Conceptualising customer-to-customer co-creation in socially dense tourism contexts

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Title

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Keywords

Tourism experience, co-creation; value; customer-to-customer; social practices
Introduction

Tourism consumption often takes place in socially dense, experiential settings, such as guided
tours, cruise holidays or events and festivals. Tourists come together to spend time with
significant others and to meet other tourists (Brown et al., 2002; Huang and Hsu, 2010;
Packer and Ballantyne, 2011; Prebensen and Foss, 2011). In the course of their social
experiences tourists bond, cement social relationships, and enhance their social skills
(Arnould and Price, 1993; Wilks, 2009); thus co-creating ‘value’. Nonetheless, not much is
known about what this value is and how it is co-created in socially dense tourism contexts. A
small number of tourism marketing studies explore the concept of value co-creation (e.g.,
Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009; Sfandla and Björk, in press). These studies are, however,
limited to co-creation of value between the tourism organisation and the tourist. More in-
depth insights are needed that would acknowledge the ability of tourists to co-create value
with each other, as opposed to with the organisation.

Looking at more closely at the notion of value, tourism marketing literature is
dominated by the outcome oriented ‘features-and-benefits’ value perspective. This approach
focuses on how the tourism provider can design and deliver value or valuable experience
through service attributes, so that it is perceived by tourists as benefits. This does not,
however, sufficiently acknowledge the active role of tourists as value co-creators. Recently, a
move toward the ‘value-in-’ perspective is evidenced in tourism marketing research, building
on the concept of the service-dominant [S-D] logic in marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2004;
2008). A number of scholars present S-D logic as a new paradigm that offers interesting
opportunities for tourism marketing research, and the study of value co-creation in particular
(Li and Petrick, 2008; Sfandla and Björk, in press; Shaw et al., 2011).

This conceptual paper aims to contribute theoretically in tourism marketing research
and specifically to the study of value and co-creation in three ways. Firstly, the paper argues
that the principles of S-D logic do not go far enough in acknowledging the complexities
inherent in socially dense tourism settings, and puts forward the recently emerged Customer-
Dominant [C-D] logic (Heinonen et al., 2010) in marketing as an alternative orientation.
Secondly, this paper engages in a debate of the paradigmatic and epistemological foundations
of the experience- vs. practice-based value perspectives in C-D logic, in order to build a
robust theoretical basis for C2C co-creation research in tourism. Finally, a conceptual
framework is posited that conceptualises C2C co-creation in socially dense tourism contexts.
This is done by presenting value as a complex, multi-layered construct that takes into account
the social structures inherent in many tourism consumption setting. The framework not only
represents a new theoretical contribution within value and co-creation research in tourism
marketing, but also offers a novel methodological and epistemological basis for future C2C
co-creation studies in a variety of shared tourism experience contexts.

Value perspectives in tourism research

The notion of ‘value’ is central in the context of this conceptual paper. However, within
marketing and consumer research the term is rather ambiguous (Woodall, 2003). Before
proceeding to discuss C2C co-creation in socially dense tourism contexts, two perspectives
on value are critically reviewed that appear in consumer and marketing research, and tourism
marketing literature specifically: The more traditional ‘features-and-benefits’ approach as an
outcome-oriented value ontology grounded within a positivist paradigm (Tronvoll et al.,
2011); and, the ‘value-in-’ perspective that primarily draws on the principles of S-D logic and
corresponds with a more reflexive, interpretive paradigm that can increasingly be found in
tourism experience research (Arnould and Price, 1993; Ryan, 2002; Uriely, 2005).

Delivering value for customers: the ‘features-and-benefits’ approach

In consumer research ‘value’ is mostly viewed as customers’ personal evaluation of the trade-
offs between the benefits they receive and the sacrifices they make (Zeithaml et al., 1988).
More recently, ‘customer-perceived value’ (Kotler et al., 2009) or ‘value for the customer’
(Woodall, 2003) is conceptualised as judgment perception of the potential economic,
functional and psychological benefits customers attribute to, or expect to receive from, the
marketer’s offering (Kotler et al., 2009; Woodall, 2003). Approaching value from a
rationalist, cognitivist perspective, researchers are concerned with how customers
(sub)consciously evaluate, assess, reason about, judge, and balance against the value of
something, allowing for calculated predictions to be made as to customers’ purchase and
consumption choices. In contrast to the cognitivist approach, the ‘experience economy’ (Pine
and Gilmore, 1999) moves toward the more symbolic, emotional aspects of consumption.
The focus is on experiences as a vehicle for delivering positive customer value.

