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## Fostering a trans-disciplinary perspectives of service ecosystems

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides a brief introduction and comments on the articles in this special issue on transdisciplinary perspectives of service-dominant logic. Insights are provided that draw on economics, ecosystems theory, philosophy, service science, sociology, strategic management and systems science. Collectively these articles enhance service-dominant logic as well as foster more transdisciplinary research. We also integrate some of the ideas presented and share some observations and suggestions on resource integration, value co-creation, institutions, and service ecosystems.

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## 1. Introduction

Rapid growth and dissemination of service-dominant (S-D) logic within marketing and service science has provided a new lens for examining business, economy and society. The expansion spans many disciplines including; computer science, information systems, marketing, management, operations management, service science, and supply chain management, as well as specialized applications such as in arts, design, education, health, sports, tourism and others.

The development of S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) began with the identification of a convergence of ideas and trends occurring for over a century. The underlying purpose was to understand how markets work and what marketing is and how it should be conducted. From the outset, some of this conceptualization was, by necessity, transdisciplinary and drew on work in anthropology, economics, law, management, marketing and philosophy. However, most of it reflected writings in marketing, especially the evolution to marketing thought around “services” (e.g., Shostack, 1977) and relationships (e.g., Berry, 1983), both with a considerable heritage from Northern Europe and the so-called Nordic School (e.g., Gronroos, 1994, Gummesson, 1994, 1995).

The initial effort (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) culminated in eight foundational premises that offered the potential for an explanatory foundation

for an entire domain of marketing and thus for a general theory of marketing (Lusch & Vargo, 2006a, 2006b). Within a couple of years, a community of supporters of S-D logic emerged and grew. Through dialogue, and an occasional debate, the community helped to provide crucial insights that resulted in further refinement and expansion from eight to ten foundational premises (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Recently, it became apparent that there was a missing premise, one to address how human actors coordinate their actions to be able to have civilized trade (exchange of service) and value co-creation. Relying on the “invisible hand” explanation of the market did not seem adequate. Institutions and institutional arrangements, which were increasingly emerging in the literatures of economics, organization science, sociology and political science, but scantily addressed in marketing thought, offered potential insights into the issue of the coordination of (often) massive, human value co-create.

Consequently, in the continuing evolution of S-D logic, some of the ten foundational premises were further refined and an eleventh premise was added, which dealt with institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). For more parsimony, four of the ten foundational premises and the eleventh foundational premise (Lusch & Vargo, 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2016) were identified as axioms, representing the core of S-D logic.

The most current statement (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) of the five axioms of S-D logic includes the following axioms. Axiom 1: Service is the fundamental basis of exchange. Axiom 2: Value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiaries. Axiom 3: All social and economic actors are resource integrators. Axiom 4: Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary. Axiom 5: Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.

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These axioms offer the basis for a shared mindset that is becoming a creative-commons platform for the S-D logic, and transdisciplinary community of global scholars. This creative platform potentially provides a shared worldview, later summarized as S-D logic “narrative”, by reducing cognitive distance, which helps to foster an architecture of participation among the actors in the S-D logic community.

Importantly, the actors are often participating in multiple, overlapping networks and sub-networks, such as those associated with computer science and, simultaneously, those associated with service(s) marketing, supply chain management, etc. Within these networks, the interactions and ties among the actors often tend to be tight, within the same disciplinary network, based on shared understandings, yet loosely coupled in relation to actors in other disciplinary networks, as can be seen in this special issue of *Journal of Business Research*. The combination of these tight and loose couplings, among actors of various networks, fosters the emergence of S-D logic. This is a transdisciplinary and a global community that can be characterized as a complex system (Simon, 1962). It enables a degree of structural flexibility, in which actors can engage in co-creation through continual communication and work around the world. However, it also has structural integrity, which is reflected in organized conferences, forums, books and peer reviewed scholarly journals. This dual ability to have structural flexibility as well as structural integrity is important (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015) for the community to continue to innovate (adapt), and thus for S-D logic to have evolutionary potential.

The prior discussion illustrated the usefulness of system and network concepts for describing the S-D logic community. These system and network concepts are also becoming increasingly central to S-D logic as relevant concepts for dealing with the (often massive) direct and indirect service exchange that occurs in the economy and society, since all actors that are involved in service exchange are a part of a network. However, while used frequently and clearly an improvement over concepts of “chains” (e.g., supply or value), the concept of a *network*, by itself, is too static. That is, chains and connections between actors and resources, while interesting to study and important to the well-being of actors, do not capture the complexity and dynamics of what occurs among actors exchanging service. Predictably, others recognized this problem previously and developed concepts such as “value constellations” (Normann & Ramirez, 1993).

