

# From Muso to Academic and Back: A Time and Person-Based Acknowledgement of Michael Kleinaltenkamp

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The year 2020 sees an important milestone for Professor Michael Kleinaltenkamp (Michael hereafter), as he concludes his official academic working life. This paper acknowledges the significant contribution Michael has made over the years. In particular, using Leximancer to undertake textmining of Michael's English language publications, we not only uncover the underlying structure of these contributions but also explore if and how focal themes of his research have changed, particularly considering his close engagement with the Australasian academic marketing community. Findings indicate foundational facets and the overall gestalt of his research over time, yet also point to important differences across the time periods analysed. Finally, we reflect on our findings from a musical perspective, drawing on Michael's passion for music, as we thank him for the many jams and the rehearsing, as well as for his support for the bands and scenes he belongs to. For future research, it should be noted that future acknowledgements would benefit from cooking as a metaphor to complete the picture.

## 1. Introduction

Professor Michael Kleinaltenkamp is known to many in academia: Marketing academics, specifically those in the areas of business-to-business and service; marketing students past and present, in particular at the Freie Universi-



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tät Berlin (FU); and of course lovers of music and good food who had the pleasure of crossing his paths. In 2020, his official academic career is coming to an end, 36 years after completing his doctorate, including 28 years at the FU. While we are certain that much more great work is to come, this paper takes a snapshot in time and reflects on some of the expansive contributions and the impact Michael has had on the marketing discipline, with a particular focus on his research. Indeed, while the process of developing this paper has certainly stimulated personal recollection and conjecture relating to the interactions and experiences in engaging with Michael and his passion for research, learning, music, cooking, and of course his family, our written contribution remains focused on data in the form of scholarly articles produced over the years.

The important juncture in Michael's academic life that we are celebrating with this special issue offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on two other junctures: (1) his move from publishing his work in German language to opening up his contributions to the world by moving to English language journals, and (2) his active participation of, and contribution to, the academic community in Australia and New Zealand, starting with a visit to the School of Marketing at the University of New South Wales, Sydney in 2007/2008.

While changes to research themes and interests over time may be expected, research is yet to investigate such changes across these junctures. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the question: *How has Michael Kleinaltenkamp's research focus changed over time, specifically considering his international ventures in the Australasian context?* Or, if we would put it in the perspective of the musician: *How has Michael changed his tunes or the chords on his instrument over time, specifically considering his engagement in different music scenes and bands?*

To answer this question, we systematically investigate the evolution of his research, with specific attention to peer-reviewed articles published between 2002 and 2019. Using Leximancer as an analysis tool, we uncover the underlying structure of Michael's English language publications, exploring if and how focal themes and concepts of his research have changed, before and since 2010 (2002–2009, 2010–2019). Michael's first publication in the *Australasian Marketing Journal* of the 2010 article 'Is Marketing Academia Losing Its Way? A commentary from a German per-

spective' was utilised as the juncture point to split time periods, so as to enable a reflection on changes aligned with the emergence of closer relations of Michael with the Australasian context.

The results offer conceptual and relational insights into his research priorities over time. Using the metaphor of the many guitars and other instruments Michael calls his own: They reflect on the strings he used and the way in which these joined into chords, whether as a lead or back-up, as a conductor or as part of a jam. It should be noted, however, that of Michael's very extensive list of research output, the publication that arguably has had the most significant impact was not included in this analysis as it is in German language. At the time of writing this paper, the article 'Leistungsbündel als Absatzobjekte' (service bundles as sales objects) reached 1,140 citations, making it one of the most cited German language articles in the marketing discipline. While not directly included in the corpus of articles examined in this research, a connection to this important contribution of Michael's work is made as part of the discussion.

This paper contributes to our understanding of the thematic developments of Michael's English language research over time, as it reflects on the types of international dialogue he has shaped on service solutions with structural and visual research insights. Specifically, while illustrating an overarching process-oriented view on value creation and service provision as fundamental to Michael's research gestalt over time, findings indicate important differences across the time periods analysed, for example a widening of Michael's research scope and a move towards a more actor-centric and systemic lens. Finally, this research is framed by a humoristic contribution by drawing on Michael's passion for music to relate identified themes and concepts to Michael's muso nature, thanking him for his humble and approachable self and for collaborations over the years.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Starting with a brief introduction of the relevance and impact Michael's work has had in the German community, the method for analysing his English language contributions is outlined. Specifically, the method section discusses the choice of Leximancer and the preparation of the text corpus for analysis, before justifying the analysis approach undertaken. Findings are then outlined and visualised, starting with the individual time periods (2002–2009, 2010–2019) before offering insights derived from the overall text corpus. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and interpersonal implications as well as directions for future research.