Both the cognitivist and the experience economy approach are predominantly oriented
at value as service attributes or experiential features that realise some positive outcomes or
benefits for customers. For instance, researchers aim to pinpoint specific types of value (value outcomes) that tourists expect to derive from their experiences (Turnbull, 2009). In a similar way, tourists’ needs and motivations are studied as an indicator of value sought (e.g., Pegg and Patterson, 2010), with findings used to aid tourism marketers’ decisions regarding effective design and delivery of ‘memorable’ service experiences (Oh et al., 2007). Alternatively, tourists’ ‘quality experiences’ are scrutinised as an important mediator between service performance factors, tourists’ overall service/ experience satisfaction, and their future behaviour intentions (Cole and Chancellor, 2009). Outcome-oriented measures, such as the expectancy disconfirmation approach, are adopted in service evaluation studies, with authors measuring tourists’ perceptions of service quality (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Thrane, 2002).

Ontologically, the features-and-benefits value perspective distinguishes clearly between the subject (the tourist) and the object of consumption (the tourism service experience), with researchers focusing predominantly on how the subject perceives and evaluates the object. While such approach can lead directly to operationalisable solutions for tourism organisations, it assumes that the organisation acts as a ‘producer’ or ‘enabler’ of tourists’ value outcomes. It promotes value creation for the tourist, who passively and uncritically accepts the organisation’s offering at its ‘face value’. Yet, as some authors (Goulding and Shankar, 2011; Kim and Jamal, 2007) point out, tourists often look for more authentic ways in which to construct and manifest their experiences. For Selby (2004, p. 191), tourists are ‘dynamic social actors, interpreting and embodying experiences, whilst also creating meaning and new realities through their actions’.

Moreover, the features-and-benefits approach becomes problematic when considering tourists’ social experiences, particularly at festivals. Festival experiences arise from ‘extraordinary’, non-routine social occasions set apart from every-day life (Getz, 2007). They have a dynamic, socially dense, and interaction-rich nature. They involve a range of rituals laden with emotion, creativity and imagination, participation in which can lead to the emergence of temporary shared social structures and communities (Kim and Jamal, 2007; Larsen and O’Reilly, 2005; Mackellar, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Wilks, 2009). Value creation in such circumstances often takes place purely in the customers’ sphere, without much regard for marketer-provided service features (Grönroos, 2011; Heinonen et al., 2010). Consequently, aiming to objectively determine and design value or valuable experiences so that through various attributes they realise benefits to tourists can represent a somewhat
prescriptive, reductionist paradigm. Tourism marketers benefit from more holistic value perspectives that not only recognise the autonomous role of tourists as value creators, but also address the complex and dynamic nature of experiences in socially dense tourism contexts.

**Co-creating value with customers: the ‘value-in-’ perspective**

The above critique of the features-and-benefits perspective builds on conceptualisation of value and re-definition of the relationship between the provider and customers as proposed within the S-D logic in marketing. Introduced by Vargo and Lusch in 2004, S-D logic focuses on customers’ role in co-creating value and valuable experiences with the service organisation. Vargo and Lusch (2004) argue that by viewing value as attributes that are embedded in a service and can be ‘exchanged’ to realise benefits for the customer marketers subscribe to a static, outcome-oriented goods-dominant logic. Instead, in the increasingly dynamic, process-oriented context of experiences marketer’s role is limited to offering ‘value propositions’ to customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Co-creation in S-D logic is viewed as a joint value-realising process that occurs as the organisation and its customers interact (Payne et al., 2008). ‘Value-in-use’ (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) or ‘-in-context’ (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) emerges as a dynamic, situational, meaning-laden, and phenomenological construct when customers use, experience, or customise marketers’ value propositions in their own experience contexts.