Another conceptual candidate for capturing the essential network dynamics is “ecosystem.” Ecosystems, in the biological literature, are communities of organisms interacting, over time and space, with other organisms and other elements in the system. The interactions result in interdependence, necessary for joint adaptability and also serve a source of the dynamism and emergence in the system. Markets, economies, and similar human systems are like natural ecosystems, in that they emerge and go through sweeping changes over time. Consequently the S-D logic literature, (e.g., Lusch et al., 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2011, Vargo & Lusch, 2016) has identified the concept of a service ecosystem to capture this systemic dynamism. Vargo & Lusch (2016) define a “service ecosystem” as “a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange”.

The five axioms of S-D logic, when coupled with the service ecosystems concept, enable the following, relatively short and concise narrative of S-D logic as a process (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) of value co-creation (well-being): *value co-creation occurs through (social and economic) actors, involved in resource integration and service exchange, enabled and constrained by institutions and institutional arrangements, establishing nested and interlocking service ecosystems of value co-creation, which serve as the context for future value co-creation activities.* As more scholars and practitioners accept this narrative, it moves toward becoming a shared understanding among actors in a creative commons platform resulting in an architecture of participation among the associated actors.

With this brief introduction, we now share some thoughts on the contributions in this special issue and then move to a discussion of the broader set of challenges facing the development of S-D logic with a particular focus on resource integration, institutions and value co-creation from a service-ecosystem perspective.

## 2. Reflection on the contributors & their contributions

“Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Service-Dominant Logic,” the theme of this special issue of the *Journal of Business Research*, comes through strongly in the half dozen contributions by nineteen contributors. These scholars brought together theories, concepts, and frameworks from disciplines both within business and from well outside of business. As hoped when establishing this special issue, this brought new perspectives and insights into S-D logic, especially in relation to the conceptualization of service ecosystems. In order to highlight the transdisciplinary nature of this research, we place the key disciplines drawn upon in bold-face font.

**Systems science** and especially synergetics, used initially to develop a richer and more complete understanding of biology, chemistry and physics (Haken, 1977) and later applied to business (Haken, 1984), were used to describe value co-creation in service ecosystems (Meynhardt et al., in this issue). Emergence and its meaning and properties were discussed, based on a variety of writings in **philosophy**. These writings enable a distinction between *heteropathic* versus *homopathic* resource integration and value co-creation in service ecosystems (Peters, in this issue). Drawing on many of the writings in S-D logic, as well as the “economies of worth” framework (Bergeron, 2003), longitudinal case study evidence of the evolution of a service ecosystem is provided. Institutional theory from sociology (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012) and the work of two Nobel Prize winners in economics (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2005) form the basis of an analysis of innovation in service ecosystems, with focus on breaking, making and maintaining institutionalized rules (Koskela-Huotari et al., in this issue).

A growing trend in the strategic management literature is the identification and elaboration of the micro-foundations that help the understanding of “higher-order” needs to be discipline, more macro constructs (Felin & Foss, 2005, Teece, 2007). Actor engagement is proposed as a micro-foundation for value co-creation (Storbacka et al., in this issue). Collaborative market and organizational structures such as “open innovation” (Chesbrough, Kim, Agogino, 2014), “crowd sourcing” (Shaughnessy, 2014), “shared agency” (Bratman, 2014), “shared purpose” (Moore, 2013) and “actor interdependence” (Iansiti & Lavien, 2004) are often addressed from some variation on ecosystems theory. The process of shared intentions emerging in service ecosystems is the focus of the article by Taillard et al. (in this issue) and draws on literature in philosophy and sociology. All of the articles connect well with service science.

Importantly, the half-dozen articles can be easily identified with the S-D logic narrative. For instance:

- “Innovation in service ecosystems—Breaking, making, and maintaining institutionalized rules of resource integration” focuses on resource integration, institutions and service ecosystems.
- “The role of shared intentions in the emergence of service ecosystems” focuses on the interdependence of actors, resource integration, service exchange and service ecosystems.
- Value co-creation and service ecosystems are the focus of “Systemic principles of value co-creation: Synergetics of value and service ecosystems.”
- Ecosystems and their evolution is the topic of “Evolution of a service ecosystem: Longitudinal evidence from multiple shared services centers based on the economies of worth framework.”
- A service ecosystems, resource integration, and value co-creation focus is provided in “Heteropathic vs. homopathic resource

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