

Extending the innovation of meaning to the service domain: an SDL-informed approach

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Abstract

The innovation of meaning process is defined as hermeneutic and interpretive and it is based on the understanding and interpretation of the socio-cultural dynamics to enable companies envision new meanings. However, people's meaning-making activities are characterised by both a social/institutional dimension and an individual one. The creation of meaning, while influenced by society, is ultimately a subjective experience. In this paper, we adopt a service-dominant logic perspective to explain the innovation of meaning as a process based on the integration of resources to drive the co-creation of meaning with customers. Through a thorough literature review on both concepts, we argue that the service-dominant logic may help further developing the innovation of meaning by informing the latter with its underlying principles. Based on this, we propose an interpretation of the innovation of meaning framework based on the service-dominant logic foundational premises. The innovation of meaning principles are re-worked to be applied to the service context and stimulate further refinement. The most promising directions for continuing the evolution are also provided, along with some fundamental research questions to be addressed in future studies. This research is the first effort to connect the innovation of meaning framework to the new dominant logic for marketing. This results in the resolution of paradoxes in the framework and the identification of research avenues to complete it, especially regarding how the meaning is proposed and co-created with customers.

Keywords: innovation of meaning, service-dominant logic, meaning-making, meaning co-creation, resource integration; institutions

Introduction

The innovation of meaning has received attention in the literature as an innovation strategy complementary to the more traditional views of innovation as stemming from technology or market needs (Utterback et al., 2006; Verganti, 2008). It has been proposed as an inherently radical typology of innovation (Verganti, 2009) that leverages design, intended as the act of making sense of things (Krippendorff, 1989), to address the aesthetic and symbolic aspects of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Verganti, 2017). The focus on design as a source of competitive advantage has developed into the proposition of a new innovation strategy, the

innovation of meaning, as opposed to the traditional technology-push and market-pull strategies (Ravasi and Lojacono, 2005; Verganti, 2009; Rampino, 2011). The innovation of meaning is based on the creation of a new “reason why” for people to use a product (Battistella et al., 2012; Verganti, 2017). One of the most famous examples is the introduction of the Wii from Nintendo, in 2006 (Verganti, 2009). The new console was radically different from the traditional ones, and customers purchased it to play while moving in the real space, with their families and friends, rather than to individually immerse into a virtual space.

However, several aspects of the process are still unclear or under-explored (Eling and Herstatt, 2017; De Goey et al., 2018). In particular, as this article will show, the innovation of meaning framework is highly rooted in the product-oriented literature. This literature focuses on innovation and product development as a process that is intended to embed value in an artefact – a good – to be delivered to the customers. Following this view, the customers are, in substance, passive recipients of the meaning delivered by the company. However, as the literature on meaning-making suggests, the perceived meaning is influenced by both cultural factors and individual ones (McCracken, 1986; Kurzman, 2008). In turn, this implies that customers may have a role in determining the perception of meaning, as it cannot be solely instantiated into the product (Flint, 2006).

For this reason, we argue that the innovation of meaning could benefit from being extended based on one of the most prominent meta-theories emerging in the marketing field, the service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008. SDL from now on). The SDL, which emerged from the sub-field of service marketing, may enrich the innovation of meaning framework with insights regarding the role that customers may have in determining the meaning and overcoming the producer-distributor paradigm. This would also help to adapt the innovation of meaning to a service context, which has been by now mostly neglected in the literature (Artusi and Bellini, 2020).

In this paper, we investigate the nature of the innovation of meaning and its most recent advancements as related to the principles, the innovation strategy, and the development process.

We show that its foundational premises highly leverage a good-dominant logic of the economic exchange, and we argue that, by switching to the SDL, major developments could be enacted and pursued in further research. We take the SDL as a theoretical lens to shed light on the innovation of meaning framework from a different and original perspective. This way, we provide an account related to how the innovation of meaning can be aligned to a service view and how this novel understanding can stimulate the growth of the field. By aligning to the SDL means, we recognise that the meaning perception is driven by an act of co-creation between customers and firms, based on the proposition of a meaning and its interpretation influenced by customers' individual characteristics. Moreover, we draw on the institutional view of the SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2016) to explain the innovation of meaning as a way to stimulate the evolution of institutional arrangements (Berger et al., 1967) to propose a new meaning that needs to be co-created between the firm and the individual customer. Thus, our research allows us to point out the directions that can be pursued in achieving a higher detail and conceptualisation of the innovation of meaning process, as advocated by Eling and Herstatt (2017) in their review. By acknowledging the non-relevancy of the division between products and services, we allow for an easier application of the innovation of meaning outside of the product-oriented domain, as research started to explore recently (Pinto et al., 2017; Trabucchi et al., 2017; Artusi et al., 2020).

To conduct such a conceptual investigation, we leverage on a semi-systematic literature review (Snyder, 2019), which is presented in the next chapter. Based on that, we are able to discuss the main characteristics of the innovation of meaning framework and the areas in which the SDL can contribute to its refinement. The two concepts are then synthesized in their communalities and we provide a new perspective on innovation of meaning based on a service logic. Drawing on this new understanding, the paper closes by providing potential research directions and relevant research questions to stimulate and continue the development of the innovation of meaning framework.