In S-D logic the process of value co-creation involves all social and economic actors drawing on and integrating various ‘operand’ (tangible resources that can be allocated or acted upon) and ‘operant’ resources (those that act on other resources and over which the actors has ‘authoritative’ capability) (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In tourism marketing research the resource-integrating approach is adopted to explore how tourists cooperate with others to achieve some goal, in this case the creation of positive value or positive experiences. This approach is applied in the context of group co-creation in physical tourism contexts, such as white-water rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993). It is noted that co-operation, participation in, and identification with group goals play an important role in co-creating positive outcomes for the individual group members, but also in co-creating shared value for the group (Finsterwalder and Tuzovic, 2010). Tourists’ co-creation in virtual contexts is also explored using the resource-integrating approach (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009; van Limburg, 2009).
From tourism organisation’s perspective, tourists who adopt participatory and active co-creation roles are viewed as particularly useful. While contributing to a better service experience for other tourists, these individuals are more likely to be satisfied with their own experiences, and consequently become loyal to the organisation (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). As a result, interacting and resource integrating tourists can become a source of innovation for the service organisation through their own value co-creation (van Limburg, 2009). Tourists-producers who co-create value for other tourists become essentially an operant resource from which the organisation can learn and develop their offering. The boundaries of the tourist’s ‘consuming’ role become blurred in reaching toward a more ‘productive’ role, even adding value to the tourism organisation’s offering though their immaterial labour (Cova and Dalli, 2009).

The strong focus of the resource-based approach in S-D logic on tourists’ work-like activities is criticised by some as too mechanistic (Korkman, 2006). It assumes that value is embedded in activities carried out by the customer who is always a co-creator of value, not only for him/herself, but also for the organisation as well as other customers. This, however, may not be the case; as a small number of authors (Harris and Reynolds, 2003; McColl-Kennedy and Tombs, 2011) point out, in some customers can in fact through their co-creation socially dense settings diminish value for other customers. These studies view value creation through customer wellbeing outcomes as “the enhancement of customer benefits” (McColl-Kennedy and Tombs, 2011, p. 4), thus veering toward the features-and-benefits value perspective. Nonetheless, the authors rightly ask whether value is or is not always co-created in the course tourists’ resource-integration, and for whom it is in fact co-created. For instance, co-creation does not necessarily result in the emergence of service-related value where customers are not interested or involved in the company’s value offering (Grönroos, 2008).

A small number of researchers based around the Nordic School of Services criticise the resource-based view, and S-D logic in general, as too provider-oriented (Grönroos and Voima, 2011; Heinonen et al., 2010; Voima et al., 2010). Introducing the term customer-dominant (C-D) logic to reflect a truly customer-centric focus, these authors argue that rather than treating their customers as partial workers or partners in co-creation and co-production (a B2C co-creation focus), service organisations should strive to find out of what customers actually do with the service to accomplish their own goals. Marketing researchers would therefore benefit from a more ‘holistic understanding of customers’ lives, practices and
experiences, in which service is naturally and inevitably embedded’ (Heinonen et al., 2010, p. 533 emphasis added). Consequently, such contextual enquiry into tourists’ co-creation sphere could be converted into specific ways for tourism organisations to support and participate in tourists’ co-creation (Grönroos and Voima, 2011).

It is therefore argued here that C-D logic offers a more suitable basis for C2C co-creation study, as it allows for focused enquiry into the social context in which tourists co-create. It represents a move away from the participatory, work-like value co-creating role of tourists in the organisation’s experience delivery activities, on to co-creation that takes place exclusively in the tourists’ sphere, without the organisation’s direct control (Grönroos and Voima, 2011). To further elaborate on how the C-D logic in marketing could contribute theoretically in the context of C2C co-creation research, the following section looks in detail at two perspectives through which C2C co-creation is studied in socially dense tourism contexts: the experiential perspective and the practice-based approach.

Illuminating customer co-creation: social experiences and practices in tourism contexts

The C-D logic in marketing suggests that in order to remain competitive in a volatile marketplace, organisations should focus solely on the customer (Heinonen et al., 2010). In this vein, C-D logic emphasises customers’ experiences and practices, in which the service offering often plays a relatively small part. Nevertheless, there is still little clarity around the differences between the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent in C-D logic’s perspectives on co-creation (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2011). Paradigmatic foundations of value creation through social experiences and practices are therefore critically discussed. Finally, a C2C co-creation framework is proposed, to help form a holistic epistemological and methodological basis for the study of how and where value is co-created by tourists in socially dense contexts.