## 2. Background: The Relevance and Impact of Michael in the German Community

Looking back at the early years of Michael's academic career, his intellectual contributions to the world of marketing remained largely focused on German-speaking audiences. Indeed, the large majority of his publications emerged in German publication outlets without an English translation. While such restrictive access may challenge the impact of research for some, Michael's work defies such concerns. The reach and impact of his prolific publishing record has achieved astounding success across the German-language academic community, with many publications achieving not just double but triple digit citation counts.

His seminal article 'Leistungsbündel als Absatzobjekte', authored in 1993 together with Werner Engelhardt and Martin Reckenfelderbäumer, demonstrates the significant impact Michael has had with his thought leading work. One of the most cited marketing papers written in German language (1,140 citations at the time of writing this paper; current yearly citation rate of 42), the paper conceptualises an integrative solutions perspective as an approach to overcoming the dichotomy between goods and services. The impact of this paper can be attributed to its ability to both build a foundation for the immediate research advancing the area, as well as to establish such a leap in thought that it would connect closely to a phenomenon that arose more than a decade later – service-dominant (S-D) logic. Indeed, this research offered an important foundation for ongoing work given the quality of its critical discourse: The definitional and conceptual foundations of service in this paper offer exceptional depth and clarity in its argument, while also clearly demonstrating and delineating relevant shortcomings.

Importantly, however, its impact can be attributed to the fact that this research was ahead of its time, with its service and solution perspective, focus on resource integration and integrative processes, as well as its conceptualisation of a comprehensive solution typology that unites a process- and outcome-oriented perspective. It should be noted that Michael's research continued to build on this seminal paper, for example in publications such as 'Leistungstypologien als Basis des Marketing' (Solution typologies as a basis for marketing; Engelhardt et al. 1995) and 'Synergiepotentiale zwischen Industriegüter- und Dienstleistungsforschung' (Synergetic potential between research examining manufactured goods and service; Kleinentalenkamp 2001).

Given the aim of this research to specifically consider Michael's research foci in relation to the Australasian context, it is important to note that the potential for a fruitful connection and complementarity of Michael's work with

the Australasian academic marketing environment that emerged from the late 2000s was already evident in the German language contributions Michael developed during the early stages of his academic career. Indeed, the inherent alignment between Michael's most impactful paper (1993) and S-D logic (2004 onwards), a paradigm adopted and shaped positively by many in the Australasian academic marketing community, was noted previously. Furthermore, his research advancing our understanding of partnerships and cooperation (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp and Wolters 1997; Kleinaltenkamp 1997), customer integration (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp 1995; Kleinaltenkamp and Wolters 1997; Kleinaltenkamp 1999) and the creation of markets through standardisations or norms align closely with research areas strongly embedded in, and driven by, the Australasian academic marketing community over the last few decades, such as relationship marketing, value co-creation, customer and actor engagement and, more recently market shaping, to name a few. Indeed, the latter offers another important example of the thought-leading nature of Michael's research, when seeing it in light of the recent theorising of S-D logic and market shaping grounded in institutional theory.

Acknowledging Michael's relentless efforts and contributions to elevating the standards and theoretical foundations of business-to-business and service marketing in the German academic landscape, the remaining paper specifically seeks to develop a better understanding of how his research foci have evolved over time, with a particular focus on his English language publications and emerging connections to the international field, specifically with a view of the Australasian context.

### 3. Method

*Textmining Fundamentals and Process.* To understand the evolution of research topics and foci by Michael over the years, we pursued a Leximancer text mining analysis, investigating a specified textual corpus of journal articles (co)authored by Michael. Leximancer is an appropriate methodological approach in this case as it enables reliable and valid results, while reducing human bias through automated text structuration and visualisation (Wilden et al. 2017; Smith and Humphreys 2006). That is, the software automatically develops the underlying dictionary, text coding, concept correlations and concept mapping (Wilden et al. 2017). Indeed, the analysis provides the identification of underlying concepts (common text elements that carry related meaning) and aggregated themes (groupings of revealed concepts) to understand the structure of and relationships within the textual data (cf. Wilden et al. 2017). Themes are groupings of related concepts that define the content of a theme, based on co-occurrence fre-

quencies and overall connectedness of concepts. More generally, Leximancer thus provides both conceptual (thematic) and relational (semantic) insights into the data (Rooney 2005).

