



The co-creation/place attachment nexus

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Establishes conceptual link between models of co-creation and place attachment.
- *Place identity* (personal relation with site) correlates more strongly with experience value.
- Sites rated higher in terms of *place dependence* (perceived site attributes).
- Demonstrates connection between *place identity* and specific site behavior.
- Implications for expansion of co-creation research beyond service-dominated logic.

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ABSTRACT

Co-creation in tourism has investigated a range of ways in which consumers are becoming increasingly involved in defining and creating services and products. These activities, however, constitute only a small portion of the full range of tourism experiences. The current concentration on co-creation of (mostly service-dominated) tourism products needs to be expanded to accommodate elements such as the physical environment and local social and cultural milieus of tourism. This article appropriates concepts and models from the discourse of place attachment to demonstrate an approach to extending the co-creation concept to include experiences of the physical tourism site, not merely as the setting of a service relation, but as a fundamental dimension of the tourism experience. This approach is tested and demonstrated based on an analysis and discussion of the findings of a survey study of tourists to the Historic Center of Macao.

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1. Introduction

Consumers co-create the experiences, and thus the value, that are the basis of exchange in the contemporary “experience economy” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Research and practice on co-creation in tourism have investigated a range of ways in which consumers are becoming increasingly involved in defining and creating the services and products that they consume, rather than selecting from pre-defined and pre-designed options (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Lugosi, 2014; Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013). Co-creation is an apt way of describing and understanding such practices, in which providers of tourism products entice tourists with the promise of highly self-defined experiences (Sfandia & Björk, 2013).

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These activities, however, constitute only a small portion of the full range of tourism practices and experiences. If the experience economy is meant to denote a global paradigm of value production in contemporary economies, and not just a set – albeit a growing one – of commercial offerings, then the current concentration on co-creation of (mostly service-dominated) tourism products needs to be expanded. It is not apparent, for example, how elements such as the physical environment and the social and cultural milieus of a tourism destination, being for the most part non-commercialized and not subject to reconfiguration to suit tourists' preferences, would be accommodated within the current understanding of co-creation.

The concept of co-creation describes an important dimension of value creation in contemporary tourism. However, the co-creation discourse has given scant attention to one of the fundamental aspects of the tourism experience: namely, tourists' relationship with the physical sites at which tourism takes place. This paper proposes a way to integrate tourists' experience of place with the co-creation

concept, which can provide managers with a more inclusive appreciation of the activities through which value is generated by tourists, in an experience economy, through their engagement with tangible tourism assets.

This article appropriates concepts and models from the discourse of *place attachment* (Williams, Patterson, & Roggenbuck, 1992) to demonstrate an approach to extending the co-creation concept to include experiences of the physical tourism site, not merely as the setting of a service relation, but as a fundamental dimension of the tourism experience. This approach is tested and demonstrated, based on an analysis and discussion of the findings of a survey study of tourists to the Historic Center of Macao.

2. Background

2.1. Tourism in an experience economy

Pine and Gilmore (1998) applied the term “experience economy” to express the centrality of experiential value as a generator of economic value in contemporary economies, asserting that consumers perceive value primarily in terms of the quality of the consumption experience, more so than function or use value. They propose a model that distinguishes four different realms of experience – *esthetic* (appreciating sensorially engaging environments), *entertainment* (passive fun), *education* (learning something) and *escapism* (“losing oneself” through total involvement) – defined by distinctions between active vs. passive, immersive vs. absorptive modes of experience. Pine and Gilmore’s concept and model have been applied and validated in a number of studies in the tourism field (Hosany & Witham, 2009; Jurowski, 2009; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Park, Oh, & Park, 2010; Willard, Frost, & Lade, 2013), and have been explicitly linked with the creation of value in heritage tourism experiences (Park, 2013).