Co-creating subjective value through social experiences

Holbrook (1999, p. 9 emphasis in original) views value as something that ‘resides not in the product purchased, not in the brand chosen, not in the object possessed, but rather in the consumption experience(s) derived therefrom’. This notion is inherent in Vargo and Lusch’s (2008) highly subjective, idiosyncratic, and phenomenological value-in-use, and expanded
on within C-D logic as ‘value-in-the-experience’ (Helkkula et al., 2012). Building on Husserl’s ([1936] 1970) phenomenology and the concept of lived experiences, the value-in-the-experience perspective views as data customers’ mental processes and highly personal interpretations of value that emerge from these experiences (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2011; Helkkula et al., 2012). Unlike the notion of experiences as value outcomes that add value to the organisation’s service offering (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), the phenomenological view of value assumes that only the tourist himself or herself can make sense of his or her internal, subjective experiences.

This approach is in line with the experiential-phenomenological orientation adopted in tourism experience studies (Arnould and Price, 1993; Ryan, 2002). In order to better reflect the subjective nature of tourism experiences and the meanings attached to them, authors explore them as ‘extraordinary’ or ‘flow’ experiences (Getz, 2007; Morgan, 2007). Based on the psychological study of individuals’ autotelic activities such as art making, rock climbing, or dancing, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) conceptualises flow as a (positive) state of ‘wholeness’, complete involvement and total immersion/absorption. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and other authors (e.g., Walker, 2010) note that flow occurs when individuals interact with each other. (Social) flow is often presented as the ‘ideal state’ through which interacting tourists realise value in the form of positive emotional outcomes (Arnould and Price, 1993).

As a result, parallels can be drawn between (social) flow theory and the resource-based perspective on co-creation in S-D logic. Balancing tourists’ personal antecedents (skills) and the experiential conditions (challenges) in order to achieve positive psychological outcomes for individuals is very much in line with S-D logic’s focus on resource configurations. Tourists co-create value by integrating their personal skills (operant resources) with the challenges (operand resources) posed by the service setting (including the social aspects of that setting in the sense of C2C interactions). Flow results in positive emotional states, while value creation is viewed, on a general level, as a process which increases the customer’s well-being in some way (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Nevertheless, adoption of a phenomenological ‘value-in-the-flow’ theory could lead researchers to focus too much on the inputs (resources/skills) and outcomes (positive emotions/positive value), resulting in somewhat simplified, bipolar, and dichotomous representations of the value construct.

An additional limitation of the experiential approach within C-D logic lies in its epistemological assumptions. Individual’s inner mental processes and subjective sense making may not be evidence of what actually ‘happened’ in social contexts (Löbler, 2011),
and therefore, purely phenomenological representations in value enquiry can only partially illuminate C2C co-creation. For instance, festival tourists’ narratives of the subjective meanings they associate with extraordinary, emotional experiences may not reflect value creation in the more mundane social practices of dinner sharing or camping (Begg, 2011). Marketers would benefit from more holistic approaches that would also allow for exploration of the more mundane and routine social practices, as these are also embedded with value (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2011; Holt, 1995; Holttinen, 2010; Korkman, 2006; Schatzki, 2001). Thus, the notions of flow and purely subjective value perceptions offer a somewhat limited epistemological basis. An alternative, more holistic focus on the inter- and intra-subjective and socially constructed nature of value as represented in the practice-theoretical is needed.

**Social practices and co-creation of socially constructed value**

Consumption of tourism experiences takes place in socially dense environments and as such, is often shared and collective (Brown et al., 2002). While subjective perceptions may vary, social consensus among the majority will shape the development of how individuals communicate and understand what is valuable (Edvardsson et al., 2011). Consequently, value assessments become more than individual and subjective. A number of authors therefore draw on social construction theories (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), to help shift emphasis away from customers’ subjective perceptions and to focus on value that is socially constructed within various consumption contexts (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2011; Holt, 1995; Korkman, 2006; Warde, 2005).

