the physical environment. These are consistent with the categories of the frequent drivers found in the CIT study, presented in Paper II. Typically, customers move from a less positive rating of the pre-consumption experience to a more positive rating of the consumption experience. This would indicate that when customers are present at the restaurant there is considerable potential to influence them in a positive way. Kimes (2009) in her study found that while customers may use on-line reservations for convenience, they also state that phone reservations give the interaction a more personal touch and are therefore also used by them. Hansen et al. (2004) described the characteristics of payment routines as a part of the meal, occurring at the end of the stay at a restaurant. The present thesis, Kimes (2009) and Hansen et al. (2004) explain the importance of phone and payment routines, which are described as organisational routines (see Paper I) having an influence on the interactive part of services.

However, the results of the present study indicate that restaurant companies of all types treat a table reservation like an order of a product, without showing any apparent interest in the customer as a person.

Drivers of customers’ service experiences
The results reported in Papers II-IV examine drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants. In Paper II, eight main categories of customer service experiences at restaurants and the main categories of drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences at restaurants are presented. The main categories of the frequent drivers are social interaction, the core service and the physical environment. The main categories for the less frequent drivers are the restaurant, the price and payment procedure, the atmosphere, the guest and the occasion. Every driver includes a number of subcategories. Paper II presents both a total picture of the resources available while customers are present at restaurants as described in the narratives, and a description of the drivers of favourable and unfavourable service experiences. The latter are treated as a subset of the resources. The narrative from the lunch at Arvid’s restaurant, presented at the beginning of the thesis, illustrates this: There are customers, the waiter, the physical environment and the food and beverages served. However, the driver of this experience was the social interaction between the actors. Both of them, drivers and value proposi-
tions were labelled with the same terms and presented together with frequencies. The labels used for the drivers have been adjusted in order to give a more adequate description of a driver, indicating that some action is carried out or something happens to the customer, as it was told in the narratives. For example employee behaviour alone does not explain what employee behaviour does to customers, the driver is therefore labelled employees are attentive, which expresses a helpful action towards individual customers. These adjustments are a consequence of the learning process, which continued throughout the whole thesis project. In general the drivers were described by thoughts (I thought that I had chosen the wrong restaurant), feelings (it was so wonderful; you are disappointed) and behaviour (customers leave the restaurant because employees try to give orders to them or because of poor food hygiene). In any one narrative there could be several drivers described.

The main driver social interaction is divided into two subcategories, namely customer-employee interactions and customer-customer interactions. These in their turn encompass a number of subcategories. The subcategory the walk before or after the stay referring to the physical environment outside the restaurant was reconsidered to better fit the subcategory actors and tangible elements of the interior/exterior facilitate meaning. Table 3 illustrates the frequent drivers’ main and subcategories, their definition and, in brackets, the respective label used in Paper II (see Table III, p. 246 in Paper II) together with their frequency of occurrence.

Social interaction is the most frequent driver, followed by the core service and the physical environment. In total, the physical environment shows the lowest frequency, but received the highest proportion of favourable ratings among the drivers. The frequent and less frequent drivers will be discussed in the following sections; with the frequent drivers in the centre of attention. First the drivers will be presented in Table 3.
Table 3: Main and subcategories of the frequent drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main category</th>
<th>Fa-</th>
<th>Unfa-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcategory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social interaction (n=141)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The customers’ experiences that refer to different types of human interaction, especially with employees but also with other customers</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer-employee interaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employees are attentive, frontline employees’ behaviour of helping customers with their individual needs (Employee behaviour)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employees show their knowledge and skills, frontline employees use of knowledge and skills of their craftsmanship and of courtesy (Knowledge and skills)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interactions with employees are involving, customers’ feelings of involvement because of interactions with frontline employees (Involvement referring to frontline employees)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employees are listening to and solving complaints, employees solve complaint and recovery situations (Complaint and recovery)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer-customer interaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Customers invite other customers’ hospitable behaviour, customers’ behaviour making other customers act towards them (Customer-customer interaction)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The core service (n=127)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The customers’ experiences referring to food and beverages</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The presentation of the core service is visual appealing, the visual presentation of the food served is attractive (Visual presentation)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The nature of the core service is enjoyable, the unusual product characteristics of the core service cause pleasurable feelings (Experience of F&amp;B quality)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Timing of food and beverages feels appropriate, the customers’ perception of time while eating, both referring to waiting time and time-coordination of meals served (Time)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Menu presentation attracts attention, the content of the menu and the way the menu is presented for customer makes them feel interested (Menu aspects)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene provokes powerful reaction, customers’ reaction to hygiene and cleanliness aspects of the food service (Defective hygiene)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The physical environment (n=35)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The customers’ experiences that refer to different parts of the physical environment of the restaurant, including the exterior and people</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Actors and tangible elements of the interior/exterior facilitate meaning, actors and tangible elements of the physical environment, both inside and outside the restaurant attract customers attention and support how they create meaning (The interior/exterior)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intangible elements maintain comfort, sensory elements of the physical environment making customers feel at ease (Positive/negative perception of the physical environment)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Placement of customers is crossing boundaries, how customer perceive their placement in the physical environment in relation to other customers’ placement (Placement of guests)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*including their definitions and frequency of occurrence for favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences
Social interaction
This driver refers to social interactions occurring between customer and employees and between customers. Customer-employee interactions refer to interactions where the company (indirectly) is able to influence the interactions through employees; customer-customer interactions refer to more or less spontaneously occurring interactions between customers who (most often) don’t know each other and are thus not controlled by the restaurant firm. Social interactions in this thesis are regarded in their context, which means also in interaction with other drivers or resources. As such they are thus a part of the resource constellation.

It is not new to note that social interactions are an important ingredient of service. In previous research about service quality or customer satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1985, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) social interactions are included in categories, describing the characteristics of service quality. However, the characteristics do not show what social interactions do to customers; they only show customers’ ratings of the characteristics. Rather they represent a third person’s perspective (the researcher’s) (Schembri, 2006). Thus the customers’ own views are not represented. Also earlier CIT studies (for example Bitner et al., 1990) (see also the discussion of CIT studies in the previous chapter) focusing on service encounters give a somewhat restricted view of customer-employee interactions, which are often described as single events without being related to their context and the service process. Arnould and Price (1993) examine social interactions in extraordinary experiences. This experience type is characterised by being extended in time, very intense and able to provoke redefinitions of the self. Such experiences are not comparable to ordinary restaurant experiences occurring in customers’ everyday life. Of course there could be some exceptions (for example visiting a restaurant with the highest ranking in the Michelin Guide), but these are few and unusual. Andersson and Mossberg’s study (2004) examine different attributes of a dining experience, showing the importance of social interactions for customers, expressed in terms of willingness to pay. They show that customers are willing to pay for social aspects in dining situations, compared to other aspects, whereas in lunch situations it is the core service they are willing to pay for. Hansen et al. (2005), in their empirical study, describe social interactions as one of five dimensions. Their categories are partly comparable to those found in the present thesis; however their descriptions refer mainly to characteristics of social interactions and only in some cases to interactions. Moreover, Hansen et al. (2005) do not distinguish between the importance of the dimensions or between favourable and unfavourable meal experiences.
In summary, in earlier research studies in culinary arts and in service research, social interactions have been continuously examined. However, when it comes to the active role that customers play in social interactions, including activities and processes, the picture given in service research is somewhat inconsistent. In part, this is because the definition of the concept service has turned the focus onto examining social interactions as one factor or dimension linked to a service offering. The service offering in its turn has been treated as a product with some inherent value created by the service firm. Consequently customers’ active role as co-creators of value, in social interactions, could not be viewed. Moreover, in the earlier literature social interactions are most often not related to the context or situation, thus making interactions and activities invisible and the descriptions static. Hansen et al.’s (2005) study in culinary arts, shows the same pattern, even though interactions are noticeable to some extent in their presentation of the results. However they present their results aspect by aspect whereas the dynamic nature of restaurant experiences receives little attention. Other reasons for the static approach in research studies include the view of reality as being separated from the individual, the conceptual or theoretical frameworks and the methods applied; and the analytical approach. These reasons are not independent of each other; they rather influence each other and are an expression of research practice at the time research is conducted.

In the present thesis social interactions are examined in the specific customer situation by referring to the service process and context. The narratives show that social interactions involve customers actively and that there are also other drivers and resources involved in these interactions. For example, while having a dialogue with customers a waiter might describe the menu and recommend combinations of food and beverages to the customers. This dialogue between customers and employees makes employees’ knowledge and skills available for customers, and at the same time social interactions link together the core service (for example the content of the menu and combinations of food and beverages) with customers. However it is also important whether employees are attentive or not, which is visible in the narratives and illustrated in Table 3.

Employees’ knowledge and skills together with attentive employees help customers to enjoy their meal and their stay at the restaurant; customers are given a catalyst for discussions with each other while they eat and taste the recommended combinations. Customers’ knowledge and skills help customers to use all the information given by the waiter, for example in discussions with other customers or when back at home. However, employees’ presentations of the menu and food and beverages could also be
perceived as a kind of lecture that feels contrived, especially when the customer gets the feeling that the waiter is not part of the ordinary staff. In a case such as this, presentations of food could be perceived as “unauthentic and learnt by heart” which could turn the experience in an unfavourable direction. Moreover, social interaction could be influenced by drivers of the physical environment. For example, the music played could be too loud to have a conversation at the table, or the next table could feel to be too close, which does not facilitate customers’ personal conversations.

Thus social interactions not only involve actors and their attentiveness, but also actors’ knowledge and skills (operand resources) and other operand resources such as the core service and the physical environment. Therefore social interactions could be regarded as a link between these resources, where actors’ knowledge and skills used in dialogues play a crucial role as discussed by Ballantyne and Varey (2006). The dialogues are value-creating activities, where actors’ operand resources and available operand resources are integrated in collaboration between actors. This linking function also explains (at least partly) the high frequency of social interactions found in this thesis. In addition, social interactions are affected (disturbed or facilitated) by the operand resources (the core service and the physical environment). Finally, the value created in these interactions also has an individual meaning for every customer, because of the fact that customers’ preferences are personal (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006, Holbrook, 2006).