To prepare the relevant text corpus for our analysis, we had to decide on the inclusion and exclusion of published work by Michael. We decided to specifically focus on peer-reviewed articles in international journals or peer-reviewed books/chapters. Despite publications early in his career in English language, we focused on his key work beginning in 2002 in international marketing journals ('German Approaches to Business-to-Business Marketing', *Journal of Business Research*). Most of his publications in the 1980s/1990s were in German language and published in books or respective journals such as *Zeitschrift für betriebswirtschaftliche Forschung*. In total we identified 34 relevant publications between 2002 and 2019 in English language.

Our text mining approach largely followed the guidelines and procedure of Wilden et al. (2017). For the purpose of analysis and meaningful results, we also used the Leximancer default list of stop words for exclusion in the analysis (e.g. words like 'thus', 'and'), while manually adding further keywords to the stop list (e.g. 're', 'de', 'vol', 'marketing', 'management', 'Kleinaltenkamp'). The exclusion of these additional words ensured that the results are not confounded, for example, by methodological or discipline-specific biases, and that the results are better interpretable in view of our research question by excluding words that do not carry meaning to this end (e.g. are just common words in academic writing). Indeed, the stop words facilitate a meaningful text corpus, built as a foundation for the analysis and visualisation. At the same time, we specified similar conditions for all analyses (e.g. enabling automatically generated number of themes rather than pre-specified number; applying identical specifications for data aggregation). This ensured that results and visualisations are comparable (akin to 'comparing apples with apples').

To further aid with the analysis, we specified three time periods for Leximancer to auto-estimate the most appropriate aggregated themes and related concepts, as well as their proximity. The first time period includes the full timespan between 2002 and 2019, offering insights into the overall gestalt of Michael's research interests and contributions. In turn, we were seeking to better understand the potential evolution of concepts and themes over time. For this purpose, we split the data into the periods 2002–2009 and 2010–2019. We applied this particular time split mainly for narrative reasons rather than any other academic reason. That is, we were interested in how Michael's research foci and relations changed after closer relations with the Australasian context. Hence, we used the

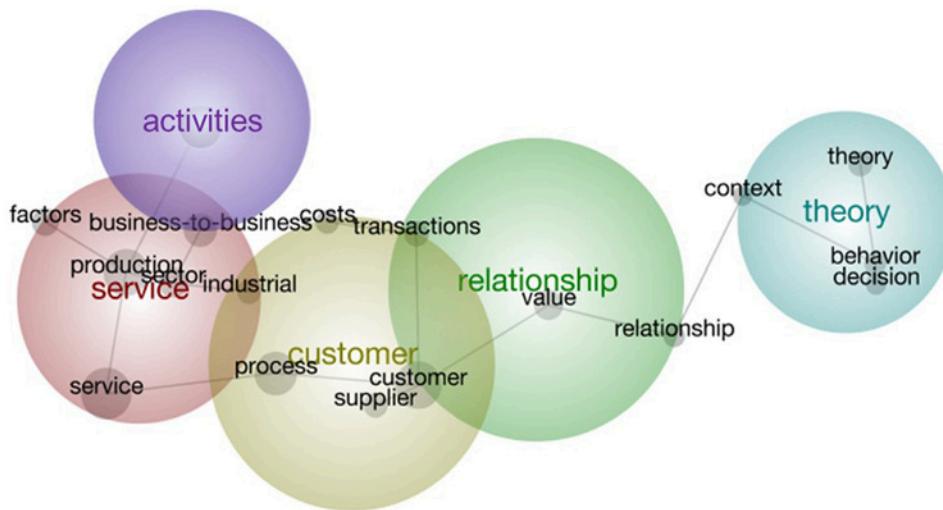


Fig. 1: Themes 2002–2009

2010 article 'Is Marketing Academia Losing Its Way?' in the *Australasian Marketing Journal* as a fitting split point, following Michael's first extended visit among the Australasian academic context in 2007, and subsequent co-authored articles with Australasian scholars (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp, Brodie, Frow, Hughes, Peters and Woratschek 2012; Haase, Kleinaltenkamp, Layton, Nill and Pels 2012).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Time period 2002–2009