Social constructionists (e.g., Berger and Luckmann, 1967) believe that knowledge and meaning are created, realised and reproduced by social actors in an inter- and intra-subjective manner. By extension, value must also be understood on an inter-subjective (mutual) and intra-subjective (shared) level (Edvardsson et al., 2011; Voima et al., 2010). Co-creation as a phenomenon embedded in the social world can then be understood by interpreting shared social structures (i.e. norms, rule and role structures), and their interaction and reproduction by individuals (Edvardsson et al., 2011). Conversely, however, it is difficult to get away completely from the individual. While the shared, collective social forces are dominant, the needs, preferences, and habits of individuals still play a part in value co-creation and assessment.
To reconcile the conflict implied in the last point, researchers can draw on the notion of *social practices*. As Schatzki (1996, p. 13) notes, ‘both social order and individuality […] result from practices’. Practices are not simply bodily actions or behaviours in sociological sense. Rather, they are ‘ways of doing’, or contexts in which these bodily actions, tasks and behaviours that the practice requires are carried out (Schatzki, 2001). In C-D-related research social practices are viewed as a ‘context-laden arena for value creation’ (Holttinen, 2010, p.102). The tourist as subject, the object of consumption, and the context in which value is co-created, are no longer separate entities. Instead, practices combine these elements in an assemblage of images (mental states, meanings, symbols), tools/skills (resources, ‘know-how’, previous experience), and the physical space (consumption context), performed through actors’ routine-like bodily actions (Korkman, 2006; Warde, 2005). Tourists actively use their skills and know-how to negotiate various practices. At the same time, however, they are mere carriers of social practices, performing the various acts and tasks that the practice requires.

Korkman (2006) argues that by identifying and understanding in depth the anatomy of tourists’ value-creating practices performed in specific consumption contexts organisations can enhance tourists’ value through positive interventions. This can be done by facilitating and supporting existing value practices, reducing those practices that are not as attractive to carry out, or creating new practices by transferring them from other, similar contexts. Instead of ‘exploiting’ tourists’ competences (operant resources) as in the resource-integrating view, knowledge of their social practices allows organisations to ‘grow’ and enhance tourists’ co-creation capability. As such, the practice-based view on value co-creation presents a perspective that could reveal useful theoretical and practical insights. The following section therefore looks more closely at social practices in socially dense tourism settings, and begins to relate them to value and C2C co-creation in the proposed conceptual framework.

*Using practices to explore C2C co-creation: conceptual framework*

There are some examples of the application of practice theory in consumer research, and to a lesser extent, in tourism. For instance, observing social interactions among baseball spectators, Holt (1995) identifies through observation a number of consumption practices through which customers co-create value, including playing through communing and socialising. In his doctoral thesis focusing on family consumption practices in a leisure cruise
setting Korkman (2006) identifies a total of 21 social practices. He categorises these according to actors who carry out these practices (i.e. family/parents/child), emphasising ethnography and situated observation as essential for embodied understanding of practices. Rantala’s (2010) account of tourist-guide practices observed during forest tours is particularly useful in highlighting the importance of the context, both physical and symbolic, in understanding how practices are enacted.

Unlike the studies outlined above, this paper does not aim to identify the co-creation practices of tourists in specific socially dense contexts, but rather, to emphasise the dynamic, multi-dimensional and contextual nature of C2C co-creation. To this end, it is important to understand the nature of the tourism setting; not simply its physical or service aspects, but rather, its socially constructed elements. Drawing on Turner’s (1982) work, Cohen (1988) and other authors (MacCannell, 1976; Ryan, 2002) conceptualise tourism experiences as a liminoid phenomenon. Tourists separate themselves from their everyday lives into “socially sanctioned periods of play and relaxation” (Ryan, 2002, p. 4). Upon return, tourists are re-integrated back into their ordinary environments, the reversion often accompanied by a sense of change, transformation, or even feelings of loss (Getz, 2007). This three-stage ritual process (Turner, 1995) is reflected in the conceptual framework presented below (Figure 1).