The meaning these value-creating interactions have for customers is developed in Paper IV with reference to social interactions and in Paper III referring to the physical environment. It is apparent in the results that customers going out to a restaurant want to have a favourable experience, and they act towards this goal, for example by making a table reservation by phone or even personally at the restaurant. Customers’ reactions are expressed as feelings, behaviour and thoughts (illustrated in the narratives presented in the Papers II-IV). When everything develops as intended, customers tend to feel like guests (or as treated hospitably as defined by Lashley (2000)). Acting as a guest is one of the main roles played by customers, in favourable experiences. When an experience turns unfavourable guests try to defend their goal of a favourable experience, but change to playing the role of a customer. Then they demand value for money, or whatever they expected but did not get. The role of the customer is closely connected to the underlying business relation between the customer and the restaurant firm.

In summary, the main roles played by the actors involved in dialogues, customer and employee interaction and activities (as responses) became apparent. So, what happens in social interactions, and all activities, are the
basis for customer service experiences. Customer service experiences in their turn are co-created in dialogue between customers and employees, where both parts are actively involved and other resources are linked together by social interactions. Finally, the meaning an experience has for a customer is individually created by every customer as described by Holbrook (2006) and customers react both through feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Next the core service as a driver will be discussed.

**The core service**

This driver is one of the frequent drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences. The narratives refer to a number of facets of the core service that unfold as drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The driver subcategories of the core service refer to the nature, presentation and the timing of the core service. Moreover, how the menu is presented and hygiene and cleanliness aspects related to the core service have been important for customers.

The quite high frequency of this driver indicates the underlying motivation for eating some food, when customers visit a restaurant. As described earlier, without the core service at restaurants there would not be a meal (Hansen et al., 2005). Most frequent are the drivers referring to the nature of the core service and timing of the core service. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the drivers with a lower frequency, both the menu presentation and hygiene and cleanliness aspects, could cause strong customer reactions.

In previous research the core service is examined and described as one factor of customer meal experiences (Hansen et al., 2005, Andersson and Mossberg, 2004). Andersson and Mossberg (2004) in their study describe the importance of food as one of five aspects of a meal experience in terms of willingness to pay. The study shows the differences between customers’ ratings of a lunch and dining experiences. The core service has importance when eating lunch, but when dining in the evening social dimensions are rated more highly. Hansen et al. (2005) describe the core service as one of five dimensions of a customer meal experience, including three characteristics of the core service, taste sensation at consumption, arrangement of food and beverages and menu composition. These are comparable to those found in the present thesis. However the importance of the subcategories is not expressed in Hansen et al.’s (2005) study. Both Andersson and Mossberg (2004) and Hansen et al. (2005) do not make a distinction between favourable and unfavourable meal experiences. In this thesis this driver was not further analysed in a separate study. Next, the physical environment will be discussed.
The physical environment
This driver is the third frequent driver of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. However, the frequency was notably lower than for social interactions and the core service. The results show that the physical environment as a driver refers most often to favourable experiences. As was the case in the narrative from Arvid’s restaurant, customers did not remember the physical environment to a great extent after the stay. Probably it did not make much difference for them. This could be one explanation for the lower frequency. Another is the linking function of social interactions, involving customers actively. In addition, everybody who goes out to a restaurant eats and drinks something, which also involves every customer actively. The physical environment in contrast, does not involve customers actively in the same way, and seems thus to play another more supportive role. However, the physical environment is still one of the frequent drivers and needs therefore be understood.

The subcategories of this driver refer to the social, tangible and intangible resources available in the physical environment and the placement of customers. The driver subcategory actors and tangible elements of the interior/exterior facilitate meaning refers to both persons and tangible elements in the physical environment, in line with Baker (1986). By contrast, Bitner (1992) did not include actors in her servicescape framework. In her model social interaction is treated as an outcome of customer interactions with the servicescape. The model, however, does not consider that actors are a necessary precondition for social interaction. Furthermore, the exterior environment included in the driver, was visible in the pre-consumption phase, before customers arrive at the restaurant, but also when they are at the restaurant and are enjoying the view. The exterior environment is not included in the servicescape (Bitner, 1992) and Baker (1986) only mentions the architecture as one factor. Similarly, the experience room framework (Edvardsson et al., 2010) does not include the exterior either.

In this thesis, the physical environment and its drivers are described in a holistic way and in detail, seen from a customer point of view. Moreover the drivers of the physical environment are related to other drivers. The holistic description deepens the understanding of the servicescape (Bitner, 1992) the experience room framework (Edvardsson et al., 2010), atmospherics (Kotler, 1973), social factors (Baker, 1986) and the FAMM (Gustafsson et al., 2006).

In earlier empirical studies in culinary arts, the physical environment was studied in different ways. Hansen et al. (2005) found that the physical environment is one important factor of a customer meal experience, which they describe by way of objects and colours. They state that the different
factors of a meal experience interact in order to create a customer experience; however interactions between the factors are not described. Other studies in culinary arts examined the influence of the type of environment and different atmospherics on customer ratings of their meal or on their behaviour (Meiselman et al., 2000, Hersleth et al., 2005, Wansink, 2004, Zemke and Shoemaker, 2007). A similar type of studies can be found in marketing. Cause and effect of the physical environment as a stimulus for customer behaviour are the focus of these studies. Customers are regarded as being reactive to the stimuli. In only a few studies found, is the physical environment examined in a holistic way and the active role of customers as creators of their meaning dealt with (for example Bonnin, 2006, Arnould and Price, 1993, Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008).

Regarding customers as active co-creators of customer value and creators of their meaning in the present thesis (c.f. Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008), helped to understand and describe the role the drivers of the physical environment play in customer service experiences as well as understanding the meaning customers create from drivers of the physical environment. Customers do something more with the drivers of the physical environment. For example, the drivers could make customers feel like being at someone’s home because of the style of furnishing and decoration, or feel unwelcome because they perceive the physical environment as being too bright. Customers, additionally draw inferences from tangible elements of the physical environment to the service experience which will follow later in time. They can draw conclusions about something they only can imagine because they never actually have experienced it, for example when a customer states that it feels just like being in Thailand without having been there. In this case, the design of the physical environment evokes multisensory images (not based on earlier real experience) (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). However, it could also be the case that the physical environment evokes feelings based on own earlier (historical) experiences such as the feeling of being at someone’s home. Thus the physical environment could elicit feelings, thoughts and behaviour, and compared to social interactions the physical environment also elicits imagination.

Besides customers’ active role when they create their meaning and value from the physical environment, the physical environment and its drivers are also continuously involved in other interactions and should therefore be regarded in relation to other resources involved in interactions, in order to be understood. One example is the disturbing effect the background noise level could have on customers’ conversation, disturbing social interactions or making them impossible. Also the furnishings, especially the
placement of furniture could facilitate or hinder interactions between actors, just as it was described in the “inline” lunch experience at the beginning of the thesis. Here, the placement of customers was inappropriate for having a conversation, which led to the customers adapting the position of their chairs. This makes the linking function of social interactions visible.

The less frequent drivers

Among the less frequent drivers the guest, referring to the customers’ own or other actors’ earlier experiences, memories and expectations relates to the relativistic character of a customer experience in the sense of Holbrook (2006). This driver describes the customer as someone who is not a “blank sheet” before arriving. Furthermore, customers have a motive when they visit a restaurant; and they want to have a favourable experience. The atmosphere as described in the narratives is a synthesis of different influences from the restaurant environment. In earlier research atmosphere is treated in different ways; for example as almost identical with the physical environment (Edwards and Gustafsson, 2008) or as the result of customer-environment interactions (Heide and Grønhaug, 2006) or atmospherics as a special type of sensory stimulus of the physical environment (Kotler, 1973). Gustafsson (2004) describes the atmosphere of a restaurant as the entirety of a meal experience which is the product of tangible and intangible factors. In her description atmosphere is presented as something more or less controlled by the restaurant company. In the present thesis, atmosphere as a driver is described as the synthesis of what happened around the customer. Elements of the physical environment, people and the situation at hand are all included. These findings, presented in Paper II, indicate that atmosphere is part of the value customers create and thus refers to the customer experience rather than being one of the preconditions of a customer service experience. The price and payment procedure emerged as a driver and are thus important for customer service experiences as is also discussed by Hansen (2004). In the following discussions the frequent drivers will be in focus. Next a categorisation of favourable and unfavourable drivers will be discussed.

Drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences

The content of Table 3 is illustrated in Figure 3. The figure shows that there are two-sided drivers with a high and low frequency in both favourable and unfavourable directions. On the other hand, there are one-sided drivers with frequencies only in one direction, either favourable or unfavourable.
Figure 3: One-sided and two-sided drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences

Figure 3 shows that the driver employees are attentive and the nature of the core service is enjoyable are two-sided drivers with a high frequency in both directions. The rest of the drivers show either a higher frequency in one direction or a lower frequency in one direction only. The driver the nature of the core service is enjoyable is a two-sided driver, with a higher frequency in a favourable direction. The narratives illustrate that customers’ experience of the same character of the core service could depend very much on the context. For example large meal portions are described in a favourable way by male conference guests, but are described as very distasteful by female customers during an dinner. In contrast, the portions served during a luxury fine dining evening dinner (in a business context) were described, by a male customer, as being extremely small and very expensive together with the unsatisfying service received in total at that restaurant. At another restaurant it is common practice to eat extra large portions of shrimp sandwiches, which is experienced as favourable and as a motive for visiting this restaurant. Thus the same characteristic of the core service, large portions for example, could be experienced in very different ways dependent upon the situation, customers’ background, type of restaurant and occasion.