The following analysis highlights the autogenerated concepts of related meanings and aggregated themes identified by the machine-learning algorithm. Specifically, the aggregated themes that emerged over this time period include *service*, *customer*, *relationship*, *activities* and *theory*. These labels are based on the concepts within a theme (Indulska et al. 2012). We treat these themes and concepts as representing part of Michael's research foci based on the underlying relevance of concepts established through the software's considered frequencies and overall connectedness of terms. The resulting proximity indicates that they often appear together in the data corpus and are visualised in *Fig. 1*.

To quote from the Web Appendix of Welden et al. (2017): "The color indicates the importance of derived themes (i.e., if a theme comprises many concepts mentioned frequently in the textual data, the relevant theme will appear in a brighter, more red color). The size of the circles indicates how many concepts have been grouped together. The distance between concepts indicates how closely the concepts are related; thus, concepts that are only weakly linked semantically appear far apart (Campbell et al. 2011; Rooney 2005)." This now leads us to the following interpretation.

In Michael's case, *service* emerged as the most dominant theme among five proposed ones. As can be seen by the

underlying concepts, the notion of service particularly relates to industrial or business-to-business marketing contexts, which Michael has been particularly interested in and contributed to over the years. The focus on service comes along with a respective emphasis on the related theme of *activities* that enable or manifest service provision, also linking back to Michael's integrative solution perspective (Engelhardt et al. 1993). Already early on, Michael was curious about studying those processes, factors and production aspects that make a difference to, and more meaningfully involve, *customers* (see also his German language publications on "Kundenintegration" [customer integration]), which constitutes another significant theme. Within a *relationship* frame, particularly in view of those customers but also suppliers, the analysis further suggests that Michael's research factored in costs and efficiencies related to transactions as well as more holistic relationship value perspectives. And finally, the analysis further reveals that Michael's research is likely strongly linked to or grounded in *theory* as a theme, given the (co)occurrence of the term, along with behavioural and contextual explanations or foci.

### 4.2. Time period 2010–2019

The visual and interpretational picture changes significantly in the second time period, as illustrated in *Fig. 2*. For example, the number of emerging aggregated themes has increased (from five to nine). This might be due to the fact that the second time period accounts for significantly more articles that define the respective data corpus, with increasing potential for academic breadth over the years.

Interestingly and importantly though, the aggregated themes provide quite a different picture in terms of research foci and connections. While *service* remains the dominant focus in the second period, the concepts of *relationship*, *activities* and *theory* continue to emerge as key themes. As *Fig. 2* illustrates the attention shifts further