The framework represents an alternative, holistic approach to study of C2C co-creation through situated value-creating social practices of tourists. Going beyond the more traditional features-and-benefits value approach, as well as the phenomenologically determined experiential value-in-perspective, the framework highlights the importance of understanding and supporting tourists’ C2C co-creation practices, focussing particularly on the ‘liminoid stage’ of tourism experiences. Tourists’ on-going co-creation practices are depicted on the left hand side. Value-in-social-practice (Holttinen, 2010) emerges not as a subjectively determined outcome of individual tourists’ co-creation, but rather, as an inter- and intra-subjective construct that reflects the context-specific nature of C2C co-creation in socially dense tourism settings. The role of tourism organisations on the right hand side is then limited to indentifying, understanding and learning from tourists’ co-creation practices, so that those that appear valuable can be supported and facilitated (Grönnroos and Voima, 2011; Korkman, 2006).

* Please insert Figure 1 about here
In the ‘pre-liminoid’ stage, tourists with their needs, motivations and a sense of anticipation embark on a ‘pilgrimage’. A process of separation from normality through ‘valorisation rituals’ takes place, which Falassi (1987, p. 4) describes as ‘the framing ritual that [...] modifies the usual and daily function and meaning of time and space’. The transitory stage that precedes travel may also be full of ‘rites of separation’, through which tourists detach themselves from their ordinary, everyday reality. While much of tourism literature tries to determine tourists’ motivations for travel, co-creation practices related to dreaming about, imagining and preparing for travel with friends and relatives, may just as valuable (e.g., Clarke, 2013). Tourism marketers can target pre-liminoid practices through marketing communication, e.g. through social media platforms (Neuhofer et al., in press). At festivals, for instance, symbolism and artefacts such as bright and colourful gateways help to mark clearly the point of transformation and entry into the next stage (Getz, 2007).

Once they enter the liminoid phase, tourists find themselves in a special temporal and spatial dimension, a ‘time out of time’, or ‘place out of place’ (Falassi, 1987) that is subject to rule structures different from everyday situations (Cohen, 1988). Tourists on holiday then perform various social practices with their significant others; for instance eating, shopping and playing together (Korkman, 2006). Additionally, tourists engage in social practices that involve complete strangers; such as providing help and information to less experienced travellers (Prebensen and Foss, 2011). Within the confounds of the liminoid, a degree of homogeneity, togetherness, and belonging develops among tourists who share their experiences to which Turner (1995) refers to as \textit{communitas}. ‘Rites of integration’ are performed, e.g. through conforming and ludic practices (Begg, 2011; Morgan, 2007).

In the above framework tourists’ co-creation practices are therefore represented on three interlinked levels: ‘Tourist’; ‘Social Bubble’ and ‘Communitas’. Importantly, the degree to which social practices are performed at these levels is influenced both by personal and contextual factors. Individuals’ \textit{personal resources} - the stock of skills, tools, knowledge or know-how, can determine whether a more or less participatory role in co-creation practices is adopted (Prebensen and Foss, 2011). For instance, Levy and Getz’s (2012) research indicates that personality, perceived similarity and mood impact on the degree to which outdoor tour participants engage with strangers.
At the same time, as argued above C2C co-creation is guided by the ways in which tourists interpret and negotiate the socially constructed shared images and social (rule and norm) structures inherent in the liminoid context. Tourism marketers’ role in the liminoid stage is then, again, in recognising and supporting valuable social practices that are performed on the various co-creation levels. For example, at folk music festivals, ‘jamming’ sessions or various workshops are organised to facilitate the sharing and performing of singing practices among groups of friends (Begg, 2011). Tour guides can try to foster interactions among tourists through various group activities (Arnould and Price, 1993). Furthermore, as Getz (2007) suggests, designing tourism settings using symbolism and artefacts that help facilitate the sense of liminoid could arguably lead to more social practices on the communitas level. For instance, escapism and practices of confusing of gender roles, or wearing of masks or costumes that are commonplace in liminoid contexts (e.g., Morgan, 2007) could be facilitated by providing various programming features that allow for such practices to be performed freely.

As tourists enter the ‘post-liminoid’ stage, they are re-incorporated back into the ordinary, everyday life. Getz (2007) notes that the reversion is often accompanied by a sense of change, transformation, or even feelings of loss. Social bonds that form in the liminoid space may result in the emergence of ‘small social worlds’ (Gainer, 1995), or neo-tribes (Cova, 1997). Tourism marketers could then facilitate such ongoing sharing practices by helping to create social communities centred on specific tourism experiences, again using technology to give tourists an opportunity to engage with each other and nurture relationships on-line (Neuhofer et al., in press).