The driver employees show their knowledge and skills is only mentioned in favourable experiences, which indicates that employees’ knowledge and
skills are only driving experiences in a favourable context. In an unfavourable context we could assume that employees don’t make use of their knowledge and skills or use them only to a certain extent. Alternatively it could be assumed that they are not skilled at all. It could also be the case that another driver is more dominant and knowledge and skills don’t play an important role and are therefore not memorised.

Another one-sided favourable driver of social interactions is *interactions with employees are involving*, indicating that customers feel involved through interactions with employees, for example when they meet the chef who helps them to combine their meal choices during face-to-face interactions. A one-sided favourable driver referring to the core service is *the presentation of the core service is visually appealing*, indicating that when food arrangements do not look too bad and still taste well, they are accepted by customers. However, in this case they are not remembered as a driver at all.

An unfavourable one-sided driver of the core service is *Hygiene provokes powerful reaction*, meaning that superior food hygiene does not make an explicit impression on customers; however it is a basic precondition for running a restaurant company. When defective hygiene is visible to customers, on the other hand, customers’ reactions are very strong; often they leave the restaurant immediately. Unfavourable one-sided drivers of the physical environment are *placement of customers is crossing boundaries* and *intangible elements maintain comfort*. We could assume that a good seating placement in the eyes of the customer and an improved level of intangible elements will not necessarily turn a customer experience into a favourable one.

In the narratives the placement was only described as a driver in an unfavourable context. Placement of customers is discussed by Edvardsson et al. (Edvardsson et al., 2010). The same is the case for the sensory elements such as lighting or level of music, for example. They are mentioned when they disturb customers, but when they are just about right customers rarely perceive them consciously and thus don’t talk about them. This was also the case in the narrative from Arvid’s restaurant at the beginning of the thesis. Intangible elements of the physical environment are discussed by Bitner (1992) as ambient conditions, although she states that there is little empirical research describing the influence on consumer situations by ambient conditions. Some explanations for this are given by Baker et al. (2002) and Wakefield and Baker (1998) who suggest that ambient conditions such as lighting and temperature, are not noticed unless they cause unpleasant feelings. Baker et al. (2002) note that one reason for this could be that these elements tend to be processed on a more subconscious level.
The two-sided driver employees are listening and solving complaints more often drives unfavourable rather than favourable experiences. This indicates that restaurant companies still can develop how they manage such situations to turn them into favourable drivers. This is especially important because complaints are a sign from customers that there is something that is not as expected and often small details are enough to turn an unfavourable experience into a favourable one. However, when customers don’t get help with their problem at the restaurant they still have the opportunity to tell their friends about this unfavourable experience after they have left the restaurant. This opportunity was used by customers in a number of cases. It is also apparent from the narratives that complaining can be an uncomfortable experience and customers don’t like to make complaints. Instead they prefer to tell others about how bad it was.

Timing of food and beverages feels appropriate is a two-sided driver, with a dominance of unfavourable drivers, indicating that the timing when serving customers is an important issue, although when timing is appropriate it is of less importance. However, timing aspects should be regarded from the customer point of view. Both waiting for too long a time without being informed about the reason for delay and bad timing of the food and beverages served at a table tend to drive unfavourable experiences, in contrast excellent timing drives favourable experiences, although this occurs less frequently. Finally the two-sided driver actors and tangible elements of the interior/exterior facilitate meaning has been remembered predominantly in favourable cases, which makes the main category the physical environment a dominant favourable driver overall. This might be interpreted as the physical environment playing a facilitating role (Bitner, 1992) for customer service experiences.

Hansen et al. (2005) in their empirical study depicted five dimensions, which are partly comparable to the dimensions found in the present thesis. However, they do not distinguish between the importance of the dimensions and their favourable and unfavourable effect on customer restaurant experiences. Through the focus on descriptions of factors and their components their descriptions only give a hint of the interactive and dynamic character of restaurant experiences. Referring to the Servqual instrument (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and to Andaleeb and Conway (2006) who examined customer satisfaction (see also Paper I) and numerous other studies applying Servqual principles, there are no distinctions made between two-sided and one-sided factors. Instead every factor examined in these studies has two sides, a favourable and an unfavourable. This might send incorrect signals to decision makers as this method only reflects customers’ ratings of different attributes of a service experience, referring to two dimensions.
Moreover, the attributes are predetermined by a third person. Furthermore, customers’ ratings only refer to the cognitive dimension of service experiences and do not take customers’ emotional and behavioural reactions into consideration.

Johnston (1995) distinguished between satisfiers and dissatisfiers and the importance of determinants of quality in bank services. His results describe, in line with the present thesis, what satisfies and what dissatisfies customers and give thus a more nuanced picture compared to for example Servqual inspired studies, as discussed above. The determinants applied in his study illustrate the results on a quite high level of abstraction, and the terms used, relate to the language of goods dominant logic. With reference to Johnston’s (1995) study the present thesis adds content to the quite abstract determinants, through the description of drivers and the illustrations by means of extracts.

So far, frequent less frequent, favourable and unfavourable drivers have been discussed separately. However, the discussions here and the results presented in the papers also indicate that interactions between actors, with drivers and with other resources involved occur simultaneously and in a specific context. Next a discussion follows, where these different parts of interaction will be integrated.

The experience driver constellation
The experience driver constellation is defined as actors’ operation on the resources available in a certain service context, resulting in responses which in their turn lead to either favorable or unfavorable customer service experiences. Here, actors’ operation on the resources refers to the process of simultaneous interactions in a specific context where the actors involved integrate resources, co-create value and constantly evaluate and react to activities while at the same time operating on resources. Drivers, in this thesis, refer to the mechanisms that evoke customer service experiences, described as what interviewees remembered and told in their narratives. In other words, what interviewees’ descriptions of what resources (one or several of the resources available) do to them, make them react and finally make them decide whether the experience is favourable or not. For example, loud music makes customers feel that it is difficult to communicate with other customers and therefore feel supposed to leave the restaurant (react). They then decide that this experience was unfavourable despite appropriate food and beverages being served in a nicely designed restaurant, and the service received from the waiting staff being pleasant at the same time.
The *experience driver constellation* integrates the results of this thesis, and highlights the simultaneous complexity and dynamics of how customer service experiences are formed, remembered and described by customers. Frequent and less frequent drivers are described and related to favourable and unfavourable experiences, which are part of a complex and dynamic process described in different parts of this thesis. In the discussions focus was on the frequent drivers, indicating the central role of social interactions, representing a link between actors the core service and the physical environment, the latter referring to the context where co-creation takes place. Interactions have the primary aim of performing the core service in a favourable way. However, stimuli coming from the context such as unexpected events occurring, sensory stimuli from the physical environment, customer placement, the occasion as such, all of them described as drivers, could facilitate or inhibit interactions and thus turn experiences in a favourable or unfavourable direction. These stimuli are evaluated continuously, as described by Holbrook (2006), and operated on by customers in different ways.

The exterior environment before arrival often has an influence on whether customers feel welcome or not. When arriving at the restaurant, a smile and a welcome greeting from a friendly employee makes customers feel welcome and comfortable and the start of their restaurant experience is likely to become favourable. In contrast in self-service restaurants the customer-employee interactions occur a bit later, when customers make their choice of the meal in direct interactions with employees. When sitting at their table, different kinds of information given by the waiter, about the dishes on the menu and suggested wine combinations help customers to ask questions about the menu and help them to decide what to choose. Sometimes customers may also learn something new. An inspiring restaurant design and an enjoyable view support the favourable experience and the conversation among customers. When repeat customers feel that an employee has simply learnt the menu by heart, without any deeper knowledge of it, this could make them have doubts about the high class of the restaurant especially at restaurants with a high price level. In other cases customers like these “lectures” given by employees. Customers revisiting a restaurant in a completely different situation may realise that nothing is as excellent as it was the first time when their visit to the restaurant was a spontaneous choice. Also large portions of the food served could be perceived in very different ways dependent on the situation at hand, the background of the customer or the type of restaurant for example. However, it is also necessary that the customer is able to understand the information he or she receives during the dialogue with service employees, otherwise the
situation could be misunderstood and the experience might turn unfavourable. In addition information about the customer could already have been missed by employees when customers made their reservation by phone (see Paper I). This might have the consequence that the planned service, for example customer placement, does not fit customers’ specific needs; in some particular situations the customer is able to adapt the physical environment to fulfill the specific needs.

Knowledge and skills as well as motivation and employees’ attentiveness are central in these service situations together with social interactions. Knowledge and skills refer to facts about the core service but also to actors’ ability to create a dialogue with other actors, including actors’ awareness of rules of etiquette, the latter being especially important in the restaurant context. An example from another context is a physician not knowing basic medical facts, or not having sufficient empathy to create a fruitful dialogue with the patient. In both cases the customer experience is likely to be unfavourable. Especially important in the interactions described above, is the extent to which, actors are able to integrate the resources available, how well actors are able to co-create and in which way they evaluate the complex interplay between actors, drivers and other resources in the specific situation. The drivers, identified as the frequent and less frequent drivers in this thesis represent a range of experience driver constellation.

As discussed above the experience driver constellation is different from situation to situation, meaning that in various situations the influence of the drivers may vary. Moreover the experience driver constellation also may vary during the process of one experience. When arriving at the place of the restaurant the exterior environment is the important driver and customer-customer interactions are central. When entering the restaurant, the cordially welcome by employees, the initiated waiter and how he takes care of his customers is dominating customer-employee interactions, but also customer-customer interactions occur continuously in conversations at the table. The important role of the core service is facilitated by the waiter’s attentiveness and knowledge and skills. The physical environment, especially the view from the restaurant is part of the total experience. Finally the experience also may have an influence on customer-customer interactions occurring after the stay at the restaurant. This experience driver constellation during one customer service experience is illustrated in the following extract.