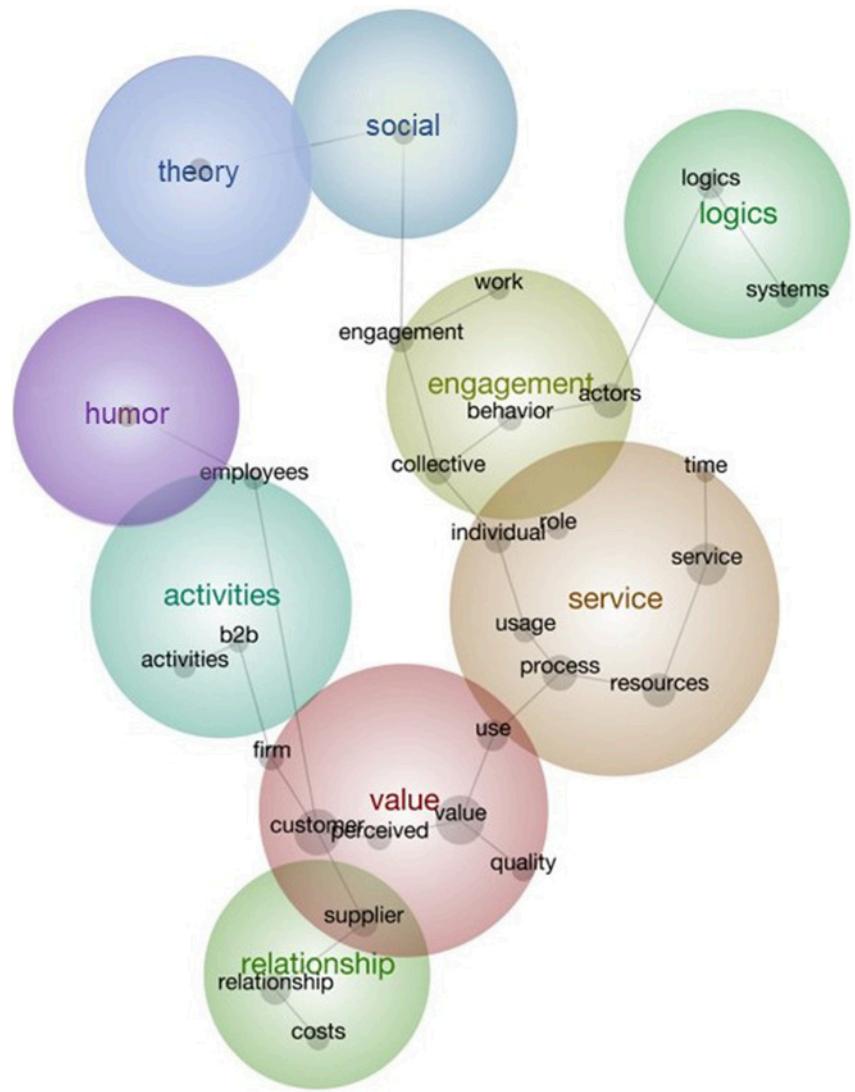


Fig. 2: Themes 2010–2019

away from customers specifically towards the theme of *value* (creation), and the linked aspects of use value (or perceived value) and quality across various user perspectives (e.g. the focal customer, firm and supplier). Building on these conceptual developments, *engagement* materialises as a significant theme in the recent stages of his research (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp et al. 2019), considering a strong interface with *service* as a theme. This evolution is consistent with the more collaborative nature of value creation emerging in the general literature across this time period, whereby value is cocreated often across a plethora of different contributors and engagement processes.

Conceptually this is further in line with S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2008; 2016), that both links to and partially drives the appearance of the theme of *logic* and *systems* views (e.g. Edvardsson, Kleinaltenkamp, Tronvoll, McHugh, and Windahl 2014). This stronger connection back to S-D logic in the second time period fits with the overall momentum of this perspective in marketing, while also going hand in hand with Australasia's early interest in S-D logic and Michael's increasing embeddedness in

this academic community. Furthermore, Michael's work ties into the *social* realm of business, giving greater consideration to the socio-cultural contexts in which service is provided. Finally, *humor* emerges as an important theme (e.g. Mathies, Chiew and Kleinaltenkamp 2016), which on face value seems odd relative to the other research foci and overall agenda. However, knowing Michael and his 'Lebensweise', it is no surprise that humor turns out to play an important role even in his academic life.

#### 4.3. Time period 2002–2019

Putting it all in perspective, the final analysis uncovers key concepts and themes across the entire time period, defining conceptual and relational insights based on all here included English language publications and putting them in relative terms. At the basic level, we can see in Fig. 3 that the autogenerated number of aggregated themes increases to ten.

As can be expected, some of the time period-specific themes resurfaced or remained in the overall analysis, demonstrating robustness of the algorithm and the rele-