Emotions guide tourists’ desire to visit a given site or attraction, and the perceived quality of their experience is proportional to the potency of the emotional engagement with the visited place (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). In an experience economy, managers at destinations and attractions devote increasing attention to offering memorable and meaningful experiences, above and beyond the provision of service quality or physical attributes, even in eminently natural (as opposed to human-made/artificial) attractions such as Niagara Falls at the US/Canadian border (Sternberg, 1997). Experience-centred tourism planning, marketing and management have been institutionalized from the scale of individual attractions such as museums (Goulding, 2000) to the experiential “branding” of whole countries (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). Cities also compete among each other for tourists (as well as for preferred residents, skilled workforce and corporate job providers) as destinations in a global experience economy (Lorentzen, 2009). In vying for the patronage of experience consumers, cities around the world are undergoing metamorphoses to provide “eventscapes related to fun and cultural experience” (Marling, Jensen & Kiib, 2008), in their physical planning, as well as in the way they are promoted and communicated.

There are many potential perspectives on tourism experience. Some researchers such as Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) advocate concentrating on the “immediate conscious experience” of the tourist on-site, as opposed to “post-hoc satisfaction”. Others suggest that pre-visit planning and anticipation (Waligo, 2013) and post-visit memories (Larsen, 2007) are as important as the on-site engagement with the place in understanding tourism experience and motivation. The tourism experience consists of both the “peak” experiences that stand out as memorable events that contrast with the activities of everyday life, and the more banal “consumer” experiences such as sleeping, eating, playing and purchasing, which

support and enable the peak experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). In a well-rounded experience, all elements contribute to reinforcing a coherent narrative that is designed to engage the emotions of the consumer/visitor. Managers of successful destinations often take a “staging” approach to site and services management, to meet evolving visitor expectations (Morgan, Elbe, & Curiel, 2009).

Experience can thus be seen as a pivotal concept for understanding many facets of tourism, and articulating the ways in which tourists derive value from tourism activities. The following section will discuss current thought on the mechanisms by which value is created from tourism experiences.

2.2. Value co-creation

Contemporary consumers assign more value to products and services in which they feel they have been able to have an influence. Co-creation refers both to the nature of processes through which consumers and firms co-create value and to the strategies by which firms facilitate such collaboration (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Co-creation of value by customers is one of the central tenets of the Service Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) that has come to dominate economics. This logic posits that service is the essential foundation of all exchange value, and that this value arises from interaction between (or is co-constructed by) the service provider and the service consumer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Service Dominant Logic has only quite recently been introduced into tourism research from “mainstream management literature” (Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011). Aligned with S-D Logic, most studies of value co-creation in tourism have dealt with service-intensive niches such as wellness tourism (Hjalager & Konu, 2011), or service-oriented sectors such as hotels (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013) and travel agents (Grissman & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012).

A popular theme in co-creation literature is the role of information technology, and the Internet in particular, in facilitating collaborative value creation (Sawhney, Verona, & Prandelli, 2005; Subbiah & Ibrahim, 2011). Digital technologies – such as Internet platforms for communication and social networks (Cabiddu, Lui, & Piccoli, 2013; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2013) and on-site interactive installations that aid in visitor engagement and site interpretation (Ciolfi, 2012) – are also discussed prevalently in the literature on co-creation in tourism.

There have been some S-D Logic-based explorations of co-creation in heritage tourism, mainly in terms of the services surrounding heritage or the systems providing interpretation of heritage sites and artifacts (Calver & Page, 2013; Minkiewicz & Evans, 2009).

The co-creation concept presents a formulation of value as something that is co-constructed, not merely consumed, by the customer. This perspective opens up the possibility of an expanded understanding of economic activity in a broad sense, and tourism in particular.

2.3. Co-creation of the tourism experience

While experiences in the context of tourism are characterized by consumption and exchange (Mossberg, 2007), the experience economy perspective brings increasing awareness of the role of tourists as active co-creators of tourism experiences, rather than passive consumers of predetermined experiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). While the idea of the co-creation of value continues to be explored in contemporary research (Ertimur & Venkatesh, 2010; Prebensen et al., 2013; Tajzadeh-Namin, 2012), a current trend proposes that it is more meaningful to discuss co-creation from the perspective of creating *experiences* (Lugosi, 2014; Sfandia & Björk, 2013). These two terms are clearly linked

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