- I took them [guests from abroad] to the restaurant, it started actually when we were standing in this little elevator bringing us up to the restaurant, and I thought that I had chosen the wrong place, we were a little concerned when we were rattling in this elevator, and thought Jesus, why didn’t we check the restaurant more thoroughly, we
only heard about it. When we arrived upstairs we met an enormously beautiful sundown over the city. When we entered the restaurant milieu we were treated cordially, a really initiated waiter who knew the menu, who knew how to behave and how to talk took care of us and he also told us about the history of the restaurant. We were eating genuine Swedish food, my guests got a very initiated and good introduction to an excellent menu, I had not decided in advance what we should eat. My guests got an overview over and a feeling for the city and I had an enormously stimulating conversation with them. It was an extraordinary successful restaurant visit, good food, a good atmosphere and extraordinary personal service from our waiter. My guests appreciated the restaurant and the food, so when we met again they several times returned to the visit at this restaurant.

With reference to previous empirical studies in culinary arts no studies were found that either applied a dynamic approach by focusing on drivers or examined the process of dynamic interactions in customer service experiences at restaurants as seen from a customer point of view. The studies found, most often examine dimensions of customer restaurant or meal experiences, however, how the dimensions are interrelated in specific situations has received little attention.

With reference to service research some earlier CIT studies, discussed in the methodology part of this thesis, have applied a dynamic approach and examined critical incidents in relation to the process (Olsen, 1992, Stauss and Weinlich, 1996). Olsen (1992) examined episodes as a part of the service process and regarded a critical incident as including several critical moments. He examined and characterised the course and the development of unfavourable critical processes by focusing on triggers and critical moments, the latter occurring after the triggers have started the process. He also looked at the outcomes of the critical process. In contrast to Olsen focusing on cognitive aspects the present thesis also includes emotional and behavioural aspects. This has been facilitated by the examination of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences, and by applying CIT and regarding critical incidents as narratives. The drivers are related to customers’ individual service experiences and the context of restaurants. Stauss and Weinlich’s (1996) sequential incident technique study, although considering the service process and regarding incidents as customers’ stories, gave little attention to emotions.

Another CIT study of interest is the study by Roos (2002). She examined customer switching processes because of dissatisfaction with a service, by applying CIT and using triggers to describe customers’ switching behaviour. A trigger is defined as giving energy and direction to the switching process, without necessarily being a visible part of the process. She de-
scribes three different triggers. Situational triggers referring to customers’ personal situation outside the business relationship; influential triggers referring to the service provider the customer is switching to; reactional triggers referring to the service firm the customer has been switching from. Compared to the focus on drivers of customer service experiences in a restaurant context in the present thesis the triggers as defined by Roos (2002) refer to a wider context of examination of the relationship between a customers and a service company in unfavourable service situations. The switching process described in the study of Roos puts a stronger focus on the relationship, whereas the present thesis is focusing on the customers’ service experience; however, both consider the context of the critical incidents as being important. Compared to Olsen’s (1992) and Stauss and Weinlich’s (1996) CIT studies, the focus on drivers in the present thesis facilitated the inclusion of also emotional and behavioural aspects of customer service experiences in addition to cognitive aspects.

**Summary**

The results discussed in this section give a nuanced picture of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. The focus on drivers and the view of customer service experiences in this thesis (as defined), directed the focus onto interactions and processes and thus facilitated a dynamic approach. The dynamics of customer service experiences are shown in different ways. First, they are shown through the description of frequent and less frequent drivers, where social interactions are the most frequent driver. Further examination of social interactions showed that social interactions could be described as a link between actors and other resources. A particular role in this linking process is played by actors and their knowledge and skills (operant resources), with the latter connecting actors in dialogues. Moreover, studying both favourable and unfavourable drivers made the picture more nuanced.

The categorisation of one and two sided favourable and unfavourable drivers illustrates that some drivers drive favourable customer service experiences. Other drivers in their turn paradoxically seem only to be visible when they are missing, and some drivers occur in both directions, however with dominance in unfavourable cases such as complaint situations and the timing of food. These nuanced descriptions show that favourable and unfavourable drivers are not the opposite of each other, but need to be treated individually when the goal is to create favourable experiences and avoid unfavourable experiences. The descriptions of drivers also show that
drivers sometimes facilitate social interactions and sometimes inhibit social interactions.

From the descriptions and the content of the narratives as a whole it became apparent that interactions and activities do not happen sequentially, but they overlap and interact with each other throughout the whole process of value co-creation. In these interactions the frequent and less frequent drivers represent the experience driver constellation, which integrates the complex and dynamic process when actors actively operate on resources available. This dynamic process is leading to responses of different character and may then facilitate or inhibit how favourable customer service experiences are formed. The experience driver constellation may vary between different situations and during the process of value co-creation.

These results contribute in different ways to previous empirical studies in culinary arts and service research. These contributions will be discussed next.

**Empirical contributions**

The overall aim of the thesis is to extend and deepen the understanding of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. Drivers in this thesis refer to the mechanisms that evoke customer experiences and direct them either in a favourable or in an unfavourable direction. Customer service experiences are regarded as the customer’s interaction with the service process, the organisation, the physical facilities, the service firm’s employees and other customers. These interactions in turn create the customer’s cognitive (thoughts), emotional (feelings) and behavioural (actions) responses and leave the customer with memories (in accordance with Johnston and Clark, 2001).

The present thesis contributes to the understanding of frequent and less frequent drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences, through the focus on interactions, processes and activities. In previous culinary arts research and in service research, despite there having been research focusing on meal experiences or customer service experiences, the picture given is somewhat inconsistent when it comes to interactions and processes related to customer service experiences. Interactions have in previous research mainly been treated in terms of factors and dimensions by relating them to service offerings. A service offering in its turn was treated as a kind of product with some inherent value created by the service firm, with the consequence that actors’ active role in social interactions and the specific context or situation was not given much attention. This was largely
a consequence of the definition of the concept service that was based on viewing service as product offerings.

The three main empirical contributions in this thesis are 1) The shift in focus from static descriptions expressed as factors of customer service experiences to customers’ descriptions of dynamic drivers of their favourable and unfavourable service experiences. 2) The identification and description of the frequent and less frequent drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences and the description of the central role of social interactions. 3) The introduction of the experience driver constellation representing the dynamics of simultaneous interactions between actors and drivers involved in co-creation of value in a specific context. These contributions will be discussed in detail.

From static factors to dynamic descriptions of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences

The first contribution is the shift in focus to studying dynamic drivers, compared to the static factors of customer service experiences in previous research. Referring to culinary arts, this thesis contributes through the examination of drivers of customer service experiences at restaurants by applying a dynamic approach. A dynamic approach was achieved through regarding customers as a part of their reality, the content of the conceptual framework, the method applied, and how data were analysed. This, together with a SD logic perspective, facilitated a dynamic approach and allowed examination of different things; in this thesis it was drivers, interactions, processes and activities, which were not visible by applying a static approach (Paper I). The dynamic aspects are addressed in three of the appended papers (II-IV).

In culinary arts research no empirical studies were found that apply a dynamic approach focusing on drivers of customer service experiences at restaurants, and studying both the total experience and its details. This thesis contributes to Hansen et al.’s (2005) study of customer meal experiences at à la carte restaurants through the descriptions of frequent and less frequent drivers and the distinction into one-sided and two-sided favourable and unfavourable drivers. Hansen et al.’s (2005) purpose of studying aspects of the meal experience, which was underpinned by a conceptual framework built on a mainly goods dominant perspective lead to a static description of a customer meal experience in their results. Their description of aspects was facilitated through the analytical approach of the study. Their focus was on finding characteristics and defining aspects of meal experiences and describing each of the aspects separately, without relating
them to the real nature of restaurant experiences that is characterised by continuous interpersonal interactions. There are numerous other empirical studies in culinary arts, which apply a static approach (for example Kivela et al., 2000, Andersson and Mossberg, 2004), where the focus is mainly on factors of customers’ meal experiences and the relationships between factors and expectations, repeat visits and customers’ willingness to pay. Social interactions in these studies refer to one or several factors studied, but what happens in social interactions in their context is not examined.

With reference to service research the focus on drivers in this thesis facilitated a dynamic approach and the examination of interactions and processes. The dynamic approach was made possible in different ways. Introducing the SD logic perspective (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008) was helpful to shift the focus onto customers together with interactions, activities and processes. Thus the dynamic drivers of customer service experiences could unfold (Paper II). Other important preconditions facilitating a dynamic approach in this thesis are the basic assumptions of customers being a part of their reality, the method chosen and its adjustment to the purpose of the thesis, and the development of the conceptual framework. Treating critical incidents as narratives and analysing them in detail and holistically helped to identify and understand the drivers in relation to their context and helped to see the emotional, behavioural and cognitive nature of customers’ reactions. This move from a static to a dynamic approach is part of the current debate in service research where there is a stated need to examine customer service experiences by considering their real nature of being dynamic where interactions, activities and processes are central (Lindquist and Persson, 1997, Schembri and Sandberg, 2002, Edvardsson, 2005). This need is addressed in the present thesis and the move from a static to a dynamic approach is demonstrated in Paper I and II.

**Frequent and less frequent drivers of customers’ favourable and unfavourable service experiences**

The second contribution refers to the drivers of customer service experiences. The main contribution here lies in the descriptions of the central role of social interaction as a driver. Social interactions are described as the most frequent driver and are examined in their specific context by relating social interactions to other frequent drivers. Furthermore by regarding social interactions as dialogues between actors in the physical and social context of restaurants, actors’ knowledge and skills are visible. Thereby I could see in the narratives how actors use their knowledge and skills and how these in their turn link together resources in continuous interactions.
The importance of knowledge and skills was further demonstrated through depicting them as a one-sided favourable driver, indicating that they are remembered by customers only in the context of favourable experiences. Moreover, the importance of social interactions is also expressed through employees’ attentiveness as an important driver of both favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. Thus social interactions are the most frequent driver and in addition they have a linking function in the process where actors actively use available resources – in resource integration (Baron and Harris, 2008).