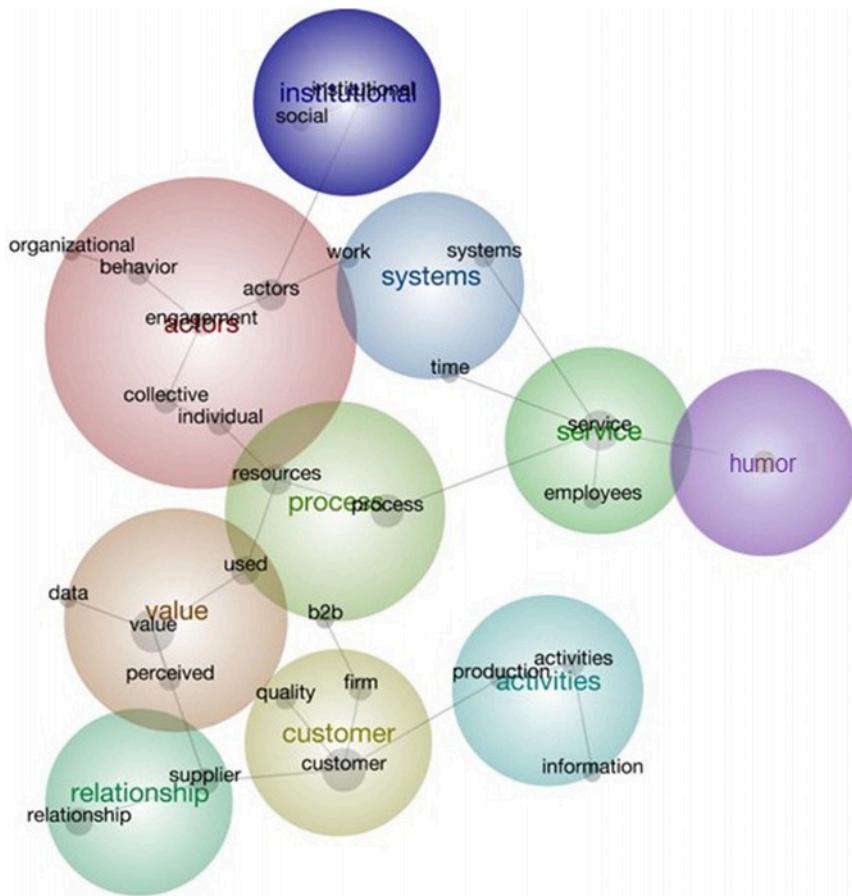


Fig. 3: Overall Themes 2002–2019

vance of these themes relative to the entire data corpus. Among the continuous themes are *customer*, *relationship*, *value*, *activities*, *humour*, and of course the notion of *service*. Importantly though, it is interesting to see that the text-mining produces a centrality of *process* (e.g. resource usage) overall. Indeed, by factoring in the entire publication period/data set, the analysis tool suggests that resources, resource usages and activities are best summarised in a process view. This finding is closely aligned with Michael's long-standing tradition of theorizing related to customer and resource integration, and an overall integrative solution perspective. Putting all of Michael's key publications since 2002 in relation combines into a systemic and actor-centric (rather than just customer-centric) language and priorities, connected through (service) *processes* that enable *value* and *relationships* to materialise. Indeed, *actors* emerges as the more integrative and substantiated term, considering both individual and collective actor phenomena (aggregated, hierarchical perspective) such as collective engagement (Kleinaltenkamp et al. 2019), as well as focal actor-transcending phenomena (horizontal perspective) such as across the value network from suppliers to buyers. Given this more holistic view, the theme of *systems* comes as a complementary theoretical focus. The stronger focus on systems might also be reflective of the contextuality of value creation that Michael has given increasing attention to. Finally, the results show the relevance

of social context as morphed into *institutional* considerations, which Michael has theoretically leveraged particularly in recent years (e.g. Karpen and Kleinaltenkamp 2019). On the flipside, the previous themes of *engagement*, *theory*, and *logics*, for example, do not feature prominently enough anymore by way of statistical co-occurrences and proximity to appear as overarching themes. Overall, the analyses reveal important time-bound specificity between 2002–2009/2010–2019, while offering a holistic view on his research priorities overall.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical and Interpersonal Implications

This paper acknowledges the wide impact and contribution Michael Kleinaltenkamp has made over the years, both within the German academic environment and the international marketing landscape, such as the Australasian academic community. Michael's impact is reflected in the number of publications and citations of his seminal articles in German language journals (e.g. Engelhardt et al. 1993), as well as seminal books or book chapters (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp 1997; 1998). If we were to take the perspective of the music world, we can only imagine the gold, platinum or even diamond records hanging in the poolroom as Australians would say.

Michael has also successfully supervised about 40 PhD students, for example, and was paramount to the business-to-business and service marketing discipline development in Germany. He has published in leading international marketing journals (e.g. *Journal of Marketing*) and has served as (Co)Editor in journals relevant to his fields of interest. In this paper we are particularly interested in the evolution of Michael's research foci over time; specifically, if and how these have changed, considering his increasing internationalisation and ventures in the Australasian context. Hence, how have Michael's tunes emerged; how did he bring various strings into play as he increasingly immersed himself in different scenes and bands at opposite side of the globe?