Review methodology

This article is based on the review of both empirical and conceptual articles related to the innovation of meaning framework and the SDL. The methodology adopted to conduct the review process is that of a semi-systematic review (Wong et al., 2013). This is in line with objective of the research, which is that of crossing the two fields to stimulate growth for the focal one, the innovation of meaning framework. (Snyder, 2019). In particular, two different methodological approach have been selected for the two bodies of knowledge investigated. Given the relatively short academic history of the innovation of meaning framework, as well as the fact that it is the main object of our study, we conducted a systematic review on the topic (Tranfield et al., 2013). On the contrary, given that the SDL is used as a theory that can cross-contaminate the focal one, a narrative approach was preferred (Baumeister and Leary, 1997). This approach is appropriate for a field that has received a lot of attention in the last years, resulting in a number of scholarly contributions taking different perspectives. Moreover, the SDL meta-theory is used as the way to stimulate the innovation of meaning framework to be adapted to a service domain, rather than being the central concept of the article. Thus, we are not interested in the nuances related to its application in different fields, rather in the theoretical pillars that allow switching the thinking to the economic relationship from centered on goods being based on service interactions. In particular, the starting point for the collection of articles related to the SDL is to be found in the systematic review provided by Wilden et al. (2017). We provide more information related to this and to the whole review process in the following sections.

Innovation of meaning: sample and review process

For the innovation of meaning framework, we followed the process outlined by Tranfield et al. (2003) for systematic reviews. First, we decided to rely on the two most used databases in academic management research: Scopus and Web of Science. To define the keywords, both the authors and an external expert engaged in discussing the terms. This process allowed us to define the following search string: {"Innovation of meaning" OR "Design-driven innovation"}. Given the relatively new topic, broad terms were used to incorporate all the contributions specifically

made on the concept This search revealed 99 articles in Web of Science and 152 in Scopus. The work of eliminating duplicates brought to an initial sample of 173 articles. Given the relatively small size of the sample, no exclusion criterias were added. The two researchers independently screened the abstracts and solved any discrepancies by confronting and reaching an agreement. The reference used by the articles in the sample were further analyzed to find any additional article that would fit the search without being included in it. In particular, this allowed to add some seminal articles upon which the innovation of meaning is based, but older than its first conceptualization, and few articles that use the innovation of meaning as a setting without explicitly recalling it in the title or abstract. The steps of the process are summarized in Table 1.

Research step

Search keyword	“Innovation of meaning” OR “Design-driven innovation”
Web of Science records	99
Scopus records	152
Full sample (no duplicates)	173
Final sample (abstract screening and seminal articles)	81

Table 1: Innovation of meaning search process

Service-dominant logic: sample and review process

For the complementary literature stream related to SDL, we defined a narrower search strategy. This choice is justified by two main lines of reasoning. The first one is related to the objective of the review: first, we use the SDL as a meta-theory that can help the innovation of meaning framework to transition from a product to a service orientation. Thus, we are interested in the underlying logic and pillars rather than all the detailed perspectives. Second, the literature produced on the topic is vastly larger in respect to the innovation of meaning. Following the same

process as for the previous search, involving a different external expert, we defined the following search string: {"service-dominant logic" OR "service dominant logic" OR "s-d logic" OR "SDL") AND innovation}. Given the maturity of the field, we decided to accept only articles published in English in academic journals. This led to the identification of 395 articles in Web of Science and 312 articles in Scopus. Given the maturity of the field (Wilden et al., 2017; Brodie et al., 2019) and our main interest lying in the pillars of the logic, we decided to only consider journals publications (in English). By eliminating duplicates, we reduced the sample to 342 contributions. Table 2 resumes the steps of the process.

Research steps

Search keyword	("service-dominant logic" OR "service dominant logic" OR "s-d logic" OR "SDL") AND innovation
Web of Science records	395
Scopus records	312
Full sample (no duplicates)	342
Final sample (abstract screening and seminal articles)	92

Table 2: service-dominant logic search steps

Analysis of the sample articles

We relied on a thematic analysis to cluster and interpret the articles related to the innovation of meaning based on the roles of the different actors involved and how the process works (Terry et

al., 2017). The same analysis has been conducted related to the service-dominant logic, mapping all the contributions that give an insight on how an service innovation process works, and the roles of the key actors. The two authors independently conducted these steps, refining the clustering by confronting on intermediate outputs and discussing the non-converging labels. This process involved several rounds of re-work to come to a preliminary classification of the concepts. At this stage, three additional external researchers operating in the service innovation field were involved to validate the classification. The researchers were asked to check the appropriateness of the classification, as well as its completeness in explaining the related topics. Based on the additional insights gathered, we further revised the classification around which the literature review is based. The two separate processes allowed us to define the final samples consisting of 81 articles related to the innovation of meaning and 92 articles for the SDL.

The two literature streams evolved following different pathways. The seminal S-D article was published by Vargo and Lusch in 2004, as an account of the last evolutionary trends in the service marketing theory, and the first proposition of a new logic. The first reflections regarding the innovation of meaning were published by Verganti in 2006, and further refined by several authors in the next decade. Understanding the interrelations and implications may be beneficial to stimulate further research and align two bodies of literature that share some concepts and refer to similar knowledge domains. Table 3 summarizes the main topics around which the articles were mapped, identifying the different conceptualizations that characterize the relationship between a company proposing an innovation and its customers. We then provide a deeper discussion of these concepts in the next chapters.