Conclusion

Tourism marketing literature is currently dominated by a position that advocates design and delivery of valuable tourism services and experiences that aim to realise benefits for tourists. In contrast, S-D logic in marketing shifts our attention away from creating value for tourists, toward co-creating value with tourists. S-D logic’s value-in-perspective then promotes co-created value as dynamic, contextual, and subjectively perceived. Yet, the stance proposed in this paper implies that S-D logic does not go far enough in addressing co-creation as a set of tourists’ ongoing value-creating social processes and experiences in which the organisation’s role may be only marginal. Viewing tourists as active co-creators of service experiences who
engage in work-like value-creating activities is viewed as a step back toward a reductionist
concern for the specific resources – inputs - that tourists need in order to create positive value – outputs – for themselves and for others.

Moreover, this conceptual paper does not subscribe to the view of value in a phenomenological sense as something that is perceived by tourists in the course of their social experiences. As the discussion is centred on co-creation in socially dense tourism contexts, subjective value is replaced by its shared and mutual forms. Following the logic contained in the recent C-D logic purported by a small number of researchers in the Nordic School of Services, this paper views value-in-social-practice as inter- and intra-subjective and embedded in tourists’ social practices. And as social practices de-centre value from the individual and position it into the practice per se, tourism marketing researchers need to explore in depth the specific contexts in which practices are performed. As seen in Figure 1, the notion of the ‘liminoid’ images and rule/role structures of socially dense tourism contexts therefore becomes fundamental for a full understanding of C2C co-creation, as it reflects the shared, socially constructed nature of reality in which tourists’ practices are embedded.

With regards to the methodologies needed to undertake C2C co-creation research based on the practice-theoretical approach, qualitative methodologies grounded in an interpretivist (as opposed to positivist) paradigm are necessary to understand these issues in more depth. As highlighted above, in order to understand value that is co-created on the mutual and shared levels, researchers need to recognise the unique social structures and shared images of the tourism social systems in which C2C co-creation takes place. A social constructionist epistemology is therefore a useful starting point. Research methods such as participant observation grounded in the ethnographic tradition allow for evidence to be gathered of tourists’ participation in social practices on various levels. By observing naturally-occurring social acts, actions, and behaviours that constitute a specific practice, and by asking questions about the personal and contextual aspects of that practice, researchers can to link the action and meaning of the action into a credible account of tourists’ co-creation.

The conceptual framework builds on literature specific to the somewhat unique nature of liminoid tourism settings in which a sense of togetherness and ‘communitas’ (Turner, 1995) emerges. Nevertheless, future research could apply the notion of social practices as a source of value co-creation in other socially dense contexts, provided that the socially constructed situational and contextual elements of social practices are fully acknowledged.
Researchers could, for instance, illuminate the nature and appeal of shared consumption of various tourist groups or subcultures that emerge in specific tourism situations, such as guided tours, clubbers in island destinations, or families visiting heritage tourism attractions. Similarly, the proposed framework may be of interest to researchers looking at co-creation in the context of conferences and business events. Additionally, future studies could break down the framework and look in detail at the specific elements/components of tourists’ social practices in the pre-, during, and post-liminoid stages of tourism experiences. Empirical testing of the framework in a variety of socially dense tourism and leisure contexts is also desirable.

In conclusion, the tourism industry is full of experiences of a social nature and settings in which people with similar interests, motivations and goals meet together and interact. Rather than striving to persuade socialising tourists that the service offering is valuable to them in some way, tourism organisations benefit from recognising how they can potentially play a role in facilitating tourists’ ongoing C2C co-creation processes. The conceptual framework proposed in this paper highlights different perspectives that exist in more holistic value paradigms, thus presenting a novel approach to tourism marketing research. By drawing on empirical studies built on frameworks such as this tourism organisations can begin to design their value propositions based on more in-depth and all encompassing knowledge of what tourists actually do with their service.
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Figure 1: C2C co-creation framework
254x190mm (96 x 96 DPI)