Using Leximancer as an appropriate analysis tool, we demonstrate conceptual and relational developments within Michael's English language research here considered. Specifically, we find significant differences across the time periods 2002–2009, 2010–2019 and overall 2002–2019, in terms of his areas of attention as derived based on text corpus (co)occurrences and proximities. Without repeating details here, we can see a widening of research scope and emerging priorities. Interestingly though, the overall time analysis puts all considered publications into perspective and shows the gestalt of Michael's research interests and contributions; for instance, away from just customer or supplier centric thinking to generic actors and a more systemic and institutional lens. Fundamental to Michael remains his process oriented view of value creation and service provision, potentially facilitated through conducive relationships, actor engagement, humour and otherwise meaningful social contexts. In musical terms, Michael's musical repertoire and joining of strings and instruments expanded over time, as he not only led a number of bands, but also more broadly shaped musical futures by conducting, performing and jamming. Reflecting on the many jamming sessions, in particular, Michael's ability to carry the rhythm and to both play the lead but also invite and support others to do the same are second to none.

Michael's endeavours in the Australasian environment increasingly show a strong link to complementary thinking and conceptualising, resulting in a range of subsequent joint publications with Australasian-based researchers (e.g. *Roger Layton, Roderick Brodie, Pennie Frow, Adrian Payne, Tim Hughes, Kaj Storbacka, Suvi Nenonen, Ian Wilkinson, Louise Young, Christine Mathies, Ingo Karpen, Carolin Plewa, Jodie Conduit, Laszlo Sajtos, Siegried Gudergan and Tom Chen*). His impact and contribution is, however, not just limited to these direct outcomes. Indeed, Michael has been an active and integrated member of the Australasian community since at least 2007. Since then, Michael has, for example, been (1) a visiting professor at various Australasian universities (e.g. University of New South Wales, University of Western Australia, RMIT University and

The University of Adelaide). His engagement deepened over time with (2) becoming a regular presenter and mentor at ANZMAC conferences and respective doctoral colloquia.

He has further (3) collaborated with multiple Australasian researchers and universities on organising and co-hosting events (e.g. Co-creation in Service and Customer Engagement Symposia); has (4) continued to expand his research projects with Australasian academics; and finally (5) is even involved in further connecting research initiatives between Berlin and Australasia in the future (e.g. MAS-HIN Workshop in Berlin). These combined efforts have significantly shaped, and will continue to shape, the Australasian academic environment. In turn, this environment has and continues to shape Michael's research as well. This mutual (market) shaping is the outcome of an open mindset and an endless desire to learn and advance our human understanding, a reason why the authors and many in the academic community look forward to continuing jamming and performances, beyond the official career ending.

Finally, the link of the characteristics of his muso-nature and their associations with Michael's research foci highlight the explanatory power of cognitive dissonance theory, whereby Michael has achieved consistency and harmony, while reconciling both academic and personal interests into a coherent and authentic narrative; offering important learnings for young academics.

Despite these achievements, plenty of research opportunities prevail. For instance, even though researchers have recognised the complementarities between Michael's integrative solution perspective (Engelhardt et al. 1993), his customer integration theorising (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp 1997; 1998), and both S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004) as well as service logic (e.g. Grönroos 2006); we still lack an attempt to more fully embrace the similarities and differences across these perspectives, and how their conceptual views may mutually contribute to each other. Indeed, seeking to further integrate these different perspectives might offer an opportunity to further advance foundational theorising in marketing.

## 5.2. Limitations

The empirical findings of this paper are based purely on Michael's English language publications in the years 2002–2019. However, there is a significant body of German language writings across journal articles, books, book chapters and case studies, particularly in the 1990s. It would be interesting to study whether there are further language-based differences that are also of conceptual and priority nature. For example, there are quite a few keywords that have a similar origin across these two languages, such as 'customer integration' or 'Kundenintegra-

tion' (German equivalent). Some overlap could hence be expected while differences might emerge due to varying research priorities.

Future research could also explore how author networks around the communities that Michael is embedded have evolved. While there might be ongoing collaborations and contributors over time (inner co-author circle), differences in second and third tier networks are likely to have emerged (outer co-author circle). Co-citation analysis might be another opportunity to further understand and acknowledge research clusters associated with Michael's work and beyond, potentially shedding light on further common themes.

Finally, the intention of this paper is to honour the significant impact and contributions Michael has offered to the discipline. Rather than putting theoretical interest and contribution first, we shamelessly acknowledge that putting Michael first is the spirit of this endeavour.

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## Keywords

Professor Michael Kleinaltenkamp, Impact, Leximancer, Australasian Academic Community, Music