	<i>Innovation of meaning</i>	<i>Key literature</i>	<i>Service-dominant logic</i>	<i>Key literature</i>
Role of the company	Creator of value in the form of new meaning	Norman and Verganti (2014);	Resource integrator and co-creator of value	Vargo and Lusch (2004)

Role of the customer	Experience seeker	Artusi and Bellini (2020)	De Goey et al. (2017)	through propositions	Co-creator of value	Ramswamy and Ozcan (2018); Alves et al. (2016)
Role of the context	Third object that informs the company value creation	Verganti (2017); Verganti and Oberg (2013)		System of institutions which contains and guides the co-creation mechanisms		Vargo and Lusch (2016); Ng et al. (2018); Akaka et al. (2017)
Typology of value	In transaction	Battistella et al. (2012);		In use		Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008)
Realization of value	Inside-out	Verganti (2009)		Emergent		Vargo et. Al (2017)
Approach	Hermeneutic	Verganti and Oberg (2013)		Phenomenological		Vargo and Lusch (2008; 2017)

Table 3: foundations of innovation of meaning and service-dominant logic compared. Actors role and innovation process

Current conceptualization of the innovation of meaning

The innovation of meaning framework stems from the works carried out in the early 2000s regarding the role that design – intended as the act of making sense of things (Krippendorff, 1989) – can play within the innovation process (Utterback et al., 2006). In a highly product- and

technology-oriented literature, design was initially seen as that activity that intervenes at the end of the new product development process, to frame the shape, colour, and other aesthetic dimensions of a product. In contrast with this view, and as an evolution of it, some researchers started to recognise the relevance of design as a way to add value to the innovation process by making sense of things (Krippendorff, 1989; Dell’Era et al., 2020), and shaping the products language to communicate values to users (Dell’Era et al., 2008; Cautela et al., 2018). Several authors have furtherly recognised the sense-giving dimension of design as the possibility to develop a product that embodies meaning for the people who will use it (Kazmierczak, 2003; Verganti, 2006). Thus, design has become a way to enact the manifestation of meaning through a product. A product’s meaning, namely the "reason why" people decide to purchase and use a product or service (Verganti, 2008), can be seen as an alternative force, with respect to technology or customer needs, upon which companies can develop a new piece of the offering. The first step of the innovation of meaning process consists in the abstraction from the analysis of currently available products, i.e. the “solution”, to understand the current meaning. The transition to the new meaning is achieved through the critical interaction between company members and external experts, called interpreters (Altuna et al., 2017), which help the company refining the internal vision. Last, the new meaning is brought to the market (Figure 1).

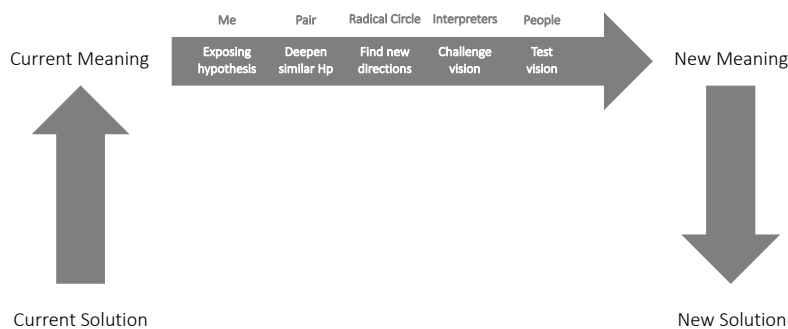


Figure 1: The Innovation of Meaning Process (Verganti, 2017)

Meanings are always communicated through signs and can pertain to different domains: *symbolic, emotional, utilitarian* (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1981). The *symbolic* meaning is the

one that, through a sign, evokes some thought that is related to another concept (Short, 2007). For example, a family picture is often seen as a representation of one's youth, or inner identity, and love. Similarly, an object is seen as having an *emotional* meaning when it can enact some emotional changes in the individual, as a horror movie could stimulate disgust. On the other hand, the *utilitarian* meaning of an artefact is, instead, strictly related to its use: take, for example, a train that can evoke the possibility of moving from one station to the other. Of course, artefacts often express an interrelation of the different kinds of meaning (Flint, 2006). Taking the example of a paper diploma, it can signify one's mastery of a topic, can generate pride in the individual and can open new ways in terms of working opportunities. The three dimensions go together in defining the meaning that can be attributed to an otherwise meaningless piece of paper.

The innovation of meaning (Verganti, 2009) is characterised as a framework that leverages the three dimensions of meaning to conceive new products to be brought to the market strategically. Companies may try to instantiate a new meaning into products by shaping their functional and aesthetic dimensions (Dell'Era et al., 2011; Monö et al., 1997). All the elements that characterise a product define the system of signs, the "language" that a product speaks (Gotzsch, 2006; Dell'Era et al., 2008). The meaning can be encoded in this system of signs, which will need an interpreter to be then decoded and give some benefits (Kazmierczak, 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2014).

The extant literature has identified two main principles that the innovation of meaning framework is based upon:

- An inside-out process: the new meaning is envisioned internally to the company.

It is usually a task of managers, that, by looking at society, design a new meaningful product to be brought to the market (Verganti, 2017). Thus, the act of designing is seen as a way to make sense of things, in line with Krippendorf's work (1989). The designer conceives the new meaning to be proposed to the market by observing the changes in the socio-cultural context and connecting to other networks of professionals(Altuna et al.,

2017; Bellis and Verganti, 2020). The way the new meaning is aligned to the major changes at the societal level determines the level of success of the new product.

- A hermeneutic approach: since customers are not asked what they would like to have, the approach needs to build on extensive interpretive capabilities (Verganti & Oberg, 2013). Meaning-making is, in fact, an unconscious process, which renders its output, the meaning, a vague and subjective concept. Managers and designers must be able to grasp the weak signs, behaviours, and routines that individuals manifest, and relate them to the inner meaning that is expressed/conveyed through those systems of signs (Cunliffe, 2010).

Several authors, building on these principles, expanded the innovation of meaning framework into different directions. Its connection with technological innovation has been the first stream to be explored, generating the concept of “technology epiphanies” (Dell’Era et al., 2017; Goto, 2017; Magistretti et al., 2020; Verganti, 2011). Parallel to that, the connection with the business model construct has been studied (Battistella et al., 2012; Trabucchi et al., 2017), in an attempt to extend it to the development process, which, however, is still mainly unexplored (Eling & Herstatt, 2017). As a framework that was born within the product innovation literature, few attempts have tried to extend it to a service domain, mostly focused on how to generate a new meaning strategy (Pinto et al., 2017) or a new concept to be scaled over different locations (Artusi & Bellini, 2020).

The current literature implies a tension between the fact that the company embodies meanings into fixed characteristics of the products (Dell’Era et al., 2011) and the fact that the interpretation by the individual customer determines the meaning perceived (Bellini et al., 2017; Verganti & Oberg, 2013).

The pillars of the SDL

The SDL is a meta-theoretical framework firstly presented by Vargo & Lusch in their seminal paper (2004). Following and building on previous research in the service marketing literature, they proposed a change in thinking about the economic relations, by switching the focus from the exchange of goods to the value embedded in any interactions. Thus, all the interactions can be described as service interactions in which the value is co-created in the service experience. In the same article, the authors put together eight foundational premises that define the core of the new logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Those foundational premises have been re-worked over the last decade (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), and summarised into five axioms: service is the fundamental basis for exchange; value is always co-created by multiple actors, including the beneficiary; all economic and social actors are resource integrators; value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary; value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2017).

The SDL is built on established concepts, as value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), which is opposed to the traditional view of value as being delivered by companies to customers (Kim & Mauborgne, 1999; Teece, 2010). The value co-creation has become central in the SDL narrative (Payne et al., 2008), independently from the roles of the actors involved. In particular, the interaction between those actors is no longer seen as a transaction, in which the firm delivers value to customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), but rather as a process in which both actors integrate resources to co-create value (Baron & Harris, 2008). Given the new equality between the co-creators of value, a changing of naming from company-to-customers to actor-to-actor has characterised the field (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). In this context, companies are actors that can only make propositions, that will, in turn, activate some processes on the customer side, enacting the value co-creation process (Gronroos & Voima, 2013). Thus, value cannot exist *a priori* of the interaction: in line with previous experiential studies (Ramaswamy, 2009; Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009), value emerges during the interaction among the different actors and is related to the use experience, and the associated hedonic factors, rather than the acquisition of a good (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1998; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The

front-end of the service is critical in that it enables customers to interact with the value proposition offered by the company, and it enables the co-creation of value based on the customers' experience within the interaction (Frow et al., 2014).

Building on the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984), SDL puts the concept of resources at the center of the economic exchange: the resources integrated on all the actors' sides is what enables value to be co-created (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Any actor in a system is characterised by owning resources, that can be distinguished between operant and operand (Ngo & O'Cass, 2009), and they put these resources into play during the interaction with other actors. Operand resources are usually static and tangible (e.g., goods); operant resources are generally intangible and present in the form of knowledge or capabilities. Each actor owns a mix of resources. By integrating the resources with the other actors involved in any interaction, value is co-created. (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018) Actors owning different sets of resources are likely to co-create value in different ways. Thus, the integration of resources from an actor in an economic relationship with another actor does not univocally creates value. The interdependencies with the resources integrated by the other actors in the relationship determine the co-creation of value. This new perspective on value creation is radically different from what is known in a good-dominant logic, where resources are conceptualised as having embedded value (Skalen & Edvardsson, 2015), which is believed to be delivered customers as it is (Kim & Mauborgne, 1999). Rather, according to the SDL, value creation is enacted on the customer side. Interacting with the customer, the provider (both would be better-called actors) may become part of the process (Heinonen et al., 2010; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Thus, value is experiential and contextual (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

Vargo and Lusch advanced a major theoretical development in 2011: the overcoming of a producer-consumer logic and the advancement of the actor-to-actor relationships allows us to see the economic exchange as an ecosystem of actors that co-create value. This is in line with the recent shift toward system thinking, and the networked relationships among actors in the economic environment (Iansiti & Levien, 2004). The service ecosystem is defined as “a relatively

self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Lusch & Vargo, 2014), and it is recognised as being the unit of analysis for value co-creation. The system, in turn, can be explored at different levels, depending on the nature of the study. The literature describes three different levels: macro, meso, and micro (Akaka et al., 2013). From the particular to the general, they respectively describe the interactions among individual actors, networks within the same institutions, or broader networks with different institutions.

Shifting to a systemic perspective, the role of institutions and institutional arrangements has become central for the further development of the SDL narrative (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Institutions, being the set of norms, behaviour, beliefs (Scott, 2008) that characterise a specific ecosystem, guide the integration of resources (Helkkula et al., 2018), facilitating the sense-making of resources by actors (Koskela- Huotari & Vargo, 2016). The role of institutions in coordinating actors in the value co-creation process has been captured in the axiom 5: “value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). The fact that institutions provide the rules of the game also implies that service innovation in service ecosystems requires a change into the institutions (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016).

At the interconnection between systems and institutions, within an SDL perspective, several research directions still need to be explored. Among those, how the institutional perspective may help study innovation is one of the promising research avenues (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). In the next chapters, we discuss how the adoption of an SDL perspective could stimulate new research leading to further refinement of the innovation of meaning framework.

SDL CONTRIBUTION TO THE INNOVATION OF MEANING

The innovation of meaning literature has unfolded following the product development stream (Utterback et al., 2006). This literature has traditionally been conceived as focused on goods, in what later has been called G-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Thus, goods are seen as ways to deliver value, in the form of a new meaning, through its tangible and intangible characteristics

(McCracken, 1986; Dell’Era et al., 2011). Following this stream, the goods may embody meaning a priori than the interaction with customers. The recent evolution of the marketing theory and the establishment of the SDL allow overcoming this thinking. In particular, the adoption of an SDL perspective in conceptualising innovation of meaning may allow refining the framework also considering the individual meaning-making processes that are always enacted at the customer level (Kurzman, 2008; Knudsen & Haase, 2018).

Indeed, any system of signs, as the product brought to the market, is interpreted by customers through the individual meaning-making process, which derives an experience of meaning. This “re-constructed meaning” (Kazmierczak, 2003) is influenced by contextual factors, such as the dominant paradigm in the society, and individual ones (McCracken, 1986). Thus, the new meaning emerges from the interaction between a proponent, and the individual customer. The role of the company should be that of guiding the new meaning into a direction, an overarching meaning. The specific perception of that overarching meaning is enacted in the customer-company relationship and may vary from one individual to another. Similar to the S-D logic, the main implications are that meanings can be conceptualized as emergent, rather than embodied into artifacts and experiences. Moreover, all the actors involved contribute with their resources (past experience, knowledge, behavior...) in determining the specific emergent meaning.

Thus, the adoption of a service perspective may trigger a broader understanding and re-conceptualisation of the framework, allowing researchers to open new domains for investigation. The fact that meaning is, at least partially, determined by the user has been already advanced by Verganti and Oberg (2013). Using the SDL words, these views can be interpreted as stating that the meaning is co-created in the interaction among actors, and cannot fully exist a priori of that interaction. This is in line both with the SDL principles, and the literature on meaning-making.

To accelerate and facilitate the switch from a good- to SDL, we need to start by analysing the assumptions underlying the framework. As we show in the following discussion, adopting a different terminology and broadening the assumptions to embrace a service orientation, may help

in transitioning toward the new logic and in further conceptualising and understanding the innovation of meaning framework.

The innovation of meaning as described by an inside-out process

Investigating the customer-side of innovation of meaning, the literature shows that the individual customers interpret the new meaning in the light of its interaction with the service front-end (Pinto et al., 2017), and it is individually determined (Verganti & Oberg, 2013). This is coherent with how the meaning-making activities work, as the meaning perceived by an individual is influenced by both societal and individual factors. Thus, the new meaning has an intrinsically experiential nature, as it fully emerges at the customer side, and unique for each individual. Indeed, there can be some degrees of difference between the intended meaning – the strategically conceived new meaning that a company aims at giving customers – and the re-constructed one – the meaning experienced by customers (Kazmierczak, 2003). How the service is configured, and the system of signs embedded into it, may lead customers to perceive the meaning proposed in different ways (Sanasi et al., 2019).

The fact that the new meaning has an intrinsically experiential nature has some implications for the innovation of meaning process described as being inside-out (Verganti, 2017). Since the meaning is firstly conceived internally to the company, the resulting meaning embedded into the service has to be a proposition to customers. Companies may envision a new meaning by investigating society, rather than involving users; still, the new meaning can only be proposed to customers through a configuration of resources (goods, personnel...). In these terms, the new meaning is offered to customers to be co-created. The meaning perceived emerges through the co-creation between the resources put in place by the company and those belonging to the individual. The company should still make efforts to envision which meaning to offer to customers, as well as how to configure those resources to facilitate customers' interpretation of the meaning. Customers always play a role in co-creating the meaning during the experience by integrating their resources.

It must be noticed that this does not imply the need of involving customers in the innovation process, as it has already been demonstrated as a non-optimal strategy for radical innovations of meaning (Candi et al., 2016). The shift in thinking implies being aware that the new meaning brought to the market is not a static feature embedded into a product or service. Rather, it is a proposition of meaning that needs the integration of some resources by customers to drive the co-creation of the perceived meaning. Using the SDL wording, it implies switching from a logic of meaning-in-transaction to a logic of meaning-in-context.

The innovation of meaning as based on a hermeneutic approach

Proposing a new meaning to customers requires the capability of observing and interpreting how the world is changing (Verganti, 2009). Taking an SDL perspective, the innovation of meaning implies two major shifts. On one side, a reconfiguration of the meaning proposed by the company internally envisioned and designed. On the other side, a change in the co-creation mechanisms among the actors, primarily the company and its customers, to let the meaning emerge. In line with Lusch & Nambisan (2015), innovation of meaning is a matter of organising resources to enable a different co-creation of value, in the form of meaning. Reconfiguring the co-creation mechanisms implies changing, or adapting to the change, of institutions governing a particular system (Vargo et al., 2015). Customers are embedded continuously in systems governed by evolving institutions. Other companies, artists, government, social movements play a role in making the institutions governing the system change at any time. Companies must identify, and potentially shape the future evolution of those institutions since they define how the co-creation with customers would take place (Edvardsson et al., 2014).

To successfully propose meanings that are based on different institutions, as new rules of consumption, companies must be careful in guiding the co-creation practices, by showing the new rules as opposed to the old ones and finding a balance among those (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). As a consequence of that, the new meaning proposed needs to build on the current one, rather than merely substituting it. The hermeneutic approach is the one that enables managers to decode

the "rules of the game" (North, 1990) underlying a specific system, and it guides them in understanding how these are evolving and in knowing how to further stimulate or adapt to the evolution.

Based on the contribution that a service thinking gives in the understanding of the innovation of meaning, we propose a formalisation of the principles in Table 2.

<i>Principles</i>	<i>Inside-out process</i>	<i>Hermeneutic approach</i>
<i>SDL informed formulation</i>	The innovation of meaning framework is based on the inside-out proposition of a new meaning, to be co-created with customers.	The innovation of meaning framework is described by a hermeneutic approach to the market institutions and institutional arrangements .
<i>Explanation</i>	Companies can make a proposition of meaning to customers by configuring their resources into their offering. During the consumption experience, and based on the resources integrated by customers, the meaning is co-created	Companies must identify the institutions governing the market and their evolution. Based on that, they may adapt to or play a role in shaping their evolution.

Table 4: a redefinition of the innovation of meaning principles based on an SDL perspective

Further developing the innovation of meaning: a research agenda.

Understanding the innovation of meaning framework within an SDL opens for further investigation of the principles underlying it. The process illustrated in Figure 1 can be remodelled in its last dimension, the interaction between the company and the market. This interaction is

based on the mutual integration of resources, to allow for a certain degree of co-creation of the meaning. Moreover, the two actors are immersed in a network of relationships with other actors (i.e., other companies and customers), which may influence the co-creation enacted at the dyadic level. Based on this novel view of the innovation of meaning, we identify four major research streams that are potentially interesting to reach a full understanding of the framework. The research directions are then summarised in Table 3, divided based on the level (micro, meso, macro) they belong, to guide the appropriate selection of the units of analysis (Figure 2).

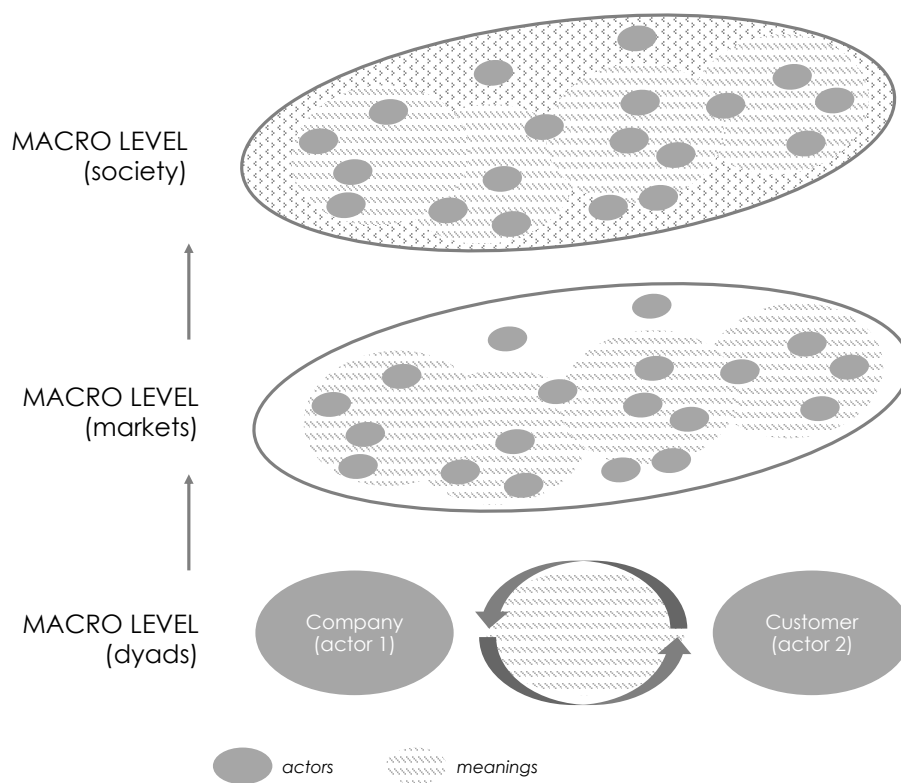


Figure 2: the different layers at which to study the innovation of meaning (adapted from Akaka et al. 2013)

Resource integration in the innovation of meaning

Once it is stated that companies can only propose meanings for interpretation and by customers, the problem of how to organise such platforms for meaning co-creation arises (Sanasi et al., 2019). Companies cannot embed meaning into a good or service in a static way (Flint, 2006), rather, they need to ensure their piece of offering is configured in a way that can lead to meaningful co-creation of meaning with customers. Thus, the problem is more centred toward how to build the architecture of a company's offering, rather than the tangible characteristics of a specific product or service. The resources may acquire different meanings if integrated by different people, or the same person in different contexts (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). For this reason, actors cannot neglect the interrelations that resources may have with the environment and other resources integrated by different actors. From a company perspective, research should be directed in understanding which resources to integrate into which context, to favour or hamper the co-creation of a given meaning. Based on that, the possibility of guiding customers through the co-creation process represents a promising avenue for research. The alignment between the meaning perceived by customers and the meaning envisioned by the company managers should then be examined with a focus on the resources needed to achieve it, as an extension to previous frameworks (Kazmierczak, 2003).

Moreover, research is needed referring to the configuration of the service front-end. The service front-end can be seen as a mix of resources that companies put in play and through which they interact with customers. The system of signs embedded in it triggers the interpretation of meaning (Holloway & Hubbard, 2014), and needs to be further explored. Thus, research is needed on how to design all the elements constituting the front-end of a company's offering. The role of the goods, of front-line employees, of physical or digital spaces for interaction, are all examples of networks of resources that may influence and guide the co-creation of meaning. The right mix of operant and operand resources and its role in allowing the co-creation to happen need to be studied.

Co-creation of meanings

The second stream of research is directed toward understanding how meanings are co-created in practice. In the dyadic company-customer interaction, the roles of the two actors are well defined and established. The company is the provider of a platform that allows the customer to come in contact with it (Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2019). In turn, this platform should allow for the interpretation and perception of meaning to happen. The customer has the role of the interpreter of the signs and co-creator of meaning (Kazmierczak, 2003). By putting her individual experience in the relationship, she plays a fundamental role in determining the meaning perceived (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008; Verganti and Oberg, 2013). Given the highly interactional characteristics of the co-creation process, the understanding related to how the two actors engage in it is needed (Gronroos & Voima, 2013).

Moreover, a distinction must be made in the conceptualisation of employees at the front. Those people can be seen as resources put in play by the company, acting based on a selling ceremony (Brun et al., 2013) or methods aimed at communicating meaning (Artusi & Bellini, 2020). At the same time, they are also actors in the company-customer interaction, which usually happens in the form of employee-customer interaction. Thus, understanding how to keep them aligned with the company's belief to act as the company side in the co-creation process is also critical. Their role in driving the co-creation of meaning might help to give increasing relevance to the front-line employees' role, which has already been enlarged to that of providing input for the start of the innovation process (Engen & Magnusson, 2015). Companies might start the re-designing of their proposition of meaning by leveraging the front-line employees' individuality and deep involvement in the constant co-creation of meaning to challenge existing institutions (Koskela-Huotari & Siltaloppi, 2020). Thus, researchers need to focus on understanding how to enable employees in capturing the early signals of institutions' evolutions, and how to enact systems that may facilitate the sharing of this information with the company decision-makers.

An institutional view on innovation of meaning

People's meaning-making activities are dependent on the values and norms that society defines in a given context (Kurzman, 2008). The co-creation mechanisms are influenced by the symbols and practices building a company's offering (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). In turn, the interpretation of symbols cannot be separated from the institutions and the experiential dimension of the meaning perception (Akaka et al., 2014; Flint et al., 2016). Thus, the co-creation process is influenced by institutions that were hermeneutically interpreted by managers, institutions, and institutional arrangements governing customer behaviour, and their evolution, on all the sides of the interaction, is what makes innovation happen (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). Meanings emerge in this interaction, based on the sense-making mechanisms enacted by the integration of resources among different actors (Luca et al., 2016). The new offering's meaning is represented by the "reason why" customers give to its purchase (Verganti, 2017), and its strictly related to the rules, norms, and behaviours embedded in the current institutions, which define the rules of the game (North, 1990). The relationship between the evolving institutions and the perception of meaning needs to be explored to understand how to frame the new propositions and how to set the desired boundaries to the co-creation mechanisms. The way managers can leverage the symbolism embedded into the new offering to align with existing and evolving institutions is also essential. Since companies are embedded in a system of institutional arrangements and may influence the evolution of institutions (McCracken, 1986), research about how to take this active role may be of critical significance to managers. Moreover, institutions are what enable the engagement of actors in the relationship (Baron et al., 2018) by expressing the rules of the game and the people's belief system. How to leverage the institution to maximise the engagement of customers is important to be studied.

The last research direction on the role of institutions is related to the existence of broader ecosystems in which the dyadic company-customer relationship is embedded. Within the system, actors engage in multiple co-creation processes with multiple actors. How this interrelation of interactions may influence the emergence of meaning in one specific dyadic relationship needs to be addressed through further research.

Area of research Level of analysis Suggested research questions

<i>Area of research</i>	<i>Level of analysis</i>	<i>Suggested research questions</i>
<i>Resource integration in the innovation of meaning</i>	Micro	<p>How can companies integrate resources to enable customers to co-create meaning?</p> <p>How to design the service front-end to enable effective co-creation mechanisms?</p> <p>Which are the operant resources that play a key role in enabling meaning co-creation?</p> <p>How to design a system of interconnected resources that enable the co-creation of meaning?</p>
	Meso	<p>How can networks of companies integrate resources to provide customers with a new meaning?</p>
<i>Co-creation of meanings</i>	Micro	<p>How does the co-creation of meaning take place in practice?</p> <p>Which is the relation between the meaning envisioned by the company and the meaning perceived by customers?</p> <p>Is it possible to control for the meaning co-creation by setting boundaries? How can companies do it?</p> <p>How to leverage on front-line employees' knowledge to make the co-creation process evolve toward a new meaning?</p>
	Meso	<p>How are meanings defined at an industry level?</p> <p>Does co-creation play a role in defining business standards?</p>

<i>Meanings and institutions</i>	Micro	How do institutions and institutional arrangements influence the meaning co-created at the company-customer level?
	Meso	How could companies track and forecast the evolution of institutions in the market? Can companies play a role in triggering and guiding the evolution of institutions in the market? Is there a timing or specific trigger in institutions' evolution that makes innovating the meaning of a product/service more promising?
	Macro	How can companies bring new meanings to different societal contexts?

Table 5: summary of the research directions and development of research questions

The relationship between meaning and value

Last, a key point that lays across the different levels needs further exploration: the relationship between meaning and value. Previous research assessed the nature of meaning as a concept that is related to the “reason why” people use a product or service, which is related to the hedonic value that people give to objects and experiences (Verganti, 2009; Korper et al., 2018). On the other side, value is usually referred to as a ratio between the benefit for the user and her cost to acquire those benefits (Priem, 2007). Meaning, instead, cannot be quantified or optimised. Both the concepts share the contextual and phenomenological determination, showing a characteristic of being “in context” (Verganti & Oberg, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Gronroos, 2012). While it is clear that the two concepts have a similar nature and may be used in very closed contexts, still, the specific distinction between the two needs to be further explored in the literature (Korper, 2018).

The co-creative nature of the concepts may help in drawing the difference among them. While value is often conceptualised as being univocally determined by the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), meanings have a societal dimension (Verganti, 2009). Moreover, the co-creation of value is regulated by institutions, while meanings are institutions, and may interact with their other dimensions, norms, rules, behaviours, in different ways. Thus, the investigation and comparison between the value and meaning co-creation processes is a promising direction for future research.

As the last point, researchers need to understand whether the two concepts are independent, or one is a sub-dimension of the other. While it appears that they insist on different assumptions and cannot be superimposed, a better conceptualisation of the two is needed to answer this question.

As a guideline for future research, the following research questions are proposed:

- Which are the differences between the concepts of meaning and value?
- Which are the relationships between meaning and value?
- Are value and meaning experienced at the same time?
- Is there any difference between the co-creation of value and the co-creation of meaning?

Conclusions

Taking an SDL perspective on the innovation of meaning, the field can be stimulated to grow into different directions. The fact that the innovation of meaning literature is still deeply rooted in the good-dominant logic opens many avenues for research. By exploring those research directions, an update of the framework and its application to a service economy may be achieved.

By organising the literature, we showed that the innovation of meaning inherently shares the SDL principles. With our contribution, we advanced the alignment by re-working the innovation of meaning principles to use the SDL wording.

However, the exploration of key concepts, as the integration of resources to enable the co-creation of meaning with customers, are still underexplored. Taking an SDL perspective may stimulate the evolution of the framework downstream, guiding further empirical understanding of how the

process work at the later stages: implementation and interaction with customers. This helps in completing the framework in areas in which more research has been advocated (Eling & Herstatt, 2017). With this article, we suggest four main research directions to further develop the innovation of meaning framework by leveraging the SDL perspective. In this way, we aim at advancing both the innovation of meaning literature and the SDL one. Regarding the latter, the innovation of meaning and the interaction between the company and customers may help in finding a relevant context in which empirical research can be pursued. As it is a promising logic to explain markets in a broader sense, we suggest another link with the innovation management literature that may further stimulate empirical investigation and the search for mid-range theories as advocated in the field (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). The development of midrange theories would help translate the theoretical knowledge accumulated into actionable knowledge for practitioners.

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