Referring to empirical studies in culinary arts research, this thesis contributes by the description of frequent and less frequent drivers and the categorisation of favourable and unfavourable drivers of customer service experiences. The descriptions of drivers separately and in interaction with other drivers and resources in both favourable and unfavourable experiences explain the central role of social interactions. In contrast, Hansen et al.’s (2005) study examines aspects of customer meal experiences. However, they do not distinguish between aspects’ importance and differences between favourable and unfavourable aspects are only made in specific cases, but not in general. Aspects are described separately, but are not related to each other, which does not facilitate the understanding of the dynamics of restaurant experiences and the central role of social interactions. Referring to other studies in culinary arts (for example Kivela et al., 2000, Andersson and Mossberg, 2004, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) focusing on the description of factors or dimensions, the present thesis contributes in different ways; by descriptions of both frequent and less frequent drivers and through the categorisation into favourable and unfavourable drivers, and the description of the central role of social interactions. Andersson and Mossberg (2004) in their study distinguished between the importance of the dimensions expressed in terms of customers’ willingness to pay for a lunch and for a dinner. They found that the social dimension is more important when dining and the food served more important when eating lunch. However, which role social interactions and other dimensions play in customer dining experiences was not shown in their study.

The fact that there are only a few empirical studies examining customer service experiences in their context and at the same time applying a dynamic approach (for example Echeverri, 1999, Stauss and Weinlich, 1996, Arnould and Price, 1993, Olsen, 1992, Roos, 2002) means that this thesis contributes to service research by its dynamic and holistic approach to customer service experiences. Here the categorisation of drivers of favourable and unfavourable drivers of customer service experiences and the descriptions of frequent and less frequent drivers contribute in particular.
Moreover, the descriptions of drivers show that social interactions are central in co-creation of value, but also that other resources are simultaneously involved in these interactions. This is the next contribution to be discussed.

**The experience driver constellation**

The third empirical contribution refers to the experience driver constellation, defined as actors’ operation on the resources available in a certain service context, resulting in responses which in their turn lead to either favourable or unfavourable customer service experiences. The contribution here is that the various findings of this thesis are brought together in the experience driver constellation. Drivers and resources, actors and their action and activities, interaction and co-creation, evaluation and finally the customer service experience, i.e. all facets, which often occur simultaneously, in dynamic interactions with several actors involved, are integrated.

Special emphasis is paid to the fact that interactions occur in their context, and that the specific situation is important. Drivers, then evoke customer experiences and lead to customers’ responses described as emotions, behaviour and thoughts. These findings are described in the narratives and are illustrated in the extracts from the narratives, presented in Papers II-IV.

With reference to culinary arts research this contribution connects the many facets of the complex and dynamic context of customers’ service experiences at restaurants as described in the appended papers and as discussed here. No previous studies were found which described drivers, interactions, processes and activities in customers’ service experiences at restaurant empirically, as seen from a customer point of view.

Referring to service research the experience driver constellation first connects the many facets of the complex and dynamic context of customers’ service experiences. Moreover, the focus on drivers and regarding critical incidents as narratives, illustrates how CIT could be applied to examine customer service experiences in a holistic way by focusing on drivers and by taking the context of the service experience into account. By referring to the tenets of SD logic the experience driver constellation contributes in particular to the foundational premises 6,9 and 10 (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The focus in these foundational premises is on interactions, resource integration and the customer service experience viewed as individual and holistic, although described on a high level of abstraction (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Therefore the results of this thesis provide empirical context to these foundational premises.

In this section the results of this thesis were related to empirical research studies. Next, the theoretical contributions of the results will be discussed.
Theoretical contributions

This thesis contributes theoretically to culinary arts and to service research. The contributions will be discussed by referring to two theoretical frameworks. These are the FAMM (Gustafsson et al., 2006, Gustafsson, 2004) originating from culinary arts and the experience room framework (Edvardsson et al., 2010) with its origin in service research. Both frameworks represent to some extent the resources required – the resource constellation – including for example people, the physical environment, technology (Vargo et al., 2008a) and to some extent the interactions involved in co-creation. The frameworks represent service systems with the role to enable, facilitate and direct value co-creation in interactions between service companies and customers. In these interactions both customers and employees (beneficiaries) apply their knowledge and skills and integrate the different resources available. The customers’ service value is realised by customers when they actively use (integrate) and interact with the resources in the service system. Value is understood as value-in-context (Vargo, 2008) including favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences.

Both frameworks are described as tools of experience design. Gustafsson et al. (2006) describe the FAMM as “a tool for understanding and handling the different aspects involved in producing commercial meals and offering the guest the best possible meal experience”. Edvardsson et al. (2010) describe the dimensions of the experience room framework as a tool to assist service designers when they develop particular service test drive environments where customers could act before they consume a service in real life; for example homepages, furniture showrooms and an open day presentation of an education. Looking at the theoretical underpinnings of the frameworks the FAMM (Gustafsson et al., 2006) reflects mainly a goods dominant thinking, expressed by viewing a customer meal experience as mainly created by the restaurant firm. The experience room framework reflects a SD logic thinking, as stated by the authors (Edvardsson et al., 2010), which is visible through the dimensions referring to interactions and the dimensions referring to resources. The respective dimensions in the frameworks are underpinned by different theoretical concepts. Some of them will be referred to when the dimensions are discussed. Both frameworks refer to an experience context, where actors’ being there is a basic precondition for interactions; in other words a precondition for interaction in the context, whether being at restaurants or in service test drives. However, it is my view that this basic ingredient is not explicitly described in both of the frameworks. Both frameworks also exclude the exterior environment as a driver of customer service experiences.
In the following sections I will first discuss the contributions to the FAMM and thereafter the contributions to the experience room framework.

**The FAMM**

The FAMM (Gustafsson et al., 2006, Gustafsson, 2004) and its five dimensions, the room, the meeting, the product, the management control system and the atmosphere, describe the entirety of the meal. The structure of the model is inspired by a restaurant guide’s assessment procedure and theoretically underpinned by different concepts. Every dimension is described separately; interactions between the dimensions are mentioned, but not described more explicitly. The framework is used as a tool to structure meal experiences predominantly seen from a company perspective. The results of the present thesis confirm and provide content to the room, the meeting and the product dimension of the model. The descriptions of the categories and the subcategories of the drivers give structure to these dimensions. In particular, the results of this thesis provide content to the meeting dimension through the descriptions of social interactions as a driver, but also the linking function of social interactions with reference to other drivers and resources. Thus, this thesis contributes by connecting the dimensions of the model through the descriptions of the process of co-creation where customers, employees and other resources are actively involved in dynamic interactions and value-creation.

Nevertheless, one dimension of the FAMM, the management control system, was only mentioned indirectly in the narratives from the results of this thesis. This could be explained by the customer focus of the thesis, and that customers don’t see these systems, rather mainly just consequences of these systems; for example when payment routines do not work or when customers make phone reservations. Customers describe their experiences of consequences of the management control system through interactions with employees, not the system as such. One such consequence of organisational routines experienced by customers is described as phone encounters in this thesis and examined and discussed in Paper I. Specific contributions of this thesis to the FAMM and some suggestions for development of the framework and its dimensions are discussed next.

1) Actors (customers, employees and other actors e.g. other customers and partners) and the exterior environment are described as important drivers of the physical environment and should therefore be added as additional sub-dimensions to the room dimension.
The inclusion of actors could be explained by actors necessarily being present in the room in order to be able to interact with other actors and to integrate the resources available in the room. Furthermore the room should not only be treated as an arrangement of tangible and intangible resources - a “Stilleben” - but also regarded as including social resources, i.e. actors and their action. This is named by Gustafsson et al. (2006) as “how diners and staff use the room”, but not explained in detail. The present thesis offers an explanation for this statement through the descriptions of social interactions and activities occurring in the room and the continuous interactions that occur between actors and other resources.

First, the thesis shows that other customers’ mere presence in the physical restaurant environment, described as other people being there and their murmur is important for customers’ perception of the restaurant environment at arrival. Thus customers’ presence partly shapes the room and impressions of tangible and intangible drivers of the room make customers construct their feelings and imagination. In addition tangible and intangible elements, such as sensory stimuli or customer placement, could be perceived as disturbing and sometimes they could inhibit social interactions and are thus regarded as unfavourable drivers.

The inclusion of the exterior could be explained in different ways. The exterior environment has an influence on customers before arrival, while they are at the restaurant and after they have left (Arnould et al., 2003, Johns and Kivela, 2001). The exterior contributes to whether or not customers already feel welcome when they arrive, whether the building has an inviting shape or the place where the restaurant is situated is attractive and easy to reach (see Johns and Kivela, 2001). When customers are at the restaurant an enjoyable view increases their favourable experiences.

However, the exterior environment is not included in other theoretical frameworks describing the physical environment (Edvardsson et al., 2010, Bittner, 1992, Baker, 1986, Kotler, 1973), except in Baker (1986) who included the architecture of the building, but not the wider exterior environment. The main reason for not including the exterior is that the frameworks, the FAMM included, argue from a service or meal design point of view, which most often does not include the phase before and after the stay at the restaurant/service company. This should not be interpreted as restaurant owners not being interested in or not being aware of the exterior environment. Moreover, the frameworks are interrelated with each other through common references, which also could be an explanation of the exclusion of the exterior in both frameworks discussed here. Inclusion of this dimension in the FAMM directs attention also toward the environment customers meet before and after their visit.
2) The results of this thesis indicate that organisational routines should be considered as part of the management control system dimension. Organisational routines, as discussed in Paper I, have both an influence on the workflow within the organisation and they are a part of how restaurants and their employees act towards customers, for example in phone encounters. Therefore they might be regarded as a consequence of the management control system, supporting customer experiences.

Referring to Gustafsson et al.'s (2006) discussions of the FAMM, organisational routines could be described as a part of the management control system. Its details are organised backstage, but they exert influence partly in the interactive part of the restaurant service. The descriptions in FAMM refer mostly to the management of routines backstage and less to how they are viewed and experienced by customers in interactions or specific situations. Examples of routines are phone encounters, payment routines, revenue management routines. These routines help the organisation to manage different areas, such as planning the placement of customers, getting paid and optimising sales per time unit. However customers experience how the employee is answering the phone, how long time it takes to split the bill or whether the point of time a table becomes available fits their own needs. Thus, customers view theses routines in a different way compared to how companies view them. Consequently it might be suggested that, in order to support the design of restaurant services, a kind of translation of these routines to a customer view should be part of the management control system.

3) The results of the present thesis and the description of atmosphere in FAMM and how atmosphere is treated in other research studies, indicate that the content and labelling of this dimension of FAMM should be further discussed and rethought.

Atmosphere as it is defined in FAMM refers to customers’ feelings influenced by the other aspects of the framework, thus this dimension refers to a customer perspective. However, in the descriptions of the framework, atmosphere seems to be treated as a company controlled dimension. In the results of the present thesis atmosphere is related to different facets of the customer experience, including the physical environment, people and behaviour and the situation at hand. Atmosphere was described by the interviewees as a synthesis of the facets. The descriptions in the narratives are abstract and are made by descriptive terms such as pleasant, cosy, familiar, homelike, and cosmopolitan to name a few. Moreover, the use of the term atmosphere differs in the literature. For example atmosphere may be re-
garded as identical with the physical environment or as the result of interaction between the individual and the environment (Edwards and Gustafsson, 2008, Heide and Grønhaug, 2006).

To conclude, the FAMM represents a helpful tool in structuring a meal experience through the different dimensions. The dimensions are held on an abstract level and are described theoretically, by referring to other research, and by referring to the restaurant context. Interactions between the dimensions are given little attention. However, when designing a meal experience at restaurants the most important part is actors and social interactions, processes and activities, which describe the real nature of a stay at a restaurant. This thesis provides empirically grounded content to the development of FAMM to be more dynamic. Moreover, the atmosphere as a dimension of the model should be further discussed as to whether it represents just a dimension of the model or whether it refers to an expression of customer value, and thus a customer service experience.

The experience room framework
The experience room framework describes service test drives using six dimensions (Edvardsson et al., 2010) seen from the service firm’s perspective. The dimensions are developed theoretically from literature, tested and further developed by case studies. Some dimensions describe the resources included in the experience room - physical and intangible artefacts, technology, and customers’ placement in the room. Other dimensions describe the interactive part of the experience room - customers’ involvement in situations and customers’ interactions with employees. In total, the framework reflects a dynamic approach to customer service experiences. The results of this thesis confirm and provide empirical content to the dimensions of the experience room, apart from the technology dimension. In particular, the present thesis contributes to the interactive dimensions of the experience room framework, through the descriptions of the central role of social interactions. Moreover, through the descriptions of how resources are linked together by actors in continuous interactions, other resources are also acknowledged to be important, especially the physical and intangible artefacts. The core service is not considered in the experience room framework. Furthermore, the results of this thesis illustrate that the static and the dynamic parts of the framework are interdependent. However, it is not totally clearly stated whether or not actors are a part of the experience room framework. The contributions to the experience room
framework and some suggestions for development of the dimensions will be discussed next.

1) This thesis describes actors as active co-creators of customer service experiences and they are described as a part of the physical environment. Therefore, the suggestion is to include actors, namely employees, customers and other actors, as resources in the experience room, as an additional dimension.

Actors, employees and customers, and their knowledge and skills are a basic precondition for social interactions and thus for integration of physical resources. In the initial formulation of the experience room framework it is not clear whether or not actors are a part of the experience room. The dimension customer placement could be interpreted as actors’ presence; however this dimension does not include employees. Nevertheless, how customers are placed is a consequence of their presence. Other actors are important for customers in different ways. For example, when they interact directly with each other in social interactions, but also when interactions are more indirect, such as a customer arriving at a restaurant that is crowded by other customers compared to a restaurant that is totally empty (for example compare with photographs of restaurant environments on homepages or in brochures). The dimension interaction with employees is also a consequence of actors’ presence. This recommendation is in accordance with Mossberg’s (2003) framework, which gave inspiration to the experience room, unlike other published works such as Bitner (1992) which do not explicitly refer to actors’ presence in the experience room.

2) This thesis shows that organisational routines, discussed in Paper I, are part of how restaurants act towards customers. As these routines directly influence the interactive part of services and thus customer service experiences, it is suggested to include organisational routines in the experience room framework. The framework does not refer to this type of routines at all. One reason could be the service test drive perspective of the framework. Nevertheless, in the test drive contexts described by Edvardsson et al (2010) customers could also interact with such routines. For example, while using a website customers could indirectly interact with a service organisation when they use the site to get in contact with the conference organisation. In the case of furniture retail, for example, customers could use a website or the phone to contact employees to check availability of one specific product for example, which they can’t see on the web-based facility.
3) This thesis shows that the exterior environment is a driver of customer service experiences; it has an influence on customers during pre-consumption, consumption and post consumption (see also Arnould et al., 2003). The exterior environment needs to be welcoming and appropriate for the service offered, even in the phase before arrival at the restaurant as has been shown in the present thesis. Therefore the suggestion here is to include the exterior environment as a subcategory of the dimension of physical artefacts.

This recommendation is in accordance with for example Arnould et al. (1998) but in conflict with Bitner’s (1992) servicescape, which both are referred to in Edvardsson et al. (2005). In the servicescape framework, interactions between actors are described as a consequence of customers’ reaction to the stimuli from the physical environment. The lack of the exterior environment in the experience room framework could partly be explained by the theoretical references from which the physical and intangible artefacts dimension are developed and the hyper reality approach, the company perspective and service design focus of the framework.

With reference to the FAMM and the experience room framework the results of this thesis provide empirical content to both of them. In particular, the contributions to the frameworks refer to actors, the exterior environment and organisational routines being considered as additional ingredients of the frameworks. Overall, the contributions add a dynamic dimension to the frameworks through the inclusion of actors as a part of the physical environment. This shows that customers and employees are a part of the context and a precondition for social interactions. These in their turn are described as the most important driver of customer service experiences and together with physical and intangible resources social interactions are part of continuous interactions. As discussed the results of this thesis contribute to both frameworks by empirically grounded details which are integrated in the experience driver constellation. The experience driver constellation links together resources, actors and service experiences through drivers and will be discussed next.

The experience driver constellation
The experience driver constellation is defined as actors’ operation on the resources available in a certain service context, resulting in responses which in their turn lead to either favorable or unfavorable customer service experiences. Here, actors’ operation on the resources refers to the process of simultaneous interactions in a specific context where the actors involved co-create value and constantly evaluate and react (Ballantyne and Varey,
experiences. Some managerial implications will be discussed in detail.

Thus the experience driver constellation refers both to the service process and the specific context.

In this thesis the discussion of the results, presented in the appended papers, were developed step by step. The discussion illustrates the complex and dynamic nature of restaurant services. The experience driver constellation is a result of this discussion and integrates the empirical results of this thesis – the drivers described and involved during the service process and in a specific situation in continuous interactions. These results are in the discussions related to some of the theoretical points made in the tenets of SD logic, in particular the foundational premise 6 (the customer is always a co-creator of value), the foundational premise 9 (all actors are resource integrators) and the foundational premise 10 (customer value is idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual and meaning laden) (Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

Managerial implications
The results and contributions of this thesis are based on a dynamic approach and describe customers as active co-creators of their experiences. Customer experiences are not only an outcome of stimuli from the physical and social environment and the core service, but also a result of customers’ own activities and interactions with other actors and the physical restaurant environment and the core service. The main contribution of this thesis for practitioners is the description of the central role of social interactions, and the categorisation of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. Some managerial implications will be discussed in detail.

Social interactions are central and restaurant customers are active co-creators of their experience
Customers not only sit at their table and wait to be served, but they engage in active preparation for example by making a table reservation, having expectations, comparing with earlier experiences, discussing with employees, enjoying together with friends or other customers and finally paying their bill. Customers act towards their goal of a favourable experience, and finally they decide whether their experience has been favourable or not. Furthermore they may decide to tell others about their experience, favourable or not, after their stay at a restaurant, and do so either face to face or by social media. Thus restaurant customers are actively working towards achieving their goals of having a favourable experience. The restaurant company is only able to offer the ingredients, attentive, knowledgeable and
skilled employees, excellent food and beverages, good service and a suitable restaurant design.

The awareness that social interactions are crucial for favourable customer service experiences is nothing new; numerous earlier studies have depicted this fact (Hansen et al., 2005, Bitner, 1990, Bitner et al., 1994, Bitner et al., 1990, Parasuraman et al., 1985, Andaleeb and Conway, 2006), and practitioners know this. However, what is new is that what individual customers eventually experience is not actually controlled solely by restaurant management. Restaurants can only support their customers’ activities when customers use the resources available. And they use these resources in interaction with other actors, employees and other customers.

While present at the restaurant social interactions between customers and employees and between customers play a crucial role. In social interactions employees’ and also customers’ knowledge and skills become apparent and they in their turn link together the food and beverages and the restaurant design in continuous interactions. When an employee is able to provide information and take care of customers, by using his or her own knowledge and skills, which in their turn help to develop a dialogue with customers who also are using their knowledge and skills, experiences tend towards being favourable. Therefore the focus of management should be as much on employees’ knowledge and skills and employees interactions with customers as on the food served and the physical design of the restaurant.

The demands on employees won’t change, but their crucial role in interactions with customers is in this thesis described as more important than the other drivers, the food served and the physical design of the restaurant. To do a good job employees need appropriate knowledge and skills and respect for these, but equally important is the authority to act when coordinating and acting in any current situation (Palmer, 2010), independent of their position. This implication is particularly interesting when looking at the arguments put forward by Romm (1989) who stated that “the future restaurant may have to accept the responsibility of satisfying emotional hunger as well as physical hunger”, which indicates a need to understand better the kind of work that goes on at restaurants, between actors.

**Customers notice some drivers only by their absence**

A customer sitting at a table together with a friend, who realises that the music is too loud to have a conversation, will be dissatisfied. However when the level of music is just about right it is not specifically perceived as a delight. That means that customers may only experience this driver in its absence or when there is too much of it, for example when it is too noisy or too bright or when there is a lack of information. This shows that some
drivers are visible only in a certain context. For example, when a customer is delighted by the extremely friendly and knowledgeable waiter, if the waiter is not present at a subsequent visit the customer will notice this, and may be less satisfied. Therefore managers should pay attention to both favourable and unfavourable and one and two-sided drivers, but treat them as being independent of each other. However, it is obvious that attentive and knowledgeable employees are an important driver, which should be taken seriously, as customers of today and tomorrow might have needs other than those relating to eating out for necessity.

**Phone reservations are an opportunity to influence customer service experiences already before customers arrive**

Phone reservation calls are, besides a formal table order, an opportunity for the restaurant company to acquire extra information about customers in order to be better prepared when the customer finally arrives. In addition, restaurants have an opportunity to make the customer feel more interested before arrival, and thus facilitate a favourable experience early in the process. Managers should be aware of the pre-purchase experience being important for customers’ total experience and should not regard this just as an organisational routine that supports work flow and restaurant and kitchen logistics.

**The critical incident technique is a fruitful and effective method**

Besides all other methods used in practice to assess customer satisfaction, which are useful methods for companies to get feedback from their customers, critical incident technique is a fruitful and effective method to collect additional information about customer experiences through short narratives. At restaurants there are natural opportunities for management to collect customer narratives while customers are present. The collecting of narratives can then become a part of everyday routines, rather than an extra effort. The narratives collected (both favourable and unfavourable) could then be analysed and used for developing the service at hand. In order to do so, it is necessary to find a suitable and systematic procedure for collecting, writing down and analysing the narratives.

**Further research**

At the outset, the stated aim of this thesis was to extend and deepen the understanding of drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences. Frequent and less frequent drivers of favourable and unfavourable customer service experiences at restaurants have been described. Two of the frequent drivers, the physical environment and social interac-
tions have been examined in separate papers. By referring to the disciplinary background of the thesis in Culinary Arts and Meal Science studying the meaning of the core service for restaurant customers in any specific context would be an interesting development of the results. As there is a strong emphasis on food and beverages within the industry in general, especially through celebrity chefs and the development of cooking procedures such as molecular gastronomy, drawing considerable attention to the food cooked and served, it would be interesting to understand this driver in more detail. Knowing more about the meaning of food eaten at restaurants related to other drivers and resources could be an important input for research, but also for higher education in hospitality and culinary arts and for practitioners.

In this thesis customer service experiences, in particular interactions, processes and activities have been examined. The results paint a first picture of drivers and resources involved in interactions. The interviews conducted in the CIT study give a rich and nuanced picture of customer service experiences, however the interviews have been relatively short and the focus has been on extreme experiences. Thus, more in depth studies, using a broader theoretical framework and different methodology could support the evidence of the findings in the present thesis. Combining observations, more in-depth interviews, participating observation and other methods, to capture customer restaurant experiences at least partly in situ, could consolidate and deepen the picture described here. The present thesis only sheds light on the customers’ point of view, so an approach that included both customers and employees and other representatives of the service firm could give a more complete picture of the interactive part of services.

The findings reported in this thesis have important implications for designing service experiences. Applying the results of this thesis to the examination of service experience design at restaurants and in other parts of the hospitality industry as well as other contact-intensive services, could provide new insights, especially with regard to the dynamic part of customer service experiences, in particular social interactions which should already be considered and tested in detail during the design phase.
Acknowledgements

This PhD project has been an inspiring, sometimes exhausting but in general an extremely rewarding journey. I want to thank everybody who in one way or another helped me to continue my PhD journey and to finally reach the goal of the project. Some individuals I want to thank especially.

First of all I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Associate Professor Åsa Öström, School of Hospitality, Culinary Arts and Meal Science, Örebro University and Professor Bo Edvardsson, Service Research Center, Karlstad University. Åsa, you took over the responsibility for my PhD education after Professor Inga-Britt Gustafsson's retirement in 2007 and guided me on my journey through research in Culinary Arts and Meal Science. On the way you also introduced me to the principles of sensory science. Åsa, thank you for all your help and for your clear and thoughtful comments and questions on my manuscripts. Bo, you helped me to find the way through service research. Thank you for invaluable support during the most critical part of the work, for generously sharing your enormous knowledge and skills, for your encouragement and inspiration, for being patient in many situations and for always finding time to discuss my drafts.

Professor Inga-Britt Gustafsson and her research group for giving me the opportunity to start this PhD journey. Thank you Inga-Britt, for introducing me into the multidisciplinary research discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science and for, together with Professor Lena Mossberg, including the phone encounter study as a part of your Service at Restaurants project. To Professor Margareta Friman and Associate Professor Bård Tronvoll, thank you for reading my manuscripts at two critical stages and for helpful comments and advice.

To Professor Judith Annett and Dr. Mervyn Gifford, thank you for scrutinising the texts and helping me to get the language correct. Judith, special thanks for all comments and discussions related to statistics.

Ywonne Nordin Stare, Anders Johansson and Patrick Hanberger thank you for generously and without limitations, placing your hotel- and restaurant facilities at my disposal for conducting interviews; and thanks to all interviewees, for taking your time and telling your stories. Thank you everyone involved in the phone encounter study, for documentation of your phone encounters and your restaurant experiences.

All research and teaching colleagues at the School of Culinary Arts and Meal Science school, thank you for all discussions of manuscripts and projects and your invaluable comments, for encouragement and practical ad-
Acknowledgements

This PhD project has been an inspiring, sometimes exhausting but in general an extremely rewarding journey. I want to thank everybody who in one way or another helped me to continue my PhD journey and to finally reach the goal of the project. Some individuals I want to thank especially.

First of all I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Associate Professor Åsa Öström, School of Hospitality, Culinary Arts and Meal Science, Örebro University and Professor Bo Edvardsson, Service Research Center, Karlstad University. Åsa, you took over the responsibility for my PhD education after Professor Inga-Britt Gustafsson’s retirement in 2007 and guided me on my journey through research in Culinary Arts and Meal Science. On the way you also introduced me to the principles of sensory science. Åsa, thank you for all your help and for your clear and thoughtful comments and questions on my manuscripts. Bo, you helped me to find the way through service research. Thank you for invaluable support during the most critical part of the work, for generously sharing your enormous knowledge and skills, for your encouragement and inspiration, for being patient in many situations and for always finding time to discuss my drafts.

Professor Inga-Britt Gustafsson and her research group for giving me the opportunity to start this PhD journey. Thank you Inga-Britt, for introducing me into the multidisciplinary research discipline of Culinary Arts and Meal Science and for, together with Professor Lena Mossberg, including the phone encounter study as a part of your Service at Restaurants project.

To Professor Margareta Friman and Associate Professor Bård Tronvoll, thank you for reading my manuscripts at two critical stages and for helpful comments and advice.

To Professor Judith Annett and Dr. Mervyn Gifford, thank you for scrutinising the texts and helping me to get the language correct. Judith, special thanks for all comments and discussions related to statistics.

Ywonne Nordin Stare, Anders Johansson and Patrick Hanberger thank you for generously and without limitations, placing your hotel- and restaurant facilities at my disposal for conducting interviews; and thanks to all interviewees, for taking your time and telling your stories. Thank you everyone involved in the phone encounter study, for documentation of your phone encounters and your restaurant experiences.

All research and teaching colleagues at the School of Culinary Arts and Meal Science school, thank you for all discussions of manuscripts and projects and your invaluable comments, for encouragement and practical ad-
vice and support, not least during the final stage of the journey. Associate Professor Inger Jonsson, thank you for dropping by to have some small talk and for your encouragement. Carola Tedenbring and Göran Ternebrandt at our library, thank you for your always excellent service when I asked for articles, books or other references. Thank you to Hasse Lundholm for all IT-support and the many emergencies you helped me with. Thank you to all other colleagues at our school; it is a pleasure to work with you all.

The first wave PhD students, Richard Tellström, Mia Prim and Erika Rapp and Dr. Tobias Nygren, thank you for good discussions and for introducing me to the PhD student association. I will never forget this introduction held at a very special place with a very “out of the ordinary ceremony”, which made me feel weird! All of you terminated your PhD projects one after the other and moved on. After having been a sole (PhD) for a while, a group of second wave PhD students, Vishal, Cecilia, Johan and Asgeir started their projects. Thank you all for inspiring discussions and the uncomplicated meal experiences!! Cecilia and Asgeir - I especially remember the multicultural “pepparkaka, sauerkraut, sausage and blue beer” meal in the Atélier. Asgeir, it seems that you don’t want to forget this meal; you still keep the rest of the blue beer tins on your shelf!! Cecilia, you are well on your way now, I hope we can continue our evening tea sessions. Johan, special thanks for your helpful comments on one of my manuscripts. It seems that you will be the next to graduate. Enjoy the rest of your time!!

Birgitta Ulmander, Thomas Blom and Tobias Nygren, the former and present heads of our school. Birgitta initially you co-recruited me to Grythytten together with Anders Andersson and Carl Jan Granqvist; Thomas, you made me think seriously about starting this journey and Tobias, thank you for understanding and all support during this journey.

Financially, my PhD education was supported by the School of Culinary Arts and Meal Science at Örebro University and by grants from the Grythytte Stipendiefond. The phone encounter study was part of a project financially supported by American Express.

On a personal level my thanks go to friends and family. Thank you all who helped us with everyday routines and logistics, and for just caring. Björg and Heidi my daughters, you have been so involved in this project, thank you for all your patience and practical help when work was most intense. Last but not least, thank you to Ulf for always taking care of us, even though at times from a distance.

Grythytten, March 2011

Ute Walter
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PRIM, M. (2007), Ready meals from the consumers’ perspective - attitudes, beliefs, contexts and appropriateness, Örebro University

RAPP, E. (2008), Sensory, attitudinal, and contextual aspects of the meal: health implications and connections with risk factors for coronary heart disease and obesity Örebro University.


### Appendix

An overview of representative references relevant for the understanding of customer service experiences is presented in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Definition of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culinary arts and meal/service experience (Kivela et al., 1999a, Kivela et al., 1999b, Kivela et al., 2000)</td>
<td>Quantitative survey 861 participants</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>A dining experience is an antecedent to customer satisfaction and return patronage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andaleeb and Conway, 2006</td>
<td>Development of a survey instrument for customer satisfaction in the restaurant context. Quantitative survey 85 participants random sampling, 34 through judgment sampling.</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Customer experience is used in the sense of customer satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall and Berry, 2007</td>
<td>Quantitative Experiment 181 participants</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Dining in a table-service restaurant is a multilayered experience that involves at least three types of clues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003</td>
<td>Qualitative Two researchers own experiences of nine lunches and nine dinners.</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Definition: Any meal experience is the outcome of a co-production between a restaurateur and a customer. The results reveal five dimensions characterising an extraordinary meal experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johns and Kivela, 2001</td>
<td>Qualitative 12 in-depth-interviews</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Eating out tends to be regarded as a spectacle or experience, rather than as pragmatic intake of food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansen et al., 2005, Hansen et al., 2004</td>
<td>Qualitative 7 semi structured interviews, 5 focus group interviews 25 participants</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>A restaurant meal experience consists of five dimensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warde and Martens, 2000</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative sociological study</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Overall the practice of eating out provides a context for sociability and the maintenance of social networks of close relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

An overview of representative references

An overview of representative references relevant for the understanding of customer service experiences is presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Definition of how experience is used in the paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Kivela et al., 1999a, Kivela et al., 1999b, Kivela et al., 2000)</td>
<td>Qualitative survey 861 participants Theme/ambience restaurants in Hong Kong</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>A dining experience is an antecedent to customer satisfaction and return patronage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Wall and Berry, 2007)</td>
<td>Quantitative Experiment 181 participants</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Dining in a table-service restaurant is a multilayered experience that involves at least three types of clues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Customer</td>
<td>Overall the practice of eating out provides a context for sociability and the maintenance of social networks of close relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Conceptual Description</td>
<td>Provider/ Customer Focus</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gustafsson, 2004, Gustafsson et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Describes five dimensions of a meal experience to be considered in education and when planning and serving meals.</td>
<td>Meal design</td>
<td>Provider: The dimensions of the FAMM, help to achieve a positive atmosphere, and thus an overall meal experience. The entirety of a meal experience or a hotel experience could be called atmosphere.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Customer/consumer experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Conceptual Description</th>
<th>Provider/ Customer Focus</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Schembri, 2006)</td>
<td>Discussion of the SD logic premises Recommends the focus on customer experience in order to capture the dynamism of services.</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Customer: Discussion of the weaknesses in SD logic resulting in a recommendation of putting the customer experience as central where the service/product and the customer's world are united. Services are experienced even if they are not satisfying, by each individual customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Carù and Cova, 2003)</td>
<td>Review of the use of the term experience in various disciplines</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Recommend a critical reflection upon the use of experience regarding the consumer as being more independent and viewing the term in a more differentiated way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caru and Cova, 2007</td>
<td>Focus on the consumer as an active creator of the own experience in different contexts Built on social construction approaches</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>The consumer experience includes a series of activities, spread over a period of time, that influence consumer's decisions and future actions and is the outcome of the value extraction processes in which consumers engage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Arnould and Price, 1993)</td>
<td>Qualitative Multi-method study Pre- and after trip survey, participant observation, field notes and photo documentation, deep interviews, focus group interviews. Quantitative analyses Narration as the basic approach in the paper as a whole Focus on the lived meaning of the experience from guides and consumers over a two year period. Customer Provider/ employee: An &quot;extraordinary experience,&quot; entails a &quot;sense of newness of perception and process&quot;. By contrast with flow, extraordinary experience is triggered by unusual events and is characterised by high levels of emotional intensity and experience.</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Provider/ employee: An &quot;extraordinary experience,&quot; entails a &quot;sense of newness of perception and process&quot;. By contrast with flow, extraordinary experience is triggered by unusual events and is characterised by high levels of emotional intensity and experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) | Conceptual | Focus on hedonic consumption, in contrast to functional dimensions of consumption. | Customer | Definition: Hedonic consumption designates those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products (p 92).

Service experience, SD logic and customer value


(Grönroos, 2008) | Theoretical | Focus on customer value creation and co-creation | Customer | Definition: Value for customers means that after they have been assisted by a self-service process (cooking a meal or withdrawing cash from an ATM) or a full-service process (eating out at a restaurant or withdrawing cash over the counter in a bank) they are or feel better off than before.


Customer service experience referring to experience design, social interactions, the core service and the physical environment

(Edvardsson et al., 2005, Edvardsson et al., 2010) | Conceptual | Focus on the experience room as a virtual place of service experiences happening before the real service is delivered. Illustrated with cases from different service contexts. | Provider | Definition: A service experience is “a service process that creates the customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses, resulting in a mental mark, a memory” (2005, p 151).

(Meyer and Schwager, 2007) | Conceptual | Compares customer relationship thinking, what a company knows about a particular customer, with customer experience thinking, referring to customers’ subjective thoughts, emotions and states of mind induced by customers’ interactions with a company offering. | Provider | Definition: A Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company (p 118).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Voss et al., 2008)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Case study building on 28 cases. Examines the impact of experience-centric services on service operation strategy and design.</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>An experience occurs when a customer has any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from some level of interaction with different elements of a context created by a service provider. Successful experiences are those that the customer finds unique, memorable and sustainable. Overtime, they would want to repeat and build upon, and enthusiastically promotes via word of mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Verhoef et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Describe a theory-based holistic model of customer experience creation.</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>The quality of the subjective product - the service experience - is the true outcome of a service interaction. This product is manufactured by both parties and must be approached as such.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Case study building on 17 cases. Focus on the context design of experience-centric services.</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>An experience occurs when a customer has any sensation or acquires knowledge from some level of interaction with the elements of a context created by a service provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Palmer, 2010)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical discussion of the term customer experience, academic approaches fitting the multidimensionality and the challenge for manager as it becomes apparent that integration of different functions is crucial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Solomon et al., 1985)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Role theory and related concepts are discussed.</td>
<td>Customer Provider</td>
<td>The core service is described in terms of the quality of the subjective product - the service experience - is the true outcome of a service interaction. This product is manufactured by both parties and must be approached as such.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Arnould and Price, 1993)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Focus on social interactions between actors</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>They show the mutual interrelationship between actors, especially the guides and the participants in social interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Czepiel et al., 1983a)</td>
<td>Edited book focusing on service encounters</td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer Employees</td>
<td>A service encounter is defined as purposeful interactions between two individuals affected by a number of facets, such as the physical environment and roles. Service encounters are explored from different perspectives, psychological, marketing and managerial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Normann, 1991, Grönroos, 1987, Edvardsson et al., 2000)</td>
<td>Two references relating to service marketing and one relating to service development</td>
<td>The core service is described in relation to the service offering, the service delivery system and the service concept.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kotler, 1973)</td>
<td>Conceptual Building on stimulus-organism-response principles Focus on ambient cues</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Definition: Atmospherics refer to the conscious planning of atmospheres, which contribute to the buyer’s purchasing propensity. Atmospherics are described as “the air surrounding a sphere”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Baker, 1986)</td>
<td>Conceptual Building on stimulus-organism-response principles Focus on ambient, design and social factors</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>The term environment will encompass the physical facilities where the service is delivered. Elements included are exterior architecture, interior architecture and decoration, and atmospheric conditions (temperature, lighting). The service audience will be included because audience size, type and behaviour will impact upon the way the environment is perceived by consumers. Service personnel are also included because they too form an important part of the environment (p 79).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Bitner, 1992)</td>
<td>Conceptual Building on stimulus-organism-response principles Focus on ambient conditions, spatial layout and signs, symbols and artefacts</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Definition: The servicescape, the built environment – manmade physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment – affects both customers and employees in service organisations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008)</td>
<td>Qualitative study Focus on the meaning of the elements of the servicescape for customers Applies an interpretive approach building on social construction.</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>Definition: A servicescape is the frozen potential of a consumption. They engage the servicescape in the construction of experiences that fit with their life themes and projects and connect to culturally embedded rituals and meanings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ek, 2005)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>A critical discussion of the servicescape from a cultural geographic point of view.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kearny et al., 2007, Ezeh and Harris, 2007, Turley and Milliman, 2000, Edwards and Gustafsson, 2008)</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Earlier servicescape and atmospheric research is reviewed. The main conclusion is that a more holistic approach, regarding customers as active creators of their own meaning and reality is proposed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Customer experience and social interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Solomon et al., 1985)</td>
<td>Conceptual Role theory and related concepts are discussed</td>
<td>Customer Provider</td>
<td>The quality of the subjective product - the service experience - is the true outcome of a service interaction. This product is manufactured by both parties and must be approached as such (p 101).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Arnould and Price, 1993)</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus on social interactions between actors</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>They show the mutual interrelationship between actors, especially the guides and the participants in social interactions (see above).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Czepiel et al., 1985a)</td>
<td>Edited book focusing on service encounters</td>
<td>Customer Employees</td>
<td>A service encounter is defined as purposeful interactions between two individuals affected by a number of facets, such as the physical environment and roles. Service encounters are explored from different perspectives, psychological, marketing and managerial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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3. Ahlgren, Mia K. Ready meal consumption – when, where, why, and by whom? Academic essay. 2004

4. Hansen, Kai V. Restaurant Meal Experiences from Customers’ Perspectives – A Grounded Theory Approach. 2005

5. Tellström, Richard. The construction of food and meal culture for political and commercial ends: EU-summits, rural businesses and World Exhibitions. 2006

6. Prim, Mia. Ready meals from the consumers’ perspective – attitudes, beliefs, contexts and appropriateness. 2007


8. Walter, Ute. Drivers of customers’ service experiences. A customer perspective on co-creation of restaurant services, focusing on interactions, processes and activities